

ENHANCING WRITING ABILITIES IN CHINESE ELEMENTARY STUDENTS: AN ANALYSIS OF THE APPLICATION OF THE FOUR SQUARE WRITING METHOD

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Abstract: As globalization of education and rapid technological advancement continue, finding effective teaching methods for writing has become a crucial task for educators. This paper explores the potential application and practical benefits of the Four Square Writing Method within the Chinese elementary educational environment. Through literature review and theoretical analysis, this paper comprehensively introduces the pedagogical principles and implementation steps of the Four Square method, and deeply discusses its effectiveness in enhancing students' writing skills, organizational abilities, and creative thinking. The study shows that the structured framework of the Four Square method can significantly improve students' logical writing structure, content coherence, and language expression capabilities. Additionally, the method also helps to boost students' motivation and confidence in writing, fostering a positive attitude towards writing. This paper also discusses the adaptability of this method in different educational contexts and potential challenges, providing directions for future teaching practices and research.

Keywords: Four Square Writing Method; Elementary Education; Writing Teaching; Chinese Education System; Creative Thinking; Student Engagement

1 INTRODUCTION

In the current global educational environment, writing skills are widely regarded as one of the key abilities for students' academic success, particularly at the elementary level where it is crucial for their language development and subsequent academic pursuits [1]. However, numerous studies indicate that many elementary students face challenges with organizing thoughts, expressing ideas clearly, and thinking creatively when writing [2]. To address these challenges, educators and researchers continually explore more effective writing teaching strategies.

The Four Square Writing Method, as a widely recognized writing teaching method, uses a simple visual framework to help students organize and plan their writing. This method is particularly suitable for elementary students as it systematically guides them through the stages from conception to completion of writing. Through the Four Square framework, students can clearly see the structure of an article, understand the function of each part, and thus enhance the organization and logic of their writing [3, 4].

This paper aims to explore the potential application and benefits of the Four Square method in Chinese elementary school writing instruction. Given the background of the Chinese education system, which traditionally emphasizes exam-oriented education and rote learning, introducing the Four Square framework could not only help students improve their writing skills but also promote their creative thinking and self-learning abilities [5]. Through a literature review and theoretical analysis, this paper will delve into the pedagogical principles, implementation steps, and the adaptability and potential challenges of the Four Square framework in the Chinese educational environment.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Traditional Writing Teaching Methods and Challenges

In traditional education systems, writing instruction often focuses on the training of basic skills such as grammar, spelling, and syntax. In China, especially at the elementary level, teachers tend to adopt a lecture and practice mode, emphasizing error correction and adherence to formal structures, often overlooking the creative and expressive aspects of writing [6]. While this approach has been somewhat effective in helping students master the norms of written language, it also has significant limitations, particularly in fostering students' independent thinking and innovative expression capabilities.

Moreover, traditional methods of writing instruction often overlook the dynamic nature of writing. Writing is not merely a static output process but a complex activity involving multiple cognitive and creative steps. Effective writing instruction should include stages such as planning, drafting, revising, and editing, which are often neglected in many traditional teaching practices [7]. For example, students are frequently asked to write without sufficient prior thinking and planning, leading to compositions that are disorganized, lack logical coherence, and are not persuasive.

The educational environment in China further exacerbates this issue. The pressure of exam-oriented education leads teachers and students to focus more on examination scores rather than the learning process, making writing instruction more about test preparation than an educational activity that enhances language expression and thinking skills [8]. This

results-oriented approach limits students' exploration of different writing styles and self-expression, thereby stifling their creativity.

Thus, facing these circumstances, educators and researchers are calling for new methods of writing instruction that not only enhance students' language skills but also ignite their creative potential, allowing them to better express their thoughts and emotions in writing. Among these, the Four Square Writing Method, due to its unique visual framework and structured teaching steps, is considered a potentially effective alternative educational strategy, especially in environments that need to improve students' organizational and creative writing skills [9].

2.2 Principles and Applications of the Four Square Writing Method

The Four Square Writing Method, developed by Judy Gould and Evan Jay Gould, was initially designed to simplify the writing process through a visual framework that helps students better organize and articulate their thoughts [3]. The core of this method is a larger square divided into four smaller squares, which assists students in planning and organizing the structure of their writing before they begin.

In the Four Square framework, the central square is typically used to note the main theme or thesis of the essay. The surrounding squares are filled with three main points or details that support the theme, and a concluding paragraph, respectively. The advantage of this method is that it provides students with an intuitive writing template, enabling them to build a logical framework before writing, thereby enhancing the organization and coherence of their compositions.

In practice, the Four Square method is not limited to helping students organize traditional essays. Its flexibility allows teachers to adapt the framework for different writing tasks, such as narratives, explanations, or application letters. This method is particularly suitable for elementary students as it reduces the complexity of writing, allowing them to focus on developing content rather than being overwhelmed by the structure [10].

Studies show that students who use the Four Square Writing Method perform better in writing tasks, demonstrating higher organization and richer content. For instance, in a study involving multiple classes, students using the Four Square method significantly outperformed those who were taught with traditional writing teaching methods. They were able to use facts and details more effectively to support their arguments, resulting in more tightly structured and logically clear articles [11].

Furthermore, the Four Square method has also been found to increase students' writing confidence and enthusiasm. Through this structured framework, students experience less fear and frustration with writing tasks, are more willing to engage in writing, and continually improve in practice [12]. The interactivity and visual nature of this method make it a powerful tool for teachers when teaching writing skills, especially for students who struggle with writing or are reluctant to write.

The widespread adoption and application of the Four Square method showcase an innovative way of teaching writing that, by simplifying structural barriers in writing, stimulates students' interest and creative potential. With the advancement of educational technology, the application of this method is also expanding, including the integration of digital learning tools and online educational platforms, further enhancing its teaching effectiveness and universality (Figure 1).

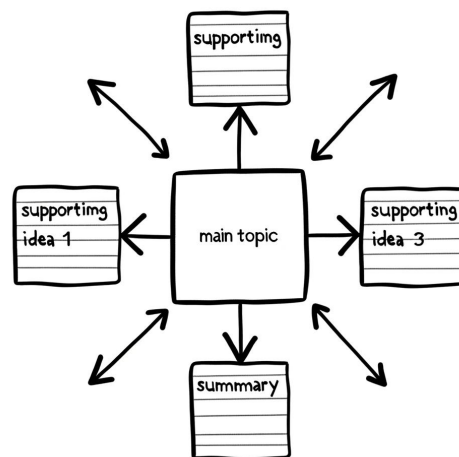


Figure 1 Schematic Diagram of the Four Square Framework

2.3 Effects of the Four Square Writing Method in Different Educational Settings

The Four Square Writing Method, due to its structured and systematic nature, has been applied in various educational environments around the world, showing significant effectiveness. Its universal applicability stems from its ability to adapt to different disciplines and age groups of students, especially in enhancing writing skills and organizational thinking.

In the United States, the Four Square Writing Method is widely used in elementary and secondary school language arts courses. Research indicates that students using this method score generally higher on the writing sections of standardized tests than those who do not use this method [13]. This success is largely due to the Four Square method's ability to help students clearly organize the structure of their essays, specify themes and supporting details in each paragraph, thereby improving overall writing clarity and persuasiveness.

In Indonesia, a study focused on whether the Four Square Writing Method could significantly impact students' ability to write descriptive texts. Results found that the method not only enhanced students' understanding of language structures but also improved their ability to transform thoughts into text. Through this structured practice, students were able to more effectively express complex ideas and achieve greater accuracy in their language use [14]. Another study in Indonesia showed that the Four Square Writing Method not only improved students' writing skills but also their classroom engagement. Students' participation in the classroom increased from 47.324% at the beginning of the first cycle to 81.25% by the end of the second cycle [15].

In Asia, particularly in China and Japan, the Four Square Writing Method has begun to be incorporated into more educational practices. These countries' education systems often emphasize rote memorization and exam skills, and the Four Square framework offers a new teaching perspective that emphasizes students' creative thinking and self-learning abilities. Research shows that through the implementation of the Four Square method, students are able to demonstrate more creativity in their writing and exhibit higher confidence and independence when tackling complex writing tasks [16].

Moreover, because of its straightforward and easy-to-understand visual framework, the Four Square Writing Method is particularly suited for digital learning environments. Online educational platforms can implement the Four Square framework through animated and interactive teaching modules, enabling remote learners to effectively grasp and apply this method. This demonstrates its wide adaptability and potential educational value across global educational technology applications.

In summary, the Four Square Writing Method has shown its wide applicability and effectiveness in improving students' writing skills across various educational environments. Whether facing students with different linguistic backgrounds or different educational cultures, the Four Square framework provides an effective tool for enhancing their writing quality, bringing positive changes to the global education field.

3 FOUR SQUARE FRAMEWORK ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Theoretical Foundations and Teaching Principles

The theoretical basis of the Four Square Writing Method stems from constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes that learning is an active process of constructing knowledge, where students build new understandings through interactions with their existing knowledge [17]. The teaching principles of the method include clear structural guidance and repetitive practice, aimed at using visual and organizational tools to help students systematically understand and apply writing skills.

3.2 Enhancing Writing Skills

Through the specific Four Square framework, students receive clear guidance on organizational structure, which is crucial for the logical coherence and organization of their essays. Each square represents a core part of the essay, helping students clarify the function and content of each part. Additionally, the method emphasizes the coherence and completeness of content development, encouraging students to focus on developing their arguments and expanding on supporting details [18]. In terms of language expression, the Four Square method provides a fixed template that boosts students' confidence in expressing their thoughts, while also prompting them to pay more attention to vocabulary selection and sentence variety.

3.3 Impact on Writing Motivation and Confidence

According to existing research, the Four Square Writing Method significantly boosts students' motivation and confidence in writing [19]. When students see their writing structured and organized through this method, their interest and enthusiasm for writing noticeably increase. Additionally, the systematic structure helps students feel more confident when faced with writing tasks, as they know how to start and how to progressively build their essays. This method reduces the uncertainty in writing, lowers students' anxiety, and enhances their engagement in learning and their ability to learn autonomously.

3.4 Enhancing Student Engagement

The Four Square Writing Method, by providing a clear framework and steps, significantly enhances students' engagement in learning. Students are no longer passive recipients of knowledge but become active participants in constructing knowledge. This sense of involvement and achievement motivates students to engage more deeply in writing and other learning activities [20]. As students' capabilities increase, they are more willing to explore more

complex writing tasks and creative expression, which not only enhances their writing skills but also fosters their thinking and innovation skills in other academic subjects.

4 IMPLEMENTATION STEPS OF THE FOUR SQUARE WRITING METHOD

Implementing the Four Square Writing Method is a phased process, designed to help students systematically organize and express their thoughts through a structured writing framework. Here are the specific steps of the Four Square method to ensure teachers can effectively apply this strategy in the classroom and maximize its impact on enhancing students' writing skills.

Preparation Phase: Before formally introducing the Four Square framework, teachers need to assess students' foundational writing skills, including their grammar, syntax, and vocabulary capabilities. This stage aims to identify potential challenges students may face in writing, to provide targeted support in subsequent teaching. Additionally, teachers should introduce students to the basic concepts and purposes of the Four Square Writing Method, ensuring they understand its role and importance.

Demonstration and Guidance: The teacher should draw the Four Square framework on the board or projector and demonstrate how to use this framework for writing by filling in each square step by step with a specific example. This visual demonstration shows students how to start with a thesis and gradually add supporting details and a conclusion. During this process, the teacher should focus on guiding students on how to connect the thesis with supporting details to ensure the logic and coherence of the writing.

Student Practice: After the teacher's demonstration and guidance, students should independently complete their own Four Square charts. Teachers can provide different writing topics, allowing students to choose ones that interest them for practice. At this stage, teachers need to monitor the class and provide individual guidance on students' work, helping them adjust and improve as needed.

Peer Review and Revision: After students complete their drafts, they can engage in peer review to provide feedback to each other. This not only helps students learn from others' works but also strengthens their ability to analyze and evaluate writing. Based on feedback from peers and the teacher, students should revise and refine their works.

Presentation and Discussion: Finally, students can choose to present their works orally. This stage aims to further enhance students' confidence and oral expression skills through public presentation and discussion. At the same time, the teacher can summarize common issues and highlights from the use of the Four Square method in student writings, providing feedback and adjustments for future teaching.

Through these specific implementation steps, the Four Square Writing Method can be effectively integrated into daily teaching activities, helping students gradually enhance their writing skills, especially in terms of organizational structure and content expression.

5 CONCLUSION

The Four Square Writing Method, as an innovative writing teaching tool, has demonstrated significant educational benefits in multiple educational settings globally. By simplifying the visual framework, this method helps students clearly understand and apply effective writing structures, thereby improving their writing skills and overall learning outcomes. The success of the Four Square method lies in its ability to break down the writing process into manageable parts, allowing students to build confidence at each step and gradually master more complex writing techniques.

Additionally, the Four Square method plays a key role in enhancing students' motivation and confidence in writing. Through clear structural guidance, students experience the success of writing, which ignites their interest and passion for writing. This positive learning attitude is a crucial factor in students' academic success and a key to their future success in various career paths.

However, despite the many advantages of the Four Square method, some challenges may arise during its implementation. For example, teachers may need specialized training before using this method to ensure they can effectively guide students through thinking and writing within this framework. Additionally, considering the differences in cultures and educational systems, the application of the Four Square method needs to be appropriately adjusted based on specific circumstances.

Looking forward, the Four Square Writing Method has the potential to be further developed and optimized to meet increasingly diverse educational needs and technological advancements. For instance, integrating this method with digital tools and online learning platforms could provide greater flexibility and accessibility for remote education and international educational projects. Through ongoing research and practice, the Four Square Writing Method can continue to provide effective, interactive, and enjoyable learning experiences for students worldwide.

In conclusion, the Four Square Writing Method has proven its capability to enhance students' writing skills in various educational environments globally. With further research and innovation, this method has the potential to support more students, helping them achieve success in their academic and career endeavors.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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