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The Impact of Synergy-Based Reading for Writing on Senior High School Students' English Writing Performance in China

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Abstract: This study examines whether a synergy-based reading-for-writing approach can enhance Chinese senior high school students' English writing performance and motivation to write. The study extends reading-writing integration research by operationalising “synergy” as structured input-output alignment across four instructional dimensions, structural synergy, contextual clue synergy, emotional synergy, and linguistic synergy, and empirically testing this model over a full semester. Using a quasi-experimental action research design with two intact parallel classes, one experimental class received the synergy-based intervention. In contrast, the control class followed a traditional reading-for-writing routine. Quantitative evidence was collected through pre- and post-intervention continuation-writing assessments, supplemented by student and teacher questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Pre-

test results indicated no significant difference between groups ($p = .753$). After the semester-long intervention, the experimental class outperformed the control class on the post-test ($p = .013$), and the experimental group showed a significant pre-post gain ($p = .046$). Motivation findings were more differentiated: questionnaire data showed that a notable proportion of students reported increased interest in writing (about 25%), while many reported no change; interview data further suggested improved engagement and reduced anxiety for some learners, especially when scaffolds supported planning and language transformation under time constraints. The findings contribute theoretically to interactive alignment accounts by demonstrating how guided multi-level alignment can support writing development, and they offer practical implications for exam-oriented senior high school EFL instruction, where students must efficiently transform reading input into coherent continuation writing.

Keywords: synergy, reading for writing, English writing performance, senior high school students.

Introduction

Writing plays a central role in second language (L2) development. Beyond cultivating writing proficiency and content knowledge, sustained engagement in writing can facilitate learners' acquisition of the target language by prompting attention to form, encouraging deeper processing of linguistic resources, and consolidating language knowledge through use (Manchón, 2011; Manchón & Vasylets, 2019; Williams, 2012; Storch, 2022). However, developing writing competence is typically a gradual process and demands sustained support. As Meng (2021) notes, improvement in writing requires strategic guidance and timely teacher feedback, alongside systematic practice that combines independent exploration with collaborative learning. Through cycles of imitation, revision, and innovation, learners gradually refine rhetorical choices and syntactic realisations, moving from reliance on models toward more flexible and purposeful language use. From an instructional perspective, this developmental process has renewed interest in pedagogies that better integrate input and output, enabling learners to draw on rich language resources while producing meaningful written work.

One prominent approach is reading for writing, which is intended to create a productive interface between reading input and writing output. In reading-for-writing instruction, learners engage with source texts not only for comprehension but also as resources for language and discourse: they notice stylistic features, organisational patterns, rhetorical moves, and linguistic realisations that can be transferred into their own writing. In this sense, reading for writing supports deliberate language imitation while also leaving space for creative content generation, potentially balancing accuracy-oriented language use with idea development (Wang, 2012). Importantly, prior work suggests that the pedagogical value of connecting reading and writing is most likely to be realised when instruction is authentic and learner-centred, allowing students to engage actively with texts and make meaningful choices during learning (Moran & Billen, 2014). At the curricular level, integrated reading-writing instruction has also been argued to better prepare students for the literacy demands of university study by fostering higher-level reading and writing abilities, indicating the feasibility and promise of combined instruction (Paulson & Van Overschelde, 2021).

Despite these pedagogical rationales, a key challenge remains: effective reading-for-writing instruction must clarify how input becomes usable resources for output and what instructional conditions promote that transformation. To address this issue, the present study draws on interactive alignment theory as a cognitive-linguistic account of how language users converge on linguistic and discourse representations during communication. Within reading-for-writing tasks, interactive alignment offers a principled explanation for why and how learners' writing may come to reflect features of the texts they have read, at lexical, syntactic, and discourse levels, through processes of noticing, priming, and alignment.

Building on this perspective, we conceptualise synergy as the pedagogically desirable outcome of successful input–output integration: learners do not merely reproduce language forms from readings, but internalise and re-use them in ways that support clearer, more fluent, and more accurate writing while generating their own ideas. In classroom practice, such synergy is unlikely to emerge automatically; rather, it can be fostered through structured task sequences and scaffolding that guide learners to engage deeply with source texts and to plan and transform ideas before composing (e.g., brainstorming, mind mapping, and other guided pre-writing activities).

Empirically, however, evidence remains limited regarding synergy-based reading for writing in Chinese senior high school contexts, particularly regarding measurable improvements in students' overall English writing performance and their affective engagement. First, although many discussions of reading for writing highlight its conceptual and pedagogical value, fewer classroom-based studies have examined whether a structured, synergy-oriented approach can produce sustained gains in learners' overall writing performance over an extended instructional period. Second, while motivation and self-confidence are frequently cited as potential benefits of integrated instruction, more systematic documentation is needed to clarify how task designs that explicitly connect input and output shape students' motivation to write and their engagement in the composing process. Addressing these gaps is pedagogically significant because reading-for-writing instruction also raises demands on teachers' instructional design, classroom interaction management, and assessment literacy, thus calling for actionable principles that translate theory into workable classroom routines.

Research Problem

Although reading–writing integration is strongly supported in L2 research and synergy-based accounts, a key analytical contradiction remains in senior high school EFL settings: despite robust theoretical arguments, there is still insufficient classroom-based empirical evidence showing how structured input–output synergy influences both students' overall writing performance and their motivation to write. In practice, reading-for-writing is often reduced to comprehension and surface imitation, and many learners still struggle to transform source-text resources into effective writing under constraints such as limited vocabulary, weak grammatical control, difficulty with planning, and exam-related time pressure.

This issue is especially relevant in China, where curriculum reforms increasingly emphasise higher-order language competence and communicative development. At the same time, examination demands require students to rapidly comprehend texts and produce coherent, accurate writing in timed conditions. Therefore, it is necessary to test whether a synergy-based reading-for-writing model, operationalised through structured scaffolding that guides multi-dimensional alignment with source texts, can yield sustained gains in writing performance and foster more positive motivational engagement in authentic senior high school classrooms.

Research Aim and Research Questions

Accordingly, this study investigates the impact of synergy-based reading-for-writing instruction on the English writing of Chinese high school students. Grounded in interactive synergy theory and the Interactive Alignment Model, the study examines whether and how structured reading-to-writing tasks promote productive input–output connections, reflected in both writing performance and students' motivation to write. The following research questions guide the study:

- (1) To what extent does synergy-based reading for writing improve students' overall English writing performance?
- (2) How does synergy-based reading for writing influence students' motivation to write?

Literature Review

The Role of Reading for Writing in Reading-Writing Integration

The integration of reading and writing has long been recognised as a mutually reinforcing process in L2 learning research. Widdowson (1978) is among the first to regard reading as an input skill and writing as an output skill, arguing that the two should be taught within a unified instructional framework to enhance language proficiency more effectively. Rubin and Hansen (1984) further note that knowledge gained through reading provides essential information for writing, a relationship that is particularly evident in academic discourse. Likewise, Tierney and Shanahan (1991) highlight the psychological similarities between reading and writing, describing both as meaning-construction processes.

Building on this perspective, Spivey (2007) demonstrates that reading and writing share continuous cognitive processes that facilitate one another through overlapping cognitive mechanisms. She shows that linguistic processing during reading, such as vocabulary recognition and sentence analysis, directly contributes to writing development, while writing enhances comprehension by deepening engagement with textual meaning. Stotsky's (1983) findings further support the positive correlation between reading and writing, showing that proficient readers tend to display stronger vocabulary control and syntactic awareness in writing. Carson et al. (1990) likewise highlight the input-output connection in L2 learning, concluding that extensive reading significantly promotes writing ability and validating the instructional model of "reading as input, writing as output".

Long-term empirical evidence also supports the integration of reading and writing. Based on a 40-year cross-linguistic study, Grabe and Zhang (2016) find that integrated instruction enhances lexical complexity, syntactic variety, and textual coherence more effectively than teaching reading or writing in isolation. Similarly, Tamara and Ali (2018) suggest that reading provides learners with structural models, rhetorical patterns, and authentic language samples that inspire and guide writing. Rahmawati and Dzulfikri (2022) observe that students benefit from reading in various ways, including acquiring new perspectives, improving language abilities, and developing richer means of expression.

More studies continue to affirm these findings. Innes (2022) describes reading and writing as inherently reciprocal processes, noting that insights from family literacy practices demonstrate how reading experiences can positively shape collaborative writing. Kendeou et al. (2023) argue that the shared cognitive and knowledge systems underlying reading and writing must be considered in instructional innovation. Mustafa (2025) further shows that extensive reading enhances writing proficiency by exposing learners to diverse vocabulary, varied syntactic structures, and multiple discourse styles.

Together, these studies provide consistent evidence that reading-for-writing instruction strengthens linguistic knowledge, cognitive processing, and textual production, ultimately supporting more effective integration of reading and writing in language teaching.

Current Teaching Situations of Reading for Writing

Recent scholarship suggests that reading-for-writing tasks can activate learners' creative engagement with texts. Rather than merely reproducing a plot, students are encouraged to expand and transform stories by drawing on cognitive mechanisms such as conceptual integration and metaphor comprehension. In this way, reading for writing helps build an interactive relationship between textual input and learners' own cognition (Wei, 2025).

In actual English classrooms, many teachers have begun to recognise the value of post-reading writing activities. They are increasingly designing tasks that connect reading input to written output (Sheng, 2021).

However, current practice also reveals several persistent challenges. First, some teachers' task design is constrained by insufficient textual analysis and incomplete interpretation of the reading materials. As a result, post-reading writing tasks may appear forced, superficial, or mechanically imitative rather than genuinely extending the meaning of the source text (Sheng, 2021). Second, task design in some cases places disproportionate emphasis on discrete linguistic knowledge, such as vocabulary and grammar, while neglecting discourse-level coherence and logical development. This often leads to writing tasks that lack progression and communicative purpose (Xi, 2025).

From the learner perspective, students in ESL contexts face multiple obstacles that limit the effectiveness of reading-for-writing instruction. Common problems include insufficient vocabulary, frequent grammatical and spelling errors, inadequate pre-writing preparation, and limited access to reading materials (Moses & Mohamad, 2019). These difficulties reduce students' ability to draw meaningfully on reading input and to transfer textual resources into productive writing.

Assessment practices further reflect the complexity of reading-for-writing pedagogy. When reviewing students' writing, teachers must attend not only to traditional criteria, such as grammatical accuracy, lexical appropriateness, spelling, and cohesion, but also to how effectively students integrate ideas from the source text. This includes evaluating whether learners can extract key expressions, connect them to the main theme, and creatively deepen or extend the original meaning (Ruan, 2023). In line with this view, Mayo (2000) emphasises that students can benefit from close analysis of authors' techniques, including sentence-level examination, and then apply these stylistic resources in their own writing.

Teaching Methods for Reading for Writing

Research on writing cognition and the reading-writing relationship provides an essential theoretical foundation for reading-for-writing pedagogy. Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) explore the psychological mechanisms of written composition, showing how learners generate, organise, and transform ideas during writing. Their work helps explain the internal cognitive processes that students draw on when integrating information from reading, constructing plots, and producing coherent continuations. Complementing this view, Fitzgerald and Shanahan (2000) argue that reading and writing rely on correlated mental processes and isomorphic knowledge, although the relationship varies across developmental stages. Together, these studies justify the instructional necessity of deliberately linking reading input with writing output in classroom practice.

On this basis, scaffolding is adopted as a teaching method for reading-to-write. Dominguez and Svihla (2023) note that "hard scaffolds" (i.e., pre-designed supports such as templates, frameworks, prompts, or guided questions) are frequently used to support writing, especially among high school learners. In reading-for-writing classrooms, scaffolding can guide teachers in designing a gradient of tasks, moving from comprehension to controlled imitation, and finally to independent continuation, so that students gradually master text-based narrative construction and language transfer (Wang L., 2024). Mind maps are another supportive scaffold that helps learners generate ideas, organise language, and build logical links between the source text and their writing (Wang Y., 2024).

Beyond cognitive scaffolds, affective and interpersonal support is equally important. Zhao (2023) emphasises that teachers should prioritise emotional communication by creating an open, supportive writing environment and engaging students in equal dialogue. Such affective guidance reduces writing anxiety and increases students' willingness to experiment with language and narrative creativity. Similarly, cooperative learning has been shown to enhance engagement and collaborative competence in writing tasks, making it a valuable pedagogical strategy for reading-for-writing instruction (Amalia et al., 2025).

Instructionally, teachers can also incorporate pre-, while-, and post-reading tasks that explicitly prepare students for writing. Pysarchyk and Yamshynska (2015) propose specific task types such as generating questions before reading, making predictions, outlining main ideas, and answering comprehension questions after reading. These activities help learners identify textual structure and key linguistic resources that they can later transfer to writing. Deng (2025) shows that applying a production-oriented approach in combined reading-writing instruction significantly improves students' learning outcomes, suggesting that output-driven task sequences can deepen textual understanding and encourage meaningful language use.

Recent studies further highlight the growing role of multimodal and digital tools in reading for writing. Zhang (2025) argues that multimedia resources, such as images or videos, can recreate authentic story contexts, support emotional immersion, and stimulate plot prediction, enhancing students' readiness for writing. In digital environments, tools like Google Docs promote collaborative reading and writing through shared drafting, joint editing, and immediate feedback (Rahman et al., 2024). Intelligent writing-support tools are also gaining momentum. Ou (2025) notes that ChatGPT can help students expand ideas and develop writing plans, while Li and Du (2025) predict that future AI tools will provide deeper semantic feedback on narrative logic, style, and tone. These tools may serve as "cognitive partners, especially for students who struggle with idea generation or linguistic accuracy.

Pedagogically, effective reading-for-writing instruction should aim at synergy between theme, plot, and language. Ou (2025) proposes that when emotional themes, plot development, and contextual language align, students' writing can preserve formal consistency with the source text while achieving deeper unity in content and spirit, improving overall writing quality. Methodologically, blended learning, genre-based instruction, and multimodal tasks can strengthen engagement, coherence, and accuracy; however, their success depends on teachers' ability to balance creativity with academic rigour (Dong et al., 2025). Peer feedback and collaborative activities are particularly valuable for learners with limited vocabulary or writing anxiety because they provide repeated exposure to language models and opportunities for supportive practice (Dong et al., 2025).

Overall, prior studies have consistently confirmed the reciprocal relationship between reading and writing and demonstrated the pedagogical value of reading-for-writing tasks in enhancing learners' language performance. At the same time, classroom-based evidence reveals persistent implementation difficulties, including limited textual transfer, insufficient scaffolding, and uneven motivational effects across learners. More importantly, existing research has not yet fully clarified why some reading-for-writing tasks generate stronger developmental outcomes than others, nor has it offered a sufficiently integrated explanatory account linking cognitive alignment mechanisms with classroom pedagogy. To address these gaps, the present study adopts interactive synergy theory as its guiding framework to explain how coordinated alignment between input and output can facilitate language development and improve reading-for-writing instruction.

Theoretical Framework

The present study is grounded in interactive synergy theory, a cross-disciplinary framework that integrates key insights from both synergy and interaction theories. At its core, interactive synergy theory posits that multiple components within a system can achieve enhanced collective functioning through sustained, dynamic interaction. This view highlights that learning outcomes are not merely the sum of individual elements but emerge from their coordinated alignment and mutual reinforcement.

German physicist Hermann Haken originally developed the synergy theory in the 1970s to explain how open systems evolve from disorder to order through self-organisation. In such systems, subsystems

interact continuously with one another and with the external environment, allowing stable structures to emerge. Two foundational concepts underpin this theory: the synergy effect, which refers to the emergent order produced by coordinated subsystems, and the servo principle, which suggests that an “order parameter” guides and constrains the behaviour of lower-level components. Together, these concepts offer a systematic lens for understanding how coherence and efficiency arise through interaction.

Interaction theory, largely originating in the social sciences, emphasises the negotiation of meaning, communicative coordination, and reciprocal influence among participants in social activity. When incorporated into synergy theory, interaction becomes the mechanism through which systemic coordination is achieved. Thus, interactive synergy theory stresses that continuous information exchange and behavioural coordination promote structural optimisation and higher-level efficiency.

Within language learning, Pickering and Garrod’s (2004) Interactive Alignment Model (IAM) provides a key cognitive underpinning for interactive synergy. IAM argues that in natural dialogue, interlocutors tend to align automatically at multiple levels (e.g., lexical choices, syntactic patterns, discourse structure) through processes of priming and imitation. Such alignment lowers cognitive load, facilitates mutual understanding, and supports the gradual convergence of linguistic representations. Importantly, IAM suggests that learners with lower proficiency often align with more proficient language users, acquiring new patterns through repeated exposure and use. This mechanism parallels the synergy effect, in which imitation serves as a powerful driver of language development.

Extending this interpersonal alignment to broader learning contexts, Atkinson et al. (2007) introduced the “interactive synergy” model within a sociocognitive perspective of L2 acquisition. They argue that cognitive growth and language development are fostered not only through individual processing but also through collaborative interaction among people, tasks, and contextual resources. This model helps explain why learning tasks that integrate participation, feedback, and co-construction yield stronger developmental effects.

Building on this account, Wang (2012) highlights that interactive synergy operates not only in face-to-face communication but also in the interaction between learners and the texts they engage with. When learners read with the intention of writing, they engage in a process of aligning with textual language forms, rhetorical moves, and narrative logic. Through repeated exposure and purposeful reuse, students internalise linguistic resources and reorganise them into their own output, achieving synergy between input and production.

Recent integrated-literacy models similarly emphasise the bidirectional and dynamic relationship between reading and writing. For example, Duke and Cartwright (2021) conceptualise a two-way framework of “Writing to Read” and “Reading to Write”. The former refers to writing activities that deepen reading comprehension, whereas the latter highlights how reading input supplies linguistic, structural, and conceptual resources for writing. Together, these views support the premise that reading and writing should be taught as mutually reinforcing skills within a unified learning system.

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives justify the instructional rationale of synergy-based reading-for-writing. In the present study, interactive synergy theory explains how alignment between learners and source texts, as well as among peers and teachers, can strengthen language representations, facilitate transfer from reading to writing, and promote measurable improvement in writing performance and motivation to write.

Materials and Methods

To enhance the accuracy and robustness of the findings, this study adopted a mixed-methods approach integrating quantitative and qualitative data. It is characterised as quasi-experimental action research using two intact parallel classes (i.e., a non-equivalent groups design) over one academic semester, with no random assignment. Data were triangulated through writing tests, questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews, and all procedures were conducted in accordance with formal ethical review and informed-consent requirements. The research materials and methods are described as follows.

Sample and Participants

This study involved 95 Senior 2 students from two parallel classes and 15 English teachers from the same grade level. The two classes were comparable in overall instructional conditions, and baseline equivalence in writing performance was examined through the pre-test analysis reported in the Results section. Valid writing-test scores were obtained from 92 students, while three scripts were excluded due to substantial verbatim copying from the source text. All 95 students and 15 teachers completed questionnaires, and five students and five teachers participated in semi-structured interviews. Only one instructor implemented the intervention in both classes; the other teachers contributed perceptions through the questionnaire and interviews. Most teacher participants had substantial teaching experience and were familiar with the requirements of reading-for-writing tasks. Some had experience in exam-related marking, which may have strengthened their familiarity with relevant scoring criteria.

Ethics

Before data collection, this study received ethical clearance from the institutional review board of the participants' institution. The review covered study procedures, potential risks, and data protection measures. Participation was voluntary, and written informed consent was obtained from all participants; for student participants, guardian consent and student assent were also obtained. Participants were informed of the study purpose, the data to be collected (tests, questionnaires, and interviews), their right to withdraw at any time without penalty, and the confidentiality and anonymisation procedures. All data were anonymised, stored securely, and used solely for research purposes.

Instrument and Procedure

The study employed a mixed set of research instruments, including (a) writing tests, (b) questionnaires administered to both students and teachers, and (c) semi-structured interviews with selected students and teachers. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS 16.0, while interview data were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and coded thematically.

Both the experimental and control classes used the same textbooks and teaching materials and were taught by the same instructor. The two classes differed only in instructional approach. In the control class, a traditional reading-for-writing routine was adopted: students read and interpreted the source text, summarised plot and emotional development, translated key sentences, and practised fixed sentence patterns and vocabulary after class. In the experimental class, a synergy-based reading-for-writing approach was implemented over one academic semester, with systematic scaffolding targeting four dimensions: structural synergy, contextual clue synergy, emotional synergy, and linguistic synergy.

To enhance replicability, the synergy-based approach followed a stable task cycle repeated across instructional units. Table 1 summarises the typical lesson sequence, teacher scaffolds, student processes, and collectable learning products.

Table 1*Task sequence and artefacts in the synergy-based reading-for-writing intervention*

Lesson phase (typical order)	Synergy focus	Teacher scaffolds (inputs)	Student task (process)	Key artifacts (collectable outputs)
1. Guided reading & noticing	Contextual clue synergy	“Clue-hunting” worksheet; evidence table prompts (“clue → inference → planned use”)	Highlight who/where/when/what-changes; record evidence and infer implications for continuation	Annotated source text; Evidence–inference–use table
2. Macro-organization analysis	Structural synergy	Narrative-frame template (orientation → complication → climax → resolution); paragraph-function labels	Map text structure; label paragraph functions; identify plot constraints that must be maintained	Structure map / narrative frame
3. Affective alignment	Emotional synergy	Emotion-curve organizer; tone/perspective prompts	Reconstruct emotion trajectory; predict next emotional shift; draft short internal monologue (4–6 lines)	Emotion curve; tone note; character monologue
4. Language resource preparation	Linguistic synergy	“Language mining” sheet (lexical chunks, sentence patterns, cohesive devices); transformation rules (paraphrase, tense/voice shifts, embedding)	Extract reusable items; plan transformed reuse (avoid verbatim copying)	Expression bank (e.g., 6–10 chunks, 3 patterns, 2 cohesive devices); planned transformations
5. Pre-writing planning	Structural + contextual integration	Continuation outline template (events, causal links, paragraph topic sentences); requirement to include source-text constraints	Produce a paragraph-by-paragraph plan; explicitly link planned events to source-text evidence	Continuation outline (events + causal chain + topic sentences)
6. Drafting (continuation writing)	All four dimensions	Time limit aligned to classroom/exam conditions; reminder checklist for alignment (structure, clues, emotion, language)	Write first draft using outline + resources; incorporate transformed language use	First draft
7. Peer review & teacher feedback	Linguistic + structural coherence	Peer-review rubric/checklist aligned to four synergies; teacher conferencing prompts	Peer review using checklist; revise based on alignment issues (cohesion, logic, tone consistency, adapted language)	Peer-review sheet; annotated draft
8. Revision & submission	All four dimensions (verification)	Final revision checklist; plagiarism reminder (no verbatim copying)	Produce revised version; submit with supporting artifacts	Final draft + attached artifacts (outline, evidence table, expression bank, emotion curve)

The above sequence was repeated across units throughout the semester using standardised worksheets and prompts. Linguistic reuse was required through transformed adaptation (e.g., synonym substitution, tense/voice shifts, embedding patterns in new contexts) rather than verbatim copying. Drafts were screened for substantial copying to protect task integrity.

Writing performance was assessed through a 35-minute reading-for-writing test administered as pre- and post-tests. Motivation-related data were collected via student questionnaires, supplemented by teacher questionnaires. To enrich and contextualise the quantitative findings, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected students and teachers, focusing on vocabulary use, language style, and narrative development. Two researchers conducted pilot coding to refine the coding scheme, achieving satisfactory inter-coder reliability (Cohen’s Kappa = 0.78).

Results

Results of Tests

This study utilised SPSS 16.0 software to conduct a comparative analysis of scores in the reading-for-writing section of the mid-term exam held in October, 2024, for Senior 2 students, which served as the pre-test scores before the experiment.

Table 2
Independent sample t-test of pre-test for the experimental class and the control class — Group statistics

	Type of group	N	Mean	S.D.	Std. Error Mean
Pre-test scores	Experimental class	48	14.1458	3.42699	.49464
	Control class	44	13.9318	3.04538	.45911

Table 3
Independent sample t-test results of pre-test for the experimental class and the control class

		Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig.(2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the difference	
									Lower	Upper
Pre-test scores	Equal variances assumed	1.004	.319	.315	90	.753	.21402	.67837	-1.13368	1.56171
	Equal variances not assumed			.317	89.919	.752	.21402	.67487	-1.12675	1.55478

As shown in Table 2 and Table 3, the mean pre-test scores for reading for writing were 14.1458 for the experimental class and 13.9318 for the control class. An independent-samples t-test was conducted using SPSS 16.0 to determine whether this difference was statistically significant. According to Table 2, Levene's test for equality of variances yielded a Sig. value of 0.319 ($p > .05$), indicating that the assumption

of homogeneity of variances was met. Therefore, the "equal variances assumed" row should be interpreted. The corresponding two-tailed p-value was 0.753 ($p > .05$).

This result demonstrates that there was no statistically significant difference in pre-test scores between the two classes prior to the experimental intervention. It can be concluded that the students in both classes were at a comparable level of writing proficiency, confirming their suitability as subjects for the subsequent experiment.

After the experiment, post-test scores from the reading-for-writing task, part of the first-semester final exam for the second year of high school, were collected for both the experimental and control classes. An independent-samples t-test was then conducted to compare the post-test performance between the two classes.

Table 4

Independent sample t-test of post-test for the experimental class and the control class —Group statistics

	Type of group	N	Mean	S.D.	Std. Error Mean
Pre-test scores	Experimental class	48	15.0000	3.50076	.50529
	Control class	44	13.1591	3.47712	.52420

Table 5

Independent sample t-test results of post-test for the experimental class and the control class

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig.(2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the difference	
									Lower	Upper
Pre-test scores	Equal variances assumed	.008	.930	2.528	90	.013	1.84091	.72830	.39402	3.28780
	not assumed									

As shown in Table 4 and Table 5, the mean post-test scores for reading for writing were 15.0000 for the experimental class and 13.1591 for the control class. An independent-samples t-test was conducted using SPSS 16.0 to determine whether this difference was statistically significant. As indicated in Table 5, Levene's test for equality of variances yielded a Sig. value of 0.930 ($p > .05$), confirming that the assumption of equal variances was met. Interpreting the row assuming equal variances, the two-tailed p-value was 0.013 ($p < .05$). This result indicates a statistically significant difference in post-test scores between the two

classes following the experimental intervention. A paired-samples t-test was then conducted to compare the pre-test and post-test scores of the experimental class.

Table 6

Paired samples t-test results of pre-test and post-test for the experimental class and the control class

	Mean	N	S.D.	Std. Error Mean
Pre-test scores	14.1458	48	3.42699	.49464
Post-test scores	15.0000	48	3.50076	.50529

As shown in Table 6, the mean reading for writing score for the experimental class increased from 14.1458 in the pre-test to 15.0000 in the post-test, indicating a mean gain of 0.8542 points. This demonstrates a clear improvement in scores following the experimental intervention. The standard deviations (S.D.) for both the pre-test (3.43) and post-test (3.50) are quite similar, suggesting that the variability of scores within the class remained consistent throughout the study. The small standard error values (approximately 0.49 and 0.51) further indicate that the sample means are reliable estimates of the population mean.

Table 7

Paired samples correlations of pre-test and post-test for the experimental class and the control class

	N	Correlation	Sig.
Pre-test scores & Post-test scores	48	.654	.000

Table 8

Paired samples t-test results of pre-test and post-test for the experimental class and the control class

	Paired differences					t	df	Sig.(2-tailed)
	Mean	S.D.	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pre-test scores – Post-test scores	-.85417	2.88053	.41577	-1.69058	-.01775	-2.054	47	.046

The correlation analysis in Table 7 reveals a statistically significant, strong positive relationship between the pre-test and post-test scores for the experimental class ($r = .654$, $p < .001$). This substantial correlation indicates that students who performed well on the pre-test tended to also perform well on the post-test, and conversely, those with lower pre-test scores generally had lower post-test scores. This finding suggests that the intervention did not radically alter the students' relative standings within the

group; instead, it appears to have contributed to an overall improvement across the board while maintaining the existing performance hierarchy.

Furthermore, as shown in Table 8, the two-tailed p-value for the mean difference was 0.046 ($p < .05$), indicating a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores of the experimental class. The mean paired difference between pre-test and post-test scores was -0.85417. The negative value confirms the direction of the change: the post-test scores (with a higher mean) are significantly greater than the pre-test scores. The 95% confidence interval for this mean difference ranges from -1.69058 to -0.01775. Importantly, this interval does not include zero, further supporting the conclusion that the difference is statistically significant at the 0.05 level. The t-value of -2.054 and the associated significance ($p = 0.046$) confirm that the null hypothesis (i.e., that there is no difference between the pre-test and post-test means) can be rejected. In practical terms, this result provides strong statistical evidence that the experimental intervention led to a significant improvement in the students' writing scores.

Results of Questionnaires

In October 2024, a student questionnaire survey was conducted, and 95 valid questionnaires were collected. The gender distribution of the participants was 61.05% male and 38.95% female. Approximately 47% of the students scored between 90 and 120 out of 150 in English, and most reported spending 6–10 hours per week studying English.

Regarding interest in writing after learning reading-for-writing skills, 57.89% of students reported no change, 25.26% reported increased interest, 8.42% reported decreased interest, and another 8.42% reported a significant decline.

In terms of perceived usefulness for reading comprehension, 44.21% of students considered reading for writing helpful for achieving clearer understanding, whereas 35.79% viewed it as not very helpful and 8.42% as not helpful at all. By contrast, 8.42% reported considerable help in grasping article content, and 3.16% indicated that it was very helpful for understanding both details and main ideas.

With respect to language imitation during practice, 44.21% reported occasionally imitating vocabulary and sentence structures from the source texts, 26.32% rarely did so, 21.05% often did so, 7.37% never did so, and 1.05% always did so. Overall, students' textual imitation and transfer from reading to writing appeared limited.

Concerning vocabulary development, 49.47% reported some improvement in vocabulary use, and 4.21% perceived a significant improvement. However, 41.05% considered the improvement not obvious, and 5.26% reported no improvement.

In terms of grammatical accuracy, 50.53% believed reading for writing was somewhat helpful though errors remained, 25.26% felt it was helpful in identifying and correcting some grammatical mistakes, and only 1.05% regarded it as very helpful. Meanwhile, 17.89% reported little benefit and 5.26% reported no benefit.

When asked about difficulties, 74.74% identified lack of relevant vocabulary and expressions as the greatest challenge. In addition, 60% reported insufficient grammar knowledge and frequent errors, 44.21% noted limited exam time, 30.53% reported difficulty understanding reading materials, and 28.42% indicated uncertainty about planning reading for writing content.

A teacher questionnaire survey was also conducted in October 2024, yielding 15 valid questionnaires. Results showed that 87% of teachers viewed reading-for-writing instruction as a way to enhance students' language application ability. About 73.33% believed it strengthened the reading-writing connection and

fostered logical thinking, 53% considered it useful for enriching writing instruction, and 47% believed it could increase students' interest in writing. Overall, most teachers recognized its positive instructional value.

In evaluation practices, teachers mainly emphasized content completeness, language accuracy, and logical coherence, whereas only 26.67% reported explicitly attending to creativity. Regarding student engagement, 53.33% observed some improvement in students' writing interest after introducing synergy-based reading for writing, 26.67% observed a significant increase, 13.33% observed little change, and 6.67% reported no noticeable effect.

Finally, teachers expressed strong support for providing specialized training, developing supporting teaching resources, organizing professional forums for sharing best practices, and establishing a more systematic and comprehensive evaluation framework for reading-for-writing tasks.

Results of Interviews

A total of 10 Senior 2 students participated in the interviews in this study. They reported that when completing reading-for-writing tasks, they consciously attended to vocabulary and phrases from the source text and attempted to incorporate them into their own writing. They also strived to maintain consistency with the original text's language style and to analyze the author's narrative logic as a guide for developing their writing.

Five Senior 2 English teachers, all with extensive teaching experience, were also interviewed. Given their professional background, they were highly familiar with the format and assessment requirements of reading-for-writing tasks in examinations. Most of them were aware of the synergy effect and reported incorporating synergy-based principles into their instruction of reading-for-writing activities.

Discussion

The present study investigated the effects of synergy-based reading-for-writing instruction on Chinese senior high school students' English writing performance and motivation to write, drawing on the Interactive Synergy Theory and the Interactive Alignment Model. By integrating quantitative and qualitative evidence, the findings provide a nuanced account of how structured input-output alignment supports writing development, while also revealing the challenges learners face during reading-for-writing tasks.

Effects of Synergy-Based Reading-for-Writing on Writing Performance

The quantitative results indicate that synergy-based reading-for-writing instruction led to statistically significant improvement in students' overall writing performance. Although no significant difference was found between the experimental and control classes on the pre-test, the experimental class significantly outperformed the control class on the post-test, and a clear gain was observed within the experimental group during the intervention period. These findings suggest that synergy-oriented instruction can promote writing development beyond what is achieved through conventional reading-for-writing practices.

From a theoretical perspective, this improvement can be interpreted through the Interactive Synergy Theory and the Interactive Alignment Model. Unlike traditional approaches that prioritize comprehension and surface-level imitation, the synergy-based model guided learners to engage in coordinated alignment across multiple dimensions, including textual structure, contextual clues, emotional development, and linguistic realisation. Such alignment enabled learners to transform reading input into usable writing resources rather than merely reproducing isolated language forms. Consistent with Pickering and Garrod's

(2004) model, repeated alignment at lexical, syntactic, and discourse levels likely strengthened learners' language representations and reduced cognitive load during writing production.

Moreover, the relatively stable standard deviations between pre- and post-tests indicate that the intervention benefited learners across proficiency levels, contributing to overall improvement while preserving individual differences. This pattern aligns with previous research suggesting that integrated reading-writing instruction supports gradual and cumulative development rather than abrupt restructuring of writing competence (Grabe & Zhang, 2016). In this respect, synergy-based reading-for-writing appears particularly suitable for senior high school contexts, where sustained development must be balanced with exam-oriented writing demands.

Input-Output Alignment and Learner Difficulties in Reading for Writing

While the overall performance gains demonstrate the effectiveness of synergy-based instruction, the questionnaire data reveal persistent difficulties that constrain learners' ability to fully benefit from reading-for-writing tasks. A substantial proportion of students reported limited vocabulary and expressions, insufficient grammatical control, time pressure, difficulty understanding source texts, and challenges in planning writing content. These findings indicate that even in integrated reading-writing contexts, learners may struggle to convert comprehension into productive language use without adequate linguistic resources and strategic support.

These difficulties can be understood through Weigle and Parker's (2012) three-stage cognitive model of borrowing-transformation-innovation. Learners often encounter the greatest challenge at the transformation stage, where source-text meanings must be reworked rather than directly copied. When lexical and syntactic resources are insufficient, transformation tends to result in simplified structures, reduced elaboration, and limited narrative development. This explains why students' writing may appear linguistically flat despite exposure to rich reading input.

From the perspective of interactive synergy theory, such challenges reflect insufficient alignment between input and output. When learners cannot effectively retrieve or adapt linguistic forms from the source text, alignment at lexical and syntactic levels is weakened, which in turn limits higher-level synergy in discourse organization and narrative development. The synergy-based model's emphasis on multi-dimensional guidance, particularly structural and linguistic synergy, directly targets these problem areas. By providing scaffolding and explicit task sequencing, synergy-based instruction makes alignment more achievable and supports learners in progressing from comprehension to meaningful transformation with greater confidence and control.

Effects on Motivation and Affective Engagement

With regard to motivation, the findings reveal a more differentiated pattern. While synergy-based reading-for-writing did not uniformly increase motivation for all students, a considerable proportion reported heightened interest in writing, and teachers observed noticeable improvements in engagement among many learners. These results suggest that synergy-based instruction can positively influence affective engagement, although its effects are moderated by learners' linguistic foundations, confidence, and learning preferences.

The motivational benefits of synergy-based reading-for-writing can be attributed to the formation of an input-output closed loop. Students begin by reading a meaningful narrative that provides lexical, syntactic, and discourse resources, and then extend themes, plot lines, or characters by drawing on these resources to express their own meanings. Linguistic forms are internalised incidentally through repeated, purposeful reuse rather than rote memorisation. This process reduces the anxiety associated with writing

from scratch and fosters a sense of agency in composing, which aligns with sociocognitive views emphasising the role of interaction and support in sustaining motivation (Atkinson et al., 2007).

At the same time, the finding that many students reported limited motivational gains underscores that affective benefits are not automatic. Difficulties related to vocabulary, grammar, and time pressure may dampen learners' engagement, particularly among lower-proficiency students. This highlights the importance of differentiated scaffolding and emotional support in synergy-based instruction to ensure that alignment mechanisms translate into positive motivational experiences for a wider range of learners.

Conclusion

This study explored the effects of synergy-based reading-for-writing instruction on Chinese senior high school students' English writing performance and motivation to write, drawing on the Interactive Synergy Theory and the Interactive Alignment Model. By integrating quantitative and qualitative data, the study provides empirical evidence that structured input-output alignment can enhance writing development and learner engagement in secondary EFL contexts.

The findings indicate that synergy-based reading-for-writing leads to significant improvement in students' overall writing performance. Compared with traditional approaches, synergy-oriented instruction enabled learners to more effectively transform reading input into productive writing resources through coordinated attention to textual structure, narrative development, and linguistic realization. These results suggest that writing development is facilitated when learners are supported in moving beyond surface-level imitation toward meaningful transformation and reuse of language resources.

In addition to performance gains, the study reveals that synergy-based reading-for-writing can positively influence students' motivation to write. By reducing cognitive burden in idea generation and providing accessible linguistic and structural support, synergy-based tasks help alleviate writing anxiety and foster a sense of agency in composing. Although motivational effects varied across learners, both student and teacher perspectives indicate that structured reading-writing integration can promote greater engagement in the writing process.

Implications

First, teachers should design reading-for-writing tasks that promote systematic alignment between reading input and writing output. Rather than treating reading and post-reading writing as separate activities, instruction should explicitly connect themes, discourse organization, and language features of the source text with students' writing tasks. Guiding students to analyze textual structure, narrative development, and stylistic features, and then encouraging them to purposefully reuse these elements in their own writing, can help learners transform reading input into usable writing resources. Such alignment-oriented instruction supports the development of writing performance.

Second, structured scaffolding is essential to facilitate synergy in reading-for-writing instruction. Pre-writing activities such as guided discussion, mind mapping, and planning frameworks can reduce learners' cognitive load and support the transformation of input into output. During writing, teachers should provide timely and constructive feedback that focuses not only on linguistic accuracy but also on how effectively students integrate ideas and language from the source text. These instructional supports help learners move beyond surface-level imitation toward meaningful adaptation and innovation.

Third, collaborative learning plays a crucial role in enhancing both writing performance and motivation. Through group discussion, peer feedback, and cooperative writing tasks, students are exposed to diverse perspectives and language models, which enrich content development and promote more

complex language use. Collaborative interaction also creates opportunities for negotiation of meaning and shared problem-solving, strengthening learners' engagement and confidence in writing.

Finally, reading-for-writing instruction should encourage learner autonomy and reflective practice. By incorporating self-evaluation and peer evaluation, teachers can help students become more aware of their strengths and areas for improvement. This reflective dimension not only supports sustained writing development but also fosters learners' sense of responsibility and agency in the learning process.

Overall, synergy-based reading-for-writing offers a theoretically grounded and pedagogically feasible approach to English writing instruction in senior high schools. By aligning reading input with writing output through structured scaffolding and collaborative interaction, teachers can enhance students' writing proficiency, motivation, and broader academic skills, thereby optimising the effectiveness of writing instruction.

Suggestions for Future Research

This research can be enhanced and refined in the following aspects in the future.

Firstly, the scope of the test sample should be expanded. Future studies can recruit more students from diverse settings, such as rural areas, and from different types of high schools, to make the sample more comprehensive and representative.

Secondly, it is necessary to conduct longitudinal research to continuously observe the development and changes in students' writing abilities over a more extended period, understand the long-term effects and potential impacts of reading on writing, and provide more implications for teaching practice.

In addition, adopting more scientific and detailed research methods can better control and analyse various variables that may affect students' writing. For example, advanced data analysis techniques can be used to deeply explore the relationships between variables and more accurately assess the independent effect of reading on writing.

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Conflict of Interest

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