Abstract

The four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing have always been the emphasis of Chinese language teaching, with writing being the benchmark of the standard of the other three skills. Hence, the study of students' writing skills remains a paramount issue in Chinese language education.

This study aims to investigate the writing skills of the grade nine students of a secondary school in Macau. To help students overcome their weaknesses in writing, the findings are used to develop a series of modules for senior high school writing syllabus.

The study lasted for two years, sampling a total number of 335 grade nine students enrolled in the academic years of 2003 and 2004. The test was conducted in the form of writing with a given topic. The topic and evaluation rubric are the same as the Chinese writing assessment in the Study on the Diagnostic Assessment of Academic Competence in Basic Education in Macau in 2000. The rubric covers eight criteria: relevance, correct use of words, word choice, sentence fluency, rhetoric, clarity, organization and content.

The results of the test indicated that students performed the worst in rhetoric. Of the 143 students enrolled in 2003, only one achieved the highest score –3; 49 students scored 1-2 and 93 students scored 0. Of the 192 students enrolled in 2004, only six scored 3; 62 scored 1-2 and 124 scored 0.

From the perspective of rhetoric teaching, the results of the study provide insight into developing a series of modules on the use of rhetoric figures for senior high school writing syllabus. The modules are centered around the 13 rhetoric figures used by the students sampled in the test, which include: ploce, anthypophora, parallelism, interrogatio, quotation, anaphora, anadiplosis, personification, metonymy, onomatopoeia, climax, apostrophe, and simile. It is hoped that the writing programme will help students apply the rhetoric figures they have learned into daily writing practice.