

An Empirical Study of TSCA in the Writing Course for College English Majors

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ABSTRACT

How to enhance college students' writing ability is an important task in the education reform of college English writing. On the basis of Teacher-Student Collaborative Assessment (TSCA), this research takes "Description of a Person" in "Courses for English Writing" as the study case, and it attempts to explore the influence of TSCA in the writing course for English majors and explores effective ways of essay assessment so as to help students achieve a synergistic development of language skills, writing skills, and critical thinking skills.

Keywords: Teacher-Student Collaborative Assessment, Production-oriented approach, Writing, English majors.

1. INTRODUCTION

For a long time, English writing has been a key and difficult part of English learning and teaching. Among the language skills (speaking, reading, listening, writing and translating), writing is the best way to test students' ability in language use comprehensively. Scholars and experts have always attached great importance to the way of reviewing and assessing students' writing products.

However, the traditional assessment of writing products still plays a dominant role. Writing assessment is a very tough task for many teachers which lead to the fact that the quality of students' writing output cannot be guaranteed and students' motivation in writing gradually undermines. On the other hand, many students focus too much on marks rather than teachers' evaluation on their writing products, so they do not take seriously the comments given by teachers whose efforts are not fully respected. Therefore, it is quite difficult to improve students' writing ability in the traditional writing class.

In this case, Professor Wen Qiufang and her team put forward in 2016 "Teacher-Student Collaborative Assessment (TSCA)" to improve the traditional way of teaching. TSCA is the most

effective way to address the needs of the Production-oriented Approach (POA) framework. It aims to find an effective evaluation strategy by choosing appropriate methods to improve the assessing process and promote teachers' evaluation of students' English writing. It can reduce teachers' workload by organizing and balancing teachers' assessment with other evaluation methods, and it can also fully mobilize students' enthusiasm and inspire them to play their main role in learning.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

First put forward by Professor Wen Qiufang, "Output-driven Hypothesis" was developed into "Output-driven and Input-enabled Hypothesis" in 2013, and this theory was officially named as Production-oriented Approach (POA) in the 7th International Conference on English Language Teaching in China, which provided compelling theoretical support and valid solutions for English teaching in China.

TSCA refers to a new method of assessment to organize and balance teacher assessment and other types of assessments (Wen Qiufang, 2016). Scholars and teachers have explored the application of POA and TSCA from different perspectives in recent years. Zhang Wenjuan (2016) did a three-week classroom experiment on POA, aiming to increase the efficiency of college English class.

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Feedbacks from students and coworkers indicated that classroom dynamics was effectively strengthened and the language output quality was greatly improved. Sun Shuguang (2017) carried on a reflective practical study of TSCA in classroom, and found that “students have improved their sense of responsibility for error detection and recognized the role of revision”, which proved that students were very willing to accept this evaluation method. Zhao Xiaofang (2018) studied the application of TSCA in college English writing teaching, and adopted TSCA model in oral English reporting in college English classroom. POA theory also aroused concern of foreign scholars like Ellis, Polio, Cumming and Matsuda. They expressed affirmation to theoretical base of POA, and offered proposals for the development, research method and research direction of POA.

From the previous study investigated, it turns out that TSCA is an efficient way of teacher assessment in English writing. Though there are some researches on TSCA in English writing, they tend to focus more on a broad theoretical level. This study attempts to explore the influence of TSCA in the writing course for English majors and explores effective ways of essay assessment so as to help students achieve a synergistic development of language skills, writing skills, and critical thinking skills.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

This research will be conducted on the basis of the following aspects:

3.1 Participants and Time Arrangement of the Research

In all, 30 undergraduate students in the second year of college English majors were designated to be as the participants of the research. The TSCA-based teaching practice was conducted in the experimental class for 16 weeks, with 2 periods a week.

3.2 Tasks of the Research

In the semester, students are expected to acquire the writing techniques of four types of English writing (narration, description, exposition, and argumentation) as well as some other practical writing skills. Each type of English writing is designed to be completed within 4 periods, with 2 periods of textbook study and 2 periods of TSCA practice.

Previous studies of English writing in colleges have mostly focused on argumentative essays and expository essays, and less attention has been paid to narrative and descriptive essays. In fact, narrative and descriptive writing is important for cultivating student’ interest in writing and developing their language skills, and cultivating students’ observation, creativity and discernment. Therefore, to improve the quality of college English narrative and descriptive writing is of great significance. For this reason, this research takes Unit 4 “Description of a Person” in Courses for English Writing (Book Three, Compiled by Yu Dongming, issued by Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press) as the teaching material.

3.3 Data Collection and Research Objectives

To record the whole process of TSCA practice as well as students’ writing and revisions, the author collected the experimental data by using classroom observations, teaching portfolios, and teaching logs: classroom recordings (teacher’s lectures and students’ discussions); students’ assignments (first and revised drafts); students’ interviews; questionnaires about students’ reflections on the effectiveness of using TSCA.

There are three main objectives of this research are as following: students’ attitude towards teachers’ assessment in English writing; students’ attitude towards TSCA; the effects of TSCA on improving students’ writing skills.

4. TEACHING PRACTICE ON THE BASIS OF TSCA

The teaching practice is divided into three stages: pre-class activity, in-class practice, and post-class exercises.

4.1 Pre-class Activity

Writing techniques (appearance, anecdotes, speech, and association, etc.) used to describe a person were expounded at the very beginning of the chapter. Then students were required to complete the writing task “Description of a Person” within 2 hours before TSCA. All the participants should hand in their drafts at the end of the week. The teacher then checked the drafts and select 2 of them as typical samples to conduct TSCA in the class of the following week. And one of the samples written by a student is presented here for analysis:

My English teacher

In my sixth grade, I transferred to a new school. Facing a brand new environment, I felt a little nervous and a little scared. But what impressed me was my English teacher. She was wearing a pair of gold glasses, not tall, and her round figure. But she gave a very serious and harsh feeling herself. It was because she is rarely seen laughing, she always likes to stare at disobedient students, and one of her eyes feels like it can kill people.

I remember that the first examination was the entrance examination. I missed one point in English single subjects. Of course, many students failed like me. That was the first test. However, the English teacher asked the students who failed to stand for a whole class. At that time I was very young, but I felt that the teacher was so strict. Of course, I did not dare to disobey the teacher. I had to work hard to be a good student. Of course, I passed the exams again and again. Because of the strict teaching methods of English teachers at that time, I really

worked hard on English; in addition, every time I dictated, as long as I made a mistake, I would be fined 150 times. At that time, there were really a lot of bad words about English teachers. Fortunately, everything has passed. But in my impression, the sixth grade English teacher is still the harshest teacher I have ever seen.

Looking back now, thanks to the rigorous teaching of English teachers at that time, my English scores are very good in junior high school and high school, and I am also interested in English.

4.2 In-class Practice

Students’ independent thinking, group discussions, and discussions between the teacher and students were all involved in the class. The TSCA tasks are listed in "Table 1":

Table 1. TSCA tasks

Writing tasks	Focus of assessment	Length of Assessment	Number of samples
Description of a Person	handwriting, English writing format	10 minutes in Period 1	2
	organizational structure, content	35 minutes in Period 1	2
	writing techniques	25 minutes in Period 2	2
	language	20 minutes in Period 2	2

To be more specific, the following steps were carried out in the class:

Step 1: Six groups were divided and students were asked to make comments on the handwriting and writing format of the given samples. One of the two samples was clean and tidy while the other one hasty and careless. The aim of this activity was to encourage students to develop keen awareness of good handwriting. And this step was planned to complete in about 10 minutes of Period 1.

Here is the analysis of the given sample based on TSCA:

- The handwriting of this sample was acknowledged as clean and tidy;
- The initial letter of “teacher” in the title should be capitalized.

Teachers and students discussed to give solutions to the above problems.

Step 2: Students were asked to analyze the organizational structure of given samples. They tried to answer the following questions: Did they have a complete structure and a clear plot? Did they achieve unity and coherence? The aim of this

activity was to make students fully understand the basic requirements and criteria of essay writing. And this step was planned to complete in about 35 minutes in Period 1.

Here is the analysis of the given sample based on TSCA:

- The writer introduced his teacher who was a strict English teacher and an important person in the his growth. General speaking, it has a well-organized structure and achieves unity.
- However, sentences in the essay did not flow naturally and readers may find it a bit difficult to follow the writer’ s train of thought. In other words, it did not meet the criteria of coherence.

Teachers and students discussed to give solutions to the above problems together.

Step 3: Students were asked to analyze whether writing techniques concerning describing a person were appropriately applied in the sample essays. The aim of this activity was to encourage students to use techniques of describing a person skillfully so as to make their descriptions more impressive

and effective. And this step was planned to complete in about 25 minutes in Period 2.

Here is the analysis of the given sample based on TSCA:

- The writer described the teacher’s appearance and anecdotes. However, the features of the teacher’s appearance were not shown in a prominent manner.
- The anecdotes of the teacher should be further illustrated so that readers can have a deeper understanding of the teacher’s influence on her student.
- It is a pity that no speech or dialogue was employed to describe the teacher.

Teachers and students discussed to give solutions to the above problems together.

Step 4: Students were required to focus their assessments on the language of the sample essays and find out grammar mistakes, spelling errors, format mistakes, inadequacy in word choice or sentence writing, and Chinglish, etc. The aim of this activity was to emphasize students’ proficiency in language use. And this step was planned to complete in about 20 minutes in Period 2.

Here is the analysis of the given sample based on TSCA:

- Grammar mistakes can be found in the sample, such as “She was wearing a pair of gold glasses, not tall, and her round figure.”
- Mistakes of Chinglish can be seen everywhere, such as “However, the English teacher asked the students who failed to stand for a whole class.” “...my English scores are very good in junior high school and high school...” “At that time, there were really a lot of bad words about English teachers.” etc.

- A lot of sentences begin with the pronoun “I”, which makes sentences tedious and dull.

As to these problems, teachers and students discussed to give solutions to the above problems together.

At the end of the class, the teacher made a summary: Handwriting is important and it is better to keep the writing clean and tidy; the writing must meet the requirement of well-organized structure, unity, and coherence; writers are encouraged to use techniques of describing a person skillfully; writers should be proficient in use language correctly and appropriately. Finally, the teacher delivered follow-up exercises for the next stage.

4.3 Post-class Exercises

The teacher handed out all students’ drafts and required students to improve their writing. The typical errors discussed in the class must be revised and avoided. Then, students were asked to hand in their revised essay before the weekend and the teacher checked their second draft to see whether they had corrected their essays as required. In addition, students were advised to rewrite their drafts carefully to try their best to keep their essays clean and tidy.

5. FEEDBACK AND REFLECTION OF APPLYING TSCA

After finishing the whole process of TSCA, the teacher organized interviews with students to get acknowledge students’ feedback on this practice. Meanwhile, questionnaires were distributed. The questions mainly concentrated on students’ attitude toward English writing, their improvement of writing skills, and their opinions concerning TSCA practice. With analyzing the data from this study, the research results are shown in "Table 2":

Table 2. Research results

Aspects	Feedback
Attitude towards writing	Students have a better understanding of “details determine success or failure” and “attitude is everything”. Students’ interest, motivation and ability of autonomous learning have been significantly strengthened.
Basic elements of essay writing	Students understand the importance of organizational structure, unity, and coherence in essay writing.
Use of writing techniques	Students gain a deep insight on “characterization” of a person and find it is helpful to describe a person effectively.
Aspects	Feedback
Language capability	Students become conscious to use concrete words and expressions, rhetorical techniques such as simile, metaphors, and personification, etc. to describe a person.
Training of critical thinking	Many students begin to consider the deep understanding and excavation of human nature in their descriptions.
Opinions on TSCA	Most of the students are willing to use TSCA to evaluate their compositions. And they believe that TSCA can effectively improve their writing ability.

6. CONCLUSION

POA theory creatively advocates the teaching concept of “the integrated principle of learning and application”, and it embeds “motivating, enabling and assessing” into the training of English writing. TSCA is a summary and supplement of teacher evaluation, student self-evaluation, peer evaluation, and automatic machine grading. In this research, teachers and students gradually adapted themselves to the TSCA model. Meanwhile, students in the experimental class made obvious progress in writing. There is a significant difference in proficiency and accuracy of writing compared with the pre-class draft. In addition, students’ learning motivation in reading writing has been greatly improved under the TSCA model. Therefore, teachers are strongly advised to appropriately apply POA teaching concept and TSCA model to their teaching of English writing.

AUTHORS’ CONTRIBUTIONS

Hongling Que is responsible for experimental design and wrote the manuscript; Linxi Zhang contributed to revising and editing the paper.

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