

Effects of *Writing Roadmap*TM 2.0 on Teachers in English Writing Teaching

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ABSTRACT: This paper attempts to investigate the impact of integrating the online assessment tool of *Writing Roadmap*TM 2.0 into English writing teaching, aiming at revealing its specific effects on teachers. Results show that the integration of WRM into teaching can help teachers monitor students' writing process and enhance teacher-student interaction, as well as reduce teachers' marking workload. On the other hand, *Writing Roadmap*TM 2.0 also poses new demands on teachers. This paper lists these new demands required of teachers and specific measures that should be taken to meet these demands, hoping to facilitate the more efficient use of *Writing Roadmap*TM 2.0 in English writing.

KEYWORD: English writing teaching; *Writing Roadmap*TM 2.0; Effects on teachers

1 INTRODUCTION

As stated in "College English Curriculum Requirements" promulgated by the Ministry of Education in 2007, computer- and classroom-based college English teaching mode and self-assessment and peer assessment form for students' English competence should be adopted. Nowadays, with the developments in Artificial Intelligence and Natural Language Processing technologies, there appeared one kind of computer-assisted English writing system — *Writing Roadmap*TM 2.0, whose introduction into China has imposed great influence on English writing teaching and learning in both elementary schools and colleges. Many researches had been carried out to prove the applicability of *Writing Roadmap*TM 2.0 in helping English writing teaching and learning (Zhou, 2011). While detailed study on the impact of *Writing Roadmap*TM 2.0 on teachers has not attracted enough attention (Wu, 2012). This paper attempts to conduct a study on the specific effects of integrating the online assessment tool of *Writing Roadmap*TM 2.0 into English writing teaching on teachers.

2 *WRITING ROADMAP*TM 2.0

As a web-based writing assessment tool, *Writing Roadmap*TM 2.0 allows teachers to assign a writing prompt— or create a new prompt— in any of the

four styles: narrative, informative/expository, descriptive, or persuasive. Online instructional tools include a grammar and syntax tutor, tips to improve essays, and grammar-tree sentence diagrams that identify basic grammatical components. *Writing Roadmap*TM 2.0 also provides spell-checking and a thesaurus. The prompts used for *Writing Roadmap*TM 2.0 were developed by CTB/McGraw-Hill's professional content staff, which was composed largely of classroom teachers with rich experience in English and composition. The prompts were reviewed by expert hand scorers who have read and evaluated hundreds of student essays, on paper and online, to determine which prompt versions elicit the best overall student's interest and response. Practice prompts are also available.

*Writing Roadmap*TM 2.0 offers teachers the ability to assign students targeted practice prompts. The procedures are as follows:

The teacher assigns a writing prompt— or creates a new prompt— in any of four styles: narrative, informative/expository, descriptive, or persuasive. Teachers can choose to receive feedback on a 4-, 5-, or 6-point scale. (Tang, 2012)

Students write essays online following the *Writing Roadmap*TM 2.0 guidelines and receive instant feedback during the writing process.

On-demand tutoring can provide instructional hints, grammar/spell-checking, and a thesaurus.

Finished essays are immediately scored holistically and on six analytic writing dimensions:

ideas, organization, voice, word, fluency, and conventions.

Teachers can take the analysis provided in the easy-to-read reports, add their own comments, and provide customized feedback on students' essay drafts.

3 RESEARCH DESIGN

The objective of the investigation was to identify the problems and the new requirements on teachers in the integration of the online assessment tool of *Writing Roadmap™ 2.0* into English writing teaching and its specific effects on teachers.

Twenty College English teachers from College of Foreign Languages and 120 non-English-major sophomores participated in the investigation. The 20 teachers, aging from 26 to 49, have been teaching college English for two to twenty years. The 120 non-English-major sophomores were taken from two A-level classes.

The main sources of data collection included experiment, questionnaire and interviews. As for experiment, students were asked to finish writing one essay and submit it, and re-submit it after revision under the guidance of the feedback from *Writing Roadmap™ 2.0*. The experiment was made to discover the problems students have in the integration of *Writing Roadmap™ 2.0* into English writing learning, which is closely and directly connected with the new demands required of teachers. Questionnaire surveys, for both teachers and students, were intended to find out the benefits of *Writing Roadmap™ 2.0* for teachers, the problems they encountered in the integration of *Writing Roadmap™ 2.0* and the measures they took to solve these problems. Interviews are made only for teachers, and there are altogether 3 collective interviews, conducted mainly for a clear knowledge of the specific problems teachers confront in the use of *Writing Roadmap™ 2.0*.

Content and quantitative analysis was adopted to analyze the research data.

4 RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 Benefits

As shown in Table 1, *Writing Roadmap™ 2.0* did help students in raising the scores of their compositions. Questionnaire survey showed that 118 of the total 120 participating students in this project think favorably about the application of *Writing Roadmap™ 2.0* to English writing. One hundred percent of the teachers believed the application of *Writing Roadmap™ 2.0* could improve their teaching efficiency, help them monitor students'

writing process, reduce their marking workload, and enhance their interaction with students.

Table 1. Contrast between pretest and post-test scores.

Dimensions / Test	Pretest	Post-test
Ideas	4.4	4.5
Organization	4.7	4.7
Voice	4.7	5.5
Word	4.6	5.1
Fluency	4.7	5.4
Conventions	4.8	5.5
Holistic	4.6	5.0

4.2 Requirements on teachers

4.2.1 To help students get in-depth understanding of the evaluation dimensions

Questionnaires and interviews illustrated that a majority of the students had a vague understanding of the real meaning of the evaluation dimensions. Therefore, teachers were required to take specific measures such as analyzing reading materials and commenting on students' essays in terms of the six evaluation dimensions, and comparing the differences between English and Chinese texts in the aspect of grammar, syntax, logical progression and so on to help students get a profound understanding of the dimensions. Only when students get a clear knowledge of the evaluation dimensions can they write following the dimensions. Moreover, teachers should also make clear to students that *Writing Roadmap™ 2.0* is only an instrument and the purpose of assessment is to understand the learning process so as to make adjustment accordingly. In this way teachers can help students to get a clear and proper knowledge of this system.

4.2.2 To change the mode of teaching

Experiment (as shown in Table 1) showed that the post test scoring was only raised a little in the aspects of ideas and organization, while the scoring improvement in the aspects of voice, word, fluency, and conventions was striking, and even the holistic scoring also get a notable elevation. As illustrated in the questionnaire survey of "what is the biggest problem about the feedback from *Writing Roadmap™ 2.0*?" One hundred and ten students thought that the small raising in the aspect of ideas and organization was caused by the fact that the feedback on ideas and organization from *Writing Roadmap™ 2.0* were fairly broad and short of specific suggestions on rectification. To solve this problem, teachers should take the following measures before class, in the class, and after class.

First, with the use of *Writing Roadmap™ 2.0*, teachers should make a fuller preparation before class. They should be familiar with every move of the instrument, offer detailed description of the writing title, and give proper introductions to each paragraph as scoring references for the realization of accurate scoring from *Writing Roadmap™ 2.0*.

Second, with *Writing Roadmap™ 2.0* relieving teachers of the workload of rectifying students' errors in grammar and spelling, teachers should put more emphasis on the two aspects of content and organization. Brainstorming like opening up students' thinking and helping students on how to express ideas logically in English should be carried out in the class. For example, specifically, the skills to make strong and well-defined theme and logical flow of action in narrative writing should be analyzed in detail in class.

Third, in after-class activities, teachers should provide highly individualized and well-directed comments and suggestions, rather than just take the analysis provided in the easy-to-read reports or give a score only without adding their own individualized comments, on students' written assignments, so as to make up for the deficiency of *Writing Roadmap™ 2.0*. Furthermore, teachers can also display students' excellent compositions through a projector with good expressions marked clearly, and ask students to revise their writings accordingly, aiming at arousing their learning interest.

4.2.3 To recognize the new role of teachers in writing teaching

A majority of the teachers were ready to forfeit their role as the center of teaching and shift to the role of a facilitator in this new teaching environment (see Table 2), which formed a vast contrast with their traditional teaching practice of teacher's lecturing occupying most of the class time. Specifically, teacher's role should change from the one and only lecturer and evaluator to the guide and supporter of students' learning, the organizer and coordinator of the teaching process, the trainer of learning skills and techniques, the analyzer of students' demands, and the learner and practitioner of evaluation criteria, etc.

Table 2. Roles of teachers (N = 20)

In your opinion, in <i>Writing Roadmap™ 2.0</i> system, the teacher's role should be ____.	Lecturer	3
	Manager	2
	Participant	3
	Dictionary	0
	Students' facilitator	12

5 CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the impact of integrating the online assessment tool of *Writing Roadmap™ 2.0* into English writing teaching and reveal its specific effects on teachers. The above analysis of experiment, questionnaire surveys, and interviews showed many benefits of the integration of *Writing Roadmap™ 2.0* into English writing, such as helping teachers monitor students' writing process and enhance teacher-student interaction, as well as reduce their marking workload. At the same time, concerns have been raised in relation to profound understanding of the dimensions, change of teaching mode, and recognition of new roles in the new teaching environment on the teachers' part. Solutions and suggestions have been discussed in this paper, which will facilitate the more efficient use of *Writing Roadmap™ 2.0* in English writing.

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