Research on the Teaching Model of College English Writing Based on the Application of "Pigai.org"

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Abstract: This paper explored the teaching model of English writing consisting of the discussion of topic types, the first draft, model composition analysis, peer review, the second draft and comment by the system and the teacher. Assisted by this website and its writing platform, the teacher chooses 38 non-English freshers as the subjects and recorded the whole teaching process. The results show that this new teaching model could improve the students' learning attitude and improve their language capacity and ability.

Introduction

English writing is the most difficult part in the English study for most non-English majors in China. According to the *College English Curriculum Requirements* [1]*,* students should be able to complete writing tasks for general purposes such as describing personal experiences, impressions, feelings, or some events, and to undertake practical writings. They should be able to write within 30 minutes a short composition of no less than 120 words on a general topic, or an outline. The composition should be basically complete in content, clear in main idea, appropriate in diction and coherent in discourse. Students are expected to be able to have a command of basic writing strategies. So, it is one of the main objectives of college English course to improve the English college students' writing ability.

However, the current English writing proficiency of the college students is not satisfying. Take the students at Wuhan University of Science and Technology as an example, among the students of Grade 2014, the average writing scores in the English final exams in the first two semesters are 7.65 and 8.04 out of 15, which account for only around 50 percent of the 15 points. Hence there are still many problems in the college English teaching and learning, and the teaching methods should be improved to improve the students' English writing.

According to the Social Constructivism theory, writing is the actively constructive process of the learners who need to play the autonomy and learn self-monitoring. During this process, due to the importance of the students' existing knowledge and experience in the writing, we should encourage teacher-student cooperation and student-students exchange and self-reflection. We need to adopt the formative evaluation to emphasize the student performance in the process of learning [2]. Hyland states that writing is learned, not taught [3]. English writing itself is a process of learning English. Writing complements listening, speaking, reading and other English skills and can not be separated from each other. Under the guidance of this theory, the teachers, assisted by Pigai.com can monitor the students' writing process, stimulate their enthusiasm, and hence improve their writing ability.

Pigai.com provides the online grading based on data base and cloud computing. By giving the scores and the comment automatically on the whole paper and on each sentence, it allows students to revise and improve their papers online for as many times as they want and grade each other's papers. It achieves the man-machine, teacher-student and student-student communication, increases the teacher's efficiency of grading the paper and improves the students' ability of English writing.

This paper is a follow-up study of the teaching practice of college English writing course and the writer wants to find out whether the teaching model of college English writing based on the application of "Pigai.org" can improve the students' ability of English writing effectively.

Method

The study takes 38 non-English freshers of Wuhan University of Science and Technology as subjects. The students are in the second semester of their first year at college when the study begins. The teaching model of English writing consists of the discussion of topic types, the first draft, model composition analysis, peer review, the second draft and comment by the system and the teacher. The data are collected through the first and the second draft. Through the analysis on the data, changes on the level of the students' English writing will be found.

Model Composition Analysis. The study takes CET-4 (College English Test Band 4) writing types as reference, which includes phenomenon description, comparison and contrast, narration, problem-solution, cartoon or graphic writing, etc. The structure and content of each type is different. Without instructions, the writings may be in irrational structure, or be off the point. So, it is necessary for the teacher to tell the students the characteristics of each type of writing before they begin to write. This study chooses the phenomenon description type as the model. First of all, teachers should introduce students to the characteristics of such composition, i.e. such composition generally require students to give an overall description of the phenomenon, try to explain the causes, related factors and influence, and, and analyze the possible problems and the development trend in the future. When writing this type of composition, finding out the causes of the phenomenon, the relevant factors or influence is the key and difficult point. Before asking the students to finish the first draft, the teacher gives a similar topic as a warm-up activity----the certificate craze, and leads the students to brainstorm the causes of this phenomenon and show their attitude towards it.

The First Draft and Model Composition Analysis. The teacher first logs on pigai.org, creates a new writing assignment, and sets the title and requirements such as deadline, words limits and so on. The teacher should also set the grading standard for this assignment. The Pigai system contain different levels of grading template, including CET-4, CET-6, TEM-4, TEM-8, IELTS, GRE, TOFEL, etc. In this study, the title of the composition is "Should the University Campus Be Open to Tourists?" The students are supposed to write the composition online with no less than 120 English words, and submit it within one week. The CET-4 grading template is chosen for this writing assignment, and the average, highest and lowest score are set as 75, 85, and 55 respectively. Then the teacher should enable function of the peer review and similarity detection that can effectively prevent the students from plagiarism.

The teacher can also show the model to the students online after they submit their composition, but this function is not adopted this time because the students' first draft will be analyzed in class afterwards. When all these settings are finished, the system randomly generates a composition number with which the students can easily find their assignment and begin writing it.

The scores and comments on the whole composition and each sentence will be shown to the students right after their composition is submitted, and the students can revise it according to the

scores and comments. In this study, I ask the students not to revise their composition until the model composition analysis and peer review are finished.

Model composition analysis is a dispensable part in college English teaching and learning. The teacher must guide the learner to learn from the models, including successful and unsuccessful ones that serve as an important intermediary which shows the learners the thinking process of the writer [4]. Hence I download the first drafts of two high-score compositions and two low-score compositions from Pigai system (the grading system of Pigai system has been tested by many English teachers and experts from different universities in China and proved to be accurate.), project them on the screen in the classroom, and ask the students to review the compositions in terms of the organization, content, grammar, collocation, cohesion and coherence, and offer some suggestions.

Peer Review. Model composition analysis not only enables the students to find the flaws in their compositions and learn from others, but also teaches them how to review the compositions[4]. In order to guide the students to review the compositions of their classmates fully and accurately, I ask them to work on the organization, content, grammar, collocation, cohesion and coherence, and let them aware that a good composition is not just grammatically and syntactically correct, but fits the expression habit of English in term of organization, content, cohesion and coherence, which is usually neglected by Chinese learners.

The students can find the compositions of their classmates in their own account in Pigai.org after the deadline of the first draft. Then, they should review their classmates' work in terms of the aspects they have learned in class. All the compositions and reviews are given anonymously which ensures the principle of fairness.

The students are encouraged to learn from each other via peer review, which is a valuable part in this teaching model because the students can improve their writing skill through the process of looking for the mistakes from the compositions of their classmates.

The Second Draft and Comment by the System. The students realize the problems and know how to revise their compositions after they see the comment given by the system and their classmates. Then I ask them to finish the second draft in one week. In particular, due to the function of online revising of the system, the students can revise their composition for as many times as they want and the system will evaluate and grade every version they submit. Thus in this part, there is no limit for the time of revision, and the students can keep revising their composition until they are satisfied with the score and comment given by the system.

Comments by the Teacher. After the second draft is submitted, I read each composition carefully, and compare each draft with the first version. Since the system can automatically mark the two adjacent editing versions with different colors, I could see very clearly the changed between the two drafts.

Besides giving revision suggestions for each sentence, I also comment on the paragraph as well as the whole composition. The comments are accurate and constructive which 34 students out of 38 in this study think helpful and valuable.

Results

In this research, I discover that the students improve their writing ability in mainly three aspects: change of the writing attitude, improvement in proficiency and the depth of the content.

Change of the Writing Attitude. In traditional English writing class, it is very common for the teacher to give assignments, the students write compositions after class and hand them in and get them back after the teacher grades them. Most of the students only have a glance at the graded

composition and put it aside without thinking about the problems in it, much less revising it. While in the new teaching model, the students are not so anxious and terrified as they were because they have the full knowledge of the organization and content of the composition through the discussion of topic types, model composition analysis and peer review. What's more, the students are also stimulated by the simultaneous grading function of the system, and they tend to revise their writing many times in order to get a higher score. In the study, some students rewrite their composition as many as 21 times, and the average rewriting time of the whole class is 7.71.

Besides, there is greater improvement in the number of words in the composition. Because of the National College English Test Band Four (CET-4) requires that there should be no less than 120 words in the composition, the research sets the similar requirements in the writing that there should be 120-200 words. By analyzing the first draft, I find that most writings have more than 120 words. See table 1.

Table 1. Number of words in the first draft

Minimum	Maximum	Average	Writings with more than 150 words
122	203	162 . 24	23 (38 total)

The writer thinks that the reason for the students' ability to write a long essay lies first and foremost in detailed explanation by the teacher and the brainstorming of the similar topic, which greatly enhances student's way of thought. Secondly, although the teacher set in the writing system that students should finish their writing within 30 minutes, most of them actually write on the paper first and then key in the words into the system, which means they have enough time to write. Besides, the writing topic is very close to life and everyone has something to say. And in the second draft, the number of words keeps increasing, with an average of 173.34 words. Only 3 students write less words than their first drafts. The number of words does not necessarily represent the quality of the composition, but it shows the desire and willingness of the students to write more.

Improvement in Proficiency. By comparing the two drafts, I find that the students improve their writing ability through correcting the mistakes according to the comment by the system and peer review. There are 8 main types of mistakes in the students' composition: structure, content, transition, syntax, vocabulary, grammar, spelling and "Chinglish". The modifications are listed from the most frequent to the least as: "Chinglish", syntax, grammar, vocabulary, transition, content, structure and spelling. Among them, "Chinglish" is most frequently revised one, which shows that students organize their thought in Chinese when they write the first draft.

"Chinglish". "Chinglish" accounts for a large part of the errors in student's composition. Affected by the mother tongue, students tend to bring their Chinese way of thinking into English writing, and a lot of expressions without English origins are created. However, since there is no grammatical mistake in most "Chinglish", the students do not realize their own mistakes because of limited language proficiency. Based on corpus, Pigai.com can identify the expressions with lower frequency of use, which means expressions not existing in the corpus. These expressions might be regarded as "Chinglish" fabricated by students.

For example, in the writing of some students appears such a sentence: "Not only does it do no harm for studying, but also it strengthens their study conscience." The system warns that there is no such a usage-- their study conscience—in the corpus, and it might be a Chinglish expression.

For another instance, there comes a sentence: "Because of the different opinion from different people, different university set up different rules for the question." The system warns that here is

no such a usage-- different rules for the question—in the corpus, and it might be a Chinglish expression.

The students can learn from the warnings given by the system and revise their Chinglish, making it in line with the English way of expression.

In the first drafts, the system marked 128 lower frequency expressions, and after the recheck of the teacher, the number is reduced to 110, which means each student use 2.89 lower frequency expressions in average. In the second draft, the system marked 10 lower frequency expressions, among which 5 remain the same in both the first and second drafts, and the other 5 are new in the second draft.

Syntax, grammar and vocabulary. By comparing the two versions, we find that that the students still make a lot of syntactical mistakes in their writing, but it also shows that the students are paying more attention to the modification of the syntactical expressions to make it more concise and smooth.

For one example, in the first draft a student writes: *A plenty of tourists enter into the university must affect the students, and it will make students can't sleep well, because it will cause noise.*

And in the second draft, the sentence becomes: *Too many tourists on the campus will interfere in the students' daily life.* This sentence becomes more concise.

For another example, in the first draft a student writes: *However, others think that it is the sacred places which students are want and studying. They refused the University campus to be open to tourists.*

And in the second draft, the sentence becomes: *However, some other people think that the university campus should not be open to tourists because the students need a quiet place to study.* This sentence is smoother.

Grammar and vocabulary is another important aspect of modification. Pigai.net will detect the grammatical mistakes which do not match with the database, and peer review will also yield some other grammatical errors. Students will also ponder on the diction.

For example, in the first draft, there is a sentence fragment: *…but the other people think visit the famous university is a happy thing.* And in the second draft it is: *… but the other people think it is a happy thing to visit a famous university.* This is an example of grammatical correction.

For another example, in the first draft, there is a sentence fragment: *…to meet different people.* And in the second draft it is: *…to meet diverse people.* This is an example of choice of words.

Transition, content, structure and spelling. The modification to the transition is only second to grammar and diction. With the help of the teacher's instruction, comment by the platform and peer view, Students pay more attention to the coherence and cohesion of paragraphs and sentences, and they begin to realize that good transition leads to a coherent and fluent piece of writing.

There are limited modifications to the content, structure and spelling of the compositions. Since it's a composition with a given topic, the content and structure are confined by the given outline. Besides, the teacher has explained the type of the writing beforehand. Therefore, students have already a clear concept of its content and structure. There are very few spelling errors, because students have finished the composition before class by checking dictionaries if they are not sure about some words. The spelling error occurs mainly when keyed into the computer.

Implications for teaching of EFL writing

The teaching model of English writing consists of the discussion of topic types, the first draft, model composition analysis, peer review, the second draft and comment by the system and the teacher.   After all these steps, the students' writing ability has improved. The writing scores of the

experimental class improves by as much as 18 points for some students and the average improvement is 6.99 points. From this research the writer finds the following implications:

(1) The explanation of the topic by the teacher is essential to help students master the writing skills of certain type of writing. Different types of composition in CET 4 have different requirements and specifications. Only when students have understood these requirements and specifications could they write a good article based on their own knowledge within the scope of the provisions. Secondly, teachers should also strengthen students' English input, and have them absorb some idiomatic expressions at the lexical, syntactic and discourse levels, so that students can write what they mean in English instead of creating a lot of "Chinglish". In addition, the discussion of similar topic before writing can help students open their mind, generate new ideas, have a more rational thought and more confidence in writing.

(2) Comment of the model composition is important. By commenting the model composition, and analyzing its merits and defects, students can find the common problems and identify themselves with the model through the comments and analysis of the teacher.

(3) Peer review benefits the students. To teach is to learn, and to comment is to learn too. While commenting others writings, students can also learn something, and they can find themselves in the writing of others. This process enhances their understanding of the defects in the writing, and warns them of the same mistake in their future writing. Through cooperative learning, the development zone has been maximally extended [5]. The teacher's final comment can give students' composition a more accurate assessment, and it also shows the shortcomings and deficiencies, as well as directions for future efforts.

(4) Pigai.com provides a good writing platform. Students can modify their compositions according to comments and suggestions instantly given by the system. Through revision of their writings, students can improve their writing levels. Teachers can have a general understanding of the distribution of errors, word class, collocations, and long sentences in the compositions of the students based on the data provided by the platform, which will help the teachers adjust their teaching strategies in the future.

Acknowledgements

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