A Study on the Blended Teaching Mode of College English Writing

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the application of a blended learning model for college English writing teaching based on the Production-Oriented Approach (POA) theory. An eight-step blended teaching mode for English writing instruction is designed and applied in English writing courses for first-year non-English majors at a comprehensive university in Beijing. Results show that the blended learning mode in the study suits the characteristics and English proficiency levels of the target students. Effects have been achieved in addressing the issue of weak writing motivation among students in traditional college English writing classes and in enhancing the quality of students' written output as well as in improving the efficiency of teachers' writing correction work.

Key words: College English; Blended teaching mode; Writing instruction

1. INTRODUCTION

College English, as an integral part of undergraduate courses, plays a crucial role in cultivating and enhancing the cultural literacy of college students. English writing, as a significant aspect reflecting students' English proficiency level, is an indispensable component thereof. The basic objectives for writing skills outlined in *Guidelines for College English Education* (2020 Edition) issued by the Ministry of Education are: being able to describe personal experiences, observations, emotions, and events in English; writing common practical texts; engaging in brief discussions, explanations, or descriptions on general topics or outlines in the form of short essays, with basically complete language structures, clear central ideas, appropriate word choices, and coherent meanings; and applying basic writing skills.

However, the effectiveness of traditional college English writing instruction leaves much to be desired. On the one hand, teaching is primarily teacher-centered, with students passively receiving knowledge in the classroom, leading to a disconnection between learning and application. Moreover, frontline teachers still face the challenges of heavy and inefficient essay grading tasks. On the other hand, college students with low English proficiency level have a weak foundation in English, lack motivation for English writing, encounter difficulties in writing, and produce texts of poor quality. Their English writing skills urgently need improvement.

Based on *Guidelines for College English Education*, the present study designed a blended teaching mode of English Writing and applied it to college English writing instruction. The aim is to cultivate students' English writing motivation, improve their English writing skills, and enhance the current situation of writing evaluation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The present study made a design of a college English writing teaching mode suitable for college students with low English proficiency level based on the teaching philosophy of the Production-Oriented Approach (POA).

Reviews of relevant research include: an overview of POA theory and the application of POA in college English writing instruction.

2.1 Overview of POA Theory

The Production-Oriented Approach (POA) is an innovative teaching method constructed by Professor Wen Qiufang and her team at Beijing Foreign Studies University to cater to the characteristics of intermediate and advanced foreign language learners in China. This theoretical framework originates from the "Output-Driven Hypothesis" and was revised to the "Output-Driven, Input-Enabled Hypothesis" in early 2014. It was officially named POA at *the 7th International Conference on English Language Teaching* in China in October of the same year (Wen, 2015). Qiu (2020) provided a comprehensive review of the birth background, theoretical framework, and application of POA theory, and analyzed the problems existing in its application process.

The revised theoretical framework of the "Production-Oriented Approach" in 2018 consists of three parts: teaching philosophy, teaching hypotheses, and teaching procedures. The teaching philosophy encompasses "learner-centeredness," "integration of learning and use," "cultural exchange," and "key competencies"; the teaching hypotheses include "output-driven," "input-enabled," "selective learning," and "learning through assessment"; and the teaching procedures comprise "motivating," "enabling," and "assessing."

As one of the teaching philosophies of POA, "learning-use integration" aims to address the issue of "separation of learning and use." Here, "learning" refers to input-based learning, while "use" refers to the production of language output. "Learning-use integration" advocates for effectively linking input-based learning content with output-oriented production activities, promoting the practice of learning a little and using a little, thereby overcoming the previous disconnection between "learning" and "use." (Wen, 2015; Wen, 2018).

The application research of POA covers a wide range of courses, including general English, business English, information technology English, and academic English; it involves various language skill courses such as English writing, reading, listening, and speaking.

In addition to English classes, some non-English language courses, such as German, Romanian, Korean, Malay, and Sinhala, have also attempted to introduce POA into teaching (Qiu, 2020). Furthermore, the application level of POA theory is also relatively broad, encompassing junior high school, high school, undergraduate, and graduate levels (Guo, 2019; Xu, 2023; Zhang et al., 2019). Due to the significant differences between the teaching philosophy, process, and steps of POA and traditional teaching methods, there are indeed some challenges in applying POA theory to teaching practice. Therefore, when practicing POA theory in teaching, teachers need to flexibly and precisely design and implement teaching based on the actual situation of students, teaching objectives, and course goals.

2.2 The Application of POA in College English Writing Instruction

In recent years, empirical research on the application of POA in college English writing instruction has gradually increased. These studies primarily focus on designing various effective driving, enabling, and assessing activities based on the POA teaching process of "driving-enabling-assessing" to improve the effectiveness of English writing instruction.

Chen and Wen (2020) conducted a semester-long POA teaching intervention with 90 non-English major students to enhance nominalization output in academic English writing. After a semester of instruction, an analysis of students' learning logs, interviews, production texts, and classroom observations and interviews with peer teachers verified the significant effectiveness of the POA teaching model in improving nominalization output in academic writing.

Niu (2020) believes that in the driving phase of college English writing instruction, teachers need to pre-select teaching materials that align with students' interests and psychological needs and the key to the enabling process lies in the high degree of cooperation between teachers and students, and positive teacher-student interaction is the guarantee for completing the entire English writing instruction process.

Liu (2023) studied the evaluation model of college English writing instruction that combines teacher-student collaborative evaluation and machine evaluation under the guidance of the POA concept based on the machine writing evaluation system "iWrite". Results show that college English writing instruction guided by the Production-Oriented Approach can change students' writing attitudes, enhance their writing interest and confidence, and improve their writing abilities.

Cao (2017) conducted a two-semester teaching experiment with first-year undergraduate students from Harbin Normal University as the main research subjects and found that the POA theoretical teaching model can alleviate students' writing anxiety to some extent, stimulate their writing enthusiasm, and improve writing quality. Liu (2019) explored the effectiveness of introducing the POA concept into instruction, believing that the Production-Oriented Approach has good feasibility in college English writing instruction and can improve students' English writing proficiency to a certain extent.

Zhang (2023) conducted college English CET-4 writing instruction under the POA model. The research results indicate that the POA model is suitable for college English CET-4 writing instruction and can effectively stimulate students' subjective initiative.

The above studies have all verified the feasibility and effectiveness of POA in college English writing instruction. This study plans to introduce the teaching philosophy of POA into college English writing instruction at a comprehensive university in Beijing, and design a blended teaching mode for college English writing that is suitable for students with low English proficiency level with reference to the POA teaching process.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research questions

The research questions of the present study include:

• In English writing classes, teachers take the lead while students passively accept, resulting in students' weak writing motivation.

• English writing instruction is commonly disconnected from application, leading to a disconnection between learning and using.

• Teachers' efficiency in grading writing assignments is low with heavy workload.

• The quality of students' written output with too much grammatical and lexical errors is to be improved.

3.2 Research method

3.2.1 Participants

(1) Students

The participating students in this study are first-year non-English major undergraduates from the 2024 cohort at a comprehensive university in Beijing.

(2) Teachers

Five teachers participated in the teaching practice of the study, all of whom are frontline instructors responsible for teaching the college English courses involved in the present study.

3.2.2 Design of the Blended Writing Instruction Mode

The present study introduces the teaching philosophy of the Production-Oriented Approach (POA) into college English writing instruction. The teaching process of "motivating", "enabling", and "assessing" of the theory has been localized into an 8-step blended writing instruction mode and applied.

The 8 teaching steps include: online video watching, online discussion, Chinese to English translation, Writing skill instruction, writing practice, co-evaluating, online testing, self-evaluation and revising with the application of AI.
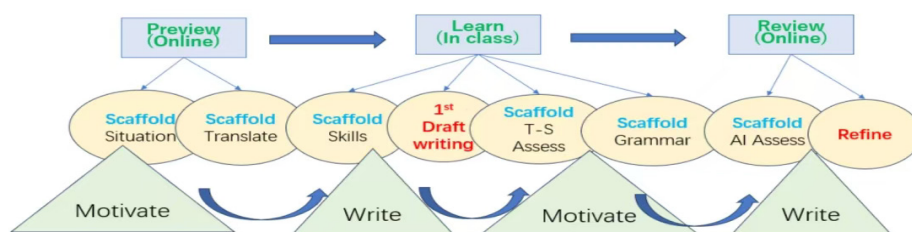

Figure 1
8-step Blended Mode of English Writing Instruction

4. TEACHING PRACTICE

The present study applied the 8-step blended mode of English writing instruction in the course *College English 1* for first-year non-English majors in the 2024 cohort at the University. The writing genres involved included Invitation Letter, Thank You Letter, Letter of Congratulations, Letter of Application, and Letter of Apology. The teaching duration totaled 15 weeks.

Table 1
Application of the Blended Mode of English Writing Instruction

Grade	Departments	Classes	Target students	Writing Genres
Freshmen (2024)	7	19	760	Invitation letter
				Thank You Letter
				Letter of Congratulations
				Letter of Application
				Letter of Apology

The instruction of the third unit writing "How to Write a Thanks Letter" in *College English 1* is taken as an example. Before the class, online, the teacher posted a topic on the online teaching platform: "Do you often say thanks to others? Or, are you often thanked by others? For what occasions?" The teacher also presented a video montage titled "Saying Thanks" featuring movie clips and assigned a translation task to promote writing, which involved translating a Chinese thanks letter. After participating in the discussion and watching the video, students naturally connected the writing theme of "Thanks" to real-life situations where gratitude is expressed. The online translation task further motivated students to express themselves and helped them identify gaps in their language expression. In the process of trying to bridge these gaps, they prepared themselves for writing an English thanks letter.

During the in-person class, the teacher organized a discussion on the structure of a thanks letter and outlined the key points of writing an English thanks letter,

providing students with writing skill scaffolds for their upcoming task. Afterwards, the teacher assigned an open-ended thanks letter writing assignment, encouraging students to draw from their real lives to determine the recipient and reason for gratitude. In this step, students actively connected to their real-life experiences, choosing to thank teachers, classmates, friends, roommates, great individuals, or even themselves, with heartfelt and sincere content. After all students completed their first draft, the teacher organized peer evaluation within small groups, requiring them to assess their peers' drafts from the perspectives of structure, content, and language. Following this, each group discussed with the teacher, who helped the group identify typical issues and provided suggestions. In this process, students further discovered gaps in their structural arrangement, content organization, and language expression. Based on this, the teacher conducted grammar-focused tests and exercises to provide students with language scaffolds.

After the class, students used AI (such as Wen Xiaoyan, Kimi) as a teaching assistant to self-check and reflect on the first drafts of writing. Incorporating suggestions from peers, teachers, and AI feedback, they polished and revised the first drafts to produce a second draft, completing all the writing stages for a themed composition.

5. RESULTS ANALYSIS

5.1 Student Learning Effects
In classes adopting the blended mode of English writing instruction designed by the study, student participation rate has reached over 95%. Typical errors that often appear in students' essays, such as incomplete structure, lack of coherence, tense errors, and run-on sentences, have noticeably decreased.

Moreover, Student satisfaction with class instruction has significantly increased. The average score given by students to the teachers in teaching evaluations is as high as 97.0, with the highest reaching 98.3, which are much higher than the average.

Questionnaire results on the effectiveness of blended mode of English writing instruction for the 2024 cohort indicate that students have adapted well to the blended writing instruction mode. 74% of students believe that online topic discussions are very helpful for writing; over 50% of the participating students think that the design of scaffolds is necessary; and approximately 46% of students accept joint evaluation by teachers and students, a proportion slightly higher than that of evaluations conducted solely by students or teachers.

5.2 Evaluations from Supervisors and Experts
Supervisors from the University's Teaching Quality Assurance Office assessed classes with the blended mode

of writing instruction applied, offering a high score of 94.0. Positive feedback on the teaching mode was made: "The design of the English writing instruction is excellent, with strong classroom management skills applied. The combination of lecture, practice, and evaluation effectively motivates students learning in writing. Overall, the classroom teaching effect is great, and students have gained a lot in such a class."

6. CONCLUSION
Based on the teaching process of the POA (Production-Oriented Approach) theory, the present study designed an eight-step blended English writing teaching mode with considerations of the characteristics of students and their English proficiency level, and implemented it in teaching practice.

This mode represents a further beneficial attempt to apply the POA theory in English teaching practice. With the mode applied, students' writing motivation is effectively enhanced. At the same time, a certain degree of integration of learning and application is achieved with the quality of written output improved. Meanwhile, teachers' heavy workload of correcting writing is reduced.

In the future, further study on the blended teaching mode of college English writing instruction is to be carried out so as to better adapt to the development trend of educational informatization and the needs of talent cultivation.

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