

A Research on the Teaching Practice of Task-based College English Writing Based on SPOC

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Abstract: Under the background of information technology, this essay has conducted a research on the practice of task-based college English writing based on SPOC (small private online course). This “Three in one” task-based writing teaching model has created a new model for teaching college English writing, which includes online network teaching, interactive feedback from offline teachers and peers, dynamic evaluation of teaching effect. This study aims at verifying the validity of the new teaching model. The research result has showed that this model has improved students’ writing ability, aroused their interest and promoted the development of their writing motivation, writing strategies and writing competence, while at the same time enhanced students’ self-efficacy.

1 Introduction

The latest edition of *A guide to College English Teaching* in China emphasizes the necessity of integrating information technology with foreign language teaching, stressing that college English teachers should design and implement the integration of information technology with the process of classroom teaching, make full use of the digital resources to expand the teaching content, and explore various teaching modes based on classroom, online courses, in order to help students in active learning, autonomous learning and individualized learning [1]. Under the background of information technology, how to guide students to learn writing methods, cultivate their active writing attitude, stimulate their interest in writing have become important topics in the teaching and research of college English writing. Therefore, this study combines TBLT on the basis of SPOC and implements the TBLT model of college English writing in Xiamen Medical College, and verifies the effectiveness of this model through teaching practice.

2 Theoretical Basis

Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) began in the 1980s. This language teaching method emphasizes “learning by doing”, which is the development of communicative teaching method. This teaching model takes Dewey's pragmatism as the theoretical basis of education, and believes that language teaching should be task-based, student-centered, and that students are the subject of knowledge and the active constructors of knowledge and meaning. Long [2] emphasized demand analysis in the process of TBLT and developed a theoretical model of TBLT from the perspective of second language acquisition. Willis, J [3] defined tasks as purposeful communicative activities and proposed three stages of TBLT: pre-task, task-cycle and language focus. Skehan [4] proposed the principle of task-based language teaching based on the cognitive learning method. After the 21st century, Ellis [5] studied task-based language teaching and learning from a theoretical perspective. Nunan, D [6] summarized the theory and practice of task-based language teaching in the past 20 years. Therefore, the research on TBLT in western countries is relatively early and tends to mature in theory, which lays a foundation for the theoretical research and practical guidance of TBLT in China.

In the middle and late 1990s, Chinese scholars Xia Jimei and Kong Xianhui [7] introduced relevant theories of TBLT into foreign language teaching in China. Foreign language teaching and researchers began to pay more attention to TBLT. Domestic researches on TBLT can be divided into

five categories: 1. About the theoretical background of TBLT; 2. About the related concept, the characteristic and the classification of TBLT; 3. About teaching design and empirical research of TBLT; 4. It focuses specifically on the task-based teaching of college English; 5. About the problems and related measures to solve the problems of TBLT. Undoubtedly, these studies provide theoretical basis and practical guidance for the application of TBLT in college English teaching. However, the existing researches mainly focus on the theoretical overview, while the empirical and applied researches are few. Zhou Li and Liu Diangang [8] discussed the practical application of TBLT in college English teaching. Besides, there are not many researches on the application of TBLT in teaching writing. CAI Lanzhen [9] made a comparative analysis of the limitations of the “results approach” and “process approach” in writing, and elaborated the application model of Willis's “task approach” in teaching writing. At present, a few scholars put forward the idea of combining modern information technology with task-based teaching method. Liu Caimin and Chu Xiangqun [10] proposed to make full use of internet multimedia technology to carry out experiments in the classroom and implement the task-based and research-based *Advanced English* classroom teaching. On the other hand, the research on the application of information technology in college English writing teaching is mostly based on the network, which reflects a certain gap between the teaching concept and the “flipped” teaching concept. In recent years, some scholars began to explore the application of SPOC model in classroom teaching of college English writing. Based on the teaching of college English writing, Cheng Lulu, Sui Xiaobing et al. [11] implemented the teaching model of college English writing based on SPOC, and verified the validity of the model. Although some of the above researches integrate information technology such as SPOC model with writing teaching, and some integrate TBLT with college English writing teaching, few people combine SPOC with TBLT in the teaching practice of college English writing.

Therefore, based on previous studies, this study attempts to construct a task-based teaching model of college English writing based on SPOC, in order to innovate the teaching model of college English writing and verify the effectiveness of this model in teaching practice.

3 Teaching Design

A. *Research objects* The objects of this teaching experiment are students majoring in clinical medicine from Xiamen Medical College, among which the experimental class is A1 (58 clinical majors), and the comparison class is A2 (59 clinical majors). The reasons for choosing these two parallel classes are as follows: first, the students of this major have good grades in terms of English Tests in College Entrance Examination; Second, this major has two English parallel classes, both taught by the same English teacher, and the students belong to the stratified teaching of A students, whose English levels are similar. The duration of the teaching experiment is 15 weeks in an academic year, lasting from September 2018 to January 2019.

B. *Research method* The research methods adopted in this study mainly include questionnaire survey, semi-structured interview, writing test, etc., and a research tool SPSS22.0 software is adopted. The questionnaire mainly involves questions related to students' learning motivation, writing strategies, self-efficacy and writing ability. Semi-structured interview is conducted mainly to understand students' personal evaluation and suggestions on the teaching model. In order to verify whether English writing ability can be effectively improved, students took the writing test before and after the experiment. Then, SPSS 22.0 software was used to compare and analyze the pre-experiment and post-experiment test results of the students, and T test and P test were used to detect whether there were significant differences among the scores.

C. *Teaching Design and Practices* Based on an analysis of teaching objectives, teaching objects, teaching strategies, teaching process and teaching evaluation, together with the teaching materials and resources, the SPOC mode is used to design classroom teaching and construct a task-based teaching model for college English writing. Teaching design mainly includes three stages: pre-teaching analysis, teaching stage design and teaching evaluation design. Pre-teaching analysis entails analyzing teaching objects, teaching objectives, teaching content and teaching environment.

Teaching stage design includes designs of teaching resource and teaching activity. The implementation framework proposed by Willis, namely pre-task, task-cycle and language focus, is adopted to divide the teaching stage into three phases: task-oriented learning, task-based learning and language focus. In the task-oriented learning session, students are required to watch specific teaching videos related to writing, guided to learn knowledge related to writing topics with the help of video resources on the online platform. Students are also encouraged to take notes and raise questions, even release questions on the online communication platform for further sharing and discussion in real offline class. In the stage of task-based learning, students are organized to conduct face-to-face communication and discussion in offline classes, and the activities are organized in the form of group discussion and communication, group cooperation to complete tasks and group presentation and group report. The language focus stage is to mainly practice and consolidate the knowledge learned in writing. The teaching activities mainly involves peer feedback and teacher feedback, and these tasks are carried out on the online writing platform. In the whole teaching stage, SPOC serves not only as a medium for students to acquire writing-related knowledge but also as an important supporting platform for implementing the online-offline combined teaching model. Teaching evaluation design provides a multiple evaluation system including online platform evaluation, offline classroom evaluation, formative evaluation and conclusive evaluation. It is worth noting that the SPOC online scoring system can collect and present data, including students' writing test scores, students' activity levels in the discussion forum, the number of students' questioning, etc. The online system automatically evaluates students' writing test results and the activity level in students' daily study.

The specific teaching practice is to implement the task-based teaching model of college English writing based on SPOC in class A1 from September 2018 to January 2019, and the traditional writing teaching method is adopted in the comparison group. Before the experiment, that is, at the beginning of the first semester, students in the experimental class and the comparison class were given a writing test within limited time (30 minutes) based on CET 4 writing tests, and the scores obtained were taken as the pre-experiment test result. At the end of the semester after the experiment, both classes were required to complete the same composition within 30 minutes to ensure that the writing difficulty and writing type were the same. At the end of the experiment, the result of the writing test was taken as the post-experiment score. In order to ensure the reliability of the score, three teachers were invited to evaluate the students' compositions. The final score of the students' compositions was the average score of the three teachers. Referring to the scoring principles and standards of CET4, the student's composition is scored from the following 7 aspects, i.e. structure, content, logic, vocabulary, sentence pattern, grammar and writing rules. The full score for a composition is 15 points. SPSS 22.0 software was used to compare and analyze the pre-experiment and post-experiment test results, to discuss and evaluate the teaching effect, and verify the feasibility and effectiveness of the teaching model.

D. Research Result and Analysis (Qualitative analysis) At the end of the teaching experiment, a questionnaire survey and face-to-face interviews were conducted, mainly aiming at the task-based teaching practice of college English writing in the SPOC mode, and the following aspects were investigated, namely, writing achievement, writing skills, writing interest, writing motivation, self-efficacy and so on.

Questionnaire survey suggests that 87% of the students think that with the new teaching model, their writing scores have increased significantly, 19% of the students think that their writing scores show a certain degree of increase, only 4% of the students think that the degree of increase is not obvious. The results also indicate that 98% of students investigated are satisfied with this teaching pattern, believing that the model can improve the efficiency of writing, improve their writing skills, while 90% of the students show that they are more interest in writing, more willing to revise their writing, their writing motivation is enhanced and writing self-efficacy is promoted, which reveals that that the new teaching model to improve the students' English writing level has achieved a good effect.

The interview results show that through this model, students have more ideas to express in writing, and they are more fluent in the organization of ideas, and they are willing to improve their writing skills through peer review and teacher feedback. At the same time, the data-push and real-time synchronization of learning resources on the platform greatly stimulated students' interest in learning English writing skills. Students were willing to revise their compositions or help their peers to revise their compositions according to the suggestions received from the platform, which enhanced their sense of accomplishment and self-efficacy. Student A mentioned in the interview: "this mode can improve our interest and participation in writing, reduce writing anxiety, and make us clear about our writing goals by mastering writing skills." Student B said, "the combination of online evaluation, teacher feedback and peer review helps to check the errors in the composition, standardizes the structure and organization of the essay, and students are more willing to revise and improve the composition repeatedly. The sense of accomplishment and satisfaction of writing is greatly improved."

(*Quantitative analysis*) Through 15 weeks of teaching practice, the task-based teaching for college English writing based on SPOC model, namely "online network teaching, offline interaction between teachers and peers, dynamic evaluation of teaching effect", has effectively inspired the students' learning motivation in English writing, improved the students' self-efficacy, to some extent, enhanced and improved the students' English writing ability. At the end of the teaching practice, writing tests before and after the teaching experiment were conducted on the students of class A1. The results were compared from the aspects of structure, content, logic, vocabulary, sentence pattern, grammar and writing rule. The paired sample T-test was conducted by SPSS22.0 software. The results was shown in Figure 1 as follows.

Scoring items	Pre-experiment test results		Post-experiment test results		T value	P value
	Average score	Standard deviation	Average score	Standard deviation		
Structure (3 points)	1.97	0.39	2.43	0.27	-1.81	0.001
Content(3points)	1.89	0.39	2.28	0.31	-1.51	0.001
Logic(3points)	1.97	0.33	2.22	0.32	-1.38	0.000
Vocabulary (2 points)	1.53	0.35	1.73	0.25	-1.93	0.000
Sentence Pattern(1.5 points)	1.02	0.15	1.21	0.16	-1.31	0.001
Grammar (1.5 points)	0.98	0.22	1.23	0.17	-1.80	0.000
Writing rule (1 points)	0.61	0.21	0.85	0.23	-1.03	0.030
Total score (15 points)	9.97	0.92	11.95	0.77	-1.72	0.000

Figure 1. The Results of Experimental Class's Pre-experiment and Post-experiment Tests.

As shown in Figure 1, the test results of the seven single scoring item as well as the total score after the teaching experiment were higher than the test results obtained before the experiment, which revealed that after 15 weeks' teaching practice in task-based English writing guided by SPOC, students in the experimental class scored higher to some extent in terms of writing from the aspects of structure, content, logic, vocabulary, sentence structure, grammar and writing rules. The results of T test and P test showed that there was a significant difference ($P < 0.05$) in the scores of students' composition before and after the experiment, and there was also a significant difference in each scoring item before and after the experiment, indicating that the task-based teaching practice of college English writing in SPOC mode effectively improved the students' English writing ability.

In addition, before the teaching practice, a writing test was conducted both for the experimental class and the comparison class under the same conditions, from which the pre-experiment test result

was obtained. At the end of the teaching practice, a post-experiment writing test was conducted again for these two classes to obtain the post-experiment test result. SPSS22.0 software was used to conduct the independent-samples T Test on the test results of the experimental class and the comparison class. The results were shown in Figure 2:

Class	Number of students	Pre-experiment Writing Test result				Post-experiment Writing Test Result			
		Mean value	Standard Deviation	T Value	P Value	Mean value	Standard Deviation	T value	P value
Experimental class(A1)	58	9.97	0.92	-0.87	0.693	11.95	0.77	5.48	0.034
Comparison class(A2)	59	9.99	0.91			10.53	0.84		

Fig. 2 Pre-experiment & Post-experiment Test Results for Experimental & Comparison Class

As can be seen from Fig. 2, the mean values of pre-experiment writing test result of the experimental class and the comparison class were similar (full score of writing was 15 points), that is, both scored 9.97 and 9.99 respectively, with no significant difference ($P=0.693 > 0.05$), indicating that there was little difference in the writing level between the two classes, which was suitable for comparative experiments. After a whole semester's teaching practice, however, both classes have higher scores in terms of mean value, with $11.95 > 9.97$ for the experimental class and $10.53 > 9.99$ for the comparison class. As for the experimental classes, greater progress in writing test can be seen obviously and there is a significant difference between the experimental class and comparison class ($P = 0.034 < 0.05$).

The result indicates that the task-based teaching of college English writing in SPOC mode can promote the development of students' writing ability better than the traditional college English classroom teaching for writing. The study found that compared with the comparison class, the writing performance of the experimental class improved significantly.

4 Conclusion

To sum up, this study constructs the task-based teaching model of college English writing based on SPOC, and verifies the effectiveness of this model through teaching practice and empirical research. The research shows that the task-based teaching of college English writing based on SPOC can effectively improve students' writing skills to some extent, stimulate students' interest in writing, promote the coordinated development of students' writing motivation, writing strategies and writing ability, and improve students' self-efficacy in writing. Of course, to some extent, this study also has some deficiencies, e.g. the experimental period is not long, the research object focuses on students with intermediate and advanced English level. Future study shall expand the scope of research objects (to group students from different English levels) and have a dynamic tracking and analysis of students' writing ability. This study is an innovative attempt at the teaching model of college English writing under the background of information technology, expecting to provide theoretical and practical reference for teaching college English writing in the information age.

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