

TSCA-Based Hybrid Teaching Model for English Writing Courses in the Context of the Cloud Era

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Abstract

Writing is the primary way for learners of English to use English, and it is also an adequate measure of learners' overall language ability because English writing skills are crucial. However, many students often have nothing to write about and make many linguistic errors when writing; students have a negative attitude towards writing and little awareness of revision; and teaching English writing is time-consuming and inefficient, all of which are conditions associated with the traditional teaching of writing feedback. Feedback is an essential factor affecting students' writing ability. Hence, it is difficult for teachers to give timely and practical feedback to students' English writing due to their limited time and energy and the heavy teaching load, so it is imperative to choose timely and effective writing feedback. In this study, a blended teaching model based on TSCA (teacher-student collaborative assessment) with an educational cloud platform to provide timely and effective feedback on students' output. The research was conducted over a half semester-long period of 8 weeks. The action plan was designed according to the pre-course, in-course and post-course operational steps of TSCA, using the dialectical stages of learning from - proposing new theories - practising new approaches - reflecting and interpreting. An online and offline TSCA post-course implementation process is proposed. The empirical results show that students' overall satisfaction with the TSCA after-school activities is high. Students have improved the quality of their written texts, their awareness of revision, and their attitudes towards writing.

Keywords

TSCA (teacher-student collaborative assessment); Production-oriented approach; English writing.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background in Universities in China

Cloud computing platforms are also known as cloud platforms and cloud systems. The advent of the cloud era has given foreign language teaching in universities in China infinite vitality, and course informatisation has become a leading trend in foreign language education; How to make full use of the cloud platform to deeply integrate information technology with English courses in universities and establish new teaching relationships and online and offline blended teaching models has become a common concern for foreign language scholars and frontline teachers (Qiu, 2020). Using the cloud platform, the hybrid teaching mode mainly lies in the extensive use of multiple teaching platforms/tools, optimising teaching resources, realising dynamic monitoring of the teaching process, and ensuring timely and efficient feedback and analysis of teaching effects.

1.2. Focus of Research

Students generally agree that it is difficult to improve their writing performance and that they have nothing to say and have a negative attitude towards writing. At the same time, the teaching mode of English writing courses in most undergraduate institutions in China is still relatively traditional, with the classroom generally adopting the form of "teachers preparing teaching materials, students writing, teachers explaining and providing sample reference". Students are passive recipients and gradually lose their active participation and ability to think, and the writing theories and skills they learn are superficial, making it difficult for them to build and improve their writing skills; while relying only on teachers' comments is subjective and lacks scientificity; this model cannot fully meet the needs of society for composite and application-oriented talents under the new situation (Qiu, 2020).

It can be seen that peer feedback and online feedback have not been able to improve the current situation and students' perceptions of writing feedback. Wen Qiufang (2017) points out that to "solve the local problem in China, we need to analyse the national situation and find the appropriate method for ourselves". To solve this dilemma, it is necessary to apply the "teacher-student collaborative assessment" (TSCA) proposed by Professor Wen Qiufang's production-oriented approach (POA) team, which integrates and optimises various types of feedback methods, to the teaching of English writing. This is a study of the effectiveness of TSCA in the education of English writing. "Teacher-student collaborative assessment (TSCA) is a new form of assessment proposed by Professor Wen Qiufang and her team of researchers in the "production-oriented approach" (Wen, 2016). TSCA is a new form of assessment proposed by Professor Wen and her team of researchers (Wen, 2016) to respond to the time-consuming and inefficient nature of ELT assessment, with a particular focus on the practical assessment of students' output. Students' writing is an output.

TSCA is a method of assessment in which the teacher selects the focus of the evaluation and a typical sample before the lesson, while the students collaborate to evaluate the piece under the guidance of the teacher during the study, and the students assess themselves according to the focus of assessment after the lesson and then assess each other or by machine (Sun, 2019). TSCA is not simply a superimposition of teachers and other assessment subjects, nor is it limited to the combined use of multiple assessment methods. The evaluation content is not limited to the quality of the product itself but also covers the achievement of the teaching objectives (Wen, 2016). TSCA is not only a form of assessment but also a means of facilitating learning. The use of TSCA in the teaching of English writing at university is not limited to evaluating the quality of students' writing texts. Still, more importantly, it helps teachers to achieve the goals of writing teaching, promotes students' attention to the problems in writing texts, increases students' engagement, and thus promotes their writing skills. TSCA is not only a complement to teacher feedback, peer feedback and feedback from automatic marking systems but is also systematic and better able to focus on targeted training while increasing friendly interaction between teachers and students. TSCA requires that teachers' assessment of writing outputs should take advantage of the subjective initiative of multiple subjects and use various assessment methods to achieve complementary strengths (Wen, 2016) to balance teacher assessment with other assessment methods.

2. Rationale and Research Questions

TSCA has clear steps and requirements for implementation, divided into pre-course preparation, in-class implementation and post-course activities (Wen, 2016). Sun (2017, 2019, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c) is committed to the practical application and theoretical optimisation of TSCA and has specified the implementation framework of the three processes and proposed implementation principles, which provide a basis for the implementation of TSCA.

However, nowadays, "hybrid learning is becoming the 'new normal' of future teaching" (Feng et al. 2019: 8). It is of practical importance to rationalise the use of online teaching platforms to achieve the articulation of TSCA inside and outside the classroom. Based on this, this study aims to optimise the after-school implementation phase of TSCA by specifically answering three research questions:

- (1) What are the specific steps for implementing TSCA after-school activities in a hybrid learning model in the context of the cloud era?
- (2) What are the students' attitudes towards TSCA as an assessment model?

3. Research Design

3.1. Background and Participants of the Study

This study was conducted in a general undergraduate institution with 34 English majors taught by the researcher. The course in which the TSCA was practised was 'Basic English Composition', which was taught for eight weeks per semester, two-course hours per week, and the development of students' writing skills was one of the basic objectives of the course. During the practicum, students complete four thematic writing tasks - mainly exam questions from the TEM-4 (Test for English Majors-Band 4) exam.

3.2. Research Methodology

In this paper, the dialectical research method (DRM) was used to conduct the study. This research method was proposed by Wen (2017a) to address the issue of 'systematicity' and is suitable for testing the validity of POA theory and practice.

Firstly, DRM considers the teaching and learning system as an organic whole, which cannot be studied in a fragmented manner, neither can the dynamic links between internal elements be cut off by generalisation, nor can the interaction between the external environment be severed. Secondly, the systemic nature of DRM is also reflected in the interpretation of the relationship between theory and practice. The relationship between theory and practice is not a one-sided theory of guidance or influence, but a cyclical and ascending theory of interaction. The starting point of dialectical research is the systemic problem, which needs to meet the three conditions of realism, complexity and criticality (Wen, 2018).

3.3. Research Process

According to Wen (2018), the process of dialectical research consists of N cycles of learning from - proposing a theory - practising theory - reflecting on interpretation. Each cycle is not simply a repetition of steps, but a process of continuous improvement.

3.4. Data Collection

The data collected for this study included: (1) classroom observations and teaching logs to record the implementation of TSCA, students' participation and teachers' reflections on teaching; (2) student work to check students' mastery of the assessment focus and students' revision; (3) students' reflection logs and in-depth interviews to understand students' feedback on TSCA and to track changes in students' attitudes towards writing. (3) Student reflection logs and in-depth interviews to understand students' feedback on TSCA and to track changes in students' attitudes towards writing. The specific writing tasks are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Introduction to TSCA dialectical research

	Writing tasks	Assessment focus	Concerns	Theory of Optimisation
Dialectical research	Argumentation Writing- Some people think learning history in school is important. Others think learning subjects more relevant to life is important. Discuss both views and give your own opinion.	Vocabulary and grammatical accuracy	Language	Steps to implement TSCA in combination with online and offline
	Argumentation Writing- Instead of asking the government to bear the cost of higher education, students should pay tuition fees themselves. Do you agree or disagree with this statement?	Vocabulary and grammatical diversity	Language	

4. Dialectical Research: Steps to Implement TSCA Online and Offline

4.1. Learning From and Refining Theory

To evaluate students' output tasks more scientifically and accurately, the TSCA-based multi-module hybrid teaching model is based on teacher-student cooperation and evaluation at three stages: before, during and after the lesson. Given the teaching requirements and characteristics of the writing course, this course adopts various teaching platforms/tools such as the iwrite platform of the Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, China MOOC, and WeChat groups etc., to optimize teaching resources, to design the teaching focus on the problems found in the pre-course, to take the output task as the guide, to integrate learning and application, and to teach the key contents through a mix of online and offline interactive methods. The key content is delivered through a mix of online and offline methods.

(i) Pre-lesson stage

The teacher uploads recorded teaching videos and audios on the Smooth Class teaching platform or ask students to watch the corresponding teaching resources on the Chinese MOOC; after watching the videos, students complete the corresponding writing tasks; after reviewing the assignments on stage, the teacher sets the focus and objectives of the assessment, selects typical samples of writing training for detailed review, and then prepares a suitable number of practice questions to help students solve common problems in TSCA according to the focus and difficulties of the assessment. The teacher then prepares an appropriate number of practice questions to help students solve common problems that arise in TSCA.

(ii) In-class implementation stage

The teacher first explains to the students the objectives, requirements and steps of the assessment, taking the objectives of the unit as a reference point and focusing on the application of the writing knowledge students have learnt during the facilitation phase.

(iii) Post-lesson stage

Students complete a comprehensive writing training project according to the teacher's requirements in class, with peer and self-assessment, supplemented by intelligent scoring and critiquing on the iwrite platform, and correction of their first drafts.

Through the above stages, the teaching cycle is formed and the teaching objectives are successfully achieved by breaking through the important and difficult points. During the teaching practice, teachers also pay special attention to students' feedback on the Education Cloud platform, conducting interviews and improving teaching when appropriate.

In particular, at the post-assessment stage, students are expected to revise their first drafts based on the focus of the assessment. Wen (2016) proposes a framework for the implementation of TSCA after class (see Figure 1), which specifies the forms of activities that students and teachers can use for post-lesson assessment, and the prerequisite for the smooth implementation of these activities is that students can grasp the assessment focus learned in class and have certain assessment literacy. In practice, however, I have found that students often do not grasp all the knowledge or skills learned in class at once, due to factors such as their English level and classroom time constraints, which greatly diminishes the effectiveness of the post-lesson assessment. In addition, in the framework of Figure 1, students and teachers have 'separate roles', with the teacher's role coming after the students have submitted their revisions. There is no direct interaction between students and teachers in the post-evaluation process, and teachers are largely 'invisible'. The combined online and offline approach helps to break down the time and space constraints of the traditional classroom and allows teachers to continue to act as a 'support' for the smooth running of TSCA after-school activities.

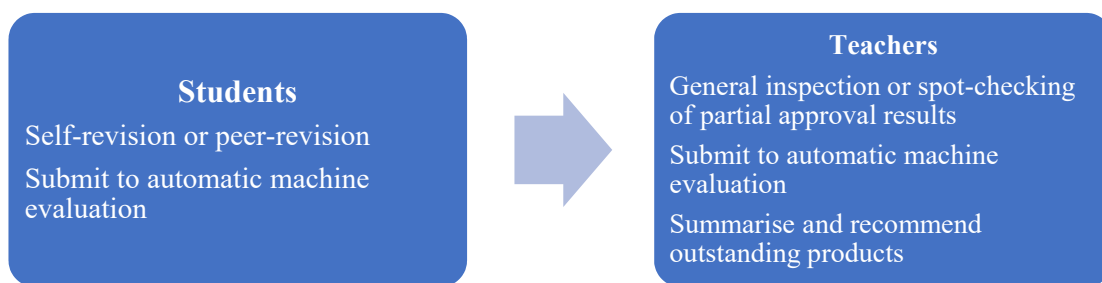


Figure 1. TSCA After-school implementation framework (Wen, 2016)

Table 2. Steps in the implementation of the TSCA with online and offline integration (Yang, 2021)

General steps in assessment	Specific actions	The role of teacher	Online/face-to-face
1. Consolidation exercise	1) Teacher designs additional teaching focus based on student feedback in class	Designers	Online
	2) Teachers push out learning resources and provide scaffolding questions	Information source	Online
	3) Students learn online and teacher summarises feedback	Facilitator	Online
2. Teacher-Student Discussion	1) Students complete an assessment form for self-assessment or mutual assessment discussion	Confusion Solver	Face-to-face
	2) Teachers post online discussion activities for Q&A		Online
3. Writing revision	1) Revised by students or based on peer feedback, with revisions marked		Face-to-face
	2) Students submit their revisions to the online automated marking system and revise again based on feedback		Online
4. Summary and demonstration	1) Teacher's summary of student revision and issues arising	Evaluators	Face-to-face
	2) Teacher recommends outstanding work for demonstration		Face-to-face

Constructivism suggests that learning occurs through three key components: contextualisation, collaborative inquiry and meaning-making (Li et al. 2007). Blended learning is the process of

creating authentic and complex contexts for learners to collaboratively explore and construct meaning in an online and offline learning environment (Feng et al. 2019). Drawing on constructivist theory, the key to after-TSCA implementation is to use a combination of online and offline approaches to create assessment contexts for students to collaborate with teachers, peers and machines to complete the assessment of their work and construct knowledge of second language writing. In a blended learning paradigm, not only does how students 'learn' change, but the role of the teacher also needs to change. According to Feng et al. (2019: 11), "the core role of teachers in blended learning is that of learning designers and facilitators". The role of the teacher is extended from in-class to after-lesson referring to Table 2 (Yang, 2021), and the role of the teacher is translated into that of designer, information source, facilitator, puzzler and assessor.

4.2. Practising the New Theory

The researcher used the above theoretical framework to carry out two assessment exercises focusing on vocabulary richness and sentence variety, which were mainly concerned with issues of English language expression. An example of the TSCA post-evaluation steps is shown by evaluating sentence vocabulary richness, with the writing questions: Instead of asking the government to bear the cost of higher education, students should pay tuition fees themselves. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? The teacher explains four ways of diversifying vocabulary during the evaluation session: 1. using substitutions or phrases. 2. nouns with adjectives or nouns as modifiers. 3. Use pronouns. 4. using attribute clause.

S23 before revision: Many young people have chosen to go to college after leaving school.

S23 after revision: Students who have work experience can find work easily.

As an example of assessing sentence diversity and grammatical errors, demonstrate the TSCA after-evaluation step by writing "Some people think learning history in school is essential. Discuss both views and give your own opinion. The teacher explains four ways of diversifying sentences in the mid-lesson assessment: using phrases, using participles flexibly, using a mixture of long and short sentences, and using special sentences appropriately. However, when guiding the students to revise the typical sample, I found that many of them had difficulties, especially in the areas of flexible use of participles and appropriate use of special clauses. Therefore, the author decided to make these two points a supplementary focus of teaching online with intensive practice before moving on to the assessment session.

Firstly, during the consolidation phase, the teacher posts the tweet "How to use participles correctly" on the Cloud Classroom, together with correction and rewriting exercises. In addition, a discussion group will be set up in which each student will be asked to share 1-2 memorable sentences in English and try to imitate them, and the students will vote for their favourite sentence in the form of likes. This stage is an essential link between in-class and after-class. The teacher plays multiple roles as a designer of remedial teaching, a source of information, and a support facilitator. Secondly, in the teacher-student discussion phase, students work in pairs to assess each other face-to-face according to the Sentence Diversity Assessment Form. The evaluation sheet is based on the four dimensions of sentence diversity taught in the lesson, and students score each dimension and suggest changes. During this time, students can ask questions about any uncertainties in the evaluation process through discussion groups and the teacher can answer questions, with the teacher acting as a puzzler. In the revision stage, students make the first round of revisions based on feedback from their peers and discuss any areas of uncertainty or disagreement with their peers. This is then submitted to an online auto-critique, which can be repeated based on machine feedback. At the end of the demonstration stage, the teacher compares the students' first drafts with the revised drafts to determine how well the students have revised them and uses the peer review form to understand how well the students have reviewed each other and how well the peer feedback has been taken up. The

teacher summarises the revisions and problems in the offline lesson and selects the five best revisers, the two best sentence formers and the best model essay and leads the class in an assessment.

When comparing the use of sentence structure in the first and revised drafts, it can be seen that students' awareness of the use of a variety of sentence structures has increased and fewer grammatical errors have been made (see Table 3), as exemplified below.

Table 3. Sentence used and common Chinese English errors before and after TSCA implementation.

Student essays	Grammatical errors	Sentences used
Preliminary draft (before implementation of TSCA)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Many sentences in Chinese lack a subject, so when writing in English, add the subject 2. Chinese long determiners are often found before nouns, while English long determiners prefer to be found after nouns. 3. Chinese often has double verbs, when writing English, you can turn the second verb into an intransitive verb 	Simple sentences, parallel sentences
Final draft (after TSCA implementation)	Avoided	Simple sentences, parallel sentences, Subordinate clauses, participial constructions, emphatic clauses, special clauses

S6 before revision: Students should learn those teach them practical skills courses.

S6 after revision: Students should attend courses that teach them practical skills, which can improve their employability.

In their reflection journals, students mentioned several gains: "I learned a lot of new sentences and ways of writing that I hadn't used before", "I learned the importance of using some advanced expressions and special sentences in my essays", "It was good to be able to look at materials in class", "It was good to be able to learn things that I couldn't learn right away in class". Some students also had an internal motivation to improve their writing: "I need to pay attention to the use of sentences and learn them in the future", and "I need to take self-training in composition more seriously and acquire more methods in the future", etc. Most of the students had a positive attitude towards the TSCA: "Discussion makes the writing process better and I like this way of evaluating my writing with my teacher and peers", and "I can improve by learning from my strengths and weaknesses". However, some students had negative opinions, saying that they "could not come up with good ideas for revision" and that they "did not want to spend too much time on this".

4.3. Reflective Interpretation

This round of experimentation extends the focus of in-class assessment in conjunction with online cloud-based classes, helping students to further internalise relevant knowledge in class and laying a solid foundation for assessment and revision sessions. Research has also shown that the integration of classroom teaching and online teaching can broaden the teaching space and facilitate students' deeper mastery of knowledge (Yang, Fang et al. 2007). To ensure that assessment proceeds smoothly, teachers, peers, assessment forms and machines all play a scaffolding role at different stages to support learners in completing objectives or tasks (Davis & Miyake 2004). When all support is directed towards the same goal, different sources or types of scaffolding can have a synergistic effect that is much greater than the sum of the parts (Tabak 2004). The various elements of the scaffold are not independent of each other, but rather

complement each other and interact with each other. In the consolidation phase, for example, the online platform provides students with learning resources and automatically grades their responses, but it does not diagnose the specific causes of errors or help them to solve their problems. The teacher can then use the feedback from the online platform to communicate with the student online, taking into account previous classroom practice, to determine where the student is struggling and to help them resolve their difficulties. Student performance is therefore the result of the teacher and the online platform working together as a system. In addition, there are synergies between the various phases. The remedial teaching in the consolidation phase scaffolds the evaluation and revision of the work, the evaluation form scaffolds the discussion of the inter-assessment, and the teacher's question and answer session, all of which serve to revise the work at the same time, and finally work together with the demonstration of excellence to form a complete assessment and facilitation loop. The synergistic effect of the scaffolding also reflects the strengths of TSCA itself, which is not simply a superimposition of several types of assessment - teacher-student assessment, student self-assessment, peer assessment and automatic assessment have their strengths and weaknesses.

5. Conclusion

This study has conducted a dialectical study to optimise the after-school activities in "teacher-student collaborative assessment" and to explore ways to improve the effectiveness of teaching writing in undergraduate English. The study draws on relevant theory and practice and optimises the original theoretical framework of teacher-student collaborative assessment. The study proposes a step-by-step approach to the implementation of TSCA after-school activities that combines online and offline activities, providing a way to implement TSCA in a blended teaching environment.

The results show that the optimised TSCA is more effective in improving the teaching of undergraduate English writing. Students not only improved the quality of their writing texts but also their awareness of writing revision, attitude towards writing and interest in learning English.

The study provides some insights for frontline teachers: firstly, they should change the traditional concept of separation of assessment and learning in writing teaching and establish the teaching concept of assessment for learning and learning by assessment; secondly, teachers can make appropriate adjustments to the implementation of TSCA after the class, such as the distribution of online and offline activities, the size of the tasks and the number of mutual assessment groups. In short, TSCA is not a static and mechanical assessment tool, but a dynamic and flexible way of promoting learning through assessment. Future research can continue to explore how to better realise the learning outcomes of TSCA in the interaction between theory and practice.

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