

A Blended Teaching Mode in College English Writing Based on Intercultural Competence Cultivation

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Abstract: From traditional approach to process approach prevailing in the recent years, it indicates that the foreign language teachers improve the students' writing abilities by attempts and exploration. However, in practice, these approaches are of disadvantages. This paper focuses on the analysis of current approaches in EFL writing instruction. It is based on the basis of cultivating intercultural competence, with intention to suggest a blended online and offline teaching approach. It creates a real situation to stimulate the interest before writing, encourage students to make full use of online resources and cultivate the students' intercultural competence while writing, and establish multiple interactive evaluation method after writing so as to open a new way of thinking for college English writing teaching.

Keywords: Intercultural Competence; Intercultural Consciousness; Blended Teaching mode; Online Teaching; College English Writing

1. Introduction

Writing is an active skill that can objectively reflect students' ability of thinking organization and language expression. It is challenging to speak both your native language and your second language. Language learning is inseparable from writing, which can not only consolidate the language knowledge learned, but also an important means of communication. Writing can effectively promote the internalization of language knowledge. "Comprehensible output" hypothesis proposed by Swain thought that language output, including writing helps learners to check the sentence structure and the use of words, promote the automation of language use, and effectively achieve the purpose of language acquisition [1]. When learners express

meaning in English, they have to actively invoke the English knowledge they have learned, weigh the application of grammar rules, ponder over the collocation of words, and weigh the accuracy and appropriateness of words and phrases. Through writing, English knowledge is constantly consolidated and internalized, paving the way for the comprehensive development of English skills [2]. However, it is not easy to learn to write, because it is a roundabout, complex and dynamic process, subject to various cognitive and social factors. The rhetorical environment of writing in a foreign language is more complex, involving cross-social and cross-cultural factors.

2. The Current Situation of College English Writing Teaching

In China, writing teaching has always been a difficult point in college English teaching. Although foreign language teachers have spent a lot of time and energy trying different teaching methods to improve students' writing skills, the students' writing ability has not reached the expected goal. There are many reasons for this situation. First, our foreign language teaching has not paid enough attention to writing. Second, writing teaching methods are outdated and backward. Therefore, it is urgent to find effective EFL writing teaching ways to improve EFL writing ability of Chinese students [3]. In recent years, there exist common problems in both the traditional product teaching method based on behaviorism theory and the current process writing method based on communication theory. In fact, students just memorized some words and cannot use language well in intercultural communication. Writing is one of the most important ways of communication, but students tend to rigidly use writing templates, lack thinking about writing topics, and are unable to express personal opinions by using

the language rules they have learned. It is also weak for college students to analyze and solve writing problems. Furthermore, students like to quote English famous sayings in their essays, but they cannot express Chinese traditional culture well in their writing. All these situations show that in English learning, most students still just memorize the idiomatic usage given in the textbook, but cannot express their own feelings properly in English, let alone express and spread their own national culture properly in another language. Under such circumstances, it is difficult to achieve the goal of intercultural communication teaching, and it is impossible to spread the cultural resources of a country in another language, and the communicative content cannot go out, and naturally the communicative goal of writing cannot be achieved [4].

With increasing international exchanges, the demand for high-level English language talents is increasing. People pay great attention to the practical application and communicative competence of English. In addition, with the development of information technology, the traditional English teaching mode has been far from meeting students' learning needs and social development requirements. Many schools in foreign countries have implemented their own mixed teaching mode according to the characteristics of their own schools. In China, some universities also have successively joined the educational reform of mixed teaching mode. Although the concept of blended learning is pursued by the education circle, there are few discussions on how to apply the blended online and offline teaching method to college English writing teaching. Therefore, this paper makes full use of the advantages of online learning and offline classroom, and discusses the implementation of mixed college English writing teaching mode from three stages, namely, before writing, while writing and after writing, all of which provide suggestions for college English writing teaching.

3. Intercultural Competence

Byram [5] believes that cross-cultural competence encompasses five elements: knowledge, attitude, interpretive/relational skills, discovery/interactive skills, and critical cultural awareness, and is a collection of

goals/intentions. In cross-cultural communication, cross-cultural competence is combined with other abilities. Based on the definition of communicative competence by Canale & Swain [6] and Bachman [7], Chen Yiting and Pan Yu [8] proposed a model of cross-cultural communicative competence, which includes cultural sensitivity, tolerance towards cultural differences, and flexibility in handling cultural differences. Chinese and English belong to two different cultures, the eastern culture and the western culture. Therefore, when conducting English writing, students should recognize both similarities and differences in thinking patterns between English and Chinese. However, the current focus of college English teaching is on imparting language knowledge, neglecting the cultivation of students' cross-cultural communication abilities. Students regard vocabulary and grammar learning as all aspects of language learning, lacking the necessary cross-cultural awareness and knowledge. Therefore, they are constrained by Chinese thinking in English writing. Their compositions lack intercultural elements and intercultural knowledge. Some students' compositions have empty structures but chaotic logic, which greatly dampens their enthusiasm for writing.

4. Blended Teaching Mode to Cultivate Cross-cultural Competence in English Writing Teaching

4.1 Pre-writing Stage

In this stage, students are required to master writing topics and genres, collect writing materials, and make a writing outline. Intercultural competence requires students to experience and master English in practice. Therefore, teachers can use the blended online and offline teaching method to create a language environment with VR technology and multimedia technology, so that students can immerse students in an English environment. Audio-visual resources can help to attract students' attention, stimulate their writing desire, inspire their thinking, deepen their understanding of the writing topic, and prepare them for the successful completion of the writing task. Specific methods can be adopted as follows:

4.1.1 Watch videos

It is a convenient and effective way to show the lives of British and American people through video materials. Students watch videos and record information, and teachers guide students to compare the differences between China and the West purposefully.

4.1.2 Mind mapping

Mind mapping is a highly effective way of getting information. Mind mapping is a creative and logical means of note-taking that literally “maps out” your ideas. Mind mapping can guide students to divergent thinking, enrich writing ideas, expand thinking, and form a strong sense of discourse. Mind mapping guides students to think independently and make full use of English vocabulary and grammar to make sentences, so that students will have no difficulty in language expression and article structure. Teachers play the role of “organizer”, guide students to dig into the writing content, organize students to carry out writing activities in groups and learn from each other. Writing teaching is more relaxed and smoother, and students are more likely to write a higher level of articles.

4.1.3 Brainstorming

Brainstorming, known as collective thinking method or intellectual agitation, often asks students to think about a specific task and express the idea, no matter how strange it may be. The purpose of brainstorming is to generate new ideas and let students observe things from different perspectives. In this way, the purpose of stimulating students’ abilities of association, imagination and creativity is achieved. Students can brainstorm on a writing topic in groups through online communication platforms such as QQ platform or Tencent conference. After the students finished their free talk, the “brainstorming” method basically completed the digging of materials in the stage of before-writing. At this time, the students already had a lot of writing materials and creative inspiration in their mind to finish the writing tasks.

4.1.4 Field trips

For expository writing, teachers can organize students to visit the site, during which relevant basic English knowledge and expression methods can be introduced.

4.1.5 Holding debate competitions

For argumentation writing, teachers can hold debate contests on a certain topic, and students can quickly collect relevant information and find out powerful arguments through brainstorming during the debate.

4.1.6 Performed culture approach

The performed culture approach requires students to take the classroom as the background, play various social roles through verbal and non-verbal means, create a simulated living environment, and successfully complete the intercultural communication tasks under the guidance of teachers [9]. For example, organize students to carry out an intercultural mini meeting about environmental protection. In such a real scene, students are required to write an article to introduce this activity and invite their foreign friends or teachers to participate in it in English.

4.2 While-writing Stage

Students can enter the writing stage after the preliminary writing preparation. This stage requires students to express their ideas in English accurately and idiomatically. In this stage, teachers, on the one hand, should pay attention to the words, sentence structure and grammar used by students in writing; On the other hand, we should pay attention to the differences between Chinese and Western cultural thinking and avoid the Chinglish.

4.2.1 The use of words and sentence patterns.

Students can use online electronic dictionaries, corpus resources, MOOCS, mini-lectures, Apps for writing and writing websites to systematically learn words, grammar, texts and rhetoric. Furthermore, students should read the original English book and newspaper widely in order to broaden their horizons and accumulate writing materials.

4.2.2 Differences in cultural thinking between English and Chinese

Intercultural communication is an activity in real life [10]. The meaning of words depends on the specific scene in which they are used, and this scene ultimately depends on the customs, habits, institutions and traditional life of the language community in which people live. Therefore, the improvement of students’ English writing ability depends on their mastery of English thinking mode.

First, provide the best language input.

The serious shortage of English input causes many obstacles to the improvement of students' English writing. Although students can figure out the ways to solve the problems logically, they cannot express their ideas in English clearly which results from students' just memorization of English knowledge rather than using what they have learned in life. The cultivation of English thinking mode begins with imitation. This requires teachers in the writing teaching process to carry out the appreciation of the model essay, translation of the model essay and other activities, carefully analyze and figure out the language characteristics of the model essay, pay attention to the cohesion and coherence between the sentences, and consciously guide students to imitate. Immersing students in English environment for a long time, students will gradually get familiar with English thinking mode and transform the Chinese thinking mode into English thinking mode subconsciously, so as to realize flexible expression and gradually improve their English writing ability.

Secondly, organize the students to recite model essays and build up English language sense.

The English knowledge acquired by students includes explicit knowledge and implicit knowledge. The explicit knowledge refers to phonetics, grammar, vocabulary, etc. Implicit knowledge refers to the knowledge that cannot be clearly expressed but can be skillfully used. The more implicit knowledge students have, the better they can use English. Therefore, teachers should try to organize students' recitation in class to help students transform their explicit knowledge into implicit knowledge and expand students' implicit knowledge as much as possible.

Third, compare the differences between English and Chinese culture.

In writing teaching, teachers should consciously guide students to compare the ways of thinking between English and Chinese, so that students can understand and eliminate Chinglish expressions. For example, in the writing class, teachers can analyze the expressions, sentence cohesion and article structure of authentic English articles, so as to clarify the differences between English and Chinese culture and the way of thinking which help students avoid Chinglish.

4.3 After-writing Stage

Students enter the revision and evaluation stage. After students have finished the first draft, feedback should be given in time by teachers and classmates. Through feedback, students can know the readers' evaluation of their own work, and realize whether the article is sufficient information, reasonable structure, clear thinking, and accurate choice of words and sentences. According to the feedback from teachers and classmates, students revise and polish the original text in time, revise or even rewrite it if necessary, until the final work is formed. Specific writing teaching methods are as follows:

4.3.1 Mutual evaluation between students via Internet

After finishing the first draft, students will post their writings to QQ Group or WeChat Group. Students will evaluate the first draft among themselves, discuss the content and structure of the draft, and propose some suggestions for revision. Teachers can also participate in online mutual evaluation and give the answers to students' controversial questions. Students revise the first draft again according to the feedback. After the students submit the revised draft, the class can grade or evaluate the students' revised draft through the Internet. Finally, post the good assignments on the class blog, or bind them up and distribute them in the class to read. When students check their papers and can share them with others in English, their intercultural competence is cultivated, their motivation to learn the language is stimulated, and their creativity is aroused.

4.3.2 Establish three-dimensional evaluation system.

The English three-dimensional evaluation system is an organic combination of teachers' comments, students' self-evaluation and group' evaluation.

Student self-evaluation refers to the process in which students independently correct mistakes in their writing under the guidance of teachers, which is conducive to stimulating students' initiative. Teachers provide students with detailed revision standards and checklists, pointing out common writing mistakes, so that students can find mistakes, improve and modify. After the revision is completed, submit to the judging panel. Each judging panel consists of three to five students, which

are divided into groups according to their writing level. Each group should have students with the high, middle and low-level writing abilities and the student with high-level writing ability will be appointed as the group leader. The evaluation should be objective and fair under the supervision of a teacher who can provide theoretical and technical guidance when necessary. Each group can choose an excellent essay as the model essay to present in the whole class. In this process, students not only learn the evaluation criteria of writing, but also experience the joy of sharing their own ideas in English.

4.3.3 Use network resources

The correction network makes use of corpus and cloud computing technology to compare the submitted students' essays with the standard corpus and correct the English essays online. Correction network can be in the shortest time to evaluate the composition, and give professional comments. The evaluation of the composition does not just give a general evaluation and a score, but can be refined to the evaluation of the student's composition in details from word to sentence, which can help students further modify their writing so as to improve their English writing ability.

5. Conclusions

The teaching of college English writing has been studied for many years in the field of foreign languages in China, but it is still not satisfactory. This paper jumps out of the traditional English writing mode, starts from the perspective of intercultural competence, integrates the online and offline teaching resources, and adopts the blended teaching method. Before writing, create a real situation to stimulate the interest of writing and introduce foreign culture; while writing, attention is paid to the cultivation of students' intercultural consciousness and self-learning ability. After writing, multiple interactive evaluation methods are adopted to fully improve students' intercultural competence. The improvement of writing ability is a long-term process of cultivation and accumulation. Teachers should fully understand western culture and integrate it into language teaching; Students need to think from the perspective of comparing Chinese and Western cultures, effectively avoiding negative transfer of Chinese thinking. Only through collaborative

efforts between teachers and students can the overall quality of college English writing teaching be improved.

This paper only elaborated the online and offline blended college English writing teaching mode and implementation method from a theoretical perspective, without empirical research on teaching, which will be the next research direction.

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