Academic Education Publishing House

Research on College English Writing Teaching Practice in the Digital Age

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Abstract: With the rapid development of digital technology, especially with the arrival of the digital age, the application of digital tools and resources in the field of education has become increasingly widespread. College English writing teaching has also been significantly affected, as traditional teaching models and methods are gradually facing new challenges and opportunities. This research, based on the background of the digital age, takes non-English major undergraduates at University of Sanya as the research object. Through real teaching practice, it explores the application of digital technology in college English writing teaching, analyzes its impacts and practical effects, and proposes some improvement measures and development directions for English writing teaching. According to the analysis of practical cases, the aim is to provide some reference and insights for improving the writing ability of non-English major undergraduates and stimulating teaching effectiveness.

Keywords: Digital Age; College English; Writing Teaching; Teaching Practice; Digital Technology

1. Introduction

With the rapid development of technologies, such as the Internet, artificial intelligence, and big data, the digital transformation of the education industry has become an irreversible trend. Particularly in higher education, the introduction of digital technology has not only changed the content and form of teaching but has also driven a transformation in students' learning methods to some extent. College English writing, as an essential part of language learning, has seen significant changes in its teaching methods, teaching models, and teaching tools in this process. Traditional writing instruction focuses on teachers introducing and explaining writing methods, while students engage in paper-based writing exercises. However, the application of digital technology provides students with richer and more diverse learning resources, interactive platforms, and writing tools. Through interactive learning, it helps enhance students' writing abilities. Especially in college English writing teaching, both teachers and students are increasingly relying on various digital platforms and tools, which has had a profound impact on the learning, teaching, and assessment of writing. Therefore, researching college English writing teaching in the context of the digital age holds significant academic value and practical significance. In this era, College English writing teaching at University of Sanya strongly advocates the introduction of digital platforms to reform teachers' writing teaching methods. Based on the broader context of the times and the practical demands of English writing teaching, this paper will explore the current situation of college English writing teaching in the digital age, analyze the impact of digital technology on teaching practices. At the same time, it will also propose innovative paths for English writing teaching with the assistance of digital tools.

2. Literature Review

Humankind has always been exploring new technologies and innovations, from the rise of the Industrial Revolution to today's digital era, where technological innovation plays a decisive role. Language learning has also shifted from traditional paper-based learning to digitalization. After the launch of the ChatGPT chatbot based on large language models by OpenAI in 2022, people have truly felt the revolutionary impact of General AI (GAI) on various aspects of social life, particularly in work and education [1]. In the digital era, learners can easily access global knowledge resources and writing samples through the

internet which provides abundant reference materials for English writing. One of the impacts of the digital age on college English writing teaching is the widespread use of information technology and the transformation of teaching models. Some scholars analyzed the applicability of ChatGPT-generated dialogue materials in foreign language learning by using multiple readability indicators [2]. This shift has promoted the diversification of teaching methods, moving from a teacher-centered approach to a student-centered learning model. The application of digital technology is inseparable from the use of writing assistance tools. Many students use grammar check tools (such as Grammarly), online dictionaries, spell check software, etc., during the writing process to improve the quality of their writing [3]. Many English language teachers in China have explored specific strategies for applying artificial intelligence technology in college English teaching. For example, Zheng analyzes AI-based English teaching strategies in listening, writing, and translation [4]. Based on the era's demands for college English teaching reform and the characteristics of foreign language education, some scholars have explored the practical path of GAI (Generative Artificial Intelligence) which empowers the reform of college English teaching [5]. Other scholars have closely integrated big data and artificial intelligence technologies with ESP (English for Specific Purposes) teaching, applying intelligent English speaking training systems, intelligent essay correction systems, adaptive learning systems, virtual teachers, and knowledge graphs in teaching practices [6]. Not only in English learning, but educational technology can also promote the development of critical thinking skills in language disciplines. Foreign scholar Mahdi Aben Ahmed believes that the use of technology fosters the development of critical thinking skills, such as the application of language rules, following instructions, brainstorming, etc. [7]. To sum up, English writing teaching in the digital age relies on online course platforms, AI empowerment, educational technology, and other related approaches to transform teachers' teaching philosophies and methods.

3. Research Design

This section mainly provides the research questions, research subjects, research methods, and procedures.

3.1 Research Questions
This study aims to answer the following four questions.
(1) How can teachers effectively integrate and use various digital tools to enhance students' writing abilities while avoiding excessive reliance on technology?
(2) How can teachers effectively utilize these platforms for interactive teaching and personalized feedback?
(3) How can teachers balance traditional writing teaching methods with digital teaching tools in order to avoid conflicts between the two?
(4) How can teachers effectively cultivate students' writing strategies during the process of digitally practicing English writing skills?

3.2 Subjects
The research subjects are undergraduates from Class 2301, who major in Hotel Management at the School of Tourism and Management, University of Sanya. These students have already completed two semesters of college English studies. The class consists of 48 students, with 20 males and 28 females. The students come from various cities or towns across China, and their English proficiency is relatively higher compared to students from other majors. Due to the university's demand for college English reform, the primary focus of English teaching in the third semester is to cultivate students' writing abilities.

3.3 Research Methods and Procedures
This study primarily adopts a qualitative research approach to ensure the analysis and evaluation of various dimensions in real teaching practice.
First, a literature review will be used to summarize and analyze both domestic and international research findings on the application, advantages, and challenges of digital teaching tools in college English writing teaching. Second, interviews will be conducted to carry out in-depth interviews with selected students. Through semi-structured interviews, the researcher can gain a more detailed understanding of students' real experiences in writing learning,

and their attitudes and feedback regarding the use of digital tools. This method helps to obtain more detailed insights from the students' perspective.

Third, an experimental teaching method will be employed by conducting a digital writing teaching in authentic classroom settings, comparing students' writing abilities before and after the application of digital tools. The researcher will assess the impact of digital tools on students' writing levels through assignment scoring, writing quality analysis, and student feedback.

This study will last for 15 weeks. In the first three weeks, traditional paper-based writing teaching will be used, and from the fourth week onward, digital writing teaching will be implemented using platforms such as PaperCorrection, Grammarly, and ProWritingAid.

4. Results

4.1 Writing Software Assisting Students in Improving Language Accuracy

In college English writing teaching, teachers are no longer confined to traditional teaching models, and can fully utilize various online writing platforms to enhance students' writing abilities. Writing tools such as Grammarly can detect language errors in students' writing in real-time, helping students better understand and master the norms of language use, especially for non-native English speakers. It will help students reduce basic errors in writing and thereby boosting their self-confidence.

4.2 The Impact of the Digital Age on College English Writing Teaching

The digital age has brought an abundance of online resources, allowing students to access a vast array of English writing examples, references, and learning materials through various digital platforms. Meanwhile, online writing tools like Grammarly can help students check for errors in grammar, spelling, sentence structure, and more, thus improving the quality of their writing.

The application of digital technology has made students' learning experiences more interactive and personalized. In traditional teaching models, students are usually passive recipients of knowledge. However, on digital platforms, students can interact with teachers and peers through online forums, social media, learning management systems (LMS), and other channels, receiving timely feedback that promotes self-directed learning and collaborative writing skills. Research comparing language teachers and large language models in terms of feedback quality has found that while their performance varies across different evaluation dimensions, large language models perform better than language teachers when providing feedback based on standards and conducting formative assessments [8].

Digital technology has diversified and made writing assessments more flexible. Teachers can evaluate students not only through traditional paper assignments but also through real-time grading and feedback on online platforms. Learning management systems offer a variety of assessment methods, including automated scoring, peer reviews, and feedback mechanisms. At the same time, students can submit assignments electronically, which not only improves submission efficiency but also encourages students to reflect on and revise their writing process. Some studies suggest that digital evaluations offer diverse content, multiple evaluators, and increased emphasis on the assessment and training of skills such as listening, speaking, and writing, with a focus on evaluating learners' learning processes [9].

5. Challenges and Improvements in College English Writing Teaching in the Digital Age

Although digital technologies have shown great potential in English writing teaching, they also face certain challenges and issues.

5.1 Effective Integration of Digital Tools

When teachers aim to effectively integrate and utilize digital tools to enhance students' writing skills, they need to find a balance—one that leverages the advantages of technology while preventing students from becoming overly reliant on it. Below are some strategies and suggestions to help teachers achieve this demanding goal.

Teachers should clarify the specific objectives for using each digital tool, such as improving grammar, expanding vocabulary, or optimizing writing structure, rather than relying solely on the tool to complete the entire writing process. While tools can help students detect grammar

errors, spelling mistakes, and sentence structure issues, teachers should encourage students to review and revise their writing on their own before submitting it, fostering independent thinking and problem-solving skills. Teachers can guide students through self-assessment, requiring them to use tools and then reflect on their writing shortcomings and areas for improvement based on feedback from teachers or peers.

Teachers can assign group tasks where students discuss and revise each other's writing within their groups. This not only improves students' writing abilities but also reduces the tendency to rely solely on technology to complete writing tasks.

Teachers should help students recognize that digital tools can only assist to a certain extent in improving their writing skills, but they cannot replace creativity and deep thinking. For instance, aspects such as logical coherence, creative expression, and emotional involvement in writing cannot be perfectly aided by technology. Teachers can guide students to understand that writing that truly moves the reader is heartfelt, a process of expressing personal thoughts, emotions, and opinions—something that technology will not and can not replace.

Even after students use digital tools, teachers should still provide timely and personalized feedback. Through face-to-face guidance and feedback, teachers can help students further understand and improve their writing, rather than relying solely on automated tools. Teachers can diversify assessment methods by combining self-assessment, peer review, and teacher evaluation. This multi-dimensional approach can stimulate students' critical thinking and prevent them from becoming overly dependent on the automated feedback of digital tools.

Teachers can design tasks that require students to complete writing without any technological support. This not only helps students hone their writing skills but also boosts their confidence in relying on their own abilities to create. Through these strategies, teachers can help students improve their writing skills while preventing over-reliance on digital tools, fostering independent thinking and writing abilities. This ensures that technology becomes an aid in the writing process, rather than a substitute.

5.2 Personalized Digital Learning Resources

Teachers can upload course materials (such as videos, articles, etc.) to digital platforms, allowing students to study independently before class. In class, more interactive activities can be used for discussions, exercises, and problem-solving. By using a learning management system, teachers can track each student's progress and performance in real-time, identifying weak areas through data analysis. Based on this data, teachers can provide personalized learning suggestions or additional resources for each student. In assignments and quizzes, teachers can use automated grading tools to provide instant feedback, offering accurate and prompt evaluations. Although automated tools cannot replace the teacher's subjective judgment, they help save time and allow teachers to focus on providing deeper, personalized feedback to students. The "Artificial Intelligence Plus Education" model can transform traditional educational concepts and methods in practice, which may reduce the reliance on rote teaching methods. By leveraging AI technology, a digital profile for each student can be created and presented to the teacher, allowing for personalized teaching based on comprehensive data feedback, which helps in building smart classrooms [10]. Depending on students' different learning levels, teachers can provide varying levels of feedback on digital platforms. For students who have mastered the material well, teachers can provide more challenging and expansive questions, while for students who are in low level, they can offer more guidance, resources, or practice questions.

5.3 Complementary, not Replacing

Digital tools should not replace traditional teaching methods but should serve as a powerful complement. For example, teachers can use traditional writing instruction techniques (such as teaching writing structure, argumentation, modifying sentences, cohesion etc.) while introducing digital tools (such as grammar checkers, collaborative writing platforms, etc.) to help students improve their writing quality. Digital tools can help students practice independently after class or provide instant feedback, while traditional methods focus more on in-depth discussions in class

and critical thinking during the writing process.

In traditional writing instruction, teachers are usually the primary content providers and evaluators. With the support of digital tools, teachers' role shifts more towards being a "guide" and "mentor," who is able to help students learn how to use tools to improve their writing skills. Therefore, teachers need to adapt to this shift by relying on traditional critical thinking and feedback while also making good use of digital tools to provide instant, personalized support. Teachers should help students wisely choose the appropriate digital tools, rather than blindly relying on them. For instance, teaching students how to use grammar checkers to correct errors is a good way to cultivate their independent learning.

While digital tools can offer efficient, instant feedback, they cannot replace students' critical thinking. Therefore, teachers should encourage students to maintain critical thinking while using the tools, learning to analyze the feedback provided and determine what is useful and what may not align with their writing style or goals. Students can use tools to check for spelling and grammar mistakes but should not blindly trust the suggestions, instead thinking and analyzing themselves to ensure their writing style and expression are accurate.

5.4 Developing Writing Strategies

It is a must for teachers to provide real-time feedback, point out the strengths and weaknesses in students' writing, and require them to make necessary revisions. This interactive feedback not only improves the immediacy and efficiency of students' writing but also helps them develop the ability to self-correct, making them aware that the writing process involves continuous revisions and personal improvements.

It is another necessity for teachers to foster students' self-assessment skills. On digital platforms, students can exchange writings and conduct peer evaluations. Teachers can guide students on how to use specific evaluation criteria, analyze their peers' writing, and provide constructive feedback. This not only helps students view their writing from different perspectives but also teaches them how to improve their work based on the feedback they receive from various resources.

Also, it is urgent to cultivate students' cross-cultural writing awareness. Teachers can introduce content related to cross-cultural writing on digital platforms, using online articles, blogs, and social media platforms to help students understand writing styles and conventions in different cultural contexts. This approach not only enables students to learn how to adjust their writing style and strategies in a globalized context, but also encourages them to incorporate cross-cultural elements into their writing process.

6. Conclusion

The digital age provides unprecedented opportunities and challenges for college English writing teaching. By utilizing digital tools and platforms, students can more autonomously improve their writing skills, and teachers can adopt more flexible and interactive teaching methods. However, the effective application of digital technology requires the joint efforts of both students and teachers. Future college English writing teaching should continually optimize teaching models and resource allocation based on the full utilization of digital tools, offering students a richer and more personalized writing learning experience.

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