

An Empirical Study on the Blended Teaching Mode of College English Writing Based on IWrite

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Abstract

IWrite automatic writing evaluation system provides a new feedback method for writing teaching. By analyzing the current situation of college English writing practice and the application of iWrite, this paper explores the real effect of iWrite system in the teaching of college English writing. It aims to construct a blended teaching mode of college English writing that combines the automatic evaluation system of writing and teacher feedback, so as to substantially improve college students' English writing ability.

Key words: iWrite; college English writing; blended teaching mode

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INTRODUCTION

College English writing, as a productive skill, plays an important role in English teaching. However, writing practice is time-consuming and inefficient, it is easy to be ignored by teachers and students in their daily English practice. The problems such as teachers' heavy burden of essay correction, relatively long feedback time and students' weak awareness of self revision have always been difficult problems in college English

writing instruction. On the other hand, students' writing difficulties also include insufficient vocabulary, lack of English expression and mentality, as well as their dependence on model texts. The lack of writing practice is one of the reasons that directly lead to the low score of CET-4 and CET-6. In the age of artificial intelligence, computer technology is widely used in foreign language teaching. It is very necessary to explore the deep integration of information technology and college English writing in order to construct a blended writing teaching mode suitable for college students.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW OF AUTOMATIC WRITING SCORING SYSTEM

As the computer and Internet technology have been widely used in language teaching, the automatic essay scoring system (AES) has been used in college English writing. AES is a system for scoring and evaluating English compositions based on a set computer program (Shermis and Burstein, 2003). At present, in the United States and some European countries and regions, AES has been used as a reliable evaluation tool for composition scoring in large-scale examinations such as TOEFL, GMAT and GRE and foreign language teaching. Other popular AES include Project Essay Grade (PEG), Intelligent Essay Assessor (IEA), E-rater, etc. The machine feedback based on large corpus is timely and effective, so the system has high scoring validity and reliability. Popular AES in China include Juku correction network, Bingguo English, iWrite and so on.

2. IWRITE AND BLENDED TEACHING MODE

The concept of hybrid teaching was first proposed by Elaine Voci and Kevin Young. They believe that the

effective mixing of learning time, environment, resources and learning methods can realize the complementary advantages of traditional classroom learning and information network learning. With the support of information technology and multimedia technology, blended teaching has become a key means of English writing instruction in colleges and universities.

As a better teaching platform, iWrite makes it possible for teachers to combine online and offline teaching under the mixed teaching mode. iWrite is an online intelligent evaluation system for English writing, which provides online automatic correction services for teachers and English learners. iWrite has been widely used in college English writing teaching and is loved by teachers and students due to its detailed revision suggestions and a variety of corpora. The system can automatically evaluate English compositions from four dimensions: language, content, text structure and technical specifications. For example, iWrite can make real-time judgment on the students' identical compositions and identify the suspected compositions with machine translation, which is very helpful for teachers to understand the students' real writing proficiency. Writing teaching of CET-4 and CET-6 based on iWrite can not only make up for the shortcomings of traditional writing teaching, provide students with rich writing resources, improve their independent learning ability, but also become an intelligent tool for teachers to innovate teaching.

iWrite English writing evaluation system is an automatic writing evaluation system integrating teaching, learning and evaluation. It not only has high scoring reliability and convenient operation, but also provides comprehensive feedback, which can improve students' autonomous learning ability. However, there are insufficient empirical studies to verify the actual application effect of iWrite. In view of this, this paper mainly explores the role of iWrite in assisting college English writing teaching. It aims to make a comparative study of the effects of man-machine mutual evaluation, iWrite evaluation and teacher evaluation on college students' writing ability through empirical research, so as to test the validity of man-machine mutual evaluation in English writing with the purpose of building a more efficient mixed teaching mode of English writing.

3. A CASE PRACTICE

3.1 Objective and Methodology

This research adopts the method of empirical research to explore the integration of iWrite and classroom teaching. With the help of iWrite database and writing platform, this research is mainly based on dynamic evaluation theory, process teaching method and output hypothesis

theory. This study attempts to answer the following two questions: firstly, it discusses whether iWrite system can help improve students' English writing ability. Secondly, to study the differences in the impact of mixed evaluation and iWrite evaluation on college students' English writing ability. Based on iWrite's statistical data and semi open interviews, this paper intends to make an empirical study on the application of online composition automatic evaluation system in English writing teaching from the aspects of improving students' writing ability, self revision consciousness and learning motivation. Quantitative and qualitative research methods are used to investigate the actual effect of iWrite, such as experimental method, questionnaire method and semi-structured interview. The subjects of this study are 120 non-English major sophomores from Qingdao University of Science and Technology. It collected 600 compositions and analyzed the review status of iWrite with the method of big data. Students are surveyed by questionnaires, pre-test, post test and three writing exercises. The duration of this study is 13 weeks.

3.2 Design of the Study

This study conducted teaching experiments on two parallel classes (60 students in each class) of sophomores, one of which was the experimental group and the other was the control group. The teacher of the two parallel classes is the same person and adopts the same teaching methods and progress. The results of the pretest show that there is no significant difference between the experimental class and the control class in writing performance. The two classes completed three identical writing tasks and received corresponding writing feedback. In the last week of the research, a post-test was conducted on the two classes, and the corresponding questionnaires and interviews were completed. The questionnaire is a survey of the current situation of English composition of students, the students' views on the composition feedback provided by iWrite automatic scoring system and teacher feedback.

During the experiment, the students in the control class revised their compositions twice according to iWrite, while the students in the experimental class revised their compositions twice according to the teacher's feedback and iWrite's feedback, and uploaded their revised drafts to iWrite again to get further modification suggestions. The detailed teacher feedback includes the explanation of composition topic type, the analysis of the first and second draft and the students' sample essays and so on. By comparing the first and final drafts of compositions, this study focuses on the feedback of automatic writing evaluation system, mixed feedback, the impact of these two feedback methods on college students' English writing, and the attitudes of students and teachers towards these two feedback methods.

4. SUMMARY AND INSPIRATION OF THE STUDY

4.1 The Findings of the Study

The study is a comprehensive analysis of the data obtained from the pre-test and post-test composition texts, questionnaires, and interviews with students and teachers. It is obvious that iWrite can correct students' English compositions in real time through multi-dimensional evaluation. It is efficient in finding out common weak points in students' vocabulary and sentences, and analyzing errors in students' compositions sentence by sentence, thus, teachers' correction workload can be effectively reduced.

According to the questionnaire survey, among the teacher feedback, iWrite feedback and peer feedback, the students' acceptance of teacher feedback is the highest, iWrite feedback is second, and peer feedback is the lowest. Sometimes, students admit that the system offers inaccurate correction; or the revision opinions are not very clear, and students are at a loss how to correct them. They hope that the teacher can give clear feedback to the general and fuzzy revision opinions or omissions on the Internet, and make targeted comments after each composition task. From the effectiveness of the three feedback methods, more than half of the students think that iWrite feedback is the most effective in punctuation and spelling, followed by teacher feedback and peer feedback. However, the most effective feedback method in language expression, text structure and content logic is teacher feedback, followed by iWrite feedback and peer feedback. Therefore, this study finds that iWrite can effectively improve students' English writing performance, but teachers are still needed to offer further guidance in language expression, discourse structure and content logic.

The results show that: firstly, compared with the pre-test scores, the post-test scores of both the experimental group and the control group are improved, and the experimental group students' scores are improved more, and the difference is significant. From the total score of writing, the average scores of the control class before and after the test were 82.05 and 84.19, respectively, and the mean difference was 2.14; The average scores of the pre-test and post test of the experimental class were 82.43 and 86.52, and the average difference was 4.09, which was almost two times that of the control class; Secondly, iWrite is relatively helpful to students in word spelling, vocabulary use, grammar and punctuation, but it is limited in cohesion, logic and text structure. In another word, it is not enough to feedback the text structure, content, logic and fluency of the essay. Therefore, the online automatic evaluation system should be optimized and improved to enhance its effectiveness. At the level of language items, the study makes statistical analysis from

five aspects: vocabulary, sentence, Chinglish, grammar and affirmative comments. Take Chinglish as an example, the number of experimental class and control class in the post test is 48 and 32 less than that in the pre-test, which shows that the man-machine mutual evaluation mode is more helpful. It can be noticed that the academic differences are narrowed, students' learning motivation is stimulated.

4.2 Teaching Enlightenment

This study draws the following conclusions. First, iWrite automatic scoring system can improve the writing performance of students on the whole, especially in language and technical norms. Secondly, both of the two writing feedback methods can promote the improvement of college students' English writing ability, but the feedback effect of teacher feedback combined with the automatic writing evaluation system is better than that of using the automatic writing evaluation system alone. It can make up for the lack of feedback in the content and text structure of the automatic writing evaluation system. It can be concluded that the mixed method provide students with greater freedom than the single iWrite feedback. Most students prefer the combination of the two methods, but a small number of students feel that iWrite is more cumbersome than the traditional method.

Some students have improved their self-efficacy and will revise their compositions repeatedly according to iWrite's feedback. For instance, students can adjust unreasonable words and phrases in time, some students will evaluate whether their writing results meet the writing goals or requirements upon finishing their compositions. Meanwhile, some students consciously choose more difficult words to replace simpler words in the process of revision, a long sentence or clause is added to replace the original simple sentence. Other students consciously use conjunctions or cohesive words to make their compositions more coherent and logical with the feedback of iWrite.

After the students revise their compositions repeatedly through the correction network, their compositions basically meet the writing requirements in terms of content, number of words and vocabulary use. When students see the improvement of their writing scores after revision, their self-efficacy in learning is also improved.

How can we make full use of the advantages of iWrite and give full play to the authority and pertinence of teachers' correction? With the help of the error statistics of iWrite, the teacher may find out the typical problems in the composition and determine the key points of the evaluation. The composition samples must be selected carefully, the common mistakes include the misused clauses, unclear logic, the lack of cohesive words, and Chinglish and so on. The teacher will correct the samples before class, then the samples are displayed in class and a collective discussion is conducted to determine the

revision opinions under the guidance of teachers. After class, students revise their compositions according to the evaluation focus and submit the essays online again. The teacher checks the modification again randomly to confirm the evaluation effect. Hence, most students admit that iWrite is helpful to cultivate their independent English writing awareness and lifelong learning awareness.

4.3 Limitations of iWrite

English composition focuses on "communication", which emphasizes the logic and fluency of composition. As a result, some limitations of iWrite can easily be found out. For example, it can not fully reflect the language characteristics of the text. It pays more attention to the composition at the lexical level, the diversity of vocabulary, the total number of words and the use of noun phrases. In particular, it fails to reflect the student's ability in sentence structure. Moreover, it pays more attention to the feedback on the surface aspects such as grammar, spelling, sentence pattern and collocation, and lacks hints on the text structure, composition content and logic. Sometimes, students still get a high score even when their writing content is inconsistent with the required topic. In the actual teaching process, teachers should not rely too much on the system while ignore the individual differences of students. It is suggested that teachers have more personalized interaction and effective communication with students. For instance, in the process of writing instruction, teachers could help students improve the diversity of sentence patterns and avoid the repetition of vocabulary. In fact, it is an undesirable aspect of the artificial intelligence platform. Actually, students should be encouraged to use more adverbial clauses, attributive clauses and so on, and it's beneficial for students to learn to flexibly convert clauses and simple sentences into various complex sentence patterns, so as to improve syntactic complexity of their writing practice.

The combination of systematic correction and manual correction can make up for the shortcomings of the system. Furthermore, the developer of the automatic scoring system should make full use of the artificial intelligence technology to continuously improve, increase the polishing function of sentence, and expand the vocabulary or semantic association vocabulary, so as to provide more detailed and reasonable feedback for students from the aspects of text, content and logic.

To sum up, iWrite automatic scoring system can be used as a supplementary means in teaching, it may not completely replace teachers' correction. The "human + machine" writing teaching mode is the ideal mode at present. Because teachers are good at providing classified or personalized guidance for students' weak points in writing, teachers also excel in strengthening syntactic structure training and cultivate discourse thinking.

CONCLUSION

Based on the above analysis and discussion, the students in the experimental class under the man-machine mutual evaluation mode have made greater progress in the total score, writing structure, content and language items of writing than those in the control class under iWrite mode. This study provides a strong support for the promotion of the man-machine mutual evaluation mode in English writing teaching. Although iWrite facilitates students to carry out independent learning and reduces the burden of teachers' correction, it does not mean that teachers can ignore online writing exercises. On the contrary, in order to quickly improve the students' English writing, teachers should give full play to their own advantages. Through browsing the students' compositions after class, teachers can give focused comments in class. As a result, learning benefits could be maximized if we may effectively combine machine correction and teacher correction.

The college English writing evaluation mode of "online correction - teacher focus - offline comments - second revision - Online spot check" will play an essential role in promoting the rapid improvement of college students' English writing. The hybrid evaluation of comprehensive intelligent evaluation and manual evaluation will be the mainstream college English composition evaluation in the future.

The rational use of the intelligent teaching platform is undeniably effective in improving the teaching of college English writing and students' writing ability. In order to maximize the validity of the man-machine mutual evaluation mode in English writing teaching, teachers should also play an active role. On the one hand, teachers should accept the system and explore its function with a positive attitude, such as in the era of big data, teachers are expected to have the ability of data analysis. It is essential that teachers formulate the next teaching plan according to the online data, and adjust the teaching methods in time so as to conduct teaching more effectively. On the other hand, teachers are expected to change their concepts, and truly apply the blended teaching mode to the whole teaching process.

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