

The Application of Teacher-Student Collaborative Assessment (TSCA) in Private Colleges

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Abstract

College students' writing abilities were slowly progressing in the Chinese context. This problem was mainly due to the over-dependence on the teacher's feedback and the confusion about the writing assessment criteria. This resulted in the low ability of students to self-evaluate their essays. Thus, teacher-student collaborative assessment (TSCA) was introduced to guide students in finding the problems that existed in their peers' writing which in reverse could also help them detect similar errors in their writing. This study aimed to explore the practicality of the TSCA principle in private colleges with students' English proficiency below the average. Altogether 42 sophomores majoring in English were selected as the participants. They had taken English writing courses for one year and had some foundation. The questionnaire was given before the course to acquire students' attitudes towards the TSCA principle. Then students' writing scores for four assignments were collected during the implementation of the TSCA principle. The results showed that it was applicable to implement the TSCA principle in private colleges for lower-proficient students with their high willingness to this principle. Hopefully, students could have a general idea of writing assessment criteria and do self-evaluation in later autonomous learning.

Keywords: TSCA principle, students with lower English proficiency, the effectiveness of writing teaching

1. Introduction

Language teaching has been thoroughly studied for decades for its wide application in life and work. To have comprehensive English competence, the teaching focuses on the four skills: reading, listening, writing, and speaking. However, Chinese students are prone to be strong in reading and listening which are input skills, and weak in writing and speaking which are output skills. Therefore, enhancing Chinese students' English writing and speaking competence is crucial to making them more competent English users.

In 2015, Wen proposed a production-oriented approach (POA) to change current Chinese students' English learning weaknesses through learning-using integration. It attaches great importance to improving English instructions in English classes of Chinese tertiary education. Wen (2016) further perfected this methodology with a more detailed assessment principle, teacher-student collaborative assessment (TSCA). TSCA aims to improve Chinese students' English productive skills through teacher-guided student-centered classroom discussion. The emphasis of current studies relevant to TSCA has been put on English writing skills as it is rather difficult to enhance in the short term but easy to assess according to certain criteria. Under this circumstance, TSCA was adopted as part of the methodology in the Advanced English Writing class, aiming to improve students' writing ability. Unfortunately, few researchers focused on the application and possible problems of the TSCA principle when applied in private colleges with students of lower learning abilities. Thus, it is still a question to be solved whether students could improve their English writing ability and know how to evaluate peers' English writing work through this principle.

This paper is going to investigate the application of the TSCA principle in Advanced English Writing classes in private colleges. Quasi-experimental approach is adopted to collect valid statistics. All the participants are English major students and all the raters are English major teachers too. The research will examine whether Chinese students' writing skills could be improved through the TSCA principle and whether this principle could help them learn English writing autonomously. Hopefully, this principle could further solve the problem of the

separation of using and learning English in the Chinese context.

2. Literature Review

English writing has been investigated for decades through various studies from multiple perspectives. The research on how to improve Chinese students' English writing has also gone through dozens of years from overseas to domestic researchers. Wen's idea of POA has come up with a new direction for English writing teaching for domestic English teachers. Thus, it is worthwhile previewing the literature related to English writing teaching in the Chinese context, POA methodology, and TSCA principle to have a more comprehensive idea of the background.

2.1 English Writing Teaching in the Chinese Context

The studies in the field of English writing teaching in the Chinese context have covered various perspectives and learning stages. Most of the research focused on teaching instruction, error analysis, and cultural influence in English writing teaching from junior high school to universities (e.g. You, 2004; Bond & Smakman, 2016; Liu, 2022).

In terms of teaching instruction, researchers mainly emphasized how to use effective English language to give instructions to students so that they could have a more comprehensive understanding of what is good writing. From this perspective, You (2004) proposed that careful attention should be paid when adopting Western pedagogies in English writing class after she observed 10 teachers' Intensive Reading classes at a large Chinese university. Several years later, Wang (2007) specified the direction of English writing strategy instruction, claiming the importance of pre-writing strategy instruction as it could not only improve students' writing competence but also enhanced their confidence in English learning.

When it comes to error analysis, more attention was paid to grammatical errors. Bond & Smakman (2016) analyzed grammatical errors based on a corpus of academic writings by Chinese students in British universities, specifying two main grammatical errors made by Chinese undergraduates. They further highlighted the importance of cross-cultural adaption in English teaching and suggested teachers consider students' typical grammatical errors when teaching English writing.

Most of the grammatical analysis of Chinese students' writings indicated the possibility of cultural influence on incorrect expressions. Therefore, new insights could be gained through some studies on cultural influence in English writing teaching. Through comparative analysis, Liu (2022) emphasized the importance of cultural elements in English writing teaching which could help students better express themselves. A five-month study made by Zhang & Hadjioannou (2021) uncovered the importance of providing Chinese students with enough translanguaging spaces and clear instructions in English writing teaching, especially for academic English writing. They defined translanguaging as a "dynamic conceptualization of bi/multilingualism" (Zhang & Hadjioannou, 2021, p3) and identified it as a critical part of English writing competence for English as foreign language (EFL) learners.

In summary, most of the research on English writing teaching marked the importance of improving Chinese students' English writing competence from various perspectives rather than grammar and syntax. Scholars must find a more appropriate teaching approach in the Chinese context in order to help students realize the transcultural aspect of English writing.

2.2 Production-oriented Approach (POA)

In 2015, Wen proposed a production-oriented approach (POA) as a solution to the problematic English instructions in Chinese universities. The theory is based on an output-driven hypothesis, aiming to motivate students to effectively use English to express themselves rather than just passively understand English.

POA consists of three teaching principles, namely the learning-centered principle (LCP), learning-using integration principle (LUIP), and whole-person education principle (WPEP), aiming to educate Chinese students to be English users with both language knowledge and humanistic qualities like critical thinking and intercultural competence.

Moreover, POA developed three-phase teaching mediated by the teacher, which is quite different from the traditional teaching procedures of English in the Chinese context (Wen, 2016). The three phases are motivating, enabling, and assessing, attaching more importance to students' output rather than input as each phase requires them to express themselves more. At a motivating stage, students are motivated through scenarios of tasks or activities in the textbook and encouraged to perceive their weaknesses through the initial trial of the production. Then teachers could design a series of instructions to guide students to overcome their shortcomings and be

prepared for the final production at the next stage. The assessing phase is arranged as the last step to evaluate students' acquisition of the target language knowledge, which puts greater emphasis on constructing a set of criteria for various final language production. During this process, students will evaluate their work together with teachers as collaborative assessments to improve students' language outcomes and revised versions (Wen, 2016).

In conclusion, POA attaches great importance to students' language production and puts great emphasis on the LUIP, expecting that students' comprehensive English competence, especially output skills, could be improved through the transition from traditional language teaching procedures to new teaching principles and phases.

2.3 Teacher-student Collaborative Assessment (TSCA)

As part of the POA principle, teacher-student collaborative assessment (TSCA) specifies the assessing phase through real-situation teaching by teachers in Chinese universities, aiming to help students establish a clearer system of assessing criteria to improve their ability of autonomous learning, especially for writing skills.

The assessment was developed into three phases, namely pre-class, in-class, and post-class (Wen, 2016). Sun and Wen (2018) gave a detailed teaching procedure for each phase through the investigation of a group of sophomores who majored in English. The research lasted for two academic years and included students' writings and revised versions, reflections, interviews, and teachers' reflective journals as collected data to justify the effectiveness of this principle and its specific teaching procedures. Teachers collected students' first drafts before class and selected the sample with typical problems that were expected to be identified by students in the next class. Teachers presented the selected sample to students in class and students were asked to assess and revise the sample writing in groups. Then students shared their revised version under teachers' guidance and were required to revise their first drafts after class according to what had been discussed in class. The final production was evaluated and compared to testify to the effectiveness of TSCA in this study. The research implied positive results of the implementation of TSCA in English writing teaching and supported teachers with detailed pedagogical procedures for later teaching practices in their classes (Sun & Wen, 2018).

As discussed above, TSCA has the theoretical foundation and practical experimentation in Chinese universities, especially with students of high English competence. However, it is still questionable whether it is effective in private colleges with students of medium or low English competence. Besides, few studies could shed light on the practicality of this issue. Thus, this research is carried out and tries to figure out the possibilities of implementing TSCA in the Advanced English Writing class.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Question

The research adopted quantitative methods to resolve two research questions:

- (1) Can TSCA be implemented in English majors of Chinese private colleges?
- (2) Is TSCA effective in improving students' writing abilities?

3.2 Participants

The participants are 42 English major students in their second year in one class in an Eastern private college. Their average age was 20 years old, with 5 male students and 37 female students. All students had passed the College English Test (CET) 6 and would take part in Test for English Majors (TEM) 4 at the end of the semester. Their English competencies were more or less the same. They took English Advanced Writing as a compulsory course in the second academic semester. Before this semester, they had studied English writing for almost one year and taken two English writing courses, one each semester, starting from the second semester in their first year. All the participants had acquired considerable knowledge of how to write English sentences and paragraphs but lacked instructions on how to write English passages, especially in different genres. Thus in the Advanced English Writing course, students were required to write complete passages in one particular genre which was argumentation. This could also help them prepare for the writing part in TEM 4 which also requires writing a short argumentative passage.

3.3 Instruments

Quantitative methods were adopted in this research. The data of the questionnaire was sorted and students' writing scores were collected and processed through SPSS.

3.3.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire was partially adapted from Altstaedter & Doolittle's (2014) and Montgomery & Baker's (2007). There are 16 items in total which are divided into two parts, namely students' perceptions towards peer

feedback (1-10) and students' perceptions towards teacher feedback (11-16). The first ten items are Likert-scale questions, from strongly agree to strongly disagree, altogether five options to receive students' perceptions towards peer feedback in three phases: going through one's partner's writing (Question 1-3), getting written comments from one's partner (Question 4-6) and taking part in the face-to-face peer feedback session (Question 7-10). The last six items are also Likert-scale questions but are described in percentages to further clarify the amount of accepted teacher feedback in students' drafts and final versions. The percentage is sorted from 0%, 30% to 50%, and 100% which covers four aspects of writing, namely ideas/content, grammar, mechanics, and vocabulary to get a more specific idea of students' perceptions towards teacher feedback.

Chinese was used to compile the items to ensure that all the students could understand the questionnaire easily and comprehensively. The reliability analysis of the questionnaire showed that the Cronbach's alpha is 0.94. Therefore, the statistics of this survey are valid and reliable.

3.3.2 Scores of Students' Writings

There were four topics assigned to students as homework to practice argumentative writing. Two of them were chosen from IELTS writing topics and the rest were picked from TEM 4 writing, which are all argumentative topics. Students were required to write at least 250 words for each topic and submit an e-version essay through dingding groups to the teacher. One topic was adopted as the pre-test assignment to test students' writing ability before the TSCA principle was implemented in class and another one was used as the post-test assignment to test students' writing ability after the implementation to see the effectiveness of this principle. The rest two topics were assigned as during-test assignments. For each of these two topics, students should hand in both the first draft and final production, which means six essays from every student were collected (See Table 1). Later, they were assessed with 100 as full scores from four aspects, namely grammar, vocabulary, content, and mechanics, by two other English major teachers as raters who also taught English writing classes. The average score of each student's writing by two raters would be collected for later data process by SPSS.

Table 1. Details of six essays

No. of the essay	The topic is from	Function
1	TEM 4 Writing	Pre-test assignment
2	IELTS Writing	First draft of first during-test assignment
3	IELTS Writing	Final product of first during-test assignment
4	IELTS Writing	First draft of second during-test assignment
5	IELTS Writing	Final product of second during-test assignment
6	TEM 4 Writing	Post-test assignment

3.4 Procedures

The questionnaire was sent and collected before the commencement of the spring semester in 2023. It was published online through the platform Wenjuanxing and students received the link at the same time on 10th February, 2023. The deadline for the questionnaire was 17th February 2023, so students had one week to finish it.

TSCA principle was implemented in Advanced English Writing class in the spring semester from 20th February 2023 to 9th June 2023, nearly 4 months. Students have this course once a week, so altogether they had 16 classes which were divided into three periods.

The first period was at the commencement of the semester in the first class, before the TSCA principle was implemented. During this period, students got a brief understanding of English writing, including genres and some general ideas. Then they were required to finish a pre-test assignment with a given topic to test their original writing ability. This assignment was handed in before the beginning of the next class and it would only be assessed by two raters without any feedback from the teacher or peers.

The second period started from the second class, adapting the teaching procedures of TSCA principles put forward by Sun & Wen (2018), but modified a few steps to fit in with students' lower English competence compared with public universities. This period included three stages: pre-stage, during-stage, post-stage.

At the pre-stage, different from Sun & Wen's (2018) procedure, more teacher guidance was added to help students better understand the task and form a clearer idea about what kind of product was expected from them. Meanwhile, the teacher offered students different writing techniques to help them write a complete

argumentative essay, which was recognized as a top differentiation from the practice of Sun & Wen (2018). After class, students were required to write an argumentation with a given topic and hand in the first draft before the beginning of the next stage. Teachers went through all the homework collected to find one or two samples with typical problems.

At the during-stage, the teacher first gave students an evaluation outline according to the writing techniques taught previously. This outline basically included four to five aspects concerning grammar, content, vocabulary, and coherence. Then students evaluated and discussed chosen samples in groups according to this outline for about 10 minutes before the representative of each group shared their comments with the rest of the class. During the sharing, the teacher supported students with some scaffoldings or hints if they found it difficult to make some comments at seemingly strange points in the samples, which is another differentiation from Sun & Wen (2018).

Post-stage was no different from Sun & Wen (2018), focusing on students' final production which was revised according to the evaluation of the sample writing and collected before the next class. Both students' final writings and first drafts were rated by two other English major teachers at the end of this period.

The third period was at the end of the semester in the second last class. Students were assigned post-test writing with fixed topics and handed in before the end of the semester to test their writing ability after the implementation of the TSCA principle. The writings would be assessed by raters as well and all the writings' assessments finished before the end of June 2023.

3.5 Data Collection

When all the procedures of the questionnaire and teaching process were finished, the data was fully collected for processing. Altogether 42 questionnaires were sent and all of them were collected as valid answers. The statistics were sorted by the Wenjuanxing platform to see its distribution and extremum. The data of all writings were processed through SPSS, using a paired t-test to see the variation between three groups of pair statistics, pre-test and post-test, and the first draft and final version of the first and second topics.

4. Results Analysis

4.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire was 100% collected and students' general attitudes towards the TSCA principle were clearly shown by the results which could be divided into four parts.

When going through their partners' writing, most students chose "neutral" as their responses, accounting for almost 54%. They didn't recognize the importance of reading peer writing but accepted its necessity. This might be due to the lack of the experience of peer assessment in terms of writing assignments. So they didn't perceive the advantages of reading through their partners' writing and the possibilities of getting some useful tips for their writing. The second most chosen option is "agree", which is a mild preference, indicating that there were a small number of students hoping to experience peer evaluation in writing class.

When it comes to getting written comments from their partners, different from the first part, most students were inclined to accept their partners' comments, but fewer students thought their partners' comments would be useful for their writing and would improve their writing quality. For items 5 and 6, almost 51% of students held a neutral attitude and for the rest, the most chosen option was still "agree". A possible explanation can be found in several previous references, suggesting that students trusted teachers' feedback more for its authority and reliability, and sometimes questioned the validity of their peers' responses (Yang, Badger & Yu, 2006).

The third part concerns taking part in face-to-face peer feedback. The result is similar to the first part, students holding neutral attitudes were slightly more than those with agreeable attitudes. The former accounted for nearly 50% while the latter accounted for nearly 38%. One noticeable point is that for item 7 about face-to-face meetings, more than 8% of students chose "strongly agree", which was the highest among the 10 items, and implied that some students recognized the importance and necessity of this meeting. However, from the perspective of students, the usefulness and reliability of such face-to-face meeting was not very high.

The last part is about students' acceptance of the teacher's feedback. Most students chose to read all the feedback the teacher gave for their first draft and final product, accounting for 53% and 63% respectively. It suggests that students pay more attention to the quality of the final product and less attention to the quality of the first draft. This might be the reason why the progress of their writing skills was quite slow. When it comes to accepting the teacher's feedback, fewer students chose to consider all of them when improving their writing and more students chose to consider 70% of the teacher's feedback. This indicates that although students believed more in the teacher's feedback, they still questioned or doubted some of the feedback and thought they were not suitable for

their writing. That might be due to too high authority on teacher feedback and less mutual negotiation between students and the teacher (Yang, Badger & Yu, 2006). The last two items are concerned with the component of the teacher's feedback for each essay. Most students perceived teachers' feedback as half concerned with spelling and punctuation and half concerned with content and structure.

From the results of the questionnaire, it could be inferred that students were interested in the peer evaluation mode in terms of writing but questioned the reliability and usefulness of peer feedback. Besides, they recognized the authority of the teacher's feedback but also held a few questions about its suitability. Thus, it is necessary to introduce the TSCA principle as a new assessment mode to overcome the drawbacks of peer evaluation and teacher feedback.

4.2 Scores of Students' Writings

Through the implementation of the TSCA principle in Advanced English Writing class, there were a total of six essays collected with average scores rated by two other English major teachers. These six essays were divided into three groups, namely no.1 and no.6, no.2 and no. 3, and no.4 and no.5. All three groups were first calculated the mean value and then tested by paired t-test to see the variation.

Table 2. Mean value of writing scores of six assignments

No. of the assignment	Mean value of writing scores
1	77.19
2	77.93
3	80.67
4	77.17
5	78.67
6	79.02

From Table 2, it can be inferred that the mean scores of both the post-test assignment and the final version of the during-test assignments are higher than those of the pre-test assignment and the first draft of the during-test assignments with minor differences, indicating students' improvement of writing ability after the implementation of TSCA principle.

At the same time, a paired t-test was applied to further test the variation between these three groups.

Table 3. Results of paired t-test

	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig.
V6-V1	10.246	1.581	1.190	41	0.241
V3-V2	6.685	1.031	2.655	41	0.011
V5-V4	2.330	0.359	4.173	41	<.001

It was shown in Table 3, except for the first group, the rest two groups had a great significant difference with a p-value less than 0.05. On average, the writing scores of the final version were significantly higher than those of the first draft for the two during-test assignments with the t value of 2.655 and 4.173 respectively, suggesting the improvement of students' writing ability with the implementation of the TSCA principle. Besides, the average writing scores of the post-test assignment were also higher than those of the pre-test assignment with a t-value of 1.190, but there seemed no significant difference with a p-value more than 0.05, suggesting the result might be accidental.

In conclusion, students could write better after they received feedback from their peers and instruction from the teacher. They knew how to improve their first draft according to the outline of the assessment criteria and discussion with peers and the teacher. The increase in the writing scores from the first draft to the final version indicated the usefulness of the improved version of the TSCA principle in private colleges with lower-competency students.

5. Discussion

5.1 Practicality of TSCA in English Majors of Chinese Private Colleges

The answers to the questionnaire from students implied that both teacher feedback and peer assessment have advantages and disadvantages. The result reflected that students were less inclined to accept peer feedback or

consider it when revising the first draft, but they did recognize the necessity and indispensability of peer assessment during the writing process. At the same time, the learners regarded teacher feedback as the authority, but still questioned or doubted some of it and ignored it when improving the final version. This advises the implementation of the TSCA principle which combines teacher feedback with peer evaluation to better make up for the problems taken by the disadvantages of using them independently (Yang, Badger & Yu, 2006).

With careful design and well-prepared guidance, students with lower competency could improve their writing ability by reading their partners' writings and interacting with the teacher at the assessment stage. Through the observation of the class, with the teacher teaching writing techniques and giving the assessment criteria beforehand, it could be easier for students to make comments on their classmates' writings. Even if students were struck by some problems, they could quickly go on with the scaffolding provided by the teacher. If it is possible, students could also acquire the assessment criteria of writing and conduct autonomous learning in the future. It demonstrated that they could evaluate their writings on their own without the help of the teacher, further proving the practicality of the TSCA principle in English majors in Chinese private colleges.

5.2 Effectiveness of TSCA for Improving Students' Writing Abilities

The result of the mean value and the paired t-test clearly showed the usefulness and effectiveness of an improved version of the TSCA principle in terms of enhancing students' writing abilities. The writing scores of learners increased slightly after the implementation of the TSCA principle. It demonstrated not only students' acceptance of this teaching principle but also consciously employed techniques taught by this principle. Before the implementation, the biggest problem was whether students with low competence could keep up with the teacher's procedures and make some progress in their writing. However, from the statistical results of students' writing scores, it could be figured out that the implementation of an improved version of the TSCA principle enhances students' writing abilities. The writing assessment criteria were actually a little bit harder than students' current level, so they needed someone else to help them approach the Zone of Approximal Development (ZPD) (Sun, 2020). According to the results, students with lower competency could follow the teacher's guidance and complete the task with satisfactory results through the peer discussion, which indicated their progress beyond their current level. Hopefully, they could also learn from the writing criteria given by the instructor in class and self-evaluate the writings in later autonomous learning, which would greatly improve their learning efficiency and effectiveness (Sun, 2020).

6. Conclusion

This research aims to investigate the possibility and effectiveness of the TSCA principle in English majors in Chinese private colleges. As Chinese students have been confused by the little improvement in English writing ability for a long time, it is expected to find a solution through this investigation. Besides, it could give students some useful tips and instructions through analysis of students' feedback and productions.

With the results of the questionnaire and writing scores given by learners, the answers to the research questions are quite clear, which suggests that the improved version of the TSCA principle could be implemented with the careful guidance of the teacher to help students with low English proficiency to improve their English writing abilities. It could further help the learners improve their autonomous learning in terms of English writing through detailed writing criteria given by the instructors in class. With the statistical results of the writing scores, the usefulness and effectiveness of this principle are also obvious as the scores of students' final production increased when compared with those of the first draft. Hopefully, it could also shed light on second language writing teaching, especially from the perspective of the collaboration of teacher feedback and peer assessment.

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