Research on In-class and Out-of-class Cooperative Evaluation in Writing Class

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ABSTRACT

In-class and out of class evaluation play important role in the SLA classroom as a supplementary teaching method, through which teachers and students could co-construct more effective teaching and learning environment. Despite its crucial function has drawn many scholars’ attention, it is not easy for teachers to implement effective evaluation in practice. This paper, based on current situation of Business English Correspondence Writing teaching, tries to put forward an applicable and easy evaluation mode can get students involved and can be beneficial and effective to both teacher and students.

1. INTRODUCTION

Writing Evaluation is an important and indispensable component in the teaching of writing, through which teachers could give students specific writing guidance, helping them to improve their writing level. Meanwhile, evaluation could also help teachers to understand the integral level of students so as to adjust their teaching. Evaluation should throughout all aspects of teaching activities as complementary teaching strategy to enhance learning.

However, in real teaching, especially in the Business English Correspondence Writing course in many universities of China, writing evaluation cannot be conducted effectively for the following reasons: First, due to the sharp conflict between more content and less course time, most teachers are inclined to spend time on focal points instruction and student-centered activities rather than conduct writing evaluation in class. While in the out-of-class evaluation, there is almost no instant interaction between teacher and students, which leads to the separation of learning and evaluation. In addition, most students will not modify their writing text actively after receiving feedback and comments, all of which result in the failure of comprehensive and effective implement of writing evaluation.

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Business English Correspondence Writing belongs to ESP, which is a very practical course different from traditional English writing. Students should not only possess basic English writing competence, but also should know the writing principles and writing formats of business English correspondence, choose proper terminologies and expressions according to different register and adopt appropriate business strategies. In real writing practice, students often make grammatical, lexical and formatting mistakes, and their content organization is often illogical[1]. The reasons are as follows: 1) Students lack of business practice; 2) Students cannot get teachers’ evaluation and modify their writing in time, so it is difficult for them to improve their writing ability. Therefore, it is necessary to increase the practice of business English correspondence writing, and pay special attention to how to use the Internet to carry out in-class and out-of-class writing evaluation and engage students in the evaluation process.

Various teaching methods for Business English Correspondence Writing have been put forward by researchers in recent years, but there are few studies specifically on how to conduct writing evaluation of this course. The development of computer science and information technology provides more possibilities for teaching and evaluation. Some online evaluation models have been studied, but problems still exit in practice: 1) Students show negative attitude and passive acceptance towards teachers’ online comments; 2) In peer-evaluation, students doubt whether they have the ability to give concrete and qualified evaluations; 3) Students lack trust in peer-evaluation and have doubts about it; 4) Most of the peer-evaluations are lack of positive empathy, which weaken students' learning enthusiasm[2]; 5) Students have no enthusiasm for peer evaluation, and do not modify the texts that have been evaluated; 6) Furthermore, studies have shown that peer-scaffolding may not exist in peer-evaluation, that is, peer evaluation cannot provide language help for learners[3][4].

Therefore, both the teacher and students should think about what kind of evaluation model can involve the students in it effectively. The former should explore the appropriate evaluation model, help students improve their evaluation ability, and facilitate peer-scaffolding by proper group division. The latter should learn to evaluate the writing works of others, modify their own works, and internalize what they have learned in the process of giving comments and self-revising.

2. Theoretical Basis

Constructivism emphasizes learner’s initiative and advocates learner-centered learning under the guidance of teachers. Teachers are facilitators of learning, while students are the main body of information processing. In such practical courses as Business English Correspondence Writing, teachers should create appropriate business situations for students, design rich classroom activities, actively guide students to carry out writing practice, and use appropriate evaluation and feedback methods to promote learners' internalization of what they have learned.

In the process, Teachers also have to follow the principle of ZPD. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development theory indicates that learners can achieve a higher level from their previous one with the appropriate scaffolding provided by
3. In-class and Out-of-class Cooperative Evaluation Model

3.1 In-class and Out-of-class Cooperative Evaluation Model

In order to better encourage students to participate in the writing evaluation process actively, the author designed the following writing evaluation model (see Figure 1) through reading the literature, data collection and classroom observation:

In this mode, students complete the writing task then upload it to the Yunbanke App, and bring the printed version to class. Teachers read students’ writing before class, selected samples according to the typicality principle[6], and conducted guided evaluation of sample letters through mobile phone projection in class. Afterwards, students are asked to evaluate their own work according to the evaluation methods and grading criteria. The third step is peer-evaluation within the group. Before class, teacher has divided the students into groups according to their pre-test results and voluntary principle, with 5-6 students of different levels. The peer-evaluation within the group requires students to analyze and evaluate every writing work together. After that, students take back their works and modify them according to the peer-evaluation comments and upload them to the Yunbanke App again. Step five is the online anonymously peer-evaluation. Each student is asked to comment on at least one writing work, one can get one point after evaluation as a reward. In the sixth step, teacher will give comments on each writing piece based on students’ comments, and give specific modification suggestions and points out possible mistakes in peer evaluation. In step seven, students should revise their work and hand in the final paper version.

3.2 The Implement Steps

In order to ensure the reliability and validity of the research, the author conducted a writing pre-test and made a questionnaire survey among 127 senior English majors in Wuchang University of Technology. Two classes were chosen to
be experimental class (E) and controlled class (C) in this study through data analysis. Each class contains 32 students with moderate English level, but low level of business English correspondence writing. There is no obvious difference in their Business writing competence. The writing test was selected from BEC Vantage and scored in strict accordance with the BEC Business English scoring criteria. Most of students are in BEC writing level 3.

Both classes are taught by the author. The experimental class adopts the experimental model, while the controlled class adopts the traditional teacher-centered evaluation model. Both models require students to revise the evaluated text before submitting it. This study lasted for one semester with 32 lessons, during which 6 writings were evaluated. According to the questionnaire, the experimental class and the controlled class also have the same attitude: they are generally not interested in the course, prefer teachers’ comments, and only 57% of them become habituated to modify the writing works after receiving the feedback.

After the research, the author conducted another questionnaire survey and arranged an interview with the students of the experimental class. Likert scale was used for the questionnaire survey, and SPSS 13.0 software was used to analyze the results. The interview adopted semi-structured method with random sampling. The author randomly selected two groups in the experimental class of 11 students.

| TABLE 1. Effects of In-class and Out-of-class Cooperative Evaluation Model. |
|-----------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Q1              | -   | -   | 6.25| 81.25| 12.5|
| Q2              | -   | 6.25| 15.62| 78.13| -   |
| Q3              | -   | -   | 9.37| 87.5 | 3.13|
| Q4              | 18.75| 56.25| 18.75| 6.25 | -   |
| Q5              | -   | -   | 6.25| 81.25| 12.5|
| Q6              | -   | 3.13| 15.62| 65.63| 15.62|

(Notes: 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 in the table is Likert scale: 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree.)

Q1 Students will actively modify their own works based on evaluation feedback.
Q2 Students are more confident to do peer-evaluation and believe they could perform well after teacher-led evaluation.
Q3 Students agree that peer-evaluation is helpful for their writing, and they will revise their works according to the comments.
Q4 In peer-evaluation, students will only point out the deficiencies in the writing.
Q5 Students feel more involved in the writing course under this kind evaluation mode.
Q6 Students deem this kind of evaluation is more interesting and meaningful than the traditional way of teacher comments.

It can be seen from the above data that in the teaching of in-class and out-of-class cooperative evaluation mode, students have more sense of participation, are more interested in business English correspondence writing, are willing to modify their own texts actively, and have more confidence in how to evaluate others’ writing works.

However, according to the interviews, some problems have also been found. For instance, in the peer-evaluation within group, it is mainly the active students play the leading role. Second, though the students can directly exchange views and opinions, and the one who was judged can get instant feedback, the face to face
evaluation also has its drawbacks because students always feel embarrassed to give
sharp comments, so students prefer to use the online anonymous peer-evaluation.
But in general, students agree that this kind of evaluation is beneficial to their
writing and they learned to give positive comments as well.

3.3 Research results
Three writing texts in the first, middle and final stages respectively were
selected and analyzed after the experimental period. To avoid Pygmalion effect,
the three final writing texts of the experimental class and the controlled class were
average graded by other two teachers. The results are as follows:

| TABLE 1. Topic 1 Composition Score Distribution. |
|-----------------------------------------------|
|   | 5     | 4     | 3     | 2     | 1     |
|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| E | 9.38  | 21.87 | 65.62 | 3.13  | -     |
| C | 12.5  | 18.75 | 68.75 | -     | -     |

| TABLE 2. Topic 4 Composition Score Distribution. |
|-----------------------------------------------|
|   | 5     | 4     | 3     | 2     | 1     |
|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| E | 31.25 | 46.88 | 21.87 | -     | -     |
| C | 18.75 | 31.25 | 50    | -     | -     |

| TABLE 3. Topic 6 Composition Score Distribution. |
|-----------------------------------------------|
|   | 5     | 4     | 3     | 2     | 1     |
|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| E | 50    | 40.63 | 9.37  | -     | -     |
| C | 28.12 | 40.63 | 31.25 | -     | -     |

| TABLE 4. Final Exam Composition Score Distribution. |
|-----------------------------------------------|
|   | 5     | 4     | 3     | 2     | 1     |
|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| E | 43.75 | 46.88 | 9.37  | -     | -     |
| C | 21.87 | 31.25 | 46.88 | -     | -     |

In addition, the author also graded the writing text of their final test, and the
results is as follows:

| TABLE 4. Final Exam Composition Score Distribution. |
|-----------------------------------------------|
|   | 5     | 4     | 3     | 2     | 1     |
|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| E | 43.75 | 46.88 | 9.37  | -     | -     |
| C | 21.87 | 31.25 | 46.88 | -     | -     |

It can be seen from the results that: 1) Students in both the experimental class
and the control class have improved their business English correspondence writing
after learning, but the writing level of the experimental class is significantly higher
than that of the control class. 2) The experimental class students’ overall level was
lower than that of the control class students at the first time of writing. Through the
implementation of in-class and out-of-class cooperative evaluation, their overall
level in the last time and the test was higher than that of the control class students.

4. CONCLUSION
Through teaching practice and analysis, the in-class and out-of-class
cooperative evaluation model can promote Business English Correspondence
Writing, so as to achieve a certain degree of “promoting learning by evaluation”.
However, due to the limited time of practice, insufficient personnel and the small
amount of research object, the depth and width of the results are far from
satisfaction. There are still some problems could be further explored in the future,
such as how to improve all students’ participation in group evaluation, what kind of comments could promote students’ enthusiasm to do writing revision.

5. REFERENCES
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