



Effects of the Production-Oriented Approach on College English Writing Instruction in Yangtze University

Yougen Lou^{1*}, Zhenjun Zhao²

¹School of Foreign Studies, Yangtze University, Jingzhou, China

²College of Horticulture and Landscape Architecture, Yangtze University, Jingzhou, China

Email: *louyougen@163.com

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Abstract

English writing ability is one of non-English-majored undergraduate students' important abilities in comprehensive applying English. This paper reviewed a four-week experiment on production-oriented approach (POA) in teaching the college English writing to 118 first-year non-English-majored undergraduate students who majored radio and television editing, horticulture and tea science from Yangtze University as subjects. Subjects in this study consisted of 59 non-English-majored undergraduate students in the control group (CG) and 59 non-English-majored undergraduate students in the experiment group (EG). Results in this study showed that 1) college English writing ability of subjects in EG with POA applied in college English writing instruction was improved; 2) For the English writing performance, there was a significant difference between CG and EG; 3) Subjects in EG gave positive responses on POA applied in college English writing instruction.

Subject Areas

Higher Education

Keywords

College English, Writing Instruction, Production-Oriented Approach

1. Introduction

College English is a required course, for more non-English-majored undergraduates in colleges/universities in mainland China, for all the first-year non-English-majored undergraduates in Yangtze University. The purpose of College

English instruction is to improve non-English-majored undergraduate students' comprehensive abilities in using English, especially listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating abilities to help them apply English efficiently in their future work and learning. English writing instruction is an indispensable part of College English. As the main source of language output, English writing provides the basis for applying comprehensive English language abilities. Writing can improve students' abilities in critical thinking and organization of papers and English language, and strengthen language awareness and logical thinking. So it is of great significance to improve students' writing competence. However, the study of Meng (2021) [1] showed that the current situation of English writing teaching in China was not very good, and students' English writing foundation was not strong. Some main problems in our English writing instruction are English writing teaching approaches. Therefore, it is of emergence for college English writing instructors to take teaching reform to change the current situation of English writing teaching and improve Chinese non-English-majored undergraduate students' English writing ability in China. And it is of emergence for college English writing instructors in Yangtze University to take teaching reform too. Production-oriented approach (short for POA) provided by Wen (2015) [2] will be the solution to the main problems of English writing teaching and students' English writing in Yangtze University. This article is with an introduction of POA applied in the college English writing instruction.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Production-Oriented Approach

Production-oriented approach (POA) includes three components: teaching principles, teaching hypothesis and teacher-mediated teaching process. Teaching principles are "learning-centered", "learning-using integrated" and "whole-person education". Teaching hypothesis refers to "output-driven hypothesis", "input-enabled hypothesis" and "selective learning hypothesis". Teacher-mediated teaching processes are three phases: motivating, enabling and assessing.

2.1.1. Teaching Principles

"Learning-centered principle" shows that the purpose of all classroom activities is to guarantee the effective learning; the teaching objectives should be achieved and the students' effective learning should be promoted. "Learning-centered principle" poses a big challenge to "student-centered principle" which is currently popular both at home and abroad (Ren & Wang, 2018) [3].

"Learning-using integrated principle" holds that learning and using should be combined for the aim of our learning to use what we learn. The instructor may integrate the learning and using in classroom instruction. Due to this principle, the textbooks are, not the core of classroom instruction, just as means for students to fulfill their output tasks. An obvious advantage of this principle is that learners of different levels, whether they are at the high level or low level of Eng-

lish proficiency, could complete output tasks of varying complexity within their capabilities (Ren & Wang, 2018) [3].

“Whole-person education principle” maintains that the purpose of foreign language (English) instruction is not only to improve students’ comprehensive foreign language (English) proficiency and autonomous learning, but also to enhance students’ critical thinking and awareness of intercultural communication. In order to achieve the purpose, the instructors need spend more time in careful selecting topics and materials to be beneficial to students’ sound development and to increase students’ awareness of intercultural communication.

2.1.2. Teaching Hypotheses

“Output-driven hypothesis” shows that output is regarded as both motivation and purposes of English learning. According to this hypothesis, English output tasks are more useful to stimulate the students’ desire and enthusiasm to learn English than input tasks do and could help the students gain better results in learning English.

“Input-enabled hypothesis” holds that the desirable results could be appeared if the instructors may provide the learners proper language material input tailored to the output tasks that are designed to satisfy the learners’ needs of different English levels.

“Selective learning hypothesis” holds that learners, in the limited time, could select useful information from all the proper language material input to learn to meet requirements of the output tasks according to learners’ English levels. This hypothesis agrees with the cognitive psychological reality. Selective learning is more efficient than non-selective learning (Miyawaki, 2012) [4] in the limited time. In the limited time, to guarantee positive learning results, it is necessary for our brains to select the most important and relevant ones from varied resources for further processing.

2.1.3. Teacher-Mediated Teaching Process

Three phases: output motivating (driving), input enabling and teacher-student assessing are included in the teaching process. These phases are teacher-mediated teaching process for teachers’ roles in the teaching process played as guiding, designing and scaffolding. The teacher-student assessing means that the assessing standards for results of output tasks are made together by teachers and students. Assessing includes immediate assessing and delayed assessing, which should be used to guarantee the best possible learning results.

2.2. Studies Related to POA

Many scholars have made fruitful studies on POA applied in college English teaching from different aspects. Zhang, L.L. (2020) [5] found that POA-based ELF teaching helped to enhance the teaching effectiveness of college English in a Chinese key university, boost the students’ self-confidence, and increase their intelligibility in international communication. The study of Zhang, H. (2020) [6]

revealed that POA played a positive role in stimulating students' (second-year students majoring in Applied English in a Sino-US cooperative education program) learning motivation and enhancing students' communicative competence, especially in speaking and writing. Ren & Wang (2018) [3] studied POA applied in college English reading instruction in a Chinese key university (north China electric power university). Zhang, W. J. (2017) [7] found that the experiment group's writing production, in a Chinese key university (China University of Political Science and Law)) contained more newly-taught target linguistic items than that of the control group, and the experiment group outscored the control group in the language achievement test.

From the studies above, we can find there are few studies on POA applied in college English writing for first-year students in a common local university. This paper will study effects of POA applied in college English writing instruction on first-year students in a common local university (Yangtze University located in Jingzhou city, Hubei province).

3. Methodology and Data Collection

3.1. Research Orientation

This study aimed to examine effectiveness of POA in college English writing instruction in Yangtze University. The study was directed by the following questions:

- 1) Could POA applied in college English writing instruction improve non-English-majored undergraduates' college English writing ability?
- 2) Was there the significant difference on their college English writing ability between the control group (short for CG) and the experiment group (short for EG)?
- 3) What were responses from the experiment group on POA applied in college English writing instruction?

3.2. Subjects

One hundred and eighteen first-year non-English-majored undergraduate students (57 male students and 61 female students) majored in radio and television editing, horticulture and tea science volunteer participated in this study. Their average age was 18. Their average time in learning English was 9 years. According to the subjects' wills, all the 118 students were divided into two groups: the control group (CG) and the experiment group (EG) and CG includes 59 (28 male students and 31 female students), EG includes 59 (26 male students and 33 female students). All the 118 subjects were taught by the same college English writing instructor. Subjects in CG were taught by the traditional college English writing teaching method (students wrote composition according to a title, then the instructor analyzed vocabulary problems and grammatical mistakes in the students' compositions). Subjects in EG were taught by the new college English writing teaching method (POA). Before the experiment, in **Table 1**, the value (P

= .708 > .050) showed that there was no significant difference ($t = .376$, $P = .708$) between the two groups (CG, EG) in the college English writing pretest.

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

The tools used in this study to collect data were two college English writing tests and an interview.

The two college English writing tests were pretest and post-test. The material for English writing test (pretest) was from the writing part of College English Test Four (short for CET 4) on June, 2019. The material for English writing test (post-test) was from the writing part of College English Test Four (short for CET 4) on December, 2019. All the 118 subjects in this study did not take the writing part of College English Test Four (short for CET 4) on June, 2019 and the writing part of College English Test Four (short for CET 4) on December, 2019.

An interview was used to collect subjects' responses on POA applied in college English writing instruction after the experiment.

The college English writing pretest was on subjects' first college English writing class time of the second term in their first academic year. All the 118 subjects were required to write the composition according to the writing material from CET 4 of June, 2019 in 30 minutes. After 30 minutes, all 118 compositions were collected by the research. Four weeks later, all the 118 subjects, participated in the college English writing post-test, were required to write the composition according to the writing material from CET 4 of December, 2019 in 30 minutes in class. After 30 minutes, all 118 compositions were collected by the research. Then all 118 subjects' compositions were handed to two college English teachers, attended to assess CET 4 compositions, to read and give marks for all the 118 subjects' compositions.

The analysis software SPSS17.0 was used in this study to analyze the data collected. Mean and T-test were used in this study.

4. Process of POA in College English Writing Instruction

The experiment of POA in college English writing instruction lasted for four weeks. There were four college English writing lectures every week, and the time of every lecture was 45 minutes. The textbook named as *Reading and Writing (books) of New Voyage College English* used in college English writing instruction was published by *Shanghai Jiao-Tong University Press*. The instructor sent the English writing output tasks through QQ (instant messaging software) to the subjects in EG to write four or five days before the college English writing class. The writing tasks completed by subjects in EG were handed to the instructor via QQ one day before the college English writing class. The instructor read subjects' output production to find what EG lacked in the English writing output tasks and good writing samples. Before the English writing class, according to what EG lacked in the English writing output tasks, the instructor would select and input the English material for subjects in EG to enable them to complete the

output tasks better. In the English writing class, the instructor showed what EG lacked in the English writing output tasks, then input the English material for EG to enable them to complete the output writing tasks. Subjects in EG would submit their revised papers again. In the English writing class, the instructor and subjects in EG assessed their revised papers according to English writing assessing standards made together by the instructor and subjects. The instructor would give the delayed assessing to the papers submitted by subjects in EG after the class because of the limited class time.

5. Results

The results in this study included three parts. The first part was college English writing test results of pretest and post-test between CG and EG. The second part was whether there were significant differences between CG with a traditional college English writing teaching model compared to EG with the POA model. The last part was that responses to the interview on POA in college English writing teaching from non-English-majored undergraduates in EG.

5.1. Effects of POA and Traditional Instruction on Non-English-Majored Undergraduates' College English Writing Performance

In **Table 1**, we could see non-English-majored undergraduate students' *college English writing* performance from CG and EG before and after the experiment. The results in **Table 1** showed tests' scores between CG and EG taught by different methods in the pretests' scores and their post-tests' scores between CG and EG. In the pretests of *college English writing* performance between the two groups (CG, EG), there was no significant difference ($t = 0.376$, $P = 0.708$) between CG ($M = 52.475$, $S = 11.062$) and EG ($M = 52.339$, $S = 10.109$). After four weeks college English writing training, both subjects in CG and subjects in EG improved their English writing ability, but after the instruction of POA in college English writing, the subjects' mean scores of EG ($M = 55.509$, $S = 10.886$) were higher than that of the subjects' mean scores of CG ($M = 52.864$, $S = 10.920$).

5.2. Results of the T-Test about CG and EG Taught by Different English Writing Instruction Approaches

There was no significant difference ($t = 0.376$, $P = 0.708$) between the two groups

Table 1. Results of non-English-majored undergraduates' college English writing scores of pretest and post-test.

Groups	Tests	CG(N = 59)		EG (N = 59)		t	P
		M	S	M	S		
	Pre-test	52.475	11.062	52.339	10.109	0.376	0.708
	Post-test	52.864	10.920	55.509	10.886		

M stands for Mean; S stands for standard deviation; * $P < 0.05$; ** $P < 0.01$.

Table 2. Results of the T-Test about CG and EG taught by different English writing instruction approaches.

	t	P
P	-3.251	0.002**

*P < 0.05; **P < 0.01.

(CG, EG) in the *college English writing* pretest. However, we could find that, in **Table 2**, there was a significant difference ($t = -3.251$, $P = 0.002$.) between CG and EG in the college English writing post-test. POA in the college English writing instruction was effective. More new vocabulary and new expressions were used in the subjects' English writing production in EG.

5.3. Results of Responses of the Interview from Non-English-Majored Undergraduates in EG on Instructing English Writing through POA

After the experiment of POA on non-English-majored undergraduate students' college English writing was ended, an interview was held on March 23, 2021 in a classroom to gain the responses from non-English-majored undergraduate students in EG on POA applied in the college English writing instruction. All the 59 subject in EG as volunteers attended the interview to provide their answers to the following two written questions: 1) Do you think POA applied in college English writing instruction has improved your English Writing ability? 2) Do you think you are difficult to accept POA applied in college English writing instruction?

For the first question in the interview, among 59 participants in EG, 49 subjects said that they had to spend the more time and energy in the college English writing due to being required to complete the college English writing output tasks before the college English writing class, and they felt difficult to complete the college English writing output tasks duo to their limited vocabulary, but POA applied in college English writing instruction had improved their English writing ability and skills because the English writing instructor helped them improve their writing ability through inputting the similar English papers for them to select what they needed in completing the output tasks and to revise their writing production and assessing their revised writing production; after class, they met in assessing their English writing production with their classmates or the English writing instructor online, and their comprehensive English writing ability could be improved duo to the help from their classmates or the college English writing instructor; 8 subjects told that it was difficult for them to complete their college English writing output tasks because they were afraid to write the English papers, and they did not how to organize the English papers because English papers they read were less; two subjects said that they did not have ideas on POA applied in their college English writing instruction. For the second question in the interview, 47 participants thought that they were, at the beginning, difficult to accept POA applied in college English writing instruction be-

cause, on the one hand, POA was different from the traditional English writing instruction, on the other hand, they did not know how to assess their classmates' writing production before they attended the POA applied in college English writing instruction. Other 12 subjects said that they were not difficult to accept the new college English writing instruction.

6. Discussion

This study was to investigate effects of the production-oriented approach on college English writing instruction in a common local university, Yangtze University.

POA applied in the college English writing instruction may improve students' writing ability in Yangtze University. English writing ability of subjects in EG was better than that of subject in CG. POA drives the subjects to know their lacks in college English writing output tasks. Then subjects in EG may get help from the English writing instructor's input material on English writing in class. The English writing instructor, in class, gave the immediate assessing to the subjects' writing production in EG to help subjects in EG know how to improve their writing papers. After class, subjects in EG may get delay assessing on their writing papers from the college English writing instructor and their classmates. Subjects in EG receive more opportunities to write their English papers and to be guided by the college English writing instruction. Results in this study agree with results in Zhang, H. (2020).

Results in this study disagree with results in Zhang, W. J. (2017) [7]. There was no significant difference between CG and EG in the study of Zhang, W. J. (2017) [7]. However, in this study, there was a significant difference ($t = -3.251$, $P = 0.002$.) between CG and EG in the college English writing post-test. The reasons for the difference may be that subjects in the study of Zhang (2017) [7] are from the key university, their English writing foundation is better and they know how to write English papers; but subjects, in this study from a common local university, are not good in writing English papers due to their lack of enough English writing instruction and practice, therefore, they need new college English writing instruction, more guidance from the English writing instructor and more English writing practice. For improving subjects' college English writing ability, POA applied in college English writing instruction is better than that of the traditional college English writing instruction.

The new college English writing instruction (POA) is beneficial to improving students' writing ability. However, students, at the beginning, are difficult to accept POA. The college English writing instructor may spend more time to explain POA to students, then students know more about POA.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

Though the present study has investigated a survey of POA among the 118 non-English-majored undergraduate students in college English writing teaching, there are still some limitations in the study. There are limitations in this ar-

ticle.

Firstly, time limitation (only 4 weeks) and other practical restrictions such as the subjects in the study consisted of only 118 non-English-majored undergraduate students in one university are needed to be broadened in further research.

Secondly, the instruments used in this study to investigate the non-English-majored undergraduate students' college English writing instruction involve two tests and an interview to measure non-English-majored undergraduate students' college English writing ability. The study would be much better, if it were combined with other instruments such as verbal report. More instruments should be used in investigating in the further research.

Finally, subjects in this study were the non-English-majored undergraduate students from only one university. The study will be better if more subjects from other local universities can be participated in the experiment.

Despite of the restraints of the study, we hope that it can offer some guidelines for further research of POA on non-English-majored graduate students' college English writing.

7. Conclusion

POA is a new College English teaching method provided by Wen (2015). POA applied in the college English writing may improve non-English-majored undergraduate students' writing ability in a common local university. There are 118 first-year non-English-majored undergraduate students who majored radio and television editing, horticulture and tea science from Yangtze University as subjects (59 non-English-majored undergraduate students in the control group (CG) and 59 non-English-majored undergraduate students in the experiment group (EG)). Results in this study show that 1) college English writing ability of subjects in EG with POA applied in college English writing instruction was improved; 2) For the English writing performance, there was a significant difference between CG and EG; 3) Subjects in EG gave positive responses on POA applied in college English writing instruction.

In the future, we may study POA applied in the postgraduate students' English writing instruction in a common local university.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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