

# The Application of Blog-Integrated Writing Instruction in Mainland China

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**Abstract:** With the increasingly developed Internet technology, computer and Internet has become an essential part of education. The function of computer-assisted language learning is gradually dominating the model of teaching and learning. This study first reviews the background of blog development, and then explores its functions that being applied in teaching, especially in writing. As a college English teacher in Mainland China, I adapt a blog-integrated approach to instruct students writing. A small experiment is conducted in Hohai University Jiangsu province to compare the effectiveness of traditional instruction and blog-integrated instruction on writing. It turns out that this new model of blog-integrated composition instruction is beneficial to improve students' writing competence.

## 1. Introduction

Writing is one of fundamental skills that second language learners should master, and it has always been an important aspect in the English language teaching. Teachers put a great amount of effort to instruct composition and show students various writing skills, however, as a productive skill, the overall of students' writing ability are not satisfactory. Like another productive skill speaking, writing has always been considered to be the weakness of Chinese students<sup>[1]</sup>. In view of the past decades of English language teaching, many Chinese students feel difficulty producing fluent English writing. This is probably due to the fact that students lack sufficient exposure to authentic English language<sup>[2]</sup>. In order to solve this problem, the Chinese Education Ministry suggested that a new teaching model should be built on modern information technology<sup>[3]</sup>. With the supportive network, English teaching will not be restricted by time and places, so that it could develop into a personalized and autonomous learning in the future. Computer-assisted language teaching is highlighted in the College English Curriculum Requirement in 2004. It was pointed out that language teaching should not only transmit knowledge in a traditional way, but also cultivate students' autonomous learning ability<sup>[3]</sup>. Meanwhile, providing students a platform where they could cultivate their writing skills and simultaneously inspect their improvement. Blog, actually, is definitely such a platform, which is gradually revolutionizing traditional writing instruction.

## 2. Blog-integrated writing process

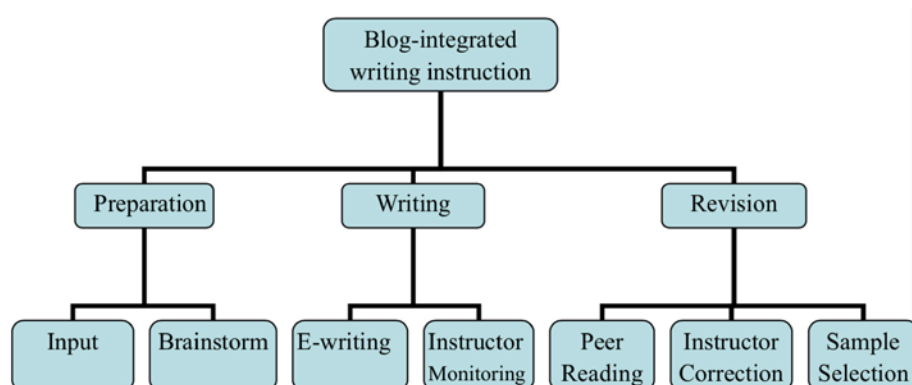


Fig.1 Blog-integrated writing process

According to Shen (2013), there are 3 stages in the process of blog-integrated writing, with various segments in each stage. In the preparation stage, the teacher first sets a theme for students to choose what topic for writing. Then, students accumulate related writing materials online to form their writing outline. The teacher could also provide target language that students supposed to use when writing. This first stage is labeled as pre-writing stage, with sufficient input and brainstorm on the theme.

In the second writing stage, students begin to construct their writing tasks. One of advantage of blog writing is that students could edit their writings with Microsoft office word, which functions as a reminder to critique students' grammar and spelling mistake, while the teacher could pay more attention and make comments on the content of students' writing<sup>[4]</sup>. After completing the first draft of writing, students publish the writing on blog. The second stage is labeled as e-writing and instructor monitoring. Publishing the writing on blog offers a connection to others in the field. This connection to others is one that perhaps could not have been made simply via e-mail or even attending a professional conference. Students would consider themselves as published writers. This can have significant repercussions as they develop their writing skills. They will be more cautious, more serious and more conscious about their writing<sup>[5]</sup>.

In the final revision stage, students' writing would be first read and evaluated among peers. Exchange reading and evaluation among peers is an indispensable input for a good writing, it is also an essential way to develop critical thinking for students themselves. The whole class could be divided into several groups to exchange ideas<sup>[6]</sup>. On this blog platform, every student acts as a real writer with readers so that the passion for writing is greatly improved. Through students' networking and reading of their peers' blogs, they are able to discover what others in their age group are going through. Compared with traditional classroom writing, student is more serious when writing on blog. The teacher functions not only as a reader but also a guider<sup>[7]</sup>. From the perspective of content, structure and organization, the teacher finally gives feedback and evaluation. The whole process of blog writing enhances the interaction between teacher and students.

### **3. Empirical Study**

In order to check this new model of writing instruction, a small experiment is conducted to compare the results of two writing instruction methods: The traditional ways of instructing composition, which is usually to introduce a type of text genre, with some topic-related input. Teacher's main focus is on students' grammar and spelling. While the new model of blog-integrated writing instruction is a creative process with collaborative work of both students and teacher.

As a college English teacher in Mainland China, I adapt a blog-integrated approach to instruct students writing. So this study mainly focuses on two different teaching methods in two semesters (from Sep 2012 to Jul 2013). Collecting data from students writing grades in the final English examination in each semester. SPSS statistics software will be used to analyze the results and compare the effectiveness of traditional instruction and blog-integrated instruction on writing. It is supposed that there is a different effect between the two approaches.

#### **3.1 Subjects**

2 classes were chosen as subjects from Hohai University where the author worked. Both classes are non-English majors in the Department of Electronic Engineering. They were chosen as they stand for the overall students who share the same educational background, and their English competency is almost at the same level. Class one is the experimental group (61 students) who are instructed by blog-integrated writing approach. While class two is the control group (60 students) who are instructed by the traditional in-class writing approach.

#### **3.2 Instrument**

The instrument is made use of final term English test in two semesters. According to the composition marking system in the final English test, the writing part consists of 15% of the total mark. It is assessed according to the structure of the writing, fluency of language expression,

vocabulary, correct spelling and grammar. Students' writing of the two classes was graded. These data will be compared by SPSS.

### 3.3 Procedure

Before the experiment, writing a composition on the topic of **My first day on the College** as a pre-test was conducted to evaluate students' writing proficiency in these two groups. At the end of the experiment, writing a composition on the topic of **My Neighborhood** as a post-test was tested in the final term exam. The total score of the two tests are 15 points.

### 3.4 Data Analysis and discussion

Table 1 Statistic analysis on the test scores among two groups

Test	Group	M	SD	T-test	
				T-value	P(2-tailed)
Pre-tests	Experimental group	9.34	1.42	0.206	0.757
	Control group	9.26	1.43		
Post-tests	Experimental group	11.51	2.06	2.637	0.004
	Control group	10.46	1.55		

From Table, it can be seen that the average score of the experimental group is 9.34, while the control group is 9.26. Through T-test analysis, statistics show that there is no obvious difference between the two groups ( $T=0.260$ ,  $P=0.757>0.05$ ). After two semesters' instruction on writing, students' writing capacity in the two groups are both improved; the average score in the experimental group and the control group is 11.51 and 10.46 respectively. Through T-test, it can be found that there is a dominant distinction between those two groups ( $P=0.004$ ), which signifies that the experimental group achieved a more significant improvement. The data results prove that blog-integrated writing instruction is more effective than the traditional approach.

## 4. Conclusion

Blog integrated writing, as a new model of instructing composition, is beneficial to both students and teachers. As blog creates a forum for the student to be an individual, each student acts as an "author". This greatly motivates students' passion for writing. Through exchanging reading and evaluation, students are all engaged in the process of developing a good piece of writing. What's more, teacher's feedback can also be given instantly in the form of comments or as a response to what the student has written. During the three stages of blog writing, students are gradually developed into independent learners and get into the habit of critical thinking, which is crucial to their future educational and professional promotion.

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