
On the Necessity and Ways of Offering Writing and Communication Courses in Applied Undergraduate Programs

Jinhui Zhao

School of Liberal Education, Liaoning University of International Business and Economics, Dalian, China

Email address:

740134649@qq.com

To cite this article:

Jinhui Zhao. On the Necessity and Ways of Offering Writing and Communication Courses in Applied Undergraduate Programs. *Higher Education Research*. Vol. 8, No. 3, 2023, pp. 75-79. doi: 10.11648/j.her.20230803.12

Received: April 27, 2023; **Accepted:** May 22, 2023; **Published:** May 29, 2023

Abstract: In the construction of the teaching system of applied undergraduate programmes, the value of "application" is highlighted, and high-quality talents with strong social adaptability and competitiveness are cultivated, which has certain requirements for the communication, writing, teamwork and innovation abilities of university students. Currently, there are many problems in writing among university students, who do not pay enough attention to writing courses and rely too much on artificial intelligence to write, lacking creative independence. The lack of writing skills also brings with it many problems, as many students find it difficult to write project books and application essays when they enter society, which does not help them to adapt quickly to the workplace. At the same time, communication skills are an important assessment factor for graduates when they first enter the workplace, and many general education courses at this stage neglect the development of communication skills. Therefore, in order to quickly solve the dilemma of the teaching mode of traditional writing courses, Liaoning Institute of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation offers the Writing and Communication course, which starts and ends with improving students' writing and communication in the workplace, and is student-centred, helping students to improve their writing and communication in the workplace and develop critical thinking skills through innovative teaching modes and improved assessment and evaluation, which helps to improve students' overall quality and cultivate Application-oriented talents.

Keywords: Applied Undergraduate, Writing and Communication, Curriculum Reform

1. Introduction

The reform of general education writing courses has become a hot topic in the past five years, starting with the opening of a course called "Writing and Communication" at Tsinghua University in May 2018, and a new wave of writing courses has followed. [1] The course draws on the writing programs and educational experiences of Harvard, Stanford, Princeton and other top universities in the world to form a novel theme-based teaching model. [2] Compared with traditional writing courses, this course is more logical or reasoned writing, focusing on developing students' logical thinking and application skills, and emphasizing the integration of the course with the country, society and young students' own experiences. [3] This new model of writing is a change in the philosophy and approach to teaching traditional writing courses.

In this context, we have absorbed a lot of valuable experience in the teaching of general writing, and formally launched the Writing and Communication course in the second semester of 2022-2023, which has been successfully declared as a university-level "Golden Course" project. The course draws on the experience of the reform of writing courses in various universities and aims to improve students' writing and communication skills, focusing on academic literacy, logical writing and communication skills, and adding official writing, social communication, copywriting, literary writing, recitation, debate, workplace communication and other related contents to the original writing course. This study aims to discuss the role of applied undergraduate courses. This study aims to discuss the necessity and ways of offering writing and communication courses in applied undergraduate programmes, which will help explore the teaching paths and methods of writing courses in applied

undergraduate general education and improve the quality of writing courses.

2. The Necessity of Offering Writing and Communication Courses in Applied Colleges and Universities

2.1. The Need to Cultivate the Writing Ability of Application-Oriented Students

At present, the problem of college students' reading and writing ability is worrying, and the lack of writing training is increasingly prominent. Wen Rumin, professor of Chinese Department of Peking University, once said in an interview, "I teach in the university, often give classes to undergraduate students, and see that the literacy ability of college students is deteriorating, and the more serious problem is that there is no habit of reading, and even if you read, it is some popular reading materials, and the so-called quality education is just empty talk." The current reading and writing ability of China's college graduates is far from social expectations, and the weak writing ability of students has, to a certain extent, hindered their professional learning and ability to improve.

The decline of college students' reading and writing ability is mainly related to the neglect of writing courses. At the objective level, writing courses, as general education elective courses, are difficult to avoid the problem of large classes with rough management. This also leads to the teachers' lack of ability to carry out criticism and guidance, and the students' lack of feedback and evaluation. At the subjective level, language was once an important test subject in basic education, and the scores of narrative and application essay writing touched every student who aspired to higher education. After entering university, most students, except Chinese majors, no longer need to take writing tests, and writing has since been relegated to a basic course. At the same time, the rise of digital writing has led some students to think of using artificial intelligence to complete their essays. In the long run, students' attitude toward writing has become more and more negative and passive.

In terms of social demand, the Talent Capital Trends reports for three consecutive years, 2019, 2020 and 2021, all show that literacy is one of the quality-based competencies that employers most want their employees and candidates to improve. [4] There is no denying that universities are the cradle of talent development. The question "What kind of competencies do the workers of tomorrow need?" This question needs to be answered by universities. Therefore, it is imperative for liberal arts undergraduates to offer effective writing courses.

2.2. The Need to Cultivate the Communication Ability of Applied Undergraduate Students

Since China has entered the Internet era, people's lives have been gradually changed. Especially young people, who are in the mainstream of pursuing newness and fashion, are

fast becoming the backbone of the network. However, students with poor self-management skills are easily indulged in the virtual online world, while being very introverted in reality. Mastering a high level of communication skills will not only help them communicate more fluently with their teachers, classmates and parents, but also benefit their long-term development. Therefore, cultivating students' communication skills is an effective way to help them adapt to society quickly.

Take our human resource management major as an example: the more prominent employment quality ability requirements include communication and expression ability, written expression ability and analytical ability. Among them, communication and expression ability is an important skill for the first time to enter the workplace. As a link between employees and managers, the human resource department needs to coordinate the relationship between employees and enterprises, and at the same time, it needs to communicate effectively with enterprises, departments or employees in various aspects. At the same time, good written expression can make the work go more smoothly. When summarizing and reporting on the work of each module, you need to express your ideas with good writing. As a human resource worker, often also need to use investigation and analysis methods to deal with problems, to ensure that the work is carried out in an organized manner. It can be said that the three abilities of communication, written expression and comprehensive analysis are the basic abilities that applied undergraduate talents should have. Being able to integrate these three abilities is more conducive to students' career planning, so that they can be more comfortable and comfortable after entering the workplace.

At present, there are still many problems in the cultivation of students' communication skills in applied undergraduate programs. [5] With the rapid development of network information technology and science and technology, fragmented language fills the network world, and unstandardized expressions go unnoticed. Some students like to use network terms in their daily communication, often simplifying, exaggerating and entertaining the semantics, which will lead to a constant decrease in students' expository ability and lack of discernment and depth if they do so for a long time. Secondly, the curriculum of communication and expression in applied undergraduate institutions is not sufficient, even though they offer courses on "Putonghua training", "social etiquette", "speech and elocution", etc., the number of class hours is small, and the number of classes is low. This makes it difficult to take care of every student in the limited classroom and lacks targeted guidance. Third, communication theory is abundant, but practical experience is lacking. The reason is that communication itself requires students to speak up, otherwise the classroom is virtually useless.

2.3. The Need to Cultivate the Logical Thinking Ability of Applied Undergraduate Students

Logical thinking ability refers to the ability to think

correctly and rationally, and is also a rational cognitive process in which people reflect objective reality through concepts, judgments and reasoning [6]. In daily life, people's perceptions of various events are always different, as if they have some justification as long as they can explain themselves. This is the result of the different arguments, arguments and argumentation processes when people elaborate their views.

With the continuous development of society, contemporary college students will welcome more opportunities and challenges. Being able to have logical written and verbal expressions will not only improve students' sharpness of thinking and insight into issues, but also help them build a bridge to communicate with others and better integrate into society. [7] Without logic, expressions can be confusing, unclear, or even uninformed. When communicating with people, the words are also often incomprehensible and easily misunderstood by others. Especially when dealing with complex issues, they are often overwhelmed and difficult to cope with, so the development of logical thinking helps students to better deal with interpersonal relationships in the workplace. [8]

To build logical thinking, writing and expression training can be used to achieve this. Both writing training and communication training can help students flexibly use logical structure to build up their discourse models. A logical structure is to writing what a skeleton is to a human being, and the skeleton is often the most basic part of a person's appearance. Similarly, a good commentary also needs to have a perfect structure to express. If the language is not well constructed, there is a danger of logical confusion easily in the process of communication and exchange.[9] Therefore, both writing and communication need to have a logical structure to help students organize their language. By explaining the theoretical knowledge of language structure, students can form a preliminary understanding of the writing skeleton and communication model, and then help them form their own language model through writing training and structured training, so that they can achieve cohesive language, smooth expression and strict logic in communication.

3. Construction Ideas of Writing and Communication Courses

3.1. *Take Students as the Main Body and Highlight the Applicability of the Course*

According to the talent training program of applied bachelor's degree, the writing course is usually a part of the general education course, which focuses more on the theoretical examination of students. Although most students can get good grades in the final exam, there is still a lot of "water" in it, and students can get a decent grade by reciting it suddenly. In reality, many students can only distinguish the style of writing or basic concepts and characteristics through a semester of study, but are overwhelmed by the real-life

writing and presentations.

OBE (Outcome Based Education) is a kind of education concept based on learning outcomes or results. The OBE "process" focuses more on students' learning outcomes and performance, which can effectively help students to obtain learning outcomes. Therefore, in order to improve students' learning effectiveness and teaching quality and efficiency, we need to establish the concept of outcome-oriented education in the course of curriculum reform, and change curriculum teaching from "teaching"-centered to "learning"-centered, and from "knowledge-oriented" to "action-oriented". The course teaching should be changed from "teaching"-centered to "learning"-centered, from "knowledge to action" to "knowledge to action", with emphasis on the application of the course.

First of all, the course should be student-oriented, which is the prerequisite to realize the applicability of the course. As the saying goes, "interest is the best teacher", students' active participation in class means that the class has a good start. Teachers should try their best to grasp students' interests and encourage them to think, speak and write. At the same time, teachers should fully consider students' acceptability in content design. If the topics discussed are too old and boring, it is difficult to stimulate students to express themselves. For example, "Why are more and more young people eager to travel to temples and pray for blessings, what do you think?" "What do you think about the phenomenon of young people lying flat?" "In practice, young people take the initiative to carry out research at the grassroots level, what do you think?", these questions not only help students practice structured expression skills, but also prompt them to think about social hot issues and form good self-reflection. In addition, the student-centered approach is also reflected in the small-class teaching model, which aims to achieve one-on-one critique and review through small-class teaching, dynamically focusing on the growth and changes of each student, ensuring high interaction between teachers and students and a good peer learning atmosphere, which is conducive to improving students' recognition of the course.

Secondly, the lecture and examination sessions need to be combined with the students' professional requirements and workplace abilities. It is necessary to highlight the supporting role of the curriculum to the requirements of talent training, and also to make the content students learn can be adapted to the job needs of enterprises. In terms of teaching content, it is appropriate to increase the teaching of workplace interview, offer writing content with professional ability related to students such as official writing, new media writing and copywriting, and create interview situations such as structured and leaderless group discussion to escort students' future career development. Students can also be introduced to psychological knowledge and public relations subjects to help them deal with interpersonal communication issues more appropriately. In terms of teaching effectiveness, students can be led to participate in various competitions held on and off campus so that they can gain experience and improve their self-confidence in the process of participation. [10]

3.2. Draw on the Experience of Theme-Based Teaching to Implement the Course of Thinking and Politics

Theme-based teaching mode is organized through theme-based, small class size, full process of deep immersion, and has the qualities of interdisciplinarity, discernment, topicality and cultural subjectivity. [11] Theme-based teaching helps students open their horizons and learn more about cutting-edge issues in tradition, society, and the world.[12] In our university's writing and communication course, based on the experience of learning from the theme-based teaching model and the ability and quality of our applied undergraduate students as well as their professional characteristics, we set nine discussion themes around document awareness, problem awareness, dialogue awareness and critical thinking, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Instructional design of course topics.

Chapter	Topic
1	Writing Perspectives
2	Government Thinking
3	Journalism Ethics
4	Social Networking
5	Urban Culture and Tourism
6	Academic Norms
7	Youth of the Times
8	Virtue and Duty
9	Artificial Intelligence

The teaching team is committed to exploring a new path of course thinking and politics, through theme-based teaching, embedding the thinking and politics content into the chapter themes, and realizing the thinking and politics in teaching and applying it in practice through five links: issuing the theme - information review - group discussion - classroom communication - post-class homework. In terms of content selection, the theme design is based on the syllabus to deepen students' absorption and understanding of the teaching content. In the setting of themes, topics rich in heat and with the characteristics of the times are chosen, for example, the concept of writing in the new era, rural literary writing, Chinese culture, digital technology and other topics, so as to gradually cultivate students' sense of social responsibility through discussion, thinking and writing. The teaching mode is divided into small groups for study and learning, through conducting debates, group discussions, peer reviews, final reports, and other flexible and diverse ways to achieve mutual motivation and inspiration between teachers and students, and between students and students. Under the premise of reasonable grouping, teachers should focus on monitoring the quality of students' seminar activities, going to students, listening to their ideas and commenting on them, and consciously guiding them to establish the correct concept of writing.

3.3. Innovative Assessment System to Enhance the Effectiveness of the Course

The assessment evaluation of the theoretical lectures mainly consists of the usual assessment and final assessment,

among which, the usual grades include usual homework, usual test, course paper and discussion, accounting for 60%. The final grade includes final paper and final exam, accounting for 40%. The traditional writing class mainly examines basic theoretical knowledge, application writing and essay writing, and students' assignments are reviewed and corrected through Learning Pass, which also causes students to rely excessively on the platform writing, and it is difficult to grasp the quality of writing and get feedback on revisions.

Based on the practical requirements of the writing and communication course, a reasonable arrangement of practice is needed to establish a connection between teachers and students through high-frequency feedback, and to quantify students' language expression. This requires an innovative assessment system, increasing classroom discussion, interaction and evaluation, making the assessment more difficult, and changing the examination format.

Compared with traditional writing courses, the Writing and Communication course is innovative and reformed in three aspects: assessment weighting, examination methods, and evaluation methods, which are important for correcting students' learning attitudes, improving learning efficiency and motivation, and thus improving the effectiveness of the course. [13]

Increase the proportion of offline assessment. In the part of the usual grade, the proportion of offline assessment is increased. Focus on theoretical assessment while paying more attention to practical assessment. In the seminar section, students' participation in the assessment is enhanced through group competition. The final grade is changed from online to offline assessment, with writing and communication accounting for 20% each. The adjustment of the weight of offline assessment can effectively improve students' attention to the course, let students really "act", and also facilitate teachers to guide students' learning in offline classes, and help students improve their abilities in a targeted manner.

Tiered and categorized exams. Writing and communication courses mainly include writing and communication teaching, even though both writing and communication are based on the teaching of language subjects, but the focus of their assessment is different, writing focuses on the test of students' ability to use words, logical framework construction, while communication also needs to assess the appearance of language and communication psychology. Therefore, a categorical assessment is required in the assessment process. The content of the categorical evaluation includes theoretical and practical examinations. The theoretical part is based on single-choice, multiple-choice, judgment, and fill-in-the-blank questions (no less than five types of questions). The practical part tests students' impromptu commentary and writing based on classroom topics and lasts about 35 minutes. Through the two-way assessment of theory and practice, students' mastery of basic knowledge and their personal comprehensive expression ability are effectively monitored.

The forms of assessment and evaluation are diversified. Traditionally, the assessment is based on teacher's evaluation, supplemented by student-student evaluation, but mainly based on teacher's evaluation as the main reference. However, whether it is essay writing or impromptu commentary, the evaluation process is highly subjective, and it is difficult to reflect students' true performance by relying only on a certain teacher to make the evaluation. Therefore, performance evaluation can be added to the traditional evaluation method by adding team outcome evaluation. Course team outcome evaluations include group-based student evaluations, and course group-based instructor evaluations. Students can form groups and grade another group, and the instructor's grade draws on the course team and uses the combined score of the course team as the basis for the grade. In addition, when conditions are available, relevant subject experts can be invited to join the course team to make the assessment results more scientific. [14]

4. Conclusion

The writing and communication course is based on the traditional writing course, with emphasis on the applicability and practicality of the course. The course is closely focused on the construction standard of "Golden Course", combined with the school and academic conditions of domestic general colleges and universities, innovative theme-based course teaching and assessment scheme, and closely integrated with students' career development plan from the main body of students. [15] In a word, the course of writing and communication is in line with the development orientation of applied undergraduate institutions and is an important part of the reform of general education in applied undergraduate institutions, which will continuously improve students' writing ability and communication skills in the workplace and cultivate applied senior talents needed by modern enterprises.

References

- [1] Dou Ji Fang, Cao Liu Xing, He Xi Ming. The Design and Practice of Curriculum Civics in a Theme-based Liberal Studies Course: An Example of Writing and Communication Class on the Theme of "Social Networking" [J]. *Journal of Higher Education*, 2023, 9 (11): 185-188.
- [2] Zhang Fen. The writing class in Tsinghua under the vision of liberal arts education [J]. *Liberal Arts Education Review*, 2022, No. 9 (01): 101-110.
- [3] Yang Yan. Exploring the teaching mode of academic writing--based on the teaching practice of "Writing and Communication" in Liberal Studies [J]. *Talent Cultivation and Teaching Reform-The Proceedings of Teaching Reform of Zhejiang University of Technology and Industry*, 2019 (00): 189-193.
- [4] Huang Haiyan. The way to build the "golden course" of writing general education in colleges and universities: an innovative practice based on the course of "writing and communication" in Jiangxi University of Finance and Economics [J]. *Writing*, 2022, 42 (03): 123-128.
- [5] Lin Xiaoping. The reform of the teaching mode of communication and writing course [J]. *Literature Education (Next)*, 2021, No. 555 (09): 78-79.
- [6] Chen Lijuan. The formation mechanism and operation logic of the phenomenon of "low vision" in graduate students' academic writing--based on 194 humanities and social sciences students.
- [7] Song Shilai. The triple change of "writing and communication" in Tsinghua University [J]. *Modern University Education*, 2023, 39 (01): 95-102.
- [8] Wang Zheng, Yang Xiaoxia. The improvement of college students' communication and expression ability based on employment orientation [J]. *Talent Resources Development*, 2021, No. 448 (13): 68-69.
- [9] Zhang Xiaoyan. Exploring the influence of structured writing teaching on college students' logical thinking [J]. *Comparative study of cultural innovation*, 2020, 4 (19): 28-30.
- [10] An Fengxian. Writing teaching in adult colleges and universities must pay attention to writing practice [J]. *Journal of Shaanxi Education College*, 1995 (04): 87-88+96.
- [11] Li Chengqing. Topic-based writing: a teaching model for university academic writing classes [J]. *Writing*, 2021, 41 (03): 91-97.
- [12] Mei Chiqi. The innovation of thinking and government model in general education courses following three laws: the example of "writing and communication" class in Tsinghua University [J]. *Journal of Thought Theory Education*, 2021, No. 267 (03): 99-104.
- [13] He Ximing. Exploring the path of formative evaluation in the teaching of liberal arts writing class [J]. *Journal of Southeast University (Philosophy and Social Science Edition)*, 2022, 24 (S1): 143-146.
- [14] Zhu Yaoying. A study on the development and impact of theme-based writing teaching in colleges and universities: the case of Princeton University, Harvard University and Tsinghua University [J]. *Writing*, 2020, No. 644 (06): 108-115.
- [15] Zhai Tiehua. From applied undergraduate to applied undergraduate: The change of applied talent cultivation mode [J]. *China Educational Technology Equipment*, 2016, (03): 81-83.