

# Blended Assessment in University Academic English Writing Course

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**Abstract:** Assessment is an important part in the teaching process. In light of technological advancement, Blended learning which integrates traditional face to face instruction with online learning technologies has become popular in English teaching. However, assessment has not fully evolved to match blended learning. University academic English writing course has been a vital part in university English teaching. Previous researches have conducted some researches on the assessment of university academic English writing course, but the researches of adopting blended assessment in university academic English writing course needs to have further investigations. To address this gap, this study will explore the concrete measures of blended assessment in different stages in university academic English writing course on the theoretical level and discuss the potential challenges and corresponding strategies. The study discovers that blended assessment emphasizes on the formative assessment which can promote assessment for learning. This study hopes to give some insights for further attempts to adopt blended assessment in university English courses.

**Keywords:** Assessment for Learning; Blended Assessment; Formative Assessment; University Academic English Writing Courses.

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## 1. Introduction

Assessment is not only a process of measuring achievements in the lessons critical in measuring achievement standards but also helps students understand their own strengths and limitations, knowing what they need to do to improve which is vital to both students and teachers [5]. When giving assessment, teachers should notice that students are in the information age that needs new knowledge and abilities [6]. In information age, technology has been integrated into every aspect of instruction [7]. In such background, blended learning which integrates e-learning with traditional face to face instruction has become popular in university English teaching [8]. However, assessment has failed to follow this trend, which leads to the situation that blended assessment does not have the same status as blended learning [3]. Therefore, blended assessment which combines technology and traditional paper and written tests should be taken into consideration in teaching. University academic English writing has been a vital part in university English teaching [4]. The effectiveness of its assessment is vital in order to objectively and accurately evaluate students' academic English writing ability. This study aims to explore the measures of blended assessment in academic English writing course, explores the potential challenges encountered and attempts to give some strategies to cope with these challenges. It is hoped that this study can provide some references for the study of blended assessment in university English courses.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Blended Assessment

According to [3], blended assessment drives blended learning. He found that the integration of assessment and learning resources can help students to learn more effectively. Many researches have been conducted based on blended assessment both from home and abroad. [6] adopted blended assessment in the course Probability and Statistics and found

that such assessment can have a quicker and efficient marker and can give immediate feedback to students. [9] proposed model for blended assessment including self-assessment, peer assessment and teacher assessment in elementary schools and proved that the necessity of adopting such assessment model in elementary school. [10] investigated blended assessment from the perspective of formative assessment and summative assessment and proposed the feedback model in assessing. It can be concluded from the previous researches that blended assessment benefits teaching in different pedagogical fields.

### 2.2. University Academic English Writing

Improving university academic English writing can satisfy university students needs of international communication and provide solid language foundation for professional learning and career development [11]. [12] adopted corpus to cultivate students ability in analyzing the structure of the genre and the context and using professional vocabulary in academic English writing. [13] discussed the strategies in teaching academic English writing which can help students cultivate critical thinking and encourage students to have an innovative practice in writing. [2] tried to adopt ideological and political education in blended learning of university academic English writing and found that such attempt can greatly improve the comprehensive quality of students including literature reading and reporting. These researches have proved that various attempts have been carried out in university academic writing in order to improve students writing ability.

However, the researches about adopting blended assessment into university English writing are limited. [14] investigated self-assessment in university English writing and proved that self-assessment can promote the concept "assessment for learning". [15] constructed the assessment system of university academic English writing based on ecolinguistics. The concrete measures in university English writing still deserves to have further investigations. The author of this paper will try to probe the potential measures in university academic English writing and hopes to act as an

reference for university English course.

### **3. Characteristics of Blended Assessment**

#### **3.1. Multiple Evaluation Entities**

In traditional assessment, teachers play a dominant role during the whole assessment process [1]. Despite the emphasis on student-centered education, the main status of students in assessment and the integration of teaching, learning and assessing do not actually take into practice [16]. The purpose of teaching is to foster students' holistic development, so teachers should give rights to students in assessment process in order to let them explore and think about their learning process and motivate their learning potentials [1]. In blended assessment, teachers are no longer the only entity in assessment, students are included in the assessment process. They have the right to participate in the assessment process including assessing themselves, assessing their classmates and even have the right to assess teachers' teaching effectiveness. Blended assessment can help realize student-centered education in the assessment process.

#### **3.2. Various Assessing Approaches**

Traditionally, summative assessment usually adopts in examining the effectiveness of teaching and takes the final examination is the most common approach [1]. The score of the final examination becomes the criteria of assessing students capability and effectiveness in the courses. [16] claimed that the current assessment focusing too much on the results. This kind of assessment is too monotonous which can not comprehensively reflect students learning condition [17]. The foundation and the original capability of each student are varied. Teachers should be aware of the differences between students, so emphasizing too much on the result of final exam is unfair. Blended assessment takes various dimensions into consideration including students' engagements and the efforts they dedicated in the whole learning process. The comprehensive ways of assessment can therefore stimulate students' motivation in study.

Due to the characteristics of blended assessment, it can be found that blended assessment has more advantages compared with traditional assessment. The author will then explore the concrete measures of blended assessment in university academic English writing based on theoretical foundation and different stages in the course.

### **4. Blended Assessment in University Academic English Writing**

#### **4.1. Theoretical Foundation**

The theoretical foundation of blended learning can be constructivism. Constructivism is a combination of multiple theories. [18] stated that there are two major strands of constructivist perspective, one is cognitive constructivism which is proposed by Jean Piaget and the other is social constructivism which is proposed by Lev Vygotsky [19]. Constructivism as an educational theory believes that students' should first focus on their knowledge and allow them to put what they know into practice [20]. Constructivists proposed a set of rules for these perspectives and claimed that learners prior knowledge will influence the construction of new knowledge and learning is an active process that learners negotiate their understanding with others in new learning

situation [19]. [21] claimed that in the process of negotiating, by asking questions and finding the answers themselves, students can have a deep understanding in what they learn than passive learning. Through active learning, students will have a sense of ownership and their commitments will benefit in their learning. [19] mentioned that constructivism should be implicated in teaching and the teaching process should not only be the tools of transmitting knowledge, but also guide and give students the opportunities to examine their own understandings. Moreover, teachers should use different methods and different materials to different students. [19] mentioned that constructivist teaching can promote learners motivation and cultivate learners' critical thinking which can help them learn independently.

In conclusion, we can find that constructivism highly focuses on the role of teachers and students in teaching and learning. The elements that constructivists emphasized are the foundation of blended learning. In the following thesis. The author of this thesis will illustrate the measures of blended assessment that can be adopted in university English writing course.

#### **4.2. Measures of Blended Assessment in University Academic English Writing Course**

The measures of blended assessment in university English writing course should be divided in to three stages: before class, in class and after class.

##### **4.2.1. Measures before Class**

Blended assessment should be first adopted before class. At this stage, teachers can upload some videos and articles about the topic that will be learned in class online. For example, if the topic of the writing is "environment", teachers can upload the videos of global warming and upload some previous researches about environment. Such measures can let students know what will be learned and have a self-reflection on the topic and can act as a guide for the students about what will they write in class. Then students are asked to preview these materials carefully before class and finished some exercises according to these online materials and submitted them in online platforms. Teachers can also post a brainstorming questions online to encourage students to express their minds freely which can open their horizons. Teachers can judge students dedications and efforts according to the times they loaded in the online platform, their quality and correctness of the exercise and also the quality of brainstorming questions. These factors can be the references for teachers to give assessments. These measures emphasize the entire learning process. Students should be actively engaged in pre-class activities because their performance is part of the evaluation in the course. Therefore, if they want to get higher grade in the course, they need to have deep understanding about online materials and finish the online exercises carefully. They need to retrieve related information online and learn by themselves in order to enhance the quality of their response online. Retrieving information can be regarded as an opportunity for independent learning which can stimulate students' intrinsic motivation for learning through assessment. These measures can also save time in class because students have previewed carefully before class and teachers can take more time in class practicing academic English writing.

##### **4.2.2. Measures in Class**

When students are in class, teachers can first make a

conclusion of the important points of the online materials before class in order to strengthen students memory. Then teachers should ask students to practice different parts of the academic English writing in class. After they finish writing, teachers can ask students to exchange articles and make comments on other students' articles in class. In the process of peer assessment, students need to read and analyze other students articles which can be an effective way to cultivate their critical thinking because they need to analyze the paper from different angles and they need to make objective, justified comments on other students' works according to the standard of what they learn. Through the assessment, students can learn the strengths in other students' articles. When they point out the weakness from others, they can consider whether their own articles have the same problems. The process of consideration in peer assessment can achieve the purpose of mutual learning in class. Moreover, during the assessment, students can gain the sense of achievement in that they have the right to make comments on other students' works like teachers. [22] stated that peer assessment enables students to have multiple roles and students will actively participate and explore independently which can stimulate their learning potentials. Peer assessment provides opportunities for students to interact with each other and exchange their own ideas, thus fostering collaborative learning. Peer assessment in class encourage every student to actively take part in the assessment process rather than just let teachers make assessment on each student. What's more, self-assessment can also be adopted in class. While conducting self-assessment, teachers should provide a self-assessment checklist which is the criteria for students to assess themselves. These elements should be included in the checklist, such as whether there is a clear thesis statement, whether the structure of the introduction and conclusion is clear, whether the words in the thesis are in an academic style, whether the references are used in the right academic form. Teachers provide checklist to students and ask them to give scores on different elements by themselves. After finishing the checklist, teachers can ask students to answer some reflective questions such as which part of the thesis is the best part ,what challenges they have met in writing the thesis, etc. In this way, assessment can help students have a better understanding about their own thesis and explore the advantages and disadvantages by themselves, which can strengthen what they learn in class.

#### 4.2.3. Measures after Class

Assessment needs be continued after class. Teachers should ask students to modify their writing based on the peer assessment or self-assessment in class and submit their revised versions to online platform. Students should also submit their self-reflection to teachers. Through this process, students can improve themselves by rethinking the comments provided by peer assessment and self-assessment and then recorded the problems encountered in writing which they need to be avoided next time. Self-reflection forces students to think independently and learn by themselves. If students have further questions after class, teachers can have a further discussion in online platform. Teachers can also do a research about the feelings of students during the class and ask students what modifications are needed in teaching, which can be a reference for teachers to change their teaching style in order to let students have a better experience in class. Moreover, teachers can conduct a project-based assessment after class, just like a case study assessment for students. For example, if

methods and conclusion are taught in class, teachers can ask students to write a comment on a given article's to make comments on its methods and conclusion which can help students strengthen their memory in class and adopt what they learn into practice. The assessment criteria includes the quality of the revised writings, the depth of self-reflection and the participation of after-class assignments. These measures can help students have a better review after class and guide them to continue learning independently after class, which shows what constructivist advocated as active learning.

All the measures of blended assessments in academic English writings emphasize the entire process of learning, students themselves actively participate in each stage in learning. [23] proposed that we should break the restriction between assessment and learning and lead students themselves to learn while assessing. These measures reflect such proposition and give students' rights in assessment.

## 5. Challenges and Strategies

Although blended learning assessment in academic English writing has shown some benefits, there are still some challenges encountered in the process of blended assessment and the corresponding strategies are provided in this session.

Firstly, blended learning assessment relies on computer technology. Not all teachers are quite familiar with these technologies. Moreover, if the software or the online platform has some problems, the efficiency of assessment can be influenced. Faced with such problems, schools should conduct a proper training to teacher in order to let them be familiar with the online platforms and know how to deal with the problems when something wrong happened and schools should have technological department to help teachers solve technological problems. Teachers should prepare various assessing approaches, if there is something wrong on software, teachers should prepare for a face to face assessment instead which can maintain the efficiency of assessment.

Secondly, the quality of peer assessment cannot be fully guaranteed. Interpersonal relationship is an important factor in peer-assessment. Students assessment may be influenced by their interpersonal relationship which can lower the impartiality in the assessment. Therefore, teachers should teach students the importance of peer assessment in academic writing and should monitor students' behavior and comments while assessing in order to make every comment of students to their partner justified. Moreover, students lack self-regulated learning skills. Some students may not watch what has been uploaded online carefully before class and they may ask their classmates for the answers or may use artificial intelligence to get the answers without thinking. Such situation may decrease the effectiveness of assessment before class. Confronted with such situation, teachers can ask questions about the online materials in class in order to examine whether students preview these materials carefully online. If a student can answer the questions logically and correctly, teachers can add points to him/her because the student previews the materials carefully. On the contrary, if the student cannot answer, teachers should minus his/her points in the preview part and ask him/her to pay great attention to preview because it is part of the overall assessment.

Finally, to cope with the potential problems of plagiarism caused by using artificial intelligence, teachers can ask the students to conduct a plagiarism check online and add the report at the end of their writings before submit the final work

to teachers. Teachers can also set a criteria for plagiarism rate such as below 15% and if their writings do not fit the criteria, they need to have further modifications by themselves. The process of further modification can be regarded as the process of self learning because it needs students to have skills like paraphrasing.

The problems mentioned above may encounter during the process of blended assessment and the corresponding strategies are illustrated in order to make blended assessment more effective.

## 6. Conclusion

This study tries to adopt blended assessment into university academic writing course and proposes some measures that can be adopted in the process of writing. The measures are divided into three stages, namely before class, in class and after class. These measures aim to encourage students to participate in the assessment rather than teachers make evaluations solely in the entire assessment. The assessment measures vary in different forms like self- assessment and peer-assessment. Moreover, various elements are taken into consideration in assessing such as students' engagements and dedication during the whole learning process rather than just take final exam as the criteria to judge students. However, the challenges such as lack of technology support, unfairness in peer assessment and the situation that students lack of self-regulated learning skills that may be encountered in university academic English writing should be noticed and the strategies that can be adopted to face with these problems are discussed in the thesis.

The study also has limitations in that it is only on the theoretical level. The measures proposed are not verified in actual experiment and in further study ,experiments can be conducted to find out whether these measures are feasible in the courses. Further study can also make a comparison between traditional assessment and blended assessment to find out students' performance in two kinds of assessment in order to examine the effectiveness of blended learning in real class. Additionally, since students and teachers are the main entity in blended assessment, further study can include semi-structured interviews to both students and teachers about their attitudes towards blended assessments.

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