



Influence of Peer Review on College ESL Writers

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Abstract

Both students and teachers are environmentally challenged. Teachers are not well-versed to do everything including giving feedback to students. Writing is a challenging area in teaching ESL. It was said that giving written feedback to students' writing is the most time consuming and challenging job (Ferris, 2007). This paper reports on a study designed to investigate and identify the benefits and the challenges of peer review, to investigate the influence of content and form based feedback to students writing. Teachers should be more aware of the right techniques to use in a writing class to produce all-rounder future communities.

Keywords: Environmentally challenged, future communities, influence, peer evaluation.

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1.0 Introduction

Today's environment challenges students and teachers. With the advancement of technology, the students' attitudes and facilities available, students are becoming too dependent. Teachers will have to do almost everything and, with the burden of multitasking, teachers are not well off to do everything including giving feedback to students, especially their essays. Writing is a challenging area in teaching ESL. Ferris (2007) stated that teachers spend most time giving written feedback to students' writing, which is also the most crucial part of being a teacher. Therefore, through peer evaluation, teachers will have extra time and this extra time can be utilized to focus on teaching techniques rather than grading students' writing by themselves (Patri, 2002). The time saved can be used to help students refine their writing skills and also focus on other techniques of teaching. Students will also benefit from this to become more independent.

This research will be focusing on the issue discussed above and will be focusing on four main objectives. The objectives are students' perceptions on the benefits and its' challenges of peer evaluation, how content based feedback from peer evaluation influences students' writing and lastly how form based feedback from peer evaluation influences the students' writing.

2.0 Literature Review

Peer evaluation is one method that is essential in teaching writing. According to Sengupta (1998), the peer evaluation process involves students to write their own compositions that are their first draft. Then, they exchange this first draft with their partner or the person sitting next to them, read each other's work and give comments and suggestions where necessary. They then return the compositions with suggestions and comments. Peers then revise the essays and make improvements. The teachers' role here is just to facilitate where they need to guide the students and help out with difficult words and so on.

Peer evaluation helps students in certain ways especially in improving writing. In a study done by Roskam (1999), 70 % of the students agreed that they learnt something from peer evaluation. Therefore, it is clear that peer evaluation helps improve writing through receiving suggestions from peers thus giving students awareness of their strength and weaknesses in writing, help improves both language and context of students' writing, add understanding of writing among students thus making students a more critical reader and writer.

Peer evaluation has been proven to help reduce teacher's workload. According to Patri (2002) and Hodges (2005), if peer evaluation can be done by students effectively, then teachers can reduce their workload and focus more on their teaching techniques. This way, teachers can teach more effectively as one of their workload has been reduced. They can finally focus and spend more time on teaching techniques for better and stimulating teaching and learning process in writing. Teachers will be able to spend more time focusing on teaching techniques rather than grading students' writing all by themselves. The time saved can be used to help students refine their writing. Peer evaluation helps teachers to focus on more helpful instructions and also to cut down teachers' marking duties to a minimum level.

Communication and critical thinking can be gained through peer evaluation. Students need to communicate with their peers when doing peer evaluation. Peers comment and give suggestions and this helps students to gain and develop their social skills (Cheng and Warren, 1996 in Roskams, 1999). Through peer evaluation, students may increase their way of thinking in a variety of ways. Critical and order thinking may be improved due to evaluation done among peers (Todd & Hudson, 2007). Furthermore, this way, they are more active than passive. This means, while conducting peer evaluation, it does not only improve writing, it improves communication and students' way of thinking at the same time.

However, there are still some drawbacks for peer review. What comes from students are not necessarily correct and precise. Moreover, students criticize their enemies, and they praise their friends and thus in effect tend to be bias. Woolhouse (1999) in Patri (2002) stated that students have difficulty in making sincere and truthful judgements. Oldfield and Macalpine (1995) in Patri (2002) mentioned that peers feel prejudiced emotionally against giving low grades to their classmates. They tend to help their friends by giving high marks. There are different levels of students and their responses may vary. During peer evaluation, students are said to overestimate and underestimate their peers. This was supported by Boud and Tyree (1979) in Patri (2002) who stated that peers tend to underestimate and overestimate their friends. Low achievers tend to overestimate high achievers and high achievers tend to underestimate low achievers.

Feedback should influence writing, and this varies according to the types of feedback. Content feedback might have its influences on students' writings. Sheppard (1992) mentioned that content based feedback is said to be better than form feedback (Guenette, 2007). Content based feedback is also said to be beneficial for the affective development from primary grades to university level though it does not focus on language form and structures (Fazio, 2001). On another aspect and view, content feedback is said to be just as effective if not more as feedback on form (Guenette, 2007). The effectiveness of both content based feedback, and the form based feedback are being debated and many have stated that both are equally prominent and have its own specialty.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Research subjects

10 students from AUSMAT programme from INTEC, UiTM Shah Alam, were chosen to be the respondents and samples. As this research is a mix method research, these samples needed to go through two rounds of peer review sessions where the first step was content oriented peer review. Second step was self revision based from the feedback given by peers which was content based before the students have to come out with the second draft. Next stage was then form oriented peer review and then another self revision based from the feedback before the final draft. After this, they were to answer the questionnaire before the comments and revision analysis took place by the researcher.

3.2 Research instrument

One of the data gathering instruments that were used in this research was students' feedback and revision analysis from the peer review sessions as comments, and the revision made by students were collected, coded, and analysed. This was done using forms and checklist as guidance (Bitchener, Young & Cameron, 2005), students' feedback analysis (Analytic Model for Categorization of Comments by Wilson, 2002) as well as the revision analysis (Faigley & Witte (1981). Another instrument used was a questionnaire adapted from McMurry (2004), Todd & Hudson (2007) and Kwok (2008). All the feedbacks and data gathered were scrutinized to provide some insight into the issue of peer review, its benefits and challenges as well as the types of feedback and revision which are both in content and form.

4.0 Findings and Analysis

4.1 Benefits of peer evaluation

In Table 1, it is found that the highest benefit stated by the students was that they felt less pressure, and more relax when having peer review. This was supported by 70% of respondents who strongly agreed, and 30% who agreed. The same goes to 40% who strongly agreed and 60% who agreed that it was very easy to use the advice from their classmates to revise their essays. This was followed by 90% of the samples agreeing that their peer who peer reviewed their essays are nice. 30% strongly agreed while 60% agreed and a total of 90% basically agreed that the advice they received are very useful. 10% of respondents strongly agreed and another 80% of respondents agreed that the evaluation and comments given were fair. 60% of the samples agreed that through peer review, they have the chance to do more practice and discussion. However, another 60% disagreed that the comments given are sufficient. Therefore, the benefits of peer review gained from this research are that students feel less pressured and more relaxed when doing peer review, the advice given by peers are easy to use to revise essay, their peers are nice, received useful advice, comments given are fair and through peer review, students are able to do more discussion and practices.

Table 1: Benefits Peer Review Questionnaire

Statements	SA (Strongly Agree)	%	A (Agree)	%	D (Disagree)	%	SD (Strongly Disagree)	%
I think that the evaluation and comments given are fair.	1	10%	8	80%	1	10%	0	0
I think the comments given are useful for making improvement.	2	20%	8	80%	0	0	0	0
I think that the	1	10%	3	30%	6	60%	0	0

comments given are sufficient.								
I have more chance to practise and discuss.	1	10%	5	50%	4	40%	0	0
I felt less pressure and more relaxed.	7	70%	3	30%	0	0	0	0
My classmates who review my essays are very nice.	6	60%	3	30%	1	10%	0	0
The advice I have received from my classmates are very useful.	3	30%	6	60%	1	10%	0	0
It was very easy to use the advice from my classmates to revise my essays.	4	40%	6	60%	0	0	0	0

1.1. Challenges of peer evaluation

Table 2: Challenges Peer Review Questionnaire

Statements	SA (Strongly Agree)	%	A (Agree)	%	D (Disagree)	%	SD (Strongly Disagree)	%
The quality of comments given by my peers is low.	0	0	1	10%	6	60%	3	30%
The quality of comments I give to my peers is low.	0	0	4	40%	5	50%	1	10%
My comments to my peers are bias.	1	10%	1	10%	7	70%	1	10%
Comments given to me are bias.	0	0	1	10%	8	80%	1	10%
Peers tend to overestimate me in my writing.	0	0	1	10%	5	50%	4	40%
Peers tend to underestimate me in my writing.	1	10%	0	0	8	80%	1	10%
I tend to overestimate my peers in their writing.	0	0	2	20%	5	50%	3	30%
I tend to underestimate my	0	0	1	10%	5	50%	4	40%

peers in their writing.								
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From Table 2, it can be concluded that the majority of the samples has less negative things to say about peer review. This was proven by firstly 40% of the respondents strongly disagreed, and 50% disagreed that peer underestimate them in their writing. Secondly, 40% of respondents strongly disagreed, and 50% disagreed that they tend to underestimate their friends' writing. This was followed by 30% of the samples strongly disagreed, and 60% disagreed that the quality of comments given was low. Moreover, 10% of the respondents strongly disagreed, and 80% of them disagreed that the comments given were bias. Another 10% of the samples strongly disagreed, and 70% of respondents disagreed that their comments to peers were bias. However, the only significant amount of challenges agreed by the students was the comments that were given by them to their peers were bias, but only by 40% as compared to 60% who disagreed. The challenges of peer review gained from this study are firstly the comments were not sufficient, which was gained from the benefit section which turned into negative. The rest of the points stated to be the challenges of peer review were not agreed by the respondents. The only point worth highlighting is that respondents were less confident about them giving comments to peers and were confident about their peers giving comments to them.

4.2 Content based feedback influences on students' writing

Table 3 illustrates that a number of 60% of respondents strongly agreed, and another 30% of respondents agreed that comments given by peers were beneficial for identifying errors in organization. 30% of the samples out of 10 students strongly agreed that comments by peers help them to identify errors in content, and ideas while another 40% of the samples agreed. 10% of respondents strongly agreed, and 80% of them agreed for both review to peers beneficial for peers' content and ideas, and own review beneficial for peers' organization. Looking at the percentages, it can be concluded that students are always more confident with what peers give rather than what they give to peers. It can be concluded that students are highly confident that peers' comments benefit most in improving grammar, the students' comments to peers are helpful in improving grammar and content and lastly, peers' comments benefit in improving the content of the essay.

Table 3: Content Oriented Questionnaire

Statements	SA (Strongly Agree)	%	A (Agree)	%	D (Disagree)	%	SD (Strongly Disagree)	%
My reviews of my peers' papers were beneficial for identifying errors in content and ideas.	1	10%	8	80%	1	10%	0	0
My reviews of	1	10%	8	80%	1	10%	0	0

my peers' papers were beneficial for identifying errors in organization.								
Comments provided by my peer papers were beneficial to me for identifying errors in content and ideas.	3	30%	4	40%	2	20%	1	10%
Comments provided by my peer papers were beneficial to me for identifying errors in organization.	6	60%	3	30%	1	10%	0	0

From Table 4, there are two types of comments, which are the content and form based comments. The total of comments on content based is 73 which consumed 41%. Content is less likely to be commented on during peer review as compared to form based feedback which consumed 59%.

Table 4: Types of Comments Analysis

Types of Comments	Frequencies	Percentage (%)
Content	73	41%
Form	106	59%
Total	179	100%

4.3 Form based feedback influences on students' writing

From Table 5, it was found that all of the samples agreed that their reviews of peers' paper helped in identifying errors in spelling. 50% strongly agreed while another 50% agreed. 40% of the students strongly agreed, and 50% agreed that their reviews of the peers' essay were beneficial in identifying grammar errors. 30% strongly agreed and 50% agreed that comments by peers were beneficial for identifying errors in spelling and the same goes also for grammar. Basically, students felt that their own comments to peers will help improve spelling and then grammar. This was followed by peers' comment were beneficial to improve spelling and then grammar. Here, students are more confident with what they comment on rather than their peers' comments.

Table 5: Form Oriented Questionnaire

Statements	SA (Strongly Agree)	%	A (Agree)	%	D (Disagree)	%	SD (Strongly Disagree)	%
My reviews of my peers' papers were beneficial for identifying errors in spelling.	5	50%	5	50%	0	0	0	0
My reviews of my peers' papers were beneficial for identifying errors in grammar.	4	40%	5	50%	1	10%	0	0
Comments provided by my peer papers were beneficial to me for identifying errors in spelling.	3	30%	5	50%	1	10%	1	10%
Comments provided by my peer papers were beneficial to me for identifying errors in grammar.	3	30%	5	50%	0	0	2	20%

5.0 Conclusion

Students feel less pressure and feel more relax when conducting peer review. Advices given by peers are useful and very easy to be used in revising essay. Through peer review, more practises and discussion are made among friends. Despite their peers being nice to them, the evaluation and comments given are fair. However, more than half of the respondents agreed that the comments given were insufficient. This has now become the biggest disadvantage of peer review in this research. The respondents disagreed that peers underestimated and overestimated the writings, bias and give low quality comments.

When comparing the two types of comments, it can be found that more comments are given for form rather than content. For content based feedback, it was found that students feel what they comment to their peers and what peers comment on them benefit in terms of grammar and also content of the writings. However, when asked about peers comments, the respondents seem more confident with peers' comments rather than with their own comments to peers. It can be concluded that the respondents were confident with what their friends commented on their writings, but they were not confident with what they did and commented on. Students are more of good evaluators but not good self-evaluators. For form based feedback, it was found that it benefits in terms of spelling and grammar. However, students are more confident with what they commented to their peers rather than what their peers commented on them. This is totally the opposite of content based feedback.

As this research has it's limitation which is the small sample of 10 students, it is recommended for future research to be done with larger sample and to investigate on the

differences of comments as well as revisions from peer evaluation with the addition of proficiency. Through all prove to show improvements, the findings revealed that form based is preferred by students. From this study, teachers should be more aware of the right techniques to use in a writing class in order to inculcate better all-rounder students for future communities.

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