

Investigating Students' Perception of Peer Assessment Practice in an EFL Academic Writing Class

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Contrary findings have been revealed in the research on students' perspectives regarding peer assessment practice in the writing classroom. While several studies showed that peer assessment assisted students in identifying their strengths and shortcomings in writing skills, others considered this application to have a limited effect on students' writing performance and encouraged little corrections. Nevertheless, some other research mentioned the fairness of this method towards the development of students' composition. This recent study examines the perspectives of a group of university students in the English Education Study Program at Artha Wacana Christian University, who are mainly foreign language learners, on peer assessment in an English Academic Writing class. This study found that students' perspectives regarding peer assessment are overall positive, and this practice improves the quality of their written work. However, in terms of interaction, the duration of time, and the application of peer assessment, some aspects reveal negative responses from the research subjects, which put a position on the neutral effect of this strategy. This study's findings are expected to reflect the participants' responses on using peer assessment. It is also hoped that the findings from this study will be helpful for future research in designing a better peer assessment process and improving its implementation.

Key words: Peer assessment, EFL classroom, Academic writing

INTRODUCTION

Peer assessment involves students assessing each other's work through reflection on the goals and what it means to achieve them. Peer assessment is recognized as a successful means of providing feedback to students in higher education (Osman et al., 2022). In the context of academic writing, both providing and receiving feedback may help students improve their writing skills, as this kind of peer interaction allows students to gain knowledge from different perspectives through social sharing (Huisman et al., 2018). Moreover, if peer feedback is thoughtfully carried out, it can assist the student in developing various learning and life skills, such as learner responsibility, thinking strategies, and appraisal skills (Sukamaran and Dass, 2014).

The use of peer assessment in the learning process requires the introduction of habituation to students because the assessment process will involve two parties, and it aims to obtain an objective value from them (Hasnani and Mubarak, 2020). In addition, before using peer assessment in teaching, lecturers should discuss and inform students about the use and achievements of peer assessment (Ndoye, 2017). In this context, Sluijsmans (2002) proposes that the peer assessment model takes three primary skills into account: (1) defining assessment criteria, thinking about what is required and referring to the product or process; (2) judging the performance of a peer: reflecting upon and identifying the strengths and weaknesses in a peer's product and writing an assessment report; and (3) providing feedback for future learning: giving constructive feedback about the product of a peer.

Peer assessment can be highly effective when students are trained to give and use feedback (Min, 2006). In an academic writing context, teachers can incorporate it to present writing skills to students, ideally creating a student-centered classroom with learners capable of critically evaluating their written work. Therefore, several things need to be considered when conducting a peer assessment: 1. Make the criteria rubric clear and by the standards for evaluation. 2. Providing opportunities for students to practice peer assessment before doing the truth. 3. Explain to students that the feedback given to their peer-assessing partners will significantly contribute to improving their abilities personally and in teamwork. 4. Self-assessment and peer assessment (Spiller, 2012)

Many researchers have conducted studies on the use of peer assessment in English writing classrooms as a learning tool that holds a variety of benefits and shortcomings. Several studies established that students view the use of peer feedback positively. De Brún et al. (2022) found that although peer assessment was a new experience for most students, they agreed it was a valuable learning experience as part of research methods training and critical skills development. In addition, Vanderhoven et al. (2012) reported more positive attitudes toward implementing anonymity in the context of peer assessment in a face-to-face secondary education setting. Moreover, based on survey responses, White (2009) found out that student perspectives on using peer assessment were positive, on the whole, and the process did indeed lead to the promotion of student learning.

In several studies, the concerns and negative perspectives of students regarding peer feedback were explored. Smith, Cooper, and Lancaster (2002), in their research on peer feedback in an EFL classroom, highlighted that although students expressed a higher level of confidence in the peer feedback process over time and continual experience, there remained within them an “unease about fairness and consistency regarding peer feedback” (p. 76). In addition, it has been found that peer assessment might cause stress and a lack of accuracy in the assessment (Falchikov, 2003).

In order to encourage the use of peer feedback in an EFL classroom and recognize the benefits of using peer feedback, studies have been carried out to identify specific steps to alleviate students’ negative perspectives of peer feedback. Sukamaran and Dass (2014) documented some previous research in this area. For instance, some have advocated for teachers to include more peer feedback experience (Wen & Tsai, 2006) to clarify peer feedback criteria (Falchikov, 2001; Smith et al., 2002). As such, there is a need for more investigation into students’ perspectives on peer assessment practice. The primary purpose of this study is to understand how students perceive peer assessment in an English Academic Writing class with mainly L2 users. This study's research problem is formulated: “What are the students’ perspectives on using peer assessment in an academic writing class at the English Education Program of Artha Wacana Christian University?”

METHOD

The primary data source for this study was collected questionnaires from each participant. The administration of the questionnaires was conducted after students had received their final feedback from their peers and completed their final essay draft. A quantitative approach revealed essential perspectives about how students perceive peer assessment in the collaborative learning environment. The participants chosen for this study were seventh-semester EFL students of Artha Wacana Christian University who had completed their academic writing course.

A 4-point Likert scale questionnaire was developed based on previous studies (Brindley & Scoffield, 1998; Cheng & Warren, 1997; Falchikov, 1995) to understand what students think about peer assessment. Before the participants provided feedback on their peers’ essays, the researcher trained them on how and what to provide feedback on the rubric. They were also taught to use assessment criteria based on Jacobs et al. (1981). Then, each draft was distributed to thirty students who reviewed and evaluated their peers’ work. The reviews the students submitted to their peers must include written feedback. After receiving their reviews, students rewrote their papers and turned in a final draft to the two teachers who will assess the paper. For this study, the participants were engaged in the writing-reviewing-revising-reviewing process for each paper they wrote.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This research is conducted to answer a research problem: What are the students' perspectives on using peer assessment in Academic Writing class at the English Department of Artha Wacana Christian University? After collecting the data from questionnaires, the writer presents the findings and discussions as follows:

Table.1. The responses of students towards the application of peer assessment

No	Statements	Responses				
		SA	A	N	D	SD
1	Peer assessment helps to improve the quality of students' written work	18	10	2	0	0
2	Peer assessment makes students understand more about the teacher's requirement for written work	12	18	0	0	0
3	Providing feedback for others can improve student's skills in assessing their written work	9	15	3	2	0
4	Peer assessment activities motivate students to learn to write better	12	14	6	0	0
5	Peer assessment activities increase the interaction between teachers and students	8	10	6	6	0
6	Peer assessment is a useful method for providing feedback to students	6	14	10	0	0
7	Peer assessment helps the student to develop a sense of participation in writing class	0	18	10	2	0
8	Peer assessment activities increase the interaction between students and the other	15	12	3	0	0
9	Peer assessment activities help the student understand what other classmates think	10	15	5	0	0
10	Having criteria for peer assessment helps the student construct meaningful feedback	5	18	7	0	0
11	Students should participate in the development of criteria for peer assessment	3	6	10	4	7
12	There should be sample feedback given to help with the peer	18	12	0	0	0

	assessment process					
13	Peer assessment activities can be time-saving	2	4	5	11	9
14	Peer assessment activities can increase the interaction among students	8	8	2	6	6
15	Peer assessment activities can increase the interaction among the teacher and students.	3	7	4	14	2
16	Peer assessment activities are a fair method when used to provide feedback to students	0	17	3	5	5
17	The aspects of rubric criteria for peer assessment activities enable students to provide more critical feedback	2	6	14	4	4
18	Students should not be responsible for providing feedback on peer's written work	7	3	6	7	7
19	Peer assessment is time-consuming	3	13	14	0	0
20	Peer assessment is effective in writing class activities	12	13	5	0	0

SA: Strongly Agree

A: Agree

N: Neutral

D: Disagree

SD: Strongly Disagree

Encountering statement number one, most students agree that peer assessment helps improve the quality of their written work, while a few students gave neutral feedback. It can be argued that even though nearly all the respondents give positive responses to this statement, several students are not certain whether this technique is helpful for them in improving the quality of their writing. Meanwhile, all students agree that peer assessment facilitates their understanding of the requirements needed for written work. The writer argues that this phenomenon happens because most teachers do not provide the assessment criteria in regular writing classes.

Furthermore, although a few students do not agree and are uncertain that providing feedback to others can improve their skills in assessing their written work, most students agree. However, the statement does not clearly state which element of writing is being assessed. It can be argued that peer assessment has a positive and significant effect on students' skills in evaluating their writing. In addition, two-thirds of students agree that peer assessment activities motivate them to write better, while the rest are unsure whether they are motivated. Even though there are no negative responses to this statement, it can be said that many students are unassertive whether they are provoked to write better by this practice.

In the following statement, students need to provide a response on whether peer activities increase the interaction between them and the teacher in classroom activities. The results

showed that more than half of the students agreed with the statement. Furthermore, while six of them were not sure, another six of them did not agree with this statement. The results indicate that some students probably do not experience the extension of interaction between students and teacher in the writing assessment practice because they do not follow the classroom activities regularly or the teacher might not focus on all the students. This circumstance then leads to a question on the proper application of the peer assessment on the teacher's side.

Additionally, seventy percent of the students agree that using peer assessment is valuable for providing student feedback. While some responded neutrally to this statement, there is no negative feedback on this perspective. This data shows that students have positive responses to the implementation of peer assessment strategies. Also, the following results show that more than half of the students strongly agree that peer assessment helps students to develop a sense of participation in writing class. Surprisingly, a few students responded negatively, while a few showed uncertainty. As the nature of the peer assessment is the collaboration and part-taking between teacher and students, this result indicates that some students do not perceive that this strategy increases their engagement in the writing class activities.

Furthermore, In terms of interaction between students, most students agree that peer assessment can increase their interaction in writing class activities. However, there are a few students who are not sure about this statement. This indicates that they are not engaged in peer assessment activities. Next, peer assessment activities benefit most students by helping them understand other classmates' thoughts. This phenomenon happens because they have an opportunity to read and assess their classmates' written work. Nevertheless, a number of students disagree with this statement, while a few are neutral on this issue. Again, the negative result on this point shows that a few students are not actually involved in the peer assessment activities.

The results from statement number ten indicate that most of the respondents gave positive feedback, and the peer assessment criteria helped them construct meaningful feedback on their peers' writing. However, a few students do not put their position on positive and negative responses. In the following statement, students' responses are equal for positive, negative, and neutral. Therefore, it can be said that participating in developing criteria for peer assessment is not recommended for students.

Further, the results also reveal that all students agree there should be sample feedback to help with the peer assessment. This data shows that the sample of the feedback given is recommended in these activities and helpful in guiding students in assessing their peer's work. Nonetheless, although most students give positive feedback on peer assessment, the length of time for the activities still becomes a problem. Most of the students do not agree that this process is time-saving. Instead, it implies that students take a long time to assess their partner's written work.

The information in statement fourteen gives a new perspective on the writer's discussion in point eight of this section. Previously, it shows that there is no negative response that the peer assessment improves the interaction between one and another student. However, regarding multiple interactions, almost half the students do not agree that peer assessment activities can increase interaction among classmates. The results imply that students focus only on their peers to evaluate their written work with a limited chance to interact with others. Consequently, since this research focuses on how students can interact with their peers, the frequency of the discussion with the teachers is limited. This might be one reason why half of the students disagree that peer assessment activities can increase their interaction with the teacher.

Next, the results of this study on statement number sixteen support the prior discussions on the benefits of using peer assessment. While two-thirds of students agree that peer assessment is a fair method to provide feedback to students, several students do not agree with this. Moreover, a few students respond neutrally on this issue. Based on these findings, it can be stated that several students still doubt the advantages of this application in terms of producing comments on students' written work. Also, half of the students are neutral on whether the rubric criteria for peer assessment activities enable students to provide more critical feedback. Meanwhile, positive and negative responses are equal, showing that the critical issues in peer assessment are still debated.

Encountering the statement that students should be responsible for providing feedback on peers' written work, almost half of the respondents responded negatively, while one-third responded positively. It shows an argument on students' responsibility in these peer assessment activities. Meanwhile, the following statement points out that more than half the students' experience working on peer assessment takes time. However, one-third of the respondents responded neutrally, indicating they were unsure.

In the last response, although a few students are unsure, most agree that peer assessment is practical in writing class activities. Furthermore, it shows that students respond positively to the peer assessment in writing class activities.

CONCLUSION

As stated previously, contradictory findings have been investigated in the research of students' perspectives regarding peer assessment practice. While some found that peer feedback was viewed with doubt and encouraged little revision, others found it helped learners recognize their writing strengths and flaws. This study aims to find out students' perspectives regarding peer assessment and to identify the concerns raised by students involved in the study. It is found that the students in this research show primarily positive responses to the implementation of peer assessment in academic writing classes. As an implication, these results give another perspective on the academic conversation in the use of peer assessment in writing activities.

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