

## USING PEER-REVIEW AS MOTIVATION TOOL IN A WRITING CLASS

Norida Ahmad  
Pusat Pengajian Ilmu Pendidikan  
Universiti Sains Malaysia  
e-mail: [norli@usm.my](mailto:norli@usm.my)

Puteri Rohani Megat Abdul Rahim  
UiTM Kampus Cawangan Perak  
e-mail: [puterinmart@hotmail.com](mailto:puterinmart@hotmail.com)

Suzila Mohd Shukor  
Unit Perkhidmatan Akademik  
Kampus Kejuruteraan Universiti Sains Malaysia  
e-mail: [suzila99@yahoo.com](mailto:suzila99@yahoo.com)

**Abstrak** Kebanyakan maklum balas terhadap hasil kerja penulisan pelajar adalah dalam bentuk gred akhir yang diberikan guru. Pendekatan ini menyebabkan ramai pelajar tidak memahami kesalahan yang telah mereka lakukan dan mereka tidak dapat memperbaiki penulisan mereka. Sudah tiba masanya penulisan perlu dilihat sebagai alat komunikasi dan bukannya latihan di dalam kelas semata-mata. Kajian ini bertujuan melihat peranan maklum balas dari rakan sebaya terhadap tugas penulisan pelajar pada setiap peringkat mengarang: merangka karangan, membina draf pertama, membaik pulih dan menulis draf akhir. Pelajar diharap mendapat latihan yang secukupnya untuk menjadikan mereka penulis yang tidak hanya mengharap kepada guru untuk membuat pembetulan atas kesilapan yang mereka lakukan. Sekiranya pelajar menyedari kesilapan mereka sendiri dan berupaya membaikinya maka mereka akan lebih bermotivasi untuk menulis.

## INTRODUCTION

Tertiary level students are required to write reports in their academic subjects. However, the engineering students' enrolled in English proficiency classes at Universiti Sains Malaysia Engineering campus have not shown evidence of writing skills and higher level thinking abilities in their written reports. The students' written works lack organization and ideas and they have no motivation to write essays. They perceived writing as subject requirement and they lack knowledge in composition and writing.

Writing is a generative and recursive process. For teachers of writing, it is necessary to recognize that revision is important in the process of composition. Teachers should also reconstruct their writing lessons to allow students to generate, formulate and refine their ideas (Zamel, 1987). Writing is also considered as the second highest skills needed for professional success after graduation (Jenkins, Jordan and Weiland, 1993). Studies by Lunsford and Ede (1992) showed that 50% of engineer's work consists of writing but majority of the engineering students' attitude towards writing showed the reverse. As teachers handling engineering students for more than six years, we have observed these negative attitudes toward writing, greatly influencing their motivation to write. More so writing assignments in English classes were not given much time and effort by the students

In writing, students must have the right attitude, since attitude have direct effect on the motivation to learn the language (Spolsky, 1989) and in turn affects achievement. Most engineering students don't realize the importance of writing in their future profession. As a technologist one must posses the strength in the knowledge of what is talked about and the ability to communicate in the language of a technical report (Pauley in Cruz, 1979). The views presented indicate support on the importance of developing writing skills for tertiary level students. One way of enhancing students' learning in writing is through peer tutoring.

Many studies have shown that peer tutoring has a positive impact on students' academic achievement and attitude towards learning (Mohan and Barresi, 1973). The use of peer and self-assessment may promote higher levels of thinking (Falchikov, 1991). Thus, peer review can provide students an opportunity to enhance learning. This consequently will encourage students' involvement in the learning process, as teachers of writing cannot possibly give attention to everyone in class. With positive peer tutoring and review every student is given an opportunity to become involved in the learning process. During these processes students can assist each other to progress to higher level.

This study investigated the use of peer review to enhance the quality of students' learning in our writing class. It looked into peer review activity to help students learn the process of writing composition and subsequently allowing us to scaffold our students' learning in the hope that they can see the importance of revision in writing. We are also interested to see if peer tutoring developed among students can be used as a motivational tool to teach writing.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The traditional approach to teach writing emphasizes more on the written outputs and evaluation of students' written works. At present, the approach in writing has shifted from the written works to the process of writing. This process involves several stages where students incorporate and expand their ideas through draft construction, revision and the final draft. Revision should be a major component in the stages of 'revising' and 'drafting' since it interacts repeatedly in order to discover meaning (Murray, 1980). In revision, students are given the opportunity to review their own writing and make necessary improvement to the work.

According to Murray (1980), Perl (1980) and other researches, writing and rewriting is a process of discovery. The discovery process can be attained through teacher intervention or peer intervention. Peer interaction, which is a form of social interaction, can be a valuable part of classroom language (Swafford, 1995). Vygotsky (1978) argued that students must interact with another to go beyond their level of development. Barnett and Stubb (1990) claimed that peer review gives the writer a real audience to point to what puzzles or pleases, asks questions and makes suggestions. The peer review activity will help teachers set a more student centered lesson which in turn helped students take a more active role for their own learning (Brief, 1984, Forman and Cazden, 1985). Gibbs (1992) as mentioned in Chalmers and Fuller (1996) also claimed that autonomous student groups and peer tutoring are two forms that can promote more effective learning. By adopting peer review as a panacea or teaching strategies, it allows students to be active participants in the learning process rather than passive recipients of information. This task provides opportunity for interaction among students where they can talk on ideas and create meaning.

Motivation is an extremely important factor in successful language acquisition. Gardner (1983), stresses that positive attitudes can increase perseverance and encourage active participation in learning. Mazzano and Pickering (1997) concur that attitude and motivation affect students' abilities to learn and suggest that attitude and productive habits of minds motivate learners. Thus, enabling learners learn effectively with the other three dimensions namely, acquiring and integrating knowledge, extending and refining knowledge and using knowledge meaningfully. Recent views on motivation provided a number of researchers to look at motivation in a broader concept through cognitive approach. From a cognitive perspective, people have choices in the way they behave and, therefore, have control over their actions. Williams and Burden, (1997) stated that motivation is concerned with such issues as why people decide to behave in certain ways and the factors influencing their choices.

Peer-review activity allows students to construct their own learning. Mittan (1989) concurs that peer review also provide students an authentic audience, increase their motivation for writing, enable them to receive different views on their writing, and help them learn to read critically their own writing. Thus, this intensifies the role of peer-review as a motivational tool in the process of writing. In a writing class, when students are provided rich, stimulating environment it allows the learners to develop cognitively as seen in a peer review process. By giving help to their peers, tutors will improve themselves in many ways as they are reinforcing their own knowledge and skill. This in turn improves their confidence. Goodland and Hirst (1990) consider peer tutoring as a system of instruction with learners help each other and learn by teaching.

According to Piaget (1964) students should be encouraged to learn on their own rather than given information. Learning can take place when students engage in experiences and experiments from which they derive their own knowledge, meaning and understanding (Cruikshank, Bainer, Metcalf, 1999). Thus, it is necessary for teachers to provide students the opportunities to think independently in order to obtain knowledge for themselves. Pond (1995) stipulates that flexible learning encompasses a wide range of teaching, learning and assessment styles such as group work, student-led seminars and peer assessment, all of which encourage a high level of students involvement and engage students in the learning process.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Subject**

The subjects consisted of 30 undergraduate Engineering students from the Universiti Sains Malaysia enrolled in Technical English level 4 (LK1 460). These students were selected based on the minimum requirement of B at matriculation level or obtained a grade of C3/C4 in their SPM English. The subjects came from one intact class out of the 14 classes taking the same course with another intact class of 25 students that served as the control group.

### **Instrument**

Two sets of instruments were used in the study. The first instrument was a questionnaire given to students at the end of the semester. The students' responses were analyzed using the SPSS software. The second instrument was the teachers' own observation to gauge students' attitude. About five students were randomly selected from six different groups and were interviewed to gain insights on their opinion concerning the writing process.

**Procedure**

The students were divided into five groups of 6 and each one was given a topic to write. The students were engaged in small group sessions before starting to write their individual draft. At the completion of the first draft, students have to exchange work amongst their group members. A set of criteria was provided (Appendix A) as guide for their comments and feedback. The students made a summary on the positive aspects of the written work followed by the negative aspects of the first draft. This was where interaction and negotiation of meaning took place. The students then revised their work based on the feedback received. On the second draft, another peer review session again was done. This session served as a peer editing stage prior to the final draft. In total the students wrote 3 final essays and underwent 6 peer review sessions. Towards the end of the semester the students were given a set of questionnaire to give feedback on the overall process.

In the control group, students were exposed to the usual practice in a traditional writing class. The teacher lectured on effective writing and discussed model essays. The students were asked to write individual essays that were evaluated by the teacher. At the end of the semester five students were selected at random for interviews to provide feedback on the writing process.

**The Findings**

Table 1 presents the students responses on the writing process.

**Table 1: A Summary of Students' Responses**

| Questions  |             | Frequency | Percent |      |
|--|-------------|-----------|---------|------|
| Q1 Did peer review help improve the beginning of your compositions?  | Not at all  | 1         | 4       | 13.3 |
|  | A little    | 2         | 5       | 16.7 |
|  | Quite a lot | 3         | 17      | 56.7 |
|  | A lot       | 4         | 4       | 13.3 |
|  |             |           |         |      |
| Q2 Did peer review help improve the development of your composition? |             | 1         | 0       | 0    |
|  |             | 2         | 5       | 16.7 |
|  |             | 3         | 19      | 63.3 |
|  |             | 4         | 6       | 20.0 |
| Q3 Did peer review help improve the ending of your composition?      |             | 1         | 3       | 10.0 |
|  |             | 2         | 9       | 30.0 |
|  |             | 3         | 12      | 40.0 |
|  |             | 4         | 6       | 20.0 |
| Q4 Did peer review make your ideas clearer?                          |             | 1         | 0       | 0    |
|  |             | 2         | 4       | 13.3 |
|  |             | 3         | 15      | 50.0 |
|  |             | 4         | 11      | 36.7 |

|  |         |    |      |
|--|---------|----|------|
| Q5 Did you make use of your classmates' advice/opinion in your composition?                  | 1       | 0  | 0    |
|  | 2       | 6  | 20.0 |
|  | 3       | 14 | 46.7 |
|  | 4       | 10 | 33.3 |
|  |         |    |      |
| Q6 Do you think you can write better by thinking more about other people's ideas/viewpoints? | 1       | 0  | 0    |
|  | 2       | 1  | 3.3  |
|  | 3       | 15 | 50.0 |
|  | 4       | 14 | 46.7 |
|  |         |    |      |
| Q7 Did peer review help you take a more careful look at your compositions?                   | 1       | 0  | 0    |
|  | 2       | 0  | 0    |
|  | 3       | 18 | 60.0 |
|  | 4       | 11 | 36.7 |
|  | missing | 1  | 3.3  |
| Q8 Was there a lot of interaction in your group each time?                                   | 1       | 0  | 0    |
|  | 2       | 12 | 40.0 |
|  | 3       | 16 | 53.3 |
|  | 4       | 2  | 6.7  |
|  |         |    |      |
| Q9 Would you like to use peer review again?  | 1       | 0  | 0    |
|  | 2       | 5  | 16.7 |
|  | 3       | 11 | 36.7 |
|  | 4       | 14 | 46.6 |
|  |         |    |      |
| Q10 Did you make changes in your final writing after peer review?                            | 1       | 0  | 0    |
|  | 2       | 5  | 16.7 |
|  | 3       | 18 | 60.0 |
|  | 4       | 7  | 23.3 |
|  |         |    |      |

From Table 1, the results showed that most students benefited from the peer review session. 96.7% realized that peer review help in revision of their composition. Majority of the students reflected they had improved in the areas of content and organization. For question 1, 70% of the respondents believed that peer review assisted them in the first stage of writing the introduction of their essays. In question 2, 83.3% of the students answered, the peers' comments improved the development of their essays. In question 3, 60% of the students agreed that peer review process guided them to write better conclusions.

A great majority (80%) of the students agreed that peer review allowed them to consider different points of view to achieve clarity. While 96.7% responded they could write better by considering the peers' comments thus building their confidence to write and subsequently motivated them. About 83.3% of the students revised their essays based on the peer reviews indicating that most of the students acknowledged the importance of peer review in writing the revisions. When asked whether they would use peer reviews again 83.4% responded positively.

From the interviews done some students responded positively. The following were the students' reflection about the process:

- *"We get more ideas and ways to improve our composition during peer review."*
- *"The peer reviews help develop our compositions better to attract readers."*
- *"It improved the flow of ideas in my essay."*
- *"We get new knowledge, style in writing and able to see our mistakes and correct them."*
- *"By getting ideas from our peers, and we could write better."*
  
- *"We understand our work better as we write, listen and talk during peer reviews."*

The interview enabled students to gain positive attitude towards writing as seen from the positive comments received. From the observations, the students find writing easier with better outputs. On the other hand, the students from the control group using the traditional method did not see the advantages of taking the writing class. To many students, writing is a waste of time and they had ample practice in their secondary level education.

## **CONCLUSION**

From the study, several conclusions can be made about peer reviews. However, these findings may not apply to other writing classes. Nevertheless, it showed that majority of the students have seen the advantages of peer reviews in their writing. Students realized that the process is equally important in the different stages of writing process not just the final written work. From the findings, the peer review activity has helped students see the importance of revision in writing. Towards the end, the students were able to discern what constitutes good writing from their own written works as well as their peers. Many were able to identify aspects related to content, organization, purpose and subsequently give possible suggestions to improve the written work.

This mini research supports that peer review is one form of students' self-assessment in writing. From the observations, students participated actively in class and took more responsibilities for self-learning. Students were no longer passive recipients of information and developed self-awareness as writers. The peer review was an effective tool used to enhance students' motivation in writing. According to Kaplan and Grabe (1996:387), peer groups appear to be most effective when students are motivated by the approach, when trained carefully during group work provided with many suggestions and guidelines as supportive feedback and when assisted appropriately by teachers. During peer review sessions, the students were encouraged to share their ideas and voice their opinion openly. They were not expected to write better but the activity has helped them understand why revision is important in writing and helped them to look critically their own and their friends' essays. When students and teachers of writing are aware of the process involved, both can appreciate the whole process in composition writing.

In addition, the activity during peer review has developed positive attitudes among the students. They became more confident and motivated to write. The activity has also lessened the students' fear to write as they realized that the repetitive process in writing was as important as the end product. In the peer review sessions, the teacher acted as facilitator in guiding and assisting students which consequently allowed students to take control of their own learning. The students became active participants in acquiring knowledge by absorbing and reflecting what they have learned. Moreover, they also realized the importance of giving positive feedback to give encouragement and support to their peers work.

### **LIMITATION**

This study is applicable only to a small number of students ( $n= 30$ ) and may not be applicable to other tertiary level students. Furthermore, the study was conducted in a short time for 14 weeks only. A longer time should be given to students to engage themselves in the process of peer review. Thus, the outcome would have been better if it were conducted over a longer period of time.

During the peer review process, some students' feedback were unreliable as in the case of slow learners which tend to refrain from giving any constructive comments when grouped with better students. In the study the need to clarify teachers' expectations, learning strategies and obtaining feedback from students were evident especially on the importance of giving and receiving feedback since many of them are not accustomed to give and receive feedbacks among peers.

Moreover, the criterion/guidelines given to students had served as a barrier for students' self-discovery in learning. The students tend to be rigid and follow the criteria strictly, thus, creativity and freedom were lessened. Time factor is also another constraint as some students worked at a slower pace compared to the rest thus creating a gap between fast and slow learners.

From the study, the use of peer review has helped improved students understanding of the writing process, however, there is still a need to investigate further the role of peer reviews in a writing class.

### **APPENDIX A**

#### **Evaluation criteria for the students**

The use of this guideline is to show the areas you can look at in order to help your group members rewrite their work in a more interesting and attractive way. You don't have to follow them exactly. But do make some suggestions around these areas as clearly as possible, so that your classmate understands your comments. Try to be as helpful as possible.

#### *Planning the composition*

- Have you determined who your audience is?
- Have you taken identifiable attitude towards your subject?
- Have you planned the composition to suit this audience?
- Have you listed ideas for your composition?

- Have you arranged the ideas into paragraphs?
- Have you decided on the order of the paragraphs?
- Does your introductory paragraph tell your readers what is in the composition?
- Have you decided on a conclusion?

#### *Rough Draft*

- Is the purpose/topic of the composition set out clearly in the introduction?
- Is the purpose/topic of the composition clear to your audience?
- Does each paragraph contribute to this purpose?
- Is each idea illustrated with several details and/or examples?
- Is there a logical development from paragraph to paragraph?
- Are there a beginning, middle and end?
- Have you checked thoroughly for spelling errors?
- Have you checked for grammatical and other errors?

#### *Composition criteria for final draft*

##### *Organisation*

1. The composition has an introduction which
  - informs the reader what the composition is about;
  - functions as a set of signposts to the reader, and/or
  - shows how the topic will be developed, and
  - may arouse interest.
2. The composition has a conclusion which
  - summarizes the content of the composition, and/or
  - reaches an appropriate judgment on the basis of the arguments in the body of the composition.

##### *The body of the composition*

1. Content
  - The content is relevant to the subject of the composition.
  - There is an adequate quantity of relevant points.
2. Organisation
  - The composition has a clear system of organization appropriate to the topic.
  - The writer develops the argument in the composition.
  - The writer guides the reader through the arguments.
  - The writer supports arguments and generalizations with evidence.
  - The writer keeps to the point.
  - Each paragraph has a topic sentence and an expansion.
  - There is a clear distinction between the main point and the examples.

3. Point of view
  - It is evident who the writer's audience is.
  - The point of view adopted is appropriate to the audience.
  - The point of view is clear.
  - The point of view is maintained consistently, or there are clear reasons why it changes.
4. Style
  - The writer has selected the correct level of formality for the topic and the audience.
  - There are no/few lapses from the appropriate level of formality.
  - The vocabulary is well selected for the formality level and the subject.
5. Formal structure
  - There are no/few errors of syntax.
  - Errors have a moderate effect on understanding.
  - Errors have a significant effect on understanding.
  - All sentences are complete (no fragments, clauses without verbs, etc.)
  - Vocabulary is varied and appropriate.
  - Cohesion markers are correctly used.
  - Sentences are varied in structure and length.
  - There is an appropriate use of idioms.
6. Spelling and punctuation
  - Free of errors
  - Few errors
  - Many errors

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