
IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF STUDENTS PARAGRAPH WRITING THROUGH PEER ASSESSMENT

Cecep Agus, Yeti Nurhayati
IPB Invada Cirebon, Indonesia
Email: cecep.prodi.inggris@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

The method used in this research is classroom action research design. The primary objectives of this research are to describe the teaching and learning process on paragraph writing through peer-assessment, to establish the amount of influence over the improvement of students ability in paragraph writing. The instruments employed to gain the data are through paragraph writing tests and observation. The tests are given before and after giving the treatment of peer assessment to appraise their own performance; furthermore, the observation is conducted to observe the teaching and learning writing process in the classroom using continuous assessment. The subjects of the research are the students of English Department who are at the fourth semester and join the subject of Writing III at Cirebon STIBA INVADA. The results of the students' paragraph writing are then analyzed on the basis of the paragraph elements and the scoring procedure according to analytic scale for rating composition proposed by Brown and Bailey. The data are analyzed qualitatively through identification and classification; additionally, they are interpreted using comparative analysis. The results of the research is that the students ability increase substantially after participating in peer assessment. The average score for all paragraph elements is improving; the average score in pretest is 36.41, meanwhile the employing of peer assessment has given rise to the score in post test by 64.35; on the whole, the students' ability on paragraph writing increases by 43.42%. Thus the evidence seems to be strong that peer assessment can do significantly for students' achievement in writing.

INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the ways that can be used to translate students' thought for others around their subject matters. It can be a great tool to help students know more about the way they think by solidifying their ideas and thoughts, and allow them to reflect on them better than if the ideas remained evolving in their head. Conversely, students frequently undergo some problems related to their mental of being very demotivated students in writing. In this regard, Hammer (2007: 329) claims such an unhealthy condition is derived from two factors such as their rare occasion to write in their first language and their incompetence to produce their ideas to put on their writing. It is clear therefore that good writing will serve them well for the rest of their academic activities; following this, this research deals with the importance of writing well.

Writing assissts students significantly with other language tasks, that is, it helps them how to form language and how to put together a plot on good paragraph. Paragraph which has eclipsed all other elements of writing during the process of writing refers to explain a group of closely related sentences that develop a central idea. As Oshima and Hogue define that paragraph is a related-sentences group in one main idea which is developed as "the topic of the paragraph"

comprising a topic sentence, several supporting sentences, and a concluding sentence (2007: 38). Summing up, paragraph is a unit of discourse developing a single idea which consists of sentences series closely related to one another and to the thought expressed by the whole group or series.

The concept of writing is highly bound up with its own discrete features and convention which make it the only existing one of its type. This uniqueness is special in some way which is being considered as uneasy subject to deal with for students. Such a circumstance lead students to the difficulty how to put their whole idea on well organized and logical paragraph to achieve their intended purpose. In this regard, Hartoyo (2011) makes it clear that such an impedement”is not only faced by students in learning second language, but also in using their own native language.” The ability to write, therefore, has become an indispensable skill which has to be mastered in this global literate community, as a prerequisite to certain condition, for the success in many walks of life and is simply taken for granted in literate cultures.

With such a monumental goal, peer assessment takes on a crucial role in teaching writing which has particularly occupied the attention to writing in a second language. Learning how to become a good writer places the student in an almost constant stage of assessment. Without reservation, to give the student the maximum benefit of assessment, it is thus important to consider some elements such as providing earlier stages, and later stages of producing a written text. Additionally, the involvement of self, peers, and teacher at appropriate steps in the process is an avoidable factor which must be incorporated in assessing writing.

he study of peer assessment has become an important aspect of teaching learning process, particularly on paragraph writing. Peer assessment normally involves a process in which students or their peers grade assignments of their writing build around a teacher’s marks. Reference to Nation (2009: 143) reveals that Peer assessment is normally concerned with the students’ activity of giving and receiving feedback from each other on their writing, which can be organized either in pairs or in a small group. Such a practice is employed to improve students’ understanding of the writing subject as well as improve their metacognitive skills.

Through peer-assessment teacher can enhance the construction of students’ involvement yielding good circumstance. Students are able to see mistakes in their thinking and can correct any problems in future assignments. The students could see what they had done wrong and were able correct such errors in later assignments since peer assessment allow teachers to help students understand the mistakes that they have made. This will improve subsequent work and allow students time to digest information and may lead to better understanding. Ryan, Marshall, Porter, and Jia (2007) conducted an experiment to see if using students to grade participation was effective. They found that there was a difference between a teacher’s evaluation of participation and a student’s.

Various investigations have explored the subject, notably the excellence of peer assessment. In this regard, Brown (2004) has drawn attention to the fact that people become good writers by writing and seeking the facilitative input of others to refine their skills. Following this, most writing specialises agree that the best way to teach writing is a hands-on approach that stimulates student output and then generates a series of peer editing and revision, and teacher response in conferencing (Reid, 1993; Raimes, 1998). On the whole, peer assessment will be giving students a sense of ownership of the assessment process; encouraging students to be more involved and take more responsibility for their learning; encouraging critical analysis of student work, so students see beyond a mark/grade.

As peer assessment is increasingly seen as one of an important methods for improving students’ writing, it is thus worth examining its impact in teaching writing, which was an effective way to enhance classroom participation. By having a great number of students in classroom participation, it can thus make an assignment which is considered too difficult for an individual to do alone may be performed easily and successfully if a pair or group does it. Turning to Saragi et

al., (1978) who perceptively states that although learners may be of roughly equal proficiency, they will certainly have learnt different aspects of the language. Simultaneously, by helping each other may allow them to deal with difficult language items.

If peer assessment are implemented, students can come to see tests not as punishments; the outcome could be otherwise, they are considered as much useful feedback. It is in line with Malehorn (1994: 323) who highlights the fruit of peer assessment implementation. He rightly points out that by using peer assessment, classmates can work together for “common intellectual welfare” and that it can create a “cooperative atmosphere” for students instead of one where students compete for grades.

A. The Peer Assessment Process

The adoption of peer assessment in assess learning in the writing subject necessitated the development of a framework to ensure that the assessment method is constructively aligned to teaching and learning methods. The framework developed for the peer assessment involved a six-stage process. Below follows the peer assessment guidelines used for an interactive process of reading, commenting, and assessing on a classmate’s writing. The guidelines are developed by Oshima and Hogue (2007), but are slightly adapted to better suit the purpose of the peer assessment process:

1. Give clear rationale.

In the first stage, the students are provided with detailed appropriate information in the subject matter on the rationale of the assessment method. Additionally, students are also provided with a guide on peer assessment containing exemplars about how to devise assessment criteria, and a brief on how to give and receive feedback after assessment.

2. Engage learners in an authentic learning context.

In this stage, student can develop the desired skills and capabilities of reviewing, assessing, and giving feedback on individual and group performance. The class is designed and delivered in a way that the learning activities and assessment tasks involved. In this stage, a model of good paragraph is given to the students to read and analyzed concerning with the elements of good paragraph. To get and produce input during the learning process, students perform the discussion either in a couple or in group. A major breakthrough in their discussion is analyzing the components of the paragraph.

3. Exchange rough draft with a classmate to assess learning and give feedback

In this stage students are getting ready to write their own paragraph employing the elements of good paragraph. Students are required to be involved in formative and summative assessment of learning and giving feedback to peers on their performance and development through set activities. In this situation they take in a more active role in discussing their sentences and make suggestions for improvement. They argue and give reason for their ideas each other. In this regard, Krashen (1985) claims that such a circumstance has a beneficial influence on their comprehensible input and output as a whole; consequently, it leads to speed up their learning success.

4. Coach for effective performance

In this stage, students are coached to promote the development and acquisition of desired skills and capabilities, as well as to ensure best practice. Coaching involves demonstrating or modeling by “example, prompting, questioning, supporting, and providing re-assurance and encouragement” (Murphy, 2001). In this stage, having finished their paragraph, again students are given another chance to evaluate their paragraph.

5. Reflect on learning

Students are encouraged to reflect on their learning, performance and practice. These are done through interactive dialogue with peers and teacher/ facilitator. Frameworks for reflection are provided as guides to help them reflect effectively.

6. Teacher check to assure quality

The last step, teacher manages to check and monitor the assessment process to verify that the stated criteria for the course are fully met and to assure quality and standard of learning.

This research is conducted to improve the process of teaching paragraph writing through peer assessment. An assessment will first be made of the performance of the writing itself, and then the quality of students' paragraph writing after teaching and learning process as a whole will be examined. The end result of this research will be fully expected to improve the quality of teaching learning process so that students' well performance to express themselves on their writing clearly with logical, well-developed organization that accomplishes their intended purposes can be achieved.

RESEARCH METHODS

The method which is used to conduct this research is action research design. This research is aimed at improving the process of teaching learning of paragraph writing through peer assessment for the purpose of improving students' ability in English writing. The research is conducted at Cirebon STIBA INVADA; the subjects of the research are all students of English Department who are at the fourth semester and join the subject of Writing III which consists of 29 students.

The data are gained through the instruments of classroom observation, paragraph writing test, and peer assessment sheets. Classroom observation is conducted during teaching and learning writing process in the classroom where they are given chances to practice writing, evaluating, and giving comments or suggestions for their partners – peer assessment. Meanwhile, paragraph writing test is given before conducting the observation to see the students ability before giving continuous assessment.

The results of the students' writing are then analyzed based on rating composition task proposed by Brown (2004). Furthermore, all data are analyzed through identification, classification, and interpretation which uses comparative analysis in interpreting the data. The elements of paragraph that are going to be analyzed are as follows along with the maximum score:

The elements of the paragraph		Maximum Score
I	Organization	20
II	Logical development of ideas	20
III	Grammar	20
IV	Punctuation, spelling, and mechanics	20
V	Style and quality of expression	20

The achieving of almost any desired results largely depend on the pattern or model that is generally accepted – standard. To know the result of employing peer assessment in the classroom, the measure is designed to be an acceptable standard. Students are considered to be successful when they meet the criteria of success, that is, they get the score of achievement by 40% of all elements of paragraph writing.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following table is the data gained before and after giving peer assessment. It indicates a significant number of improvements on students paragraph writing ability.

Table 2

The increase of the students' paragraph writing average score

No	TEST	I	II	III	IV	V	Tota
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							1
1	PRE	5.33	7.65	6.53	10.55	6.35	36.41
2	POST	12.30	13.15	12.5	15.75	10.65	64.35
3	Increase	6.97	5.5	5.97	5.2	4.3	27.94
	%	34.85	27.5	29.85	26	21.5	43.42

The main areas in each element of the paragraph has been identified from which it has generated a wide range of interpretation. It can thus be seen clearly from the table above that it shows the wide variations in the increase of students' paragraph writing average in a range of test. The average score of pretest varies from the lowest score (5.33) in organisation of paragraph writing to the highest score (10.55) in punctuation, spelling, and mechanics; meanwhile, the average score in the post test ranges from the lowest score (10.65) in style and quality of expression to the highest score (15.75) in the area of punctuation, spelling, and mechanics.

On the basis of each maximum score (20), it reveals that the increase of students' achievement rate varies from the lowest achievement (53.25%) in style and quality of expression to the increase of students' highest achievement (78.75%) in punctuation, spelling, and mechanics of the paragraph. In other words, the increase score in Style and quality of expression is less than 25% of all elements in the paragraph writing, while the proportion increases significantly in organization which is more than 30%. This suggests that in the elements of the paragraph writing such as style and quality of expression which is at the lowest rate may be a result of the impediment inasmuch as getting a small number of exposure to them.

The students' ability to organize the paragraph can be categorized into Adequate level on account of the slightly increase (61.50) based on the maximum score given (20). The organization of the paragraph consists of introduction, body, and conclusion. The various main areas have been identified. They make adequate title, introduction, and conclusion. Additionally, they organize the body of essay which is acceptable, but some evidence seem to be lacking, and some ideas also are not fully supported. And the last, their sequences are logical, but their transitional expressions appear to be absent or misused.

The further study on students' ability to organize logical development of ideas is carried out. In this case, the assessment is concerned primarily with their ideas that are contained in a piece of their writing; in other word, the amount of a particular substance contained in their paragraph writing. Some major areas have been recognized such as their essays address the issues but they miss some point and some of them are somewhat off the topic. Furthermore, on the one hand their ideas are more fully developed, but on the other hand, some extraneous material is present. This suggests that the students ability to organize logical development of ideas increases (27.5%). If we refer to the maximum score given (20), it can be concluded that their achievement in post test is 65.75%. It means that it is categorized into Adequate level.

Other element of the paragraph writing is concerned primary with grammar which students have to absorb. Based on the result of this research, their ideas are getting through to the reader, but grammar problems are apparent and have a negative effect on communication. In addition, run-on sentences or fragments still present. The score of students grammar in pre test is only 6.53

and becomes 12.50 in post test. If we refer to the maximum score of grammar (20) it can be seen that the quality of the students grammar ability is adequate (62.50%).

This study also demonstrates that peer assessment has given a significant improvement on students ability on the element of paragraph: punctuation, spelling, and mechanics. From the data it can be said that there is an increase of students achievement (78.75%); the quality of students paragraph writing on punctuation, spelling and mechanics is therefore categorized into Good level. In this major area, students make some problems with writing conventions or punctuation. Not only do they set their left margin correctly but also their papers are neat and legible. However, occasional spelling errors still occur on their writing.

The last element of paragraph – style and quality of expression – seems to exhibit signs of little improvement. In this area, there appears to have some vocabularies that are misused. They lack some awareness concerning with register as well; similarly, they fail to recognize their words that are too wordy. The data seems to indicate that an increasing effort is made in post test (10.65), which suggests that they make a sense of achievement 53.25% from the maximum score expected (20). This result can prove that their ability in this area is categorized into Fair level.

CONCLUSION

On the basis of the result on this research and discussion, the evidence seems to indicate that.

The teaching learning process of paragraph writing through peer assessment results in better quality of students paragraph writing and more efficient classroom setting such as allows teachers to manage their time more effectively, gives faster feedback since students work can be graded soon after completion. On the whole, Not only can students improve their ability to write after participating in peer assessment but also enhance their ability to evaluate others through improved metacognitive thinking.

Peer assessment can do significantly for classroom attitude – cooperative atmosphere – for students instead of one where students compete for grades; accordingly, students are able to come to see tests not as punishments but as useful feedback.

The role of peer assessment is much different with that of teacher's evaluation which makes the students focus more on the grades not seeking feedback. By employing peer assessment, students can learn from grading the papers of others and have more chances to learn what they did wrong. It goes without saying, this will improve subsequent work and allow their time to digest more information which may lead to better understanding.

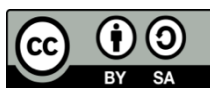
One concern about peer assessment is that nevertheless teachers may want to reduce grading time but not at the cost of losing accuracy. Following this, teachers must assign what assessment each individual in the group deserves since students need guidelines to follow before they are able to grade more open ended questions.

To get the most objective result, teachers have to recheck the students assessment and may design the form of rubrics, which can lay out different objective and how much is worth when grading.

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