

Peer Assessment Training on EFL Writing for Lower Proficiency Level, Is It Worthy?

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Abstract: The present study was conducted to investigate whether training on peer assessment could foster better writing ability for English lower proficiency EFL students. Forty-eight (48) students participated in this study and randomly assigned into two groups; trained and untrained peer assessment. Trained group is as experimental group and untrained group is as control group. The students' English proficiency level was lower to higher based on the results of TOEFL test scores. A pre-writing test of argumentative essay was given before providing the training. Then, the students in experimental group were given peer assessment training before instructing them to rate their peers drafts. The whole sessions were lasted in six sessions. The pre-test was administered before giving the six sessions to apply the treatment; and a post test was given at the end of the session to determine the effects of peer assessment training on students' writing ability. The result of analysis revealed significant between-group differences, $F(2, 816) = 3.440, p(.020) < .05$. the lower proficiency in trained group performed better than the higher and lower proficiency students in untrained group.

Keywords: *Peer Assessment, Training, Writing, Proficiency Level*

1. INTRODUCTION

For EFL students, writing might be perceived as the most challenging skill to acquire. Writing needs the involvement of learners' background knowledge and a complex mental process in developing ideas is acquired. O'Malley and Pierce (1996) state that the writers need to include the purpose or prompt into their unique approach to writing in order to write well. It is acknowledged that the types of knowledge that the writers need to rely on when writing are having knowledge of the content, organize the content, conventions of writing, and produce a particular type of writing (Hillock, 1987). It is becoming more challenging for the students in EFL context that they also need the knowledge of English including sentence construction and some other linguistic aspects which has an essential role in making the texts understandable. These aspects were common students' problems which are identified from the researcher's observation as an English teacher.

The learners whose exposure to the second language does not include training experience or sort of feedback instruction might experience fossilization (Lightbown and Spada, 2011). Training would help students recognize differences between their interlanguage and the target language. Therefore, to help improve learners' L2 language, especially in writing, it is necessary to provide language input through giving such kind of training experiences. Therefore, peer assessment training is a key element for the teacher to provide learners with

plentiful comprehensible input (see Krashen, 1981; 1982; 1985). Students are expected to comprehend the available input by inferring its meaning based on the linguistic information that is attached in the communicative context. A trend toward a more process-oriented approach in teaching writing to L2 learners has been investigated. Polio (1997) claims that editing waits until the final drafts. She contends that through exchanging ideas, discussion, collaboration and feedback, learners get valuable opportunities for improvement in writing. In other words, writing needs practicing and internalizing a set of structures that can promote a balance development of learner's linguistic mastery in the target language.

As students work together on the tasks and being involved in the interaction, they may notice a gap in their understanding of the language item and attempt to solve it through negotiation, elaborating on aspects of the item's form and meaning, and helping each other. In other words, practice is increased with communicative task because the task is a set of learning opportunities and potential activities for learning. Therefore, writing teachers' duty is to provide students with different tasks as teaching different materials in their classrooms. Using these tasks would be helpful in teaching and assessing writing performance, too.

Engaging students in peer assessment to strengthen the development of students' writing skills has become a popular pedagogical approach over the last decade. In doing

peer assessment, students can exchange papers and work in pairs or small groups to discuss their writing in preparation for subsequent revisions they will make. The effects of peer assessment have been mixed. Empirical evidences from previous findings reported that engaging in peer assessment benefited student writers by drawing their attention to the weaknesses in writing and driving them to revise for improvement (Tsui & Ng, 2000; DiGiovanni & Nagaswami, 2001; Min, 2006). For instance, Peterson (2003) contended that students sense the need to reconsider use of vocabulary, sentences, and organization in their writing as a result of peer assessment. Students integrated peers' evaluation and suggestions into their own writing could improve the quality of their work as they progresses from draft to revision. When revisions from peers' assessment are carried out frequently, revised text tends to lengthen, given elaboration on ideas or insertion of details. When peer assessment has been considered as effective to facilitate students in revision, Lundstrom & Baker (2009) argued that providing commentary scores has a more profound effect on writing improvement than receiving commentary only.

Furthermore, peer assessment also can provide learners with the experience of having responsibility for analyzing, monitoring and evaluating aspects of both the learning process and product of their own and peers. More explicitly, Topping (2010) mentions that peer assessment is an

arrangement for learners to consider and specify the level, value, or quality of a product or performance of other equal-status learners. The terms peer assessment and peer feedback are sometimes interchangeably especially in the context of an activity frequently used in L2 writing classrooms which is often associated with the process approaches to writing instruction. Accordingly, Liu & Carless (2006) define that peer feedback is primarily about rich detailed comments but without formal grades, whilst peer assessment denotes grading (comments are also included).

Allowing the students to grade their own writing and their peer's writing offer the benefits over teacher grading, as proposed by Saddler & Good (2006); pedagogical (i.e., students could deepen their understanding by reading their peer's comments); meta-cognitive (i.e., students could be made aware of their strengths and weaknesses and could take responsibility for their own learning); and affective (i.e., classes could become more productive, friendlier, and more cooperative). Peer assessment between students is increasingly common in higher education. Peer assessment is often defined as an educational arrangement in which students assess the quality of their fellow students' work and provide one another with feedback. In other word, peer assessment has been proved could improve students' writing development (Hu & Sandra, 2010; Mok, 2011; Wigglesworth & Storch; 2012 and Zhao, 2014).

In the context of writing pedagogy, students' working with peer assessment is that assessing and providing feedback among peers and it resembles professional practice. In that sense peer assessment fits in with other recent developments in university teaching, such as collaborative learning and writing, and real-life task performance (Van Weert & Pilot, 2003). Therefore, teachers' role in implementing peer assessment is needed to help students make informed decisions about how to revise and improve as well as to reflect the strengths and weaknesses of their writing development (Leung & Scott, 2009; Tan, 2011; and Amhag, 2013). More insight into the nature of peer assessment would indicate more clearly how students could support one another and what kind of assistance teachers should preferably provide. For example, teachers facing adequate scoring on style and textual coherence, but not on content, will know where to direct their assistance. So then the use of peer- assessments focused on teachers' assessments could be an effective way to improve students' writing final drafts and can promote students' writing development successfully (Suzuki, 2008; Julia & Christian, 2011; Lam, 2013; Yuh, 2008; and Mok, 2011).

On the other hand, there are some studies have questioned of peer assessment values on such grounds as the students' lack of trust of their peers as reviewers (Ross, 2006; Topping, 2013; Tsui & Ng, 2000; Zhao, 2010; & Wang, 2014) which being merely responsive to micro level errors and

particularly because of their lack of knowledge and skills to provide effective comments and feedback. In other words, learners will not benefit from doing such kind of interaction if they do not have good skills in reviewing their peers' writing. All the benefits of peer assessment as mentioned above can be possessed both for teachers and learners only if thoughtfully implemented with guided practice and training. This requires that teachers build into their schedules sufficient time to prepare, train, and monitor students so that students can carry out peer assessments in a credible manner. It is seen as providing learners with more opportunities to practice the L2 than are afforded in teacher led classroom activities.

However, there are limited number of studies that investigated the benefits of acquired training for the lower proficiency students to be experienced in rating or scoring. Therefore, this present study attempted to examine the effects of peer assessment training on students' writing quality especially for argumentative essay task. The expecting results was whether the lower proficiency students who were trained could perform better writing performance as compared to untrained group of students. In the present study, since the students participated were taking academic writing, argumentative writing test was considered match with the students' academic needs.

In the process of developing L2 writing performance, different students have different progress cognitively and

socially especially while doing the interactions. Some students tend to do self-corrections on their own works more while others tend to interact with one another or with their peer (Storch, 2005; Hanjani & Li, 2014). Some students consider teachers as the only legitimate agent for giving supports for their learning experiences and therefore are reluctant to assess themselves or their peers or negotiate with others over its use in their revisions and much prefer to have teachers assess them. It is explained mainly in terms of students perceived low/high level of EFL proficiency. Therefore, the factor of students' characteristics must be taken into account. There is a difference among the performance of students possessing different types of proficiency; high and low English proficiency (Paleczek et al., 2015). It is believed that higher proficiency students will have better initial scores. However, it is still unclear if initial proficiency upon a learning process affects growth rate.

Under the consideration that lower and higher proficiency students have different needs of exposure to improve their learning based on their apprehension level. Lower proficiency students are often assumed to have high level of anxiety in contrast to higher proficiency students have low level of anxiety. It is reported that the students with higher anxiety received lower grades on essays, written exams, and standardized writing tests (Daly, 1985; Lee & Krashen, 1997 in Martinez et al., (2011). It is clear that there was a relationship between students' writing proficiency and level

of anxiety. It can be assumed that providing effective training could foster students' writing ability as well as decreasing students' anxiety. Suppose the students with different level of proficiency especially the lower ones can be mediated through peer assessment activities to enhance their writing performance. Therefore, this study presents an investigation of the effects of peer assessment training on writing performance for lower proficiency level with different learning apprehension levels.

2. METHOD

The design of this study was a quasi experiment which aimed at investigating the effects of peer assessment training for different proficiency students with different learning apprehension levels. 48 lower proficiency students were involved in this study. Pre-writing test was administered to know whether the students of the two experimental groups were equally homogeneous in terms of writing performance. Before giving the training, the 48 students were grouped into two experimental groups.

A post-test was held at the end of experimentation to measure the students' writing outcome. Two raters were involved to score students' writing by using an argumentative rubric developed by the researcher. The rubric covered five different rating dimensions of writing quality with 100-point scale, each dimension having a different weight: introduction (15 points), argumentative points (40

points), organization (15 points), sentence structure and convention (20 points), and relevance (10 points). To estimate the reliability of the scores, the measurement of inter-rater reliability was used in this study. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to estimate the internal consistency between the two raters. The correlation was performed in coefficient alpha.

Table 1.
The scheme of the training treatment for the experimental groups

Meeting	Session	Experimental Group	Non-Experimental Group
Pretest			
1	Training	Writing Task 1	Writing Task 1
2	Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback_essay #1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback_essay #1
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revision_essay #1 • Writing Task 2 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revision_essay #1 • Writing Task 2
3	Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback_essay #2 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback_essay #2
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revision_essay #2 • Writing Task 3 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revision_essay #2 • Writing Task 3

4	Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback_essay #3 • Revision_essay #3 • Writing Task 4 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback_essay #3 • Revision_essay #3 • Writing Task 4
	Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback_essay #4 • Revision_essay #4 • Writing Task 5 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback_essay #4 • Revision_essay #4 • Writing Task 5
6		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback_essay #5 • Revision_essay #5 • Writing Task 6 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback_essay #5 • Revision_essay #5 • Writing Task 6
		7	Posttest

Based upon the study by Mardijono (2003) and a pilot study by present researcher, Indonesian EFL students at the lower level who do not have such kind of training experience often made serious problems in writing argumentative composition. For that reason this study selectively provided training on doing collaborative peer assessment. Nine argumentative essays were assigned to students and 30 minutes time allocation were given

to them to study and to revise the given feedback collaboratively before starting to write a new piece of writing in each session. Table 1 shows the scheme of the treatment for the groups.

In carrying out the treatments to the groups, peer rater 1, peer rater 2, and peer rater 3 provided feedback to students' writing as can be seen in the following scheme:

Table 2.
Peer Assessment Training Provision

Writing Task	Feedback Provision	
	Trained H & L	Untrained H & L
1	Rater 1&2	Rater1&2
2	Rater 1&3	Rater 1&3
3	Rater 2&3	Rater 2&3
4	Rater 1&2	Rater 1&2
5	Rater 1&3	Rater 1&3
6	Rater 2&3	Rater 2&3

In writing task 1 in the trained group, rater 1 and 2 recorded their peer draft (rater3) and provided assessment in the form of feedback using the form of assessment, while rater 2 and rater 1 were assessed in the following writing task. Every student had experiences of giving assessment and was assessed by their peers. It was instructed by the teacher that before starting to write writing task 2, the students were asked

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to revise their writing based on the feedback and comments provided by peers. This process applied to the rest of treatment session – writing task 2 to writing task 6.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The hypotheses were tested after the statistical assumptions (independence of the dependent variable, normal distribution, and the homogeneity of variances) had been fulfilled. The test was administered once in the same day and time as an attempt to maintain the independent test of all participants of this study. All the participants were asked to write an essay independently.

Shapiro-Wilk test was used to measure the normality of the data since the number of participants of this study was categorized into small/medium. The essay writing test scores gained by the trained group students with low apprehension level was $D(14) = .978$, $p = .964$, and those students with low apprehension level in untrained group was $D(14) = .905$, $p = .134$ were normally distributed. For those students with high apprehension level in trained group was $D(12) = .886$, $p = .106$, and those with high apprehension level in untrained group was $D(8) = .952$, $p = .735$ were also statistically normal.

The output of test implied that the assumptions of homogeneity met the evidence that Levene statistic was $(3,44) = .628$, $p = .601$. The result of homogeneity test was, $p = .601 > \alpha (.05)$. From the results of testing normality and homogeneity variances above, all of the assumptions were

fulfilled. From the results of the test, data analysis using one-way ANOVA was preceded. The result of data analysis revealed that there was a significant effect of peer assessment training on students' writing quality across different proficiency. Statistically, the findings showed that the quality of the students' writing in the trained and untrained groups was different.

Based on the statistical output, the results show that the trained group students was statistically significant different with untrained group students (with low apprehension level) by the evidence that $p (.020) < .05$. The study revealed that lower proficiency students' with low apprehension level had better writing performance in the trained group than the lower and higher proficiency students in untrained group.

Table 3.
Percentage of Lower Students' Revisions for Writing Aspects

Groups	Macro Level (%)	Micro Level (%)
Trained	20.37	24.57
Untrained	12.54	19.5
Total (N=48)	32.91	44.07

From the observation during the experimentation, the students who received revisions from trained peers/reviewers could be more effective and helpful than the revisions received from untrained peers. From the description of students' focus assessment criteria of essay writing (see Table 1), it can be drawn that those students with low apprehension

level in trained group gained the highest improvement of macro and micro writing aspects. This result was similar to the finding of Min (2006) and Rahimi (2013) that the writing quality of the students who had been trained was significantly higher than that of the untrained students and Donato (1994) that the improvement observed in the learner as a result of training has a long-term effect on the learner's language development.

Pertaining to the research question of the study about the effects of peer assessment training for lower proficiency students for writing performance, the study found that the trained students with lower apprehension level gained better writing performance as compared with those untrained students. Since the training provided an experience for students' scoring, revisions and comments on peer's writing, therefore they were always struggling to practice their L2 about how to express their ideas. The experience was automatically could enhance the students' language development. As Rahimi (2013) confirmed that the idea of training was provided only when the students' interaction and negotiation was both focused and meaningful. From the observation during the observation, the training in the present study was conducted in a systematic and careful guide. Therefore, the training was effective and meaningful for the students' writing performance.

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In relating to the research question, the result of this study was supported by Larsen-Freeman (2006) who claims that different rates of change happened among her homogeneous learners of L2 ability. The learners of lower

proficiency in her study had faster rates of growth because the students had lower starting point upon and enrollment but they had similar outcomes as same as the rates of higher proficiency students. It can be concluded that the students' training experiences could be expected as an important factor to be considered to consolidating students' language skills especially for L2 writing context. As mentioned above that the training in the present study was arranged in a systematic and careful guides, therefore, the training could foster the lower proficiency students with higher level of anxiety in improving their writing performance better.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings imply that training could increase the lower students' writing quality and expertise by exposing them through peer assessment training to be a proficient student raters or reviewers. Training is effective to foster the lower proficiency students' writing performance. Through an effective and well-design training, students can be trained to become more confident and engaged writers. The findings give practical contributions for EFL writing teachers to employ peer assessment activities to facilitate lower proficiency students to have motivation and willingness to have better writing performance. The teachers perhaps can be creative to put training as a part of teaching writing syllabus. This could be inserted as an effort to reach an extensive training inside and outside

the class to help the achievement of teaching objectives. Of course, the process should be enclosed in a systematic and careful designed training; therefore the maximal impact could be reached effectively and efficiently. For further research, investigation about students' experience with high or low anxiety level in doing peer assessment training needs to be conducted since anxiety level is close to the issue of lower language proficiency.

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