



GRADUATE STUDENTS' VOICES TOWARD PEER ASSESSMENT IN ACADEMIC WRITING CLASS

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Abstract

Peer assessment is the alternative assessment used by a teacher/ lecturer in assessing process and product in English language teaching and learning. The practice of peer assessment in higher education fosters graduate students more actively in the assessment process. This article aimed to explore graduate students' perceptions of the practice of peer assessment in an academic writing class conducted in the first semester of the English department graduate program at a University in Surakarta. This research was a case study, and the sampling technique in this research was purposive sampling, where 24 graduate students in academic writing class participated. A focused interview was conducted to explore graduate students' views on the practice of peer assessment for academic writing, which covered the feeling and challenges during peer assessment activity. The data were analyzed through the stages of examining, categorizing, tabulating, and recombining data. This study's result reveal that the peer assessment practice in academic writing class helps graduate students find the weaknesses in their writing that they could not see by themselves. Feedback from peers during peer assessment practice completed the understanding of things the graduate students needed for revision. This research is expected to contribute to educational development by encouraging English writing lecturers' awareness to optimize peer assessment practice for assessing students writing.

Keywords: *peer-assessment, scientific writing, students' perception.*

INTRODUCTION

Every class implemented the assessment practice in classroom activity, including writing classes. The practice of assessment inside classroom activity is the tool for monitoring students' learning progress. One of the alternatives is using peer assessment. Peer assessment helps teachers carry out corrective measures to improve students' performance (Sivan, 2000). Peer

assessment aims to boost students' learning (Boud & Falchikov, 2006; Wanner & Palmer, 2018; Li et al., 2021). Peer assessment is a process in which students think critically and suggest the best grade for their friends from the instructors' perspective, which is good for fostering students' critical thinking (Topping, 2009; Fang et al., 2021). The strong reliance on the position and role of feedback is the main

characteristic of peer assessment as a formative assessment (Strijbos et al., 2010). Peer assessment was reported to develop students' higher-order thinking skills with critical reading activity. Critical reading here means the students read their peer writing critically to achieve the process feedback that is useful for their peers to write a better composition of their work. The critical reading process in academic writing goes well by assimilating peer feedback in the revision process (Zhao, 2010).

Conducting peer assessment for academic writing means the students gave their peer feedback regarding their writing. The responsibilities of the peer are to check and assess their peer's writing. Peer assessment is the activity where the students need to deliver either feedback or grades on a product or a performance of their peers (Boud & Falchikov, 2006). The students involved in the assessment gave the score to their peers, guided by the teacher's criteria. The students' critical thinking is needed during peer assessment activities because they are required to criticize their peers' writing (Dewi et al., 2019). By involving students in assessment, teachers can enhance students' learning through showing the students as the writer to assume criteria in assessing their writing (Crusan & Matsuda, 2018). Writing in the field of English for academic purposes cover undergraduate and postgraduate as the description of research genres, students' writing, and writing for publication (Hyland & Diani, 2009). The students use criteria that the teachers gave and apply standards to their peers' work in order to judge their work (Boud & Falchikov, 2006).

The study entitled "Incorporating Self and Peer Assessment in Reflective Teaching Practices" reported the descriptive study on teachers' perception of the use of self and peer assessment in giving evaluation on planning the lesson and teaching performance in Reflective Teaching Class (Ratminingsih et al., 2017). The questionnaire results showed that they had a positive perception of using self and peer assessment. The students do the collaborative learning by using the peer-feedback that is useful to compose a better lesson plan for the next classes and execute more engaging teaching. Hence, self and peer-assessment are considered beneficial for preparing for real teaching practicum and future career development.

Unlike the previous study, this research intended to investigate graduate students' insights and perceptions in academic writing, which has a different challenge than the basic writing at school. Academic writing has rigid and complex aspects of writing criteria. Writers in academic writing construct an argument where the text is simply the channel which allows scientists to communicate existing truths, relaying directly observable facts to the world independently (Hyland & Salager-Meyer, 2009). This research explored graduate students' perceptions of peer assessment in academic writing classes.

Peer assessment usually deals with learning with products such as writing, oral presentations, portfolios, and drawings, but peer assessment also deals with other associated skills, learning, or broader social behaviour (Topping, 2017). Peer assessment sometimes encompasses both academic products and associated

behaviour. Thus, this type of assessment is regarded as a process which points to the learning activity and is not only talking about the product of learning (Topping, 2017).

Peer assessment can become a medium to give new experiences for writers with different strengths and weaknesses, different writing styles, expressions, and rhetorical strategies to get involved in either oral or written communication (Min, 2005). The communication carried out in peer assessment can be in the form of questions that later can be elaborated in the form of responses. From those questions and responses, the instruction for the revision stage that carried out a better writing composition is becoming the goal of peer assessment. Peer-assessment activities give responsibility to the students not only to provide grades for their peers at the end of the learning activity but also to improve their social skills and behaviour in the interaction process to achieve deals with peers regarding their grades. The students in peer-assessment activity have chances to work with a peer to exchange as much information as possible, which is beneficial for both the assessors and their peers (Min, 2005). Before the students consider the score or feedback for their peers, they have a chance to communicate through the questioning session while doing a peer-assessment activity. The students' communication skills can help them make a successful information exchange. There is evidence that shows students' improvement in the learning activity by involving peer assessment in a learning activity that is as good as the practice of teacher assessment in the case of writing activity (Topping, 2009). On the other hand, peer assessment

prepared the students both as assessors and assessees.

Writing is significant to analysts for the simple reason that what academics principally do is write (Hyland & Salager-Meyer, 2009). The students use criteria that the teachers gave and apply standards to their peers' work in order to judge their work (Boud & Falchikov, 2006).

Explaining the explicit criteria of the peer assessment form is essential for students before participating in peer assessment practice. Students as assessors may primarily be trained on when and how to state positive, negative, or neutral feedback and balance those three feedbacks. Students also need to be careful and thoughtful in considering the feedback that peers have given as an assessor. Students as assesees must select and decide what kind of feedback can be accepted as the source of information for revision.

There are also disadvantages or problems in implementing peer assessment (Topping et al., 2000). Poor performers might not accept peer feedback as accurate. Students might not be willing to accept any responsibility for assessing their peers, especially initially, in a small and socially cohesive group or if they see it as substitution (Falchikov, 1995). Student groups could be inhibited and constrained and the use and abuse of peer power relationships should be monitored. Thus, peer assessment is not necessarily cheaper than traditional assessment, although it might yield added value. However, it should be noted that traditional assessment by tests or examinations, with multiple-choice or essay questions, is doubtful reliability and validity, even for assessing

surface learning of information (Topping et al., 2000).

The research investigating students' negative perceptions about an online peer assessment system for undergraduate writing across the disciplines was done (Kaufman & Schunn, 2011). The end-of-course survey was administered to 250 students in ten courses across six universities using an online peer assessment system called SWoRD for their writing assignments in this research. The findings indicate that students have the most positive perceptions of SWoRD in those courses where an instructor graded their work in addition to peers (as opposed to peer-only grading). Findings from that study indicate that students sometimes regard peer assessment as unfair and often believe that peers are unqualified to review and assess students' work.

Furthermore, students' perceptions about the fairness of peer assessment drop significantly following students' experience in doing peer assessment. Students' fairness perceptions and drops in those perceptions are most significantly associated with their perceptions about the extent to which peers' feedback is useful and positive. However, students' perceptions appear unrelated to the extent of their revision work.

The paper entitled "The effects of self-and peer assessment on Iranian EFL learner's argumentative writing performance" reveals that the students have new experiences and opportunities, which leads to helpful tools to improve their writing ability, in this case, is argumentative writing ability (Iraji et al., 2016). Self- and peer-assessments are involved in the previous study, which has a

powerful influence on the students. Those alternative assessments are believed to help students to write with better compositions (Dewi et al., 2019). The research by Iraji et al. (2016) comparing non-experimental and experimental groups shows a significant change in the experimental group. Teachers can help their students to find and realize their weaknesses and strength by developing strategies in their learning, including involving alternative assessments in their class. The peer-assessment strategy also leads to students' autonomous learning (Dewi et al., 2019). Autonomous learning means students play a role in controlling one's learning. Students use the self-assessment activity checklist that gives their teacher complete information about their progress and failure in the learning process (Roki'ah & Suparno, 2020).

RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a qualitative research method focused on a case study. The case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not obvious (Hollweck, 2016). This research focused on describing the peer-assessment practice in academic writing classes for graduate students in an English department graduate program. The researcher concerned with the graduate students' perceptions of the assessment tool used for assessing academic writing, which was peer assessment.

In the academic writing class, the lecturer helped the students write academic texts with self-assessment and peer assessment. The research was conducted in this class since peer assessment had become

one of the assessment tools used in assessing students' Academic writing.

The participants in this research were the first semester students in the Academic Writing class of the English department graduate program of a university in Indonesia. Thirteen female and five male students were involved in this study.

The researchers used focused interviews to seek graduate students' perceptions of the practice of peer assessment for academic writing. The instrument was intended to get the data about the real practice of peer assessment administrated in that class so far. The purposive questions as a guide were provided to ask students' explanations or ideas. As the students answered the questions, the researchers also wrote the answers and recorded the interview. The interview was about the application and the students' perceptions of peer assessment in academic writing. Therefore, the data obtained from this method were in the form of qualitative data, which were intended to find the answer to the research problems.

In order to answer the problem of this research, the researcher used a data analysis method proposed by Hollweck (2016). The steps of analyzing qualitative data in this study included examining, categorizing, tabulating, and recombining data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Interviews with graduate students were conducted to determine their perceptions of the peer assessment for academic writing practice. The perceptions of graduate

students were drawn into two significant parts. Those were the advantages and challenges that they faced during the practice of peer assessment. The respondent who had experience in doing peer assessment argued that Peer Assessment helped her review her academic writing. The students prefer to be assessed rather than assessed others. All respondents agreed that peer assessment made learning effective and qualified in the Writing course. The graduate students also indicated that they met the challenges of doing peer assessments. The challenges in practising peer assessment include students' reluctance, uncertainty, time-consuming, and tendency to award everyone the same mark (Boud & Falchikov, 2006).

Graduate Student's Positive Thoughts on Peer Assessment

The participants of this research argued that peer assessment positively affected them, especially in writing. Peer assessment is regarded as the channel for them to raise awareness and have a responsibility both as assessors and assessees. With a positive attitude towards peer assessment, R1 stated that:

"I feel that peer assessment encourages me to be a good assessor to help my peer give feedback that can be beneficial for my peer for revising, and I also get the feedback to improve and revise my writing."

R2 pointed out that:

"As the student, I feel that peer assessment allows me to be a critical thinker to evaluate my peer's academic writing."

Additionally, R3 stated that:

"In my opinion, I feel comfortable to be involved in Peer Assessment activity, I have opportunities to ask about things that I do not understand, and I can share many things with my peer."

When the students were involved in a peer assessment activity, they could use their technique of reading, i.e., critical reading, to understand and assess their peer's academic writing. With the reliance on peer assessment for feedback, the students argued that feedback from peer assessment practice helped them revise their work. The students in peer assessment used two kinds of feedback, namely direct and indirect feedback. R1 argued that

"The thing that matters for me in peer assessment is feedback from my peer to support me in revising; I give both direct and indirect feedback for my peer, and my peer also gives the same to me."

Another student (R4) felt encouraged to be more critical of assimilating feedback from a peer in revisions. R4 argued that peer feedback helped her find the weaknesses of R4's Academic writing. From the interview, R4 said that she felt her writing was perfect, but her peer could find the imperfection she could not find by herself. Through Peer Assessment, assessed students were encouraged to think critically and read critically to find their friends' academic writing errors. Collaborating with a peer in assessment gave the students a chance to exchange suggestions that are beneficial for revising their work.

Challenges in Peer Assessment Practice

A respondent, R5, was reluctant to judge her peer work in practising peer assessment. R5 thought everyone in the academic writing class struggled to write their academic text. The lack of knowledge was the problem that caused the reluctance in peer assessment practice for graduate students. Grouping students based on their expertise helped them to assess peers easily.

In contrast, other respondents believed that peer assessment was found to be great as graduate students' training in evaluation. The respondents trust their peer to assess her academic writing since everyone has their capacity. Peer assessment allows the group of students to communicate and share their ideas freely. The graduate students could ask and answer questions together with their peers.

Discussion

The result from this study indicates the positive perspective of graduate students toward peer assessment practice in academic writing class. Students realized the beneficial impact of the peer assessment practice on their academic writing. Peer assessment leads to improvement in the quality of writing and learning activity, and the graduate students in this study felt so (Topping, 2009). The students made peer assessments as alternatives to help them improve their writing, in this case, academic writing. Academic writing is a sophisticated form of writing since the authors are required to produce succinct, precise texts to communicate their ideas and research results to a scientific audience (Ädel, 2016). It can be difficult for graduate students to cope with academic writing

alone. There is insight that peer assessment allows students to communicate about students' work both orally and in writing (Min, 2005). Thus, the students in this study could ask and answer questions freely with their peers to meet the solution to their writing problems.

The participants also perceived peer assessment as a way to train them to be critical thinkers. The graduate students used a critical reading technique in reading peers' academic writing to assess and give useful feedback to their peers. The activity of critical reading in peer assessment allows students to develop higher-order thinking and assimilate peer feedback in revision (Zhao, 2010). The participants in this study then used peer feedback as the guide for the revision activity. Both direct and indirect feedback is used and delivered as assistance to revise students' academic writing. Peer feedback in revision is regarded as a good reference for students. The participants in this study felt that peers gave another perspective to the academic writing that the students have made. The students who are involved in peer assessment activity could have the opportunity to assimilate peer feedback in revision (Cheng & Warren, 2005).

Additionally, the results of this study show that the participants can work collaboratively by questioning and instructing about what peers should and should not do for the writing. Graduate students have a big chance to read and assess peers' writing which lets the students compare their writing to find weaknesses and strengths. Peer assessment allows observing and comparing peer's work (Cheng et al., 2015). By observing and comparing peers' work, the students could

find strengths and weaknesses in their writing and their peers' writing. Thus, the students could emulate the strength and weaknesses of their peers. The students can express their feedback in the form of opinions regarding their peer's writing, which can benefit the student as an assessor or the one who is assessed. The peer-assessment activity showed the students' positive attitudes toward class communication. The students enjoy exchanging information without anxiety and inconvenience.

Beside the advantages of peer assessment that graduate students perceive, the participants of this study also faced challenges in peer assessment practice for academic writing in the academic writing class. The reluctance of the students to assess their peer's work became the first difficulty in doing peer assessment. The students need to give comments and scores to their friends. Although peer assessment is the alternative to teacher assessment, the students assumed that they still need teacher assessment and teacher feedback. Some students might feel reluctant when evaluating their peers (Falchikov, 2003). The students felt reluctant due to their relationship with friends. Involving students in peer assessment made them face the dilemma of appreciating their involvement in an assessment activity or feeling reluctance to give the score to their peers. However, the participants in this study trusted their friends to assess their writing. R1 stated that she fully trusted her friend to assess her work because she assumed that all her friends were capable and had the competency to assess her work.

Peer assessment in class would be time-consuming (Falchikov, 2003).

However, the graduate student in this study revealed that time in peer assessment was the quality time when they could gain as much knowledge as possible. Although practising peer assessment needed much time, this activity gave many advantages both for students and teachers. The tendency of students to give everyone the same mark is the last challenge (Boud & Falchikov, 2006). In this study, the participants did not tend to give their friends the same mark. Due to the critical reading activity in peer assessment for academic writing, the graduate students had critical consideration to give a mark to their peers. The lecturer had prevented the least problems in conducting peer assessment activities. The lecturer explained the term peer assessment well to all students, which made students understand how to deal with peer assessment in class.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, graduate students in academic writing classes have assumptions about peer assessment that their lecturer brought to the class. Advantages, drawbacks, and challenges were found in peer-assessment practice. This research shows that peer assessment is an interactive way of assessing students' performances in academic writing class. The graduate students felt the flexibility in doing peer-assessment and did not have anxiety in asking and answering the questions related to their peers' writing. Although the graduate students can interact through questioning, they have difficulty in answering the difficult questions. Here, the role of the lecturer as a facilitator in peer-assessment activity can validate or answer the difficult questions for the students. In addition, the difficulties in answering the questions proposed by the peer encourage

the students to think critically and recall their memories regarding the materials they have read. Peer assessment activity gives the students the forum to share ideas in an enjoyable situation. The lecturer will see the students' difficulties regarding the article writing by the questions proposed by the students. It can be a new source of information for the lecturer to formulate the materials for the next meeting.

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