

THE EFFECT OF PEER REVIEW ON STUDENTS' ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAY WRITINGS

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ABSTRACT

This article reports the effectiveness of peer review on students' argumentative essay compared to teacher review. The rationale of conducting peer review is that students have problems in making use of the feedback given by teachers, and teachers have problems in giving feedback due the large class and time constraint. After carrying out this experimental research for two months, the research hypothesis was tested by applying t-test. The calculation revealed that t_{observed} could exceed the t_{table} . It means that the research hypothesis was statistically accepted, and null hypothesis was rejected. It proved that peer review was more effective on improving students' argumentative essay writing. In addition, peer review facilitated collaborative learning and stress -reduced activity and helped students be self-reviewers as well. Consequently, peer review improved student's ability in writing argumentative essays.

Keywords: peer review; effect; argumentative essay writing

INTRODUCTION

Essay writing is at the center of teaching and learning in studying English as a foreign language. At university level, students' knowledge and understanding are largely exhibited and valued through the medium of essay writing (Coffin et al., 2003). This importance of the essay writing is due to a variety of purposes. It is used as assessment in which students are required to produce essays or to take written examination. It is an aid to critical thinking and understanding memory. It is to extend students' learning beyond teachers and to improve students' written communication skills. It is also to train students as future

professionals in particular disciplines (Goldfinch, 2006). In short, those five purposes make essay writing widely used at university level.

However, writing essay is still difficult for some of the students. The interview conducted to STBA Prayoga students revealed that they faced four problems in the process of producing an essay. The first problem was that some students had nothing to write due to the anxiety of their spelling and their ability to construct sentences and paragraphs. The second problem was that some students are lack of familiarity with the criteria to make a good essay. The third one was that the students were not accustomed to reviewing their own writing. This self-review could be achieved as the students have experienced in reviewing other's essay. The last one was that some students cannot make sense of the teacher feedback to their writing due to some reasons. First, teachers gave feedback only at the students' final copy. As the result, students did not have any opportunity to revise their essay based on the teacher feedback and it is just ignored. Second, the words used such as well made, good or poor were confusing. Last, the feedback was given most on the mechanics of the language. In short, having nothing to say, lack of familiarity with the criteria, and being unable to make sense of the teacher feedback were some common problems faced by students in producing an essay.

Like students, teachers also faced some problems in giving feedback to the students' essay due to the large class and time constraint. Having many students in the classroom made teachers not have enough time to respond to the process of the students' essay. This means that although they had a strong desire to respond to students' essays individually while they were under the development. Time limitation was a big problem. As the result, some teachers gave feedback to the final product only. Giving feedback at the final copy only made teachers play a role as examiners who only marked the paper and make decision about the grade. Therefore, some of them asked someone else to write for them or copy others' essay just for a good mark.

In relation to the problems above, involving students in reviewing each other's essay, which is called peer review, needs to

be considered as one of the effective ways to improve students' essay writing. Peer review that allows students to respond and correct each other's written output may make sense to many language teachers and student writers. This is based on the demand that the teachers should focus not only to the product, but also to the process- the steps taken by students to achieve a final copy.

THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

Argumentative Essay

There have been some ideas of argumentative essay proposed by some experts. Harmer (2004a) state that argumentative essay is one type of the essays with the purpose to convince readers by appealing readers' logic and emotions. Convincing needs proves and arguments (Coffin, et al., 2003) to prove a particular point, demonstrate understanding, and show a perspective, a position or stance on something. Without strong proves aand arguments, argumentative essay cannot meet its purpose, that is, to convince.

Arguments used to convince need students' deep undertanding and analysis on one particular topic. Therefore, this essay, according to Coffin et al., (2003) is the most common labeled type of the essays in higher education for four reasons. The first one is that it expects students' interpretation about a topic. The second one is that it requires students to seek for evidence for their arguments. The third one is that to arrive at an argument, students need to think across disciplines. The last one is that it should be persuasive. It is clear that the students' interpretation, evidence for arguments, ideas synthesized from across disciplines, and persuasion are highly demanded at university level as university students need to actualize their understanding of subjects studies.

Displaying ideas in argumentative essays is organized in one of three ways. First, exposition, with the purpose to put forward a point of view, uses arguments and evidence to support the writer's position. Second, discussion, with the purpose to argue the case for two or more points of view, starts with a controversial issue. The

two or more perspectives forms of the issue are explored by reaching a position stated in the concluding paragraph. Last, challenge, with the purpose to argue against a point of view or argument, contains a series of rebuttal arguments and supporting evidence before putting forward the writer's overall arguments (Coffin et al., 2003). In brief, an argumentative essay can be organized in one of the three ways; exposition, discussion, or challenge to show students' interpretation on one subject or an issue.

Those three types are organized into at least three paragraphs consisting of introduction, body, and conclusion. Harmer (2004) identifies the introductory paragraph, the body, and the concluding paragraph as the organization of the argumentative essay. The introductory paragraph shows the object of analysis, the background to the thesis statement, and the thesis statement. The body consists of some arguments and evidence to support the arguments. The conclusion can be arrived by retracing the steps, restating the thesis statement, and suggesting some points to make the arguments stronger.

In conclusion, since an argumentative essay is the most widely used at university level, understanding its organization and its process is necessary. The argumentative essay organization includes the introductory paragraph with a thesis statement, the body to support the thesis statement, and the concluding paragraph. This argumentative essay organization is used as the indicators in framework for argumentative essay test. The argumentative essay, which has three types, should meet some criteria- introductory paragraph, supporting reasons and arguments, evidence and examples, mechanic of writing, knowledge and understanding, and concluding paragraph. The process of the argumentative essay consists of prewriting, drafting with the revision of draft on development, organization, and elaboration of ideas, reflection, and editing on proofread. Within those processes, peer review is done in drafting and in editing on proofreading. Briefly, understanding the organization and the process of the argumentative essay aims at producing a good argumentative essay.

Peer Review

Some writers and researchers use different terms for peer review. It names peer response, peer suggestion, peer revision, peer comment and peer evaluation (Ong & Zhang, 2010). The terms for the student who reviews are the peer student ((Ferris, 2007), the reviewer (Coffin et al., 2003) and the peer reviewer (Coffin et al., 2003). The terms for the student who writes the paper are the author (Coffin et al., 2003), the student writer (Harmer, 2004b); (Coffin et al., 2003)). Based on those different terms, the peer reviewer, for the student who reviews, and the student writer, for the student who writes, are used in this research.

The importance of peer review in writing has been studied by some researchers. Cowan (2004) observed that the involvement of peer in evaluation helped to reduce the students' mistakes in the anthropology written exercise. Ferris (2007) found that students agreed to apply peer preview on the first draft (vocabulary choice, organization, writing style, and ideas) and the final one (spelling, punctuation, and grammar). These studies students' mistakes on the mechanics of language can be minimalized by conducting peer review activity.

In relation to the importance of peer review in writing, other researchers have done some studies to find out the effect of peer review on students' writing achievement. A study by Topping, Smith, Swanson (2000) to students of Psychology indicated that peer review had positive and negative effects. The positive effect was that it was effective in improving the quality of the students' academic writing, while a time consuming was the negative one. A study by (Min, 2005) to 18 Taiwanese students found that peer review affected self-monitoring and confidence as readers and reduced the percentage of students' surface level mistakes – noun, verb, punctuation, word form, and preposition.

Peer review is the students' feedback to other students' writing by responding and correcting (Coffin et al., 2003) and (Harmer, 2004b). In responding, students do not only say the weak points, but also the strong ones. These could be done by giving the

statements of compliment (for the strong points) and questions (for the weak points). “I enjoy reading your work, especially your solution to the problems” is an example for the strong points and “Why did you start with the story about the bus late? You could have begun, instead, with the problem of public transport in general” is an example for the weak point. In correcting, students indicate other students’ mistakes by using symbols in syntax (word order), concord (grammatical agreement between subjects and verbs), collocation (words which live together) or word choices. Chisholm (2006) suggests that correcting should come later as focusing too early mechanical aspects of writing detracts attention from rethinking and restructuring. In sum, responding and correcting in peer review facilitates students to give feedback to others’ writing in the form of discussion rather than in the form of judgment.

The students’ discussion in peer review promotes confidence in students’ ability in writing. The confidence will be achieved as the students learn from the work of others. The students, then, can interpret and compare their own writing based on the review of others (Coffin et al., 2003). In other words, students can learn by reviewing each other’s writing to improve their own writing.

The review is usefully done in drafting and re-drafting ((Harmer, 2004b); (Diab, 2006); (Russell, 2006)). In drafting or in the first draft, peer review is on vocabulary choice, organization, writing style, and ideas. In re-drafting, word order, concord, collocation, spelling, punctuation, and grammar are reviewed. In short, the peer review is conducted while the students’ writings are under development.

The responses in peer review could be in written and spoken (Chisholm, 2006). Written responses allow the peer reviewer to create appropriate responses and the student writer to refer to them back after the review session. Spoken responses stimulate more ideas and collaboration. Furthermore, Coffin et al., (2003) specify that responses given to student writer’s first and second drafts may take the form of oral or written comments for

revision. In short, two forms of responses in peer review are written and spoken to make a warm response.

Peer review in writing has some advantages. It provides an opportunity for the students to experience cooperative learning (Chisholm, 2006). According to Christison (2002), cooperative learning can certainly be done due to uniqueness of the brain. He further states that teachers can address this uniqueness by allowing students to work with peers to assess their own works. Furthermore, in cooperative learning, the students share and defend ideas to one another and are motivated to increase the learning of others (Ghaith, 2002). This sharing and defending ideas leads to cooperation to arrive at one idea, at correction, and at improvement the students' own writing. In brief, peer review in writing allows students to experience the peer cooperation for the improvement of their own writing.

Moreover, peer review is a stress-reduced activity. Students may check, discuss, and evaluate their work with peer students without being afraid of the grade from teachers (Yang, Badger, & Yu, 2006). In such activities, students are free to share and defend their ideas for the improvement of their writing. If the students make many mistakes, for example, the mistakes will not influence their grade. Briefly, peer review is an enjoyable activity.

Peer review also helps students be self-reviewer by correcting friends' grammatical mistakes. Some grammatical mistakes, for example, word forms, diction, spelling, functional position of words, punctuation, and conjunctions, are some common mistakes made by many students and are easily found and are corrected by peer students (Diab, 2006). Such mistakes make readers difficult to get the idea of the students' overall writing (Richard, 2002). The students, therefore, have to learn to reduce them through peer review. Learning to reduce the grammatical mistakes in peer review can be done by finding and correcting friends' mistakes. Finding and correcting peer' work is just like finding and correcting the students' own mistakes. This idea is in line with the idea stated by (Bruce, Shanti and Rafoth, 2004) who state that peer review helps students become proficient-self

editors. In conclusion, the aim of peer review in writing lies in helping students to be self-reviewer.

Teacher Review

Teacher Review is the feedback given by the teachers in commenting, responding, and correcting to student' writing (Coffin et al., 2003); Harmer, 2004; (Burgess, Sally & Head, 2005). This aims at suggesting ways for students to improve their writing. To achieve this aim, teachers spend much time and energy in providing feedback to students' writings.

Comments on students' essay can be in some words describing the quality of the students' essay such as very well, quite well, OK, not very well, and badly (Burgess, Sally & Head, 2005). However, Coffin et al., (2003) who question the usefulness of such comments argue that they turn out students into confusion by two reasons. First, students do not recognize what they have done exactly relating to such comments. Second, Students do not know how to make sense such comment for the future essay.

Responding students' essay is strongly suggested in oral form. One way is by using face-to-face discussion (Coffin et al., 2003). However, Burgess, & Head (2005) argue that it is a time-consuming. Teachers are sometime uneasy spending much time talking with one student, while others are working individually in silence. The other way is one way-to whole class interaction as suggested by Burgess & Head (2005). After reading all of the students' essays, the teacher tells the strong and weak points that most students have made on vocabulary choice, organization, writing style, and ideas. The teacher then gives suggestions to the weak points.

Unlike in responding, in correcting, the teacher concerns much on the mechanics of the language which can be done in seven ways. First, selective correction focuses on correcting certain aspects. In other words, not all mistakes are corrected. Second, using marking scale means giving marks 10, for example, for each category chosen (such as grammar, vocabulary, coherence, or

cohesion). Third, correction symbols such as **s** for spelling mistakes, and **wo** for a mistake in word order are used to encourage students to think about what the mistakes are, so that they can correct them themselves. Fourth, reformulation is a way of showing to write more correctly. Instead of asking them to find the mistakes and correct them, the teacher writes the correct ones. Fifth, asking students to refer to a dictionary or a grammar book they have is also useful. If, for example, the student writes *I am not interested with sailing*, the teacher can suggest that the student consult grammar book *see page 20*. Sixth, face-to-face interaction can be done by teachers if it is impossible to understand exactly what has been written. Last, remedial teaching is done when many students make the same mistakes. Among seven of kinds of corrections, marking is frequently used in a large class (Harmer, 2004b).

To achieve an effective teacher review, Martin (2006) states the effective ways in which EFL writing teachers can help students to be better writers. One is by helping students get rid of negative attitudes towards writing through the freewriting process. Another is by giving them feasible writing assignment and complete with specific instruction. Still another is by giving specific feedback and correction written and oral. The other is by giving patience and care. In short, those four ways need to be considered by teachers to help students to be better writers.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this experimental research, Pretest-Posttest Control Group Design was used. A pretest was given to both groups- experimental and control group- to see if the groups were essentially the same on at the start of this research. At the end of the treatment the posttest was administered to both groups receiving a different treatment, peer review and teacher review. The posttest scores of the experimental and control groups were compared to determine the effectiveness of the two treatment groups (Gay & Airasian, 2000).

The sample of this research, 27 students in experimental group and 30 students in control group, were selected by cluster random sampling. The instruments used in this research were pretest and posttest. The pretest was administered once on the topic about TV or not to see whether they were at the same ability at the start of this research or not. Unlike the pretest, the posttests were administered twice with different topics. Giving two different topics for the students in this research was the best choice to anticipate those sources of errors. The first topic was about fuel price increase. The topic for the second one was about reading fictional works. The sources for these two posttests were taken from the English news paper “The Jakarta Post”

The data were collected through the students’ argumentative essay writing tests, made by the researcher, administered twice, and scored by different reviewers, from both groups after two months of different treatment. Each of the students was asked to write an argumentative essay from each topic consisting of one introductory paragraph, not more three paragraphs in the body, one concluding paragraph, and references. As the data had been collected, they were analyzed by some analyses- the normality testing, the homogeneity testing, and the hypothesis testing. These three kinds of the testing need to be in analyzing the data in the research which are designed to see the effectiveness of the two group treatments (Sugiono, 2006).

RESULTS

As the purpose of this research was to find out whether peer review was more effective than teacher review, statistically it was found that peer review gave better effect on improving students’ argumentative essay writing than teacher review. The calculation of t-test indicated that , t_{observed} yielded 2.94. The total case degree of freedom was 55 $((27-1) + (30-1))$. T_{table} at the .05p level and 60 degree of freedom (the closest df) results in a figure of 2.00. This calculation reveals that t-observed could exceed the t_{table} . In short, the hypothesis testing was described in the following table:

Table 1. The Result of the Calculation of the Hypothesis Testing

Variable	N	Mean	The	t-	t-	Interpretation
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			closest df	<i>observed</i>	table	
Peer review	27	34.82	60	2.94	1.67	t. observed > t-table. Therefore, there is a significance difference.
Teacher review	30	31.47				

There are some possible explanations for the statistical result found in this research. First, the students treated in peer review were motivated to revise their first and second drafts. This was due to the opportunity to share and defend their ideas about their own essays. The student writer and peer reviewers eagerly told each other about what they had written and what they meant cooperatively. They were free to discuss each other's weaknesses. As they had arrived at one idea, they started to improve their essays. Unlike in peer review, in teacher review students did not have such opportunity since they had to revise by themselves based on the symbols given by the teacher. Therefore, this finding is consistent with the theory proposed by (Chisholm, 2006), (Christison, 2002) and (Ghaith, 2002) who confirm that peer review creates cooperative learning in order to improve students' writing.

It was also found that during peer review, whenever either the student writer or peer reviewers made mistakes, they were not afraid of the score from the teachers. They sometimes laughed at one another when they realized that they had made some mistakes. They also frequently shook hands to each other after they successful arrived at one idea by referring to the books they had. In other words, they really enjoyed revising their essays. However, in teacher review the students, who were worried about their marks or about the low marked written on their essays by the teacher, seemed not to enjoy revising their essays based on the symbols given by the teacher. In short, this finding supports theorists -(Yan, 2005) - who believes that peer review can lower the students' filter in writing as it is stated in review of the related literature.

Moreover, the finding indicated that the few weeks before this research ended, the majority of the students treated by peer review were able to revise their own writing. Those students were more successful in reviewing friends' argumentative essays, and they made more review to their own works. This was proved by the students' final copies. Their final copies were handed in only by little suggestion from the peer reviewers. Even some of them were able to come directly to the final copy. Contrary, the majority of the students treated by teacher review still made more mistakes in their final copy, especially in the mechanics of the writing. They sometime did not know how to improve their essay based on the symbols given by the teacher even though the teacher, in one to whole class interaction, had informed what mistakes they made most and how to improve them. In sum, this finding was relevant to the idea that peer review makes students skillful in reviewing their own essays as stated by (Diab, 2006).

In relevance to four problems in peer review stated by Harmer (2004), and Coffin et al., (2003), it was found that two problems existed only in the beginning of this research, one remained until this research ended, and the other was not discovered. One of two problems existed in the beginning of this research was that some students were reluctant to show their essays to others as well as to give impression to others' essay for fear of hurting the other students' feeling. The second one was that some students did not take into account the peer's suggestions. These students came in front of the class asking for the teacher's approval. In this case the teacher used the books that the students had to overcome such a problem. The problem remained was that few students were not focused on peer review activity. In this condition, peers just let them and joint another group. That not all students can work was not discovered in this research. This was because the students were free to choose their group members and they could change their group members any time.

It was contrary to Diab's finding (Diab, 2006) which indicated that vocabulary choice, organization, writing style, and ideas were reviewed on the first draft and spelling, punctuation, and grammar were reviewed on the second one. The students in this research were able to review at once. This was due the fact that

the students' reviewers were able to make use of the review from the peer reviewers. Concerning this condition, students only reviewed one another's argumentative essay once only. Therefore, in this research it only took only one meeting for peer review activity.

To sum up, statistically, peer review is more significant than teacher review on students' argumentative essay. Out of this empirical finding, some findings support some theories, and some were not. Collaborative learning, a stress-reduced activity, and self-reviewer were relevant to the theories. Of four problems, three were found, and one was not discovered. The research finding about reviewing on the first and second drafts was contrary to the findings of this research.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

After carrying out the experiment for two months, the finding indicates that peer review gives better effect on students' argumentative essay than the teacher review. This effectiveness has been proved statistically by the calculation of t-test. The result of the calculation indicated that t_{observed} could exceed the t_{table} . Referring to this result, the research hypothesis is accepted.

In addition to such finding, other findings were that some theories were supported in this research, but some others were not. The benefits of peer review -collaborative learning, a stress-reduced activity, and self-reviewer- were relevant to the theories. Of four problems, two problems-reluctance of sharing expressions to others and rely on the teacher-s approval- existed only in the beginning of this research. One problem-not focusing on peer review activity- remained. The other problem- not willing to work with others- was not discovered in this research. Those benefits were achieved by training students what to look for, letting them know the criteria to evaluate, grouping, and having clear procedures. Students, then, are also trained to identify strong points, not only the weak ones.

Consequently, peer review facilitates students to learn from each other for continuous improvement of their writing skill.

Briefly, peer review was more effective than teacher review on students' argumentative essay. Involving students in reviewing each other's essay, which is called peer review, needs to be considered as one of the effective ways to improve students' essay writing. Peer review that allows students to respond and correct each other's written output may make sense to many language teachers and student writers. This is based on the demand that the teachers should focus not only to the product, but also to the process- the steps taken by students to achieve a final copy.

SHORT BIOGRAPHY

Yen Polisda is a native Padangese educated in teaching English. She obtained her Doctoral degree in Education of Science focused on teaching English from State University of Padang. Yen now lectures English at STBA Prayoga Padang while continuing to develop the concept of Fun with Literacy. Highly passionate with literacy, she enjoys teaching English for various purposes in the realm of promoting literacy while doing a number of research in writing.

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