

DEVELOPING STUDENTS' WRITING PERFORMANCE THROUGH PEER FEEDBACK WITH CHAT SYSTEM

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Abstract: To English learners, writing has been considered the most difficult skill for some reasons such as the grammar, the vocabulary, and the background knowledge. To help them develop their writing skill, it is recommended to employ the peer feedback in the teaching learning process at the writing class. Providing feedback in the process of writing tend to have beneficial help for the students to improve the quality of their work, especially in writing an essay. This expectation is generally agreed since students often face difficulties in accomplishing their writing due to the complexity of the writing itself, the students' factors and the teacher's factors. From the writing aspect, mastering the language form such as grammar, diction, etc and the content of the essay seems to be common problems for many EFL students.

Keywords: *Writing performance, peer feedback, chat system*

Among the other skills in English, mastering writing is considered the highest and the most difficult one to achieve (Corder, 1974:177). To master writing we have to master the other language components first to support it. In addition, Harris also states that learning to write well is a difficult macro skill for any language learners; for instance the native, the second, or foreign language learners (Harris,1980:76). From this statement it can be assume that mastering writing is difficult for any learners and especially will be more difficult for the foreign language learners since they have double job that is learning the target language itself and learning the skill in writing.

In Indonesian context, writing is difficult for the students for three common reasons. *First*, students still face problem with the grammar. Grammar as the framework of a language which often becomes a significant problem in writing since English and Indonesian language have many differences in rules. For example, the existence of tense system in English has already a prevalent for the students since it doesn't exist in Indonesian language. Although grammar is not everything in a language, but everything needs grammar, especially in writing. *Second*, is vocabulary or the diction. English as a big language is flexible to adopt and adapt to any languages in the world to enrich its vocabulary. It means that the students have to master the massive vocabulary in writing. In addition, the students may encounter with finding suitable diction for certain meaning. For example, the look, watch, observe, see, notice, etc. *Third*, the students don't have enough background knowledge to write due to the low habit in reading. These

three factors are very important and have significant effect in writing which can make the students reluctant to write.

Based on writing process approach, when a person writes he/she must go through some stages; prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, before they come to the final product. It is a recursive cycle in which the writer can go forward or backward. Among these stages prewriting is considered the most difficult stage because in this stage the students must go through three steps namely; researching, generating ideas and outlining. This is the most frustrating activity in writing because it is like the start up engine in a motorcycle. When the students can finish it well, it can be assumed that the job of writing will be easier and vice versa. In addition to prewriting, the other steps such as editing and revising can also be a challenge for the students due to their process in developing the target language.

In the teaching learning context, prewriting is often the hardest part for students in writing process. Students are often confused what to write as their teacher ask them to express their ideas in the class. They usually spend much time to shop the ideas for the material to write. However, at the end they often get stuck even get nothing and finally they lack of time to complete the teacher's writing task. This condition can trigger them to be frustrated in writing class. In the long run, this can contribute to the students' reluctance in developing their writing skill. To minimize this, students need to practice making outline with some review from both from the teacher and the peers to help them improve the quality of the outline.

Although some people may doubt on the effectiveness of outline in writing, many studies reveled that outline can help students to enhance effective writing. Hogue suggests using outline in improving our writing for three reasons; it will help us organize our ideas, write more quickly, and improve our grammar (Hogue, 1983). In addition, Barbara et all conducted a study on the functions of outlining among college students in four disciplines and found that outlining has 5 functions: 1) to guide their work on a paper; 2) as a bridge between content and structure; 3) to impose order on their own ideas; 4) to generate, preview, and evaluate modes of arrangement of their writing; and 5) to summarize progress and to motivate their writing projects. Furthermore, a regular practice of outlining can affect students' products in writing and perceives mental effort (MJR et al, 2012).

After completing the outline or other stage, students need to have their work checked since they may not sure their work has already met the criteria. For this purpose, doing peer feedback though cooperative writing is hopefully can help them improve their outline. The benefits from this activity are (1)cooperative writing can encourage students to work together to promote an equal opportunity for every students to work together (2) share ideas and resources and language resource with another, (3) build social interaction in the classroom(4) help low achieving students to complete the writing task (Handoyo, 2006).

Providing feedback in the process of writing tend to have beneficial help for the students to improve the quality of their work, especially in writing an essay. This expectation is generally agreed since students often face difficulties in

accomplishing their writing due to the complexity of the writing itself, the students' factors and the teacher's factors. From the writing aspect, mastering the language form such as grammar, diction, etc and the content of the essay seems to be common problems for many EFL students. In addition, students' factors such as unmotivated, inferior feeling, and low achiever may contribute to the student's development in writing. Finally, in EFL context, the teacher often face with a big number of students to handle which potentially lead to the ineffective monitoring during the teaching and learning process.

In responding to this phenomenon, the practice of providing feedback as part of teaching learning activities would appear to be useful as a mediator to meet the teacher expectation and the students' real condition. In other words, feedback is needed to shorten the distance between the teacher and the students since the teaching learning process is actually a two way communication in which the teacher should not present the material by his own but he should involve and understand the students' engagement during the teaching learning process. Therefore, as a teacher we should employ feedback is an essential part of the learning process since it is believed that effective feedback can motivate students, change their behavior and improve their learning.

There are numerous classification on types of feedback; however, the biggest umbrella are two types; teacher feedback and peer feedback. Many studies revealed the benefit of applying feedback as part of EFL instruction practice. Schunn states that there is significant relationship between the feedback features, levels of mediating variables, and implementation rates (Schunn, 2009:375). In addition, Choi suggest that Peer feedback combined with teacher feedback appeared to be beneficial for increasing L2 knowledge and lowering L2 writing anxiety(Choi,2013:1). With the development of ICT, feedback has also developed with online system and many studies has conducted exploring its effectiveness. Woo states that many studies on peer feedback through wikis can help provide support for students' collaborative writing process, showing that different types of feedback elicited actual revisions, which may it have resulted in better group writing (Woo,2013:279). Furthermore, Chen found that peer feedback through blogging is effective way to improve the quality of students' writing, and are able to write rich and meaningful content (Chen, et. al, 2011:1).

As usual, teacher feedback has already practiced for long time since giving feedback for is part of the teacher's job and it is believed to be more effective than peer feedback because this feedback is usually most expected by the students for it symbolizes the teacher's attention for the students. Besides, teacher feedback is also believed to be superior than peer feedback for its quality due to the better mastery the teacher has than the peers does. Teacher's feedback can foster the students' willingness to revise the content and organization of their writing (Petterson and Portier 2013:29). In addition, Lee, further suggests that providing mediated learning experience (MLE) as a new object of the feedback system and introducing other innovations can lead to more effective feedback and help students improve learning.(Lee, 2014:13).

The concept of student peer feedback has increased attention in higher education and it has been used for over three decades since it is in line with the

growing focus on collaborative learning. Most of studies were conducted at the tertiary and secondary levels and covered a wide range of different subject disciplines, which include English language. Peer feedback is also referred to in the literature as formative peer assessment, peer evaluation, peer response, or peer editing. It involves students giving and receiving feedback on each other's work. Actually, there are 2 benefits employing this feedback: first, it can be used to ensure that students receive feedback from a number of different people. It means that through engaging in peer feedback and receiving feedback from a number of peers, students are exposed to a greater diversity of perspectives than just those of their teacher. Second, it is particularly beneficial in large classes where it may be difficult for the teacher to provide detailed and timely feedback to all students.

Besides those two main benefits, a lot of studies have revealed the advantages of practicing peer feedback as follows (cited in Gielen et al, 2010, p.125). Firstly, peer feedback can increase the social pressure on students to perform well on an assignment. This effect was found in fourth grade (Cole, 1991) as well as in university (Pope, 2005). The potential embarrassment of colleagues—rather than teachers—judging their work brings about an increase in the time and effort students spend on assignments (Tsui & Ng, 2000; Pope, 2001; Gibbs & Simpson, 2004). This way, regardless of the actual output of the peer feedback, a mere announcement that it will take place might suffice to raise performance.

Secondly, research in higher education shows that students often perceive peer feedback as more understandable and more useful because fellow students 'are on the same wavelength' (Topping, 2003). Teachers, being experts in their domain, often provide feedback that is based on a thorough insight into the complexities of the subject and the domain-specific demands. Their feedback, however, is often not understood or is misinterpreted by students as it is associated to discourse that is not directly accessible to students (Hounsell, 1987; Higgins, 2000; Gibbs et al., 2004; Yang et al., 2006). This might be true to an even larger extent in secondary education, since the 'intellectual distance' between pupils and teachers is even greater than in higher education.

A third argument in favor of peer feedback is that it increases the students' ability to understand feedback. When a learner sees what happens behind the curtains of an assessment and participates in it, learning goals are clarified and internalized (e.g. Rust et al., 2003; Bloxham & West, 2004). A clear view of the goals, criteria and standards of assessment is essential and can even without the actual feedback taking place raise performance by generating appropriate learning activities (Gibbs et al., 2004).

Fourthly, peer feedback is quicker. As teacher feedback often has a considerable delay after the submission of an assignment or test, feedback sometimes is not available until after the curriculum has passed to another topic. In that case, 'imperfect feedback from a fellow student provided almost immediately may have much more impact than more perfect feedback from a tutor four weeks later' (Gibbs et al., 2004, p. 19).

Fifthly, peer feedback can be part of an increase in the frequency or amount of feedback. Gibbs and Simpson emphasize that only giving feedback at the end of the learning process is not enough to support learning effectively and may provoke frustration in the learner. Several 'intermediate' peer assessment sessions on draft versions of for instance an essay or report could answer to this need of regular feedback if teachers are not able or willing to increase its frequency themselves.

A sixth possible advantage is the individualization of feedback. If teachers try to provide more timely and more frequent feedback, they often organize it collectively to make this feasible. Collective feedback cannot, however, address personal needs and provide opportunities for personal interaction as often as individual feedback can. Additionally, pupils are not likely to show their ignorance or uncertainty during a collective session, so a lot of questions will not even be posed. Peer feedback can make it feasible to provide individual feedback, leaving the teacher available for personal interaction whenever assessors and assesses cannot find an answer to a specific question.

A final argument is the association of feedback with power issues, emotions and identity, which may launch an 'emotion-defence system' in students (Higgins, 2000). Learners may hide their weaknesses and doubts from the teacher, rendering teachers unaware of particular student difficulties or misconceptions. Peer feedback may bypass these difficulties since it is less power-sensitive.

In line with the rapid development of information and technology, the use of ICT for blended teaching or blended learning has been applied to enhance successful teaching learning process. Many studies exploring the effectiveness of blended teaching/learning with various formats have revealed that this concept has great influence on students' language development. Yang (2013) conducted a study to know the students' perception of blended learning for college students with English reading difficulties. It revealed that blended learning can provide extensive practice, reflection, and social interaction. In addition, Yang (2014) continued to conduct a study on preparing language teachers for blended teaching of summary writing. The finding showed that language teachers' problems in blended teaching of summary writing fell into three categories: instructional processes, community concerns, and technical issues. It can be concluded that blended format can decrease the distance and increases the interaction between teachers and students and among students themselves. In Indonesian context, nowadays teachers also have involved ICT as media and learning resources to support their teaching practice due to the students' familiarity with computer and internet use. For example, in writing practice, teacher can use web, blog, wiki, etc as the resources in teaching writing.

Considering to the students' need and their availability access mentioned previously, we can use many different types of program provided freely from the internet such as cms (content modified system) or other programs which have chat feature to be modified so that it can be used in the teaching learning process to facilitate peer feedback session. In this system the students can give comments to their friends' work one and another anonymously so that they can

get some review/feedback without being inferior from other friends. In addition, hopefully this program can enhance effective teaching learning process in writing since the teacher can assist, control, and even monitor the students' progress in completing the task which usually can't be done in a big class size setting. When this system is fully applied in online meeting, it can help both the teacher and the students to manage their time flexibly so that the teaching learning in writing can be more fun. The teacher can expand his activity in onsite meeting with this system to save the time and energy. Finally, since the teacher can monitor the students' activity more accurately, it can help the students to work more intensively with the certain time allotment when they practice writing. It happens because the teacher can't assist the students' process in writing due to the limited time given in onsite meeting, some students tend not to focus to their work and did something else, instead.

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