

PEER-ASSESSMENT IN GOOGLE CLASSROOM: MOTIVATOR OF THE WRITING SKILLS

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ABSTRACT

The tertiary level ESL learners from the Private Universities in Bangladesh face lack of motivation in writing outside the classroom. Examining and providing feedback of the writing of a large number of students become a struggle for the teachers inside the classroom where the time is very limited. In that case, self-directed engagement in writing can be very useful with constant motivation. Traditional strategies fail to provide sufficient stimulations to foster their writing performance. For that, peer-assessment can be used for eliminating the fatigue of writing. On the other hand, young-generation people are very flexible to computer-adaptive learning. So, peer-conference can be conducted in a virtual setting like Google classroom. The main purpose of this paper is to examine how students involve in peer-assessment in Google Classroom and how it effects on their motivation, identification and improvement of the cohesion of their writing. The paper also elaborates the rationale of this application from a practitioner's point of view. The sample of the study consisted 50 students of Engineering Faculty in a Private University in Bangladesh. In their writing discourse, imperfect sentence formulation with lack of relevance and coherence is very prominent. So, use of "linking words" is included in their syllabus. In this research they were provided with two types of tasks on "linking words" in Google Classroom. They completed the first one individually with the help of a model text and the second one collaboratively with their peers. Both tasks were focused on making new sentences with particular "linking words". A descriptive-quantitative approach was applied to analyze the data taken from the Google classroom. The data reveals concrete evidence of their participation and performance. The result implies that both being and getting real-audience outside classroom accelerate motivation of writing. Furthermore, detection of flaws can be acceptable from peers. So constructive peer-assessment is not an assessment of writing skills but rather for writing skills. This small scale study offers further research on virtual setting where students can improve other language skills also through peer-assessment.

Keywords: Peer-feedback, Google classroom, Writing skill, Motivation.

1. INTRODUCTION

The students of the Private Universities of Bangladesh face challenges in their writing in English as maximum of their background is from Bengali medium. Even after having twelve years of instruction, especially in writing, learners in Bangladesh still find formal writing troublesome. In addition, the same common errors they made during their early school and college life reoccur at the tertiary level. (Saleheen, 2015, p.215) In their school and college, the medium of language, both spoken and written, was their native language- Bengal. The education system of the mainstream of Bangladesh, from where they come, is also responsible. The present system of learning English is still based on memorization of grammatical rules rather than the use of these rules at the sentence level. Therefore, learners are not getting an opportunity to practice academic writing skills with appropriate use of grammar. (Saleheen, 2015, p.219). So, when they come to the University for their Graduation, the language barrier is enormous for them, especially in writing. They are also reluctant to write inside the classroom. This creates a cycle of challenges from which the teachers are not separated. In writing instruction, teachers often struggle with developing engaging and interactive activities. They face constraints such as large classes and packed teaching schedules. A purposeful and appealing pre-task can energize the writing process and set the context for the subsequent writing task. (Chong, 2017, p.32). Here, in place of "pre-task", the researcher has proposed "peer-assessment". In a group work weak students will be motivated and encouraged by the other members of the group. (Siddique, 2015, p.116). In the same way, technology can work as a catalyst to execute this plan. Computer technologies, can bring about drastic changes in the academic milieu of EFL pedagogy in Bangladesh in general and in the provision of feedback on tertiary-level EFL students' writing in particular. (Uddin, 2015, p.91) The main objectives of the paper is to ascertain the pragmatic way of utilizing Google Classroom in peer-assessment of writing skills.

2. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The researcher has been teaching the fundamental English language courses in a private university of Bangladesh named Daffodil International University for three years. Because of the HSC question pattern and traditional methods of teaching, it is observed that almost 90% students are weak in free writing in L2. It is also found that the learners are not motivated enough to write in L2. ...they did not get enough opportunity to practice creative writing in the classroom. However, they need extensive writing skills at University level at L2 (Sufian &Islam, 2015, p.146). So, students from all faculties in Daffodil International University (DIU) are offered with two compulsory courses on Basic English Language skills in their first year: English 1 and English 2. English 2 is focused on reading and writing skills. The subjects selected for this study are the students of English 2 but their writing skill is disappointing. According to Kabir (2015), the proficiency that the learners achieve at graduate and postgraduate levels is painfully disappointing. Students can hardly write a discourse in acceptable English. (p.196). Writing a meaningful and correct syntax with all the required information becomes a huge challenge for them. In Bangladesh, students of different levels follow certain instruction for writing to develop their writing skills, but the question is how effective are these instructions. (Saleheen, 2015, p. 215). Instructions couldn't motivate them. At Bangladeshi universities students are mainly provided with instructor-controlled feedback through written comments and error correction; peer correction and face-to-face conferencing are relatively new practices and not widely used. (Uddin, 2015, p.89). So, experimenting peer-assessment: can

reshape the cognitive skill of writing. On the other hand, The ELT pedagogy of Bangladesh can be amply benefited by introducing technology based modes of feedback on EFL learners' writing. (Uddin, 2015, p.90). To keep pace with that, all the faculties of DIU maintain their online LMS (Learning Management System) Google Classroom, which is an online classroom, for academic purpose. The paper argues that whether peer-assessment in Google classroom generate motivation for learners as well as satisfaction for teachers in harnessing the writing skills.

3. RESEARCH QUESTION

Considering the above mentioned circumstances, the paper aims at depicting the answers of these questions:

- How can students improve their writing skills through peer assessment in Google Classroom?
- How does peer assessment motivate students in free- writing outside the classroom and create awareness and reflections on accuracy?
- Whether the teachers are benefitted from this practice or not.

These areas have been little researched in the ELT context of Bangladesh until recently.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

4.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEMS IN WRITING SKILLS

Writing is thought to be the most difficult of the four language skills..... In writing, one needs to be very careful with every word and every sentence, in logical presentation of information (Braman, 2017, p.88). But the tertiary level students have a tendency of breaching the cohesion of language. They also give limited revision after writing. It is also unfortunate that, lexical cohesion in L2 writing instruction has historically been overlooked, both in L2 writing research and instructional materials (Jhonson, 2017, p.12). Consistent and frequent deviances of cohesion has been observed by the teachers of fundamental writing courses in the Private Universities in Bangladesh. The size of the classroom and limited time in a semester system are the indispensable reasons behind the circumstance. Providing feedback on students' writing is a time-consuming task for instructors and they may not be able to give individualized, immediate, content related feedback to multiple drafts (Uddin, 2015, p.81).

4.2 SIGNIFICANCE OF PEER ASSESSMENT

Peer assessment, therefore, is an alternative of assessment process that involves the learner's participation. It can well reflect the effectiveness of the learners' feedback and cooperation as well as enhance learners' awareness of self-learning and self-esteem (Puegphrom & Chiramanee' 2011, p.2). So, the students can be independent learners which assists the teacher in a classroom. Pair work promotes co-operation in the classroom and make it a more relaxed and friendly place (Siddique, 2015, p.106). This positive environment can extract the latent quality of writing. Pair/group work not only provides a unique opportunity for students to improve an array of skills such as critical thinking and problem solving, but also enables them to experience a diversity of personalities and perspectives. (PhuQuypge, 2017, p.14). Here, contextualization of language practice can occur. Besides, assessing and editing peer's writing helps learners gain more knowledge and ability in gathering, acquiring, analyzing and synthesizing formation, reading and writing skills. Through the assessing and editing process learners become more patient, responsible, and cautious and learn how to think systematically(Puegphrom & Chiramanee' 2011, p.3). This qualities are very essential for writing skills.

4.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF LMS/ GOOGLE CLASSROOM FOR MOTIVATION

There are many additional factors that pertain to adult learners than children such as age, intelligence, motivation, attitudes, learning styles and strategies, and personality (Ferdousy, 2017, p.206). But the traditional classrooms are devoid of these factors and follow "written comments" as feedback which gets less appraisal from both the teachers and learners. Critical written comments can be threatening or de-motivating because of its authoritativeness (Uddin, 2015, p.83). But in virtual classroom, authoritativeness doesn't exist directly. "The digital environment produced positive attitude because student felt there was no pressure of accuracy... (Khan & Ivy, 2017, p.308)". Specially, in conducting peer-assessment, the mentor focuses not on accuracy but on comfort. The students also seemed to like and have fun when studying the e-lessons as they thought e-Learning helped creating motivation to learn English grammar and practice writing (Pumjarea, Muangnaki, Tuntinakhongul, 2017, p.86)

4.4 PAST STUDIES

From the Prince of Songkla University one faculty and one student conducted a research on "The Effectiveness of Implementing Peer Assessment on Students' Writing Proficiency" in 2011. The results are following:

- It was found that after experiencing the writing instruction with peer assessment and being assessed by peer the subjects' writing ability improved significantly, at .01.
- Highly positive attitudes towards the teaching technique were also found, in particular on the following aspects: the writing ability development, self-directed learning, co-operative learning, and self-confidence.
- The improvement included the more accuracy in using grammatical elements, completeness of contents, and better idea organization.
- Those considered more proficient were helpful to those poorer classmates. Thus, peer assessment activities in the present study can be assumed to develop the learner's social and cognitive ability.
- Learners who had asked their teacher almost all the time became increasingly self-reliant. They were observed to make their own decision more often.
- Around 90% of the subjects...thought that the proficient peer had more integrity and would provide them with correct and more appropriate language input than their own. (Puegphrom & Chiramanee' 2011, p.1, 8-10).

5. METHODOLOGY

The virtual classroom was integrated with real classroom here. According to Tufazoli : ...we have to consider technology as the vital supplementary tool in language classes (Tufazoli, 2017, p.326). The data was collected from the activities of two tasks given in the Google Classroom. As it was not adapted with the final evaluation system, the researcher included 2 marks only for each task. "Knowing a language means the ability to produce an unlimited number of sentences from a limited set of rules (Rahman, 201, p.174). So, reformulation of syntax with transitional words was given in the tasks. The researcher addressed the result through descriptive quantitative data analysis.

5.1 Participants

The students were from level 1 term 2, first year from the Electrical and Electronic Department. Their age ranged from 20 to 22 years. Their background study: Secondary School Certificate (SSC) and Higher Secondary School Certificate (HSC) were from Bengali Medium where they were taught reading and writing in English for the last twelve years. Maximum of their primary and secondary education were from rural areas and they represented the mainstream of the tertiary-level students in Bangladesh. To describe their level of English, they were mixed ability students. They were selected by the researcher as reliable sample representing the students of Daffodil International University.

5.2 Contents

Few teaching materials appear to have taken up the issue of lexical cohesion as part of L2 writing instruction (Jhonson, 2017, p.13). So the topic used for the peer-assessment was "using transitional words". The contents were designed in two formats: an assignment and a quiz. For the first task or the "assignment", five model sentences were given as supplementary and the students were asked to identify transitional words from them and make another five sentences using them. Without models, students' anxiety may be heightened, as they might feel expectations are not clear. (Qaddour, 2017, p.28). For the second task or the quiz, there were two activities. Firstly, the students were asked to solve some multiple choice questions (MCQ). The questions were on five linking words and their functions. Teaching our students commonly used discourse markers and their function is a quick and easy method to help them achieving cohesion in their writing (Jhonson, 2017, p.13). The purpose of this question was to elicit the meaning. After that they were asked to provide the answers to their peers and the peers checked the answers. The other peer did the same. They could communicate with their peer physically and virtually. After that they had to make five sentences using the linking words, chosen by their peers. Then, they exchanged the sentences again with their peers and submitted in the Google Classroom. This time the peers assess their sentences and identified mistakes. They were directed to assess the sentences regarding the use of linking words in a comprehensive way. They were also allowed to check the holistic errors of the sentence if there was any. The data collection was not typical but was a pragmatic and distinctive representation of learners' autonomy in writing skill.

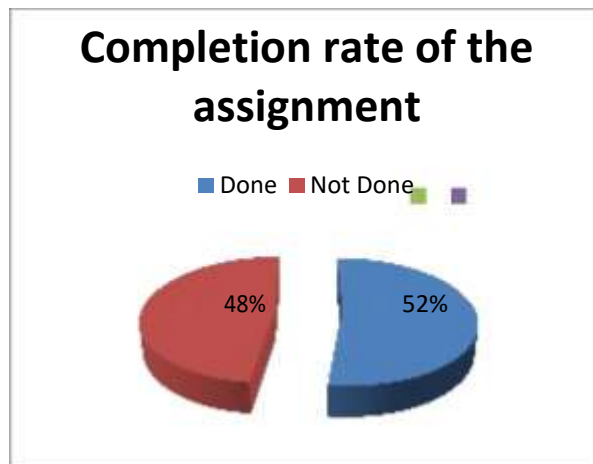
5.3 Procedure

Both the quiz and the assignment were assigned to them on December 9 (Sat), 2017 and the duration allocated for them was 7 days. The deadline was 15 December, 2017, till 11:59 pm. No late submission was accepted. The marks allocated for them were very few: 2+2=4 as it was a firsthand experiment. The researcher investigated the research question by computing the participation rate of the students in the two tasks. The study was also conducted on the score of the students that determined their performance and motivation. The charts and tables co-constructed the findings and determined the assumption stated above.

5.4 Results

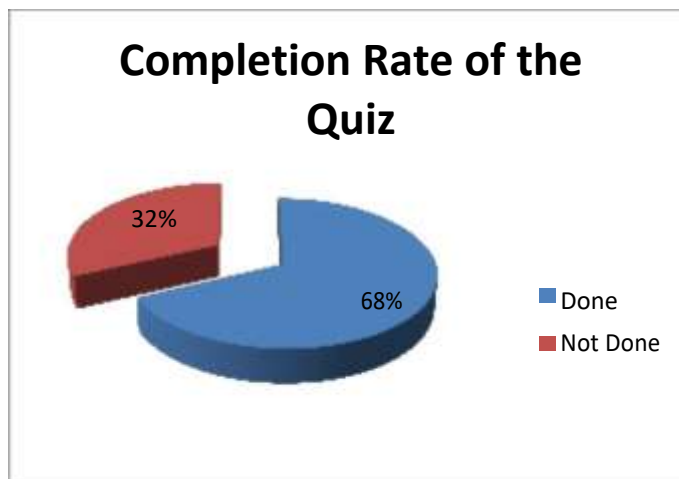
The results were shown through pie and bar charts and addressed the issue properly as it analyzed the comparison of the participation between the assignment and the quiz as well as the comparison of the participation between the two tasks of the quiz. It also highlighted the rate of success by showing their scores.

Figure 1: Students' completion rate of the assignment



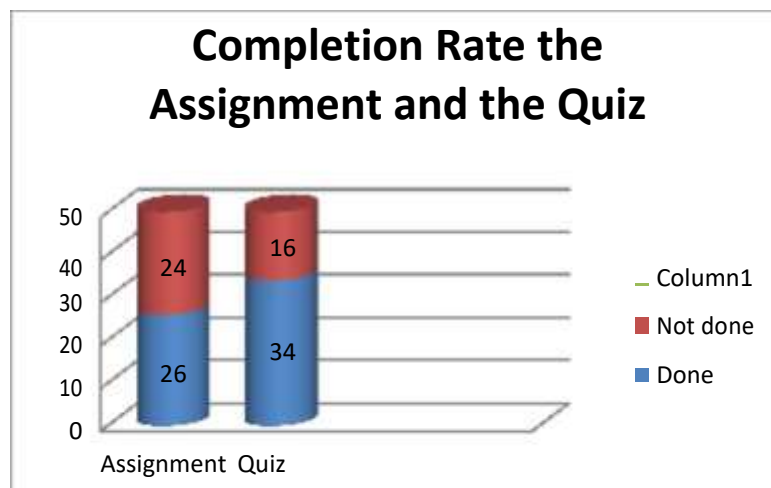
This pie chart attempted to show the completion rate of the assignment. Among 50 students, 26 students or 52% of the total completed the assignment and 24 students or 48 % of the total didn't. This outcome unveiled the fact that internet accessibility was not always available and computer facilities were not equitable for the tertiary level students outside their classroom.

Figure 2: Students' completion rate of the quiz



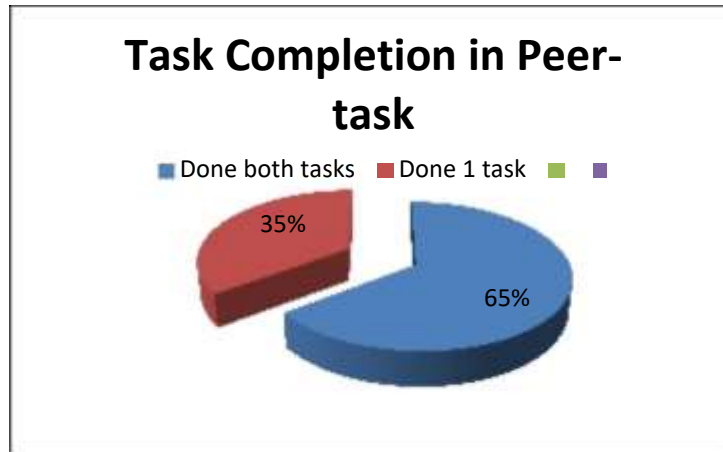
The second result stemmed from the Quiz after the assignment continually as they were assigned simultaneously. It can be seen that among 50 students, 34 students or 68% of the total could complete and 16 students or 32% of the total could not.

Figure 3: Comparison between the completion rate of the assignment and the quiz



This bar chart emphasized the backwash effect of using peer involvement in these two tasks. It manifested the increase of the participants in the peer task that is 26 to 34 in number. So 8 students or 16% of total participation increased in the Quiz. As described in the previous the charts presented empirical findings on the fact that peer assessment reinforce the learning. The second part of the result showed the participation and success rate in the two tasks of the Quiz. Among 34 students 22 students completed both tasks, 12 students completed only the first one that is the MCQ.

Figure 4: Students' completion rate of the two tasks of the quiz



Based on the finding of the pie chart, 65% of the total students completes the both tasks and 35% of the total students did the first task only. This indicated that some students in the private university still encounters barrier in writing new sentences or still comfortable only in paper-based writing. Peer-assessment was extensively used in scoring the MCQ and the solution was given after the deadline. Here the teacher rechecked assessment to reframe the success rate.

Table 1: Marks Obtained in the MCQ of the Quiz

Marks	5	4	3	2	1
No of students	14	15	1	3	1

Among 34 students who did the MCQ, 14 students corrected 5 out of 4, 15 students corrected 4, 1 student got 3, 3 students got 2, and 1 student got 1. So, the overall performance presents the positive result in negotiating meaning of linking words according to prior knowledge.

Figure 5: Mistakes of the Students in the "Make Sentences" of the "Quiz"



In the above chart, the vertical axis represented the number of the students and the horizontal axis represented the number of mistakes done in the make sentence. Among 22 students who completed the 2nd tasks/ "make sentences": 8 students had 1 mistake, 9 students had 2 mistakes, 2 students had 3 mistakes and 1 student had none. The elemental mistakes of syntax were subjected to the counting. Here the teachers' interference also reappeared to scrutinize the assessment of the students as their revision strategies were not only good enough for independent learning but also less reliable for conclusive result. After observing the above chart, it is clear that the endeavors that the peers take give them gravity of constructing knowledge on the topic.

6. DISCUSSIONS

In the existing result, peer participation is considered an independent variable and the rate of students' participation is considered as a dependent variable. The comparison between the percentage of students' participation in the Quiz and the same in the Assignment shows that Google classroom can create a supportive environment where peer-assessment favors the consciousness raising of writing involvement. Students feel somewhat more confident in themselves when working as part of a team because they know that their friends are still learning English, too, and they all come to this class to improve their skills (PhuQuy, 2017, p.17). The same thing happens here. But their deep-rooted habit of paper-based writing works in action de-motivate some students and they miss the tasks. Though the majority strains to produce new sentences, 12 students restrict themselves from this. The more creativity a task was expected to generate, the more students' confidence was undermined (Qaddour, 2017, p.28). This issue is yet to be resolved as most of the students believes that they can't write appropriately. A significant trait can be observed among the students' number of mistakes. As it is primarily self-reported, the teacher interferes later. Their main drawback in writing is juxtaposing the morphemes. The researcher seeks to address the result through descriptive quantitative data analysis. The last figure and the table interprets that students are attracted mostly for the precision of the task naturally and they have negligence in writing. But the peer-assessment enhances the reinforcement in their writing. As a consequence of the study, the perceived implication from the research question is truly justified.

7. LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

Firstly, the paper explores the performance of writing skills by using few exercises. There are countless categories of substantive exercises for the writing skills. Secondly, the scale of accuracy and fluency is not assessed in the peer-assessment. The short duration of a semester may be a challenge to the integration of action research. Technological constraints and power cuts is a challenge for simulated recall (Ivy, 2015, p.125). So, thirdly, some unanticipated events like lack of internet access generates uncertainty. Fourthly, the intensive measurement of critical awareness and reflection among the students over writing skill are also missed. Fifthly, in the virtual setting like Google classroom, monitoring system is not much reliable and the authenticity can be questioned as the student can take help from others.

8. RECOMMENDATION

Computer as well as multimedia literacy is a must for both teachers and learners to benefit from the technological innovations (Uddin, 2015, p.90). So, the advancement of technology can make a revolution in teaching writing skills. But all classroom tasks and activities cannot be assigned as group works because there are some students who prefer working on their own (Siddique, 2015, p.117). Though the teachers can't change the mentality of the students overnight, a mindful application of peer-assessment can extract student's writing potential. Students can be given tasks and projects to complete in collaboration with other students. Greater allocation of marks of such tasks will also motivate learners to take responsibility and become autonomous (Khan, 2017, p.62). Presumably, inclusion of marks, without violating the rules of the curriculum in this kind of tasks can accelerate the self-development of the students. Learners need to be motivated and feel the urge to develop themselves and this awareness will help them to be more focused (Khan, 2017. P.62). Moreover, it is necessary to clarify the guidelines and control the execution of the plan to avoid any undesirable interference.

9. CONCLUSION

ESL teachers in Private Universities can utilize the opportunities of online classroom as the accessibility and availability of internet and computer have increased several times during the last decades. However, it is accepted globally that writing is a complex process. In Bangladesh, technology-based feedback, if it is introduced successfully, may bring about a big change in students' writing performance in large EFL classrooms at the public universities as well as in the small or medium-size classrooms at the private universities (Uddin, 2015, p.91). For exchange information between the teacher and the class, the LMS Google classroom is used in widespread basis. The LMS provides students with communication channels for giving feedback to peers and receive feedback from instructors and peers, and then students can use the feedback to improve their written assignments (Pumjarea, Patcharee & Tuntinakhongul, 2017, p.87). In virtual setting, where the teacher plays passive role, the peers can play active role to reduce their unwillingness of writing. The researcher investigated whether peer-interaction contributes to diminish the constraints of writing and how implementing those in Google classroom encourage more transmission of knowledge in target language. The paper also puts light on the substantial challenge of the teachers regarding the assessment of writing in a large classroom with low enthusiasm and review a solution. This research draws an inconclusive line from where more research can be done to reach the core of the problems and propose solution to acquire the meta-cognition of any language skill.

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Appendix I

Assignment

A. Read the following sentences carefully. Then, indicate and circle each transitional word that compares or contrasts.

1. I was anxious to leave. However, we had to wait until Uncle Pete arrived.
2. Mother told us to hurry onto the bus. Otherwise, we all would have been caught in the rain.
3. I make my sandwich in the same way that Shawna does. WE both use food that is peanut free because of our food allergies.
4. I asked about homework, but neither Todd nor Antonio knew what had been assigned.
5. Even though it was very cold, Mary did not wear a jacket.

B. Write 5 more sentences using the same transitional words you've circled in "A". Don't repeat the sentences.

Appendix II

Quiz:

1. Which transition word shows location?
a. for example b. below c. then
2. Which transition word shows time?
a. between b. in other words c. later
3. Which transition word adds information?
a. in addition b. over c. earlier
4. Which transition word compares and contrasts?
a. earlier b. besides c. otherwise
5. Which transition word clarifies?
a. first b. besides c. in other words