

Improving students' academic essay writing achievement through rubrics and peer correction

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Abstract – This study attempted to find out the contribution of rubrics and peer correction in improving the students' achievement in academic English essay writing in terms of what the students' perception on the application of rubrics and peer correction in academic English essay writing was; what the students' academic English essay writing achievement was after being exposed through rubrics and peer correction; whether there was a correlation between rubrics and peer correction and the students' academic English essay writing achievement.

The data were collected from a distributed questionnaire consisting of a five-scale statement and open-ended questions to be responded by 60 samples of two classes out of 9 classes of semester 5 students of English Department of Faculty of Teacher Training and Education of Mahasaraswati University Denpasar in academic year 2016/2017 and the achievement of the students' academic English essay from a determined thesis statement after being exposed to the application of rubrics and peer correction; both of whose scores were confronted to obtain the correlation.

The result showed that there was a strong correlation (0.62) between the students' perception on the application of rubrics and peer correction and their academic English writing achievement meaning that that rubrics and peer correction had a positive contribution in improving the students' academic English writing achievement. Therefore, it was logical to recommend that rubrics and peer correction be applied as one of the techniques in improving academic English essay writing.

Keywords: rubrics, peer correction, academic English essay writing achievement

1. Introduction

Teaching proper academic essay writing is such a serious task in which undergoes complex problems through a series of processes involving prewriting, drafting, responding, revising, editing and post-writing (Widodo, 2008) requiring integrated

mastery of structure, grammar, vocabulary, spelling, mechanics as well as the capability of organising until putting them into a real piece of academic writing. Such complex processes require the teacher to find out as appropriate teaching techniques as possible so as to help the learners accomplish their academic writing products. A few investigations have been conducted in order to get more appropriate supplementary techniques such as ‘peer review’ (Kristi Lundstrom, Wendy Baker, 2009; peer review process to scientific writing (Nicholas, 2011) ‘Outlining’ (Wardhana, 2015), and rubrics and peer *correction* on academic English paragraph writing (Wardhana, 2016). As one of English writing teachers himself the writer was also faced with problems of the students’ weak or even poor English grammar and writing the essay organization. It was just like building a house without foundation and upon weak pillars; and the roof was emergently collapsed. The question was whether rubrics and *peer correction* was able to improve of the students’ gain in writing academic English essay.

Responding to the students’ serious problem where the writer taught academic English essay writing and the recommendation of the investigation on the role of rubrics and peer *correction* to academic English paragraph writing (Wardhana 2016) and confirming the investigation of Kristi Lundstrom and Wendy Baker (2009) on peer review activities, this study attempted to find out whether rubrics and peer *correction* could help support the students’ ability in academic English essay writing; besides, it was also a follow up study of Wardhana’s earlier (2016) study on rubrics and peer correction.

In order to know the role of rubrics and peer correction in academic essay writing the study formulates the following research questions; (1) what is the students’ perception on rubrics and peer *correction* in academic English essay writing ?; (2) what is the students’ achievement in academic English essay writing after being exposed to academic English essay through rubrics and peer *correction* activities? (3) what is the correlation between rubrics and peer correction and the students’ academic English essay writing achievement?; (4) what are the types of errors committed by the students in writing academic English essay?

Theoretically, (1) the study could confirm the benefit of rubrics and peer *correction* to improve the students’ academic English essay writing; (2) practically rubrics and peer correction could provide the teacher with a technique which enhances his teaching academic essay writing handler and more efficiently; (3) also the students could learn more grammar and sentence structure through presentations, discussions and peer *correction*. As the investigation on the study mostly conducted for the improvement of teaching learning process, the study determined the following purposes; (1) to provide information about the students’ perception on rubrics and peer correction in academic English essay writing. (2) to find out what the students’ achievement is in academic English essay writing after being exposed to academic English essay through rubrics and peer correction activities; (3) to find out the correlation between the students’ perception on rubrics and peer correction activities and the students’ academic English essay writing achievement (4) to provide types of errors committed by the students in writing academic English essay.

This study intended to investigate how rubrics and peer *correction* could help improve the students’ academic English essay writing. In particular it limited itself to

find out the roles of elements of rubrics, the elements which had to be used in academic English writing assessment such as formatting, punctuation and mechanics, contents, organisation, grammar and sentence structure (Oshima and Hogue 2007). However, on the part of peer *correction* this study mainly focused on checking and correcting the organisation and grammar and the sentence structure.

Actually, rubrics are used as the elements of assessment but in this study it was assumed to be beneficial to be used both as technique and assessment. According to Oshima (2007: 196), there are 5 elements of rubrics for essay writing. They are (1) format in which the title must be centered; the first line of each paragraph is indented; the margins are left on both sides, and the text is double-spaced; (2) punctuations and mechanics in which periods (full stop), commas, apostrophes, quotation marks, colon, semi colon, capital letters, and spelling are used; (3) content in which the essay fulfills the requirements of the assignment; the essay is interesting; the essay shows that the writer use care and thought. (4) organization in which the essay follows the outline, and it has an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. In the introductory paragraph the introductory paragraph begins with several general sentences and ends with a thesis statement; followed by body in which each paragraph of the body discusses a new point and begins with a clear topic sentence; each paragraph has specific supporting material: facts, examples, quotations, paraphrased or summarized information, and so on; each paragraph has unity; each paragraph has coherence; Transitions are used to link paragraphs; and concluding paragraph in which the concluding paragraph summarizes the main points or paraphrases the thesis statement, begins with a conclusion signal, and leaves the reader with the writer's final thoughts on the topic; and (5) grammar and sentence structure.

Peer *correction* or peer review or peer editing, according to Oshima (2007: 194), refers to an interactive process of reading and commenting i.e. giving suggestions on classmate's writing for improvement. In this study, a peer *correction* referred to commenting the organisation and finding the errors of grammar and structure and correcting them. Referring to Oshima's definition (2007: 3), academic English writing in this study was the kind of formal complete English sentence writing used in college classes to be organised in a certain way.

The study of rubrics contribution to writing academic paragraph was conducted by Wardhana (2016) showing that the main role of rubrics was on the element of organization especially on the contribution of outline (Wardhana, 2015) in organizing ideas in sentences and paragraphs in prewriting steps especially in organising ideas from a thesis statement to developing ideas in a paragraph of introductory, in this case, the thesis statement and the body as well as the conclusion; however it did not study on essay writing and peer correction. The study was also conducted by Widodo (2008) in which outline could help determine the thesis statement, topic ideas, brainstorming ideas, organising ideas and drafting.

On the other hand, the benefits of peer correction activities for academic writing process were investigated by Kristi Lundstrom, Wendy Baker (2009) showing that the

reviewer or corrector giving feedback got more help for the improvement of academic writing. Besides, Widodo (2008) studied the process-based academic essay writing instruction in an EFL context showing that within the process-based framework, writing was viewed as a process which involved pre-writing, drafting, responding, revising, editing, and post-writing through which students recursively and reflectively reel. Here the place of the process-based academic essay writing was on peer correction or peer editing activities.

The procedures of the teaching-learning process were that the students were firstly reviewed or exposed with all components of the rubrics, then the process of writing the essay began by developing the thesis statement into body and conclusion of paragraphs which was then followed by peer correction through all the rubrics elements. On the part of grammar and sentence structure the students had time to exchange ideas to discuss grammar they used with their writing peers and finally the result or the phrases and sentences errors were discussed in class with the teacher. Additionally to reinforce the students' grammar and structure as well as to support their soft skills, they were also supposed to do a rewarded group presentation and class discussion on a given structural topic taken from Oshima and Hogue (2007).

2. Method

Since this investigation was a kind of semi classroom action research and expose- pacto in which the writer was the teacher himself, the population taken were all 8 classes of Semester V Classes, Class VA to VH; and the samples were 65 students of class E and F of English Department of Mahasaraswati University where the writer taught academic English essay writing in academic year 2016/2017. From the preliminary questions (Appendix 1) 90.38% students stated that they did not have any knowledge about rubrics and peer correction. The writer did not take Class VG and VH on purpose because they were already taken as samples of previous study on paragraph academic English writing (Wardhana, 2016). The samples on this study were quantitatively considered representative (25%) (Suharsimi, 2002).

This study applied a questionnaire and a test as its instruments. The responses from the questionnaires would show the information about the students' preferences and opinions about academic essay writing processes derived from a five-scale preference on the traits of *very agree and very disagree* from positive and negative statements about the benefits of rubrics and peer correction to academic essay writing which were confirmed by the responses out of open-ended questions with the items such as whether rubrics and peer correction were beneficial for the students; how they were beneficial and what they suggested about the use of rubrics in writing academic essay (Appendix 2). The samples were preliminary given pretest to find out whether they had known or had been exposed to rubrics in the earlier semesters. Then, this study required them to do the final exam or semester's exams by writing an essay from a few provided thesis statements in order to get their academic writing achievement. The tabulated data were then computed applying Pearson's product moment correlation formula.

As informed earlier the study was a follow up investigation of the study on rubrics of writing academic paragraph (Wardhana, 2016); in that case, here this study was called semi classroom action research and ex-post facto in its nature as Goodenough (2011:4) said that it was conducted in the classroom in order to improve or overcome the problems of teaching learning process (Elisabeth, in Burns 2010: 5) to be conducted in one cycle depending on the improvement of teaching learning process. The data of which were made about the new knowledge through conclusion drawn from validated evidence (Mc. Niff and Whitehead 2002: 16).

The procedures of teaching learning processes started by explaining the elements of rubrics required for writing academic essay writing through formatting, punctuation and mechanics, contents, organisation, grammar and sentence structure emphasising on writing the thesis statement, topic sentences, supporting sentences with details, applying the transition signals, cohesive devices to maintain the coherence and unity; organising the supporting paragraphs discussing about patterns of essay organization on chronological order, logical order, process order cause and effect order and comparison and contrast. On the parts of grammar and sentence structure the students were supposed to discuss Oshima's (2007: 151 – 240) English sentence structure, complex and compound sentences comprising types of sentences, noun clauses, adverbial clauses, relative clauses, and participial phrases through a group of three-member presentation and class discussion from which points of rewards were given for the correct and grammatical answers; on the other hand, the students' practices on academic essay writings were then corrected by their peers by referring to the rubrics. On the parts of grammar and sentence structure the errors and peer corrections were finally discussed with the teacher to find the more appropriate and grammatical corrections, in case, the students' correction might have resulted on errors themselves. This process was also, the writer thought a very beneficial teaching learning process of academic writing. Points of reward were given to both parts, the correctors and the *correctness*, the ones being corrected.

Finally, at the end of semester they were supposed to respond to a 15-item-Likert's (1932) scale of five categories questionnaire with 7 open-ended questions (Dwyer, 2000: 86) (Appendix 2) which would show the positive and negative perception of the students' towards rubrics and peer correction. The post test was conducted from a number of provided list of optional thesis statements to find out their academic writing achievements. Then, the average score of every sample on all questionnaire items was confronted with their achievement in academic writing to find out the correlation applying Pearson's product moment. The preliminary questions and questionnaires were written in the students' native language as to avoid misinterpretation.

As the questionnaire comprised positive and negative types of questions (see Table 1), expecting to get more objective responses, the data of which were treated properly so as to show the appropriate perception. In other words, the positive responses to the positive items (items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 11, 12, 14) were treated as positive

perceptions; on the other hand, the negative responses to the negative items (6, 8, 10, 13, 15) as positive perceptions and vice versa.

As for the open answer questions of the questionnaire percentages of the answers were determined to find out their positive and negative responses and the reasons for their preferences. The examples of errors were presented in the forms of error classification according to Ellis in Wardhana (2014) a study on Food and Beverage students' errors.

3. Results and Discussion

Out of the 65 distributed questionnaires only 60 were considered to be valid and therefore the responses would be taken from those 60 samples. The questionnaire items to be responded by the students comprised whether rubrics could make the students find it easier to write academic essay writing in organising ideas and information from a thesis statement into supporting paragraph and the use of punctuation, mechanics and essay format; whether they understand correcting others' writing and at the same time to learn grammar and structure of the essay writing (See Appendix 2) Applying Pearson's product moment correlation formula the result of the computation was 0.62 showing that there was a strong positive correlation between rubrics and peer correction and the students' academic English essay writing achievement (Sugiyono, 2007; Eko Budiarto, 2001: 248). This also meant that the higher the students' perception on the positive use of rubrics and peer correction was, the higher their academic paragraph writing achievement would be.

The open-ended questions posed items such as whether rubrics and peer correction were beneficial for the students; how they were beneficial and what they suggested about the use of rubrics in writing academic essay (Appendix 2). In general the answers to the open ended questions supported the idea that the students had positive attitude towards the positive contribution of rubrics (84%) and peer correction (81%) in writing academic essay. The strong contribution of rubrics appeared in supporting to write the organisation of the essay (81%) in determining a thesis statement, supporting paragraphs and a concluding paragraph. This was, according to the writer, very logical, because the teaching learning process was focussed on the organisation, element 4 of rubrics (Wardhana, 2016) and therefore when they were asked on the benefit of other elements such as punctuation, mechanics and format (question 2, see Appendix 2) they had less strong perception (72%) and the benefits of rubrics in more specific elements such as in the necessity of mechanics, in evaluating others' writing and learning grammar (question 3 and 5) they also had less strong attitude (72%, 79%); and therefore their recommendation is explaining rubrics in a more detailed way (question 7, 79%) which was positive as well. In addition, peer correction was very positive for the students for they got very good benefit on both for the correctors and the *correctness* (Kristi Lundstrom, Wendy Baker, 2009) to improve their grammar and structure.

Peer Correction

The errors of the students' essay writing applying Ellis' classification (Ellis in Wardhana 2012) can be classified into (1) *errors of addition* (42.86%) such as *addition of verb ending* (61.54 %); *addition of verb auxiliary: be/do/modal* (20.51 %); and addition of *to infinitive and verb-ing* (17.95 %), (2) *errors of omission* (29.67%) such as *omission of subject* (66.67 %); *omission of verb of auxiliary* (18.52 %), and *omission of passive auxiliary* (14.81 %); and (3) *errors of misuse of verbs/adjective/nouns/adverb or miscellaneous errors* (27.47 %).

The sources of the students' errors in essay writing can be identified as (1) errors of transfer which are inter-lingual transfer, or language transfer in which they applied the native language system in the target language writing and (2) intra-lingual transfer or developmental errors which causes overgeneralization and ignorance of rules restriction because of misapplication of rules and false concept hypothesized (Ellis, Richard in Wardhana 2012).

Contrastive analysis is considered to have very little pedagogical relevance (Corder, 1967; Sridhar in Al-Sibai 2004), however, others including the writer, as an English teacher, still believed that error analysis remained of some help to language teaching learning in that it was able to (i) identify strategies which learners use in language learning, (ii) identify the causes of learner errors, and (iii) obtain information on common difficulties in language learning as an aid to teaching or in developing teaching materials (Richards in Wardhana, 2012). For instance, in the expression * *with the internet; easier for them to chatting with friends* ---it was very likely that it was a transfer from Indonesian and because of the weakness on grammar and structure there was a failure for him/her to give proper introductory subject and proper infinitive-to which are erroneous in English. Then, the remedy could be done through peer discussion to be finalized by classical teacher's conclusion. After classifying the types of errors, the common grammar and structural difficulties could be recognized.

4. Conclusion

The role of rubrics and peer correction in teaching learning of academic English was not only known in the field of assessment but also in the teaching learning process. The study showed that (1) there was a positive perception of the students in the application of rubrics and peer correction in the teaching learning process (X mean = 3.44; open-ended questions: rubrics =84%; peer correction = 81%); (2) the average achievement of the students' academic English writing was 3.25; (3) there is a strong correlation between the students' perception on rubrics and peer correction and their academic English achievement ($r_{xy} = 0.62$); (4) The types of the students' errors could be classified into (a) *errors of addition* (42.86%) such as *addition of verb ending* (61.54%); *addition of verb auxiliary: be/do/modal* (20.51%); and addition of *to infinitive and verb-ing* (17.95%), (b) *errors of omission* (29.67%) such as *omission of subject* (66.67%); *omission of verb of auxiliary* (18.52%), and *omission of passive auxiliary* (14.81%); and

(c) *errors of misuse of verbs/adjective/nouns/adverb or miscellaneous errors* (27.47 %); and the reasons for the errors are mainly inter-lingual errors and intra-lingual errors; (5) however 3 per cent of them suggest that there should be used another technique.

Based on the students' suggestions, the study would recommend that (1) there should be better preparation to clarify each element of the rubrics and peer correction to ensure that all students understand and apply them. The teacher should give a model or example of reviewing each element, especially on peer correction it could be in the form of groups consisting various students' ability. (2) There should be a deeper and wider study on the application of rubrics and peer correction, for instance, a collaborative study among different education institutions.

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