

INCREASING AUTONOMOUS LEARNING THROUGH PEER ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUE

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Abstract

Working collaboratively with peers is one of the aspects that define learner autonomy. Peer assessment is a growing solution for writers to get an improvement. It allows students to work socially since they will know strengths and weaknesses of learning. Regarding to previous related studies, peer assessment in writing encourages students to be active and take a part of their own writing progress with their peers. (Ashley Landry, 2014). Furthermore, peer assessment can contribute and trigger student's autonomous learning. (Kulsirisawad, 2012). It is also viewed as another way of challenging students dependence on the teacher for feedback and guidance in their language learning to emphasize learner autonomy and cooperation to get students involved and learn as much from each other as they can from the teacher (Hamid Ashraf, 2015). In this research, the writer applied peer assessment in Writing I class by considering some beneficial effects over student's writing proficiency within the autonomous learning context as the Writing I is the beginning writing course in English Department of UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh. The aim of this research to investigate the process of autonomous learning situation through peer assessment in Writing I class and find out the outcome of peer assessment in Writing I class. It was conducted by using experimental research. The population of consisted of 4 classes, consist of 119 students fourth semester. The instrument of collecting data is writing test. Based on the data analysis, the writer found that the score of the experimental class students was higher than the control class students. The analysis of research result shows that peer assessment is an appropriate technique for university students to foster learner autonomy especially in EFL writing class.

Keywords: *Peer assessment, Autonomous Learning, writing*

Introduction

In learning English as a Foreign Language, we have noticed that there are sections of language learning that demands a learner-centre as the main role of its process. The learners have to be creative to assess themselves in achieving their skills by promoting an autonomous learning in language classroom. The concept of autonomous learning has been introduced by Henri Holec who had defined autonomy as "the ability to take

charge of one's own learning". As mentioned in Nematipour, Little also defines learner autonomy as essentially the matter of the learner's psychological relation to the process and content of learning, a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making and independent action. One way to promote autonomous learning is peer assessment. Some studies revealed that the implementation of peer assessment gained a positive feedback from student's learning experience. Sivan has been researching that student feedback indicated that they found the method to be appropriate for their studies. They regarded it as a good mechanism to develop critical thinking and to learn from other's work. Another related studies was done by Phnita Kulsirisawad. In 2012, she conducted the research on Thai EFL University Students with title "*Developing Learner Autonomy in EFL Writing Classrooms via Peer Feedback*". This study was aimed to develop the learner autonomy by assessing their peers through giving feedback in writing. The relevancy of this study to this research is showed from the peer's technique that has a contribution to trigger the autonomous learning.

As we have added the theory in the abstract that peer assessment can trigger student's autonomous learning, we argue that the gap of this study focused on the application of peer assessment in writing class in order to direct students to get involved within autonomous learning.

In this research, peer assessment was applied in writing class by considering some beneficial effects over student's writing proficiency within the autonomous learning context. To achieve the goal of present study, the following research questions were proposed:

1. How does peer assessment process in writing I class promote autonomous learning?
2. To what extent student's autonomous learning through peer assessment increase student's writing skill?

Literature Review

The Concept of Autonomous Learning

Autonomous derives from word "autonomy". Autonomous learning was first developed by Holec, which means that students take charge of their own learning by carrying out their own learning plans according to their own needs. As stated by Benson from O'Leary asserts that the term "autonomy" can also be used to refer to situations in which learners are responsible for all decisions and actions involved in their learning. Hughes wrote some characteristics of autonomous learner that emerge from his literature:

1. Self-awareness & reflection
2. Intrinsically motivated
3. The ability to plan and manage own learning
4. Institutional awareness, understanding requirements and procedures
5. Ability to formulate own question
6. Interdependence, the ability to work well with peers, to recognize when appropriate support and guidance from tutors and peers will be helpful
7. Critical thinking

8. Discipline & subject awareness, knowing how knowledge has been and is created in your subject area.

Peer Assessment

Peer assessment is an assessment of students by other students which is through a process of sharing and evaluating student's work. The process allows students to provide feedback on each other's work. By using this assessment, the role of teacher and students are getting involved together. Students are encouraged to work assessing and give any comments to their peer's work in order to construct a meaningful learning process. Jarvela, cited in McLoughlin (2014), defines that peer assessment tasks are alternative forms of assessment that involve individuals deciding what value their own, and each of their colleagues has contributed to a process or project, and enables students to engage in self-regulated activity. This view is also supported by Falchikov (2014) who defines peer assessment as a process where individuals rate their peers by agreeing on assessment criteria and then accurately apply the assessment.

In writing, peer assessment is considered as a valuable tool of learning to encourage students to be active and take a part of their own writing progress with their peers. (Ashley Landry, 2014). Furthermore, peer assessment is viewed as another way of challenging students dependence on the teacher for feedback and guidance in their language learning to emphasize learner autonomy and cooperation to get students involved and learn as much from each other as they can from the teacher (Hamid Ashraf, 2015).

As cited in Walker, several studies have been researched the main benefits attributed for peer assessment as below:

1. Davis, Bond, et.al assert that peer assessment is a fairer method for assessing group-work than tutor-assessment as the students often have a greater knowledge of the contributions made by their fellow group members
2. Falchikov states that peer assessment increases the students' responsibility and autonomy and allows for the development of both personal and interpersonal skills.
3. Topping explains that prior knowledge of the assessment procedure can led to greater clarity concerning what constitutes high-quality work, this is especially the case when concrete examples of assessed work are provided.
4. As Abson mentions that the knowledge that one is to be assessed by one's peers makes students work harder.

Apart from those advantages, peer assessment also has some disadvantages that might happen in learning process. Therefore, it is considered to know the weaknesses before we apply it. As elaborated in Jui Chi Peng (2010), a number of studies have revealed that on the other hand, students expressed dislike in criticizing friends and getting arbitrary markings. Cheng and Warren reported that students felt neither comfortable nor confident evaluating their peers due to their own perceptions of inability. A similar result was found in Orsmond and Merry's research. Freeman emphasized the importance of appropriate training and practice in peer assessment for achieving objectivity. Patri echoed this sentiment, stating that in order to ensure the effectiveness

of peer assessment, training and experience are necessary. In other words, peer assessment is time-consuming because training, preparation, and monitoring are needed. Brown identified subjectivity as the primary weakness of peer assessment which needs to be resolved. Two possible situations may occur. One is that students may either be too critical on themselves or too rodomontade. The other is that they simply do not know how to make an adequate assessment. It is also possible that students may feel anxious and resistant (at least in the beginning) toward peer assessment.

Research Method

Participant and Setting

This study was conducted at English Department of Tarbiyah Faculty of UIN A-Raniry. Population of this research is 119 fourth semester students of UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh academic year 2012-2013 which divided into four classes namely: unit 1 (34 students), unit 2 (27 students), unit 3 (29 students) and unit 4 (29 students). They were chosen as a population since they had Writing I class which was become a focused subject to apply peer assessment technique. The sample of this study is unit 1 as the experimental class and the unit 3 as the control class. In this research, the writer used a purposive sampling. She chose those classes as the sample according to several purposes as follow:

- a. Those classes fulfilled a required criterion to apply peer assessment effectively since they already had insights about how to write a paragraph properly. This criterion could ease the process of student's peer assessment in commenting, giving feedback, assessing their peer's writing.
- b. They are taught by the same English lecturer and with the same teaching method.
- c. They have almost the same English proficiency level.

The method used in this research is experimental teaching method. The researcher had three meetings for each class by teaching with different technique. She applied peer assessment technique in experimental class and traditional assessment in control group.

Data Collection

In this study, the writer used some instruments to collect the necessary data. The first one is test. The researcher conducted pre-test and post-test that used to measure before and after implementing peer assessment by giving assigned writing topics. Second, an observation was conducted by the researcher to investigate the student's autonomous learning environment. The researcher observed how the autonomous process ran in Writing class during the implementation of peer assessment. Last, the questionnaire was constructed and distributed to the experimental class students to obtain additional information about student's response toward the implementation of peer assessment for increasing autonomous learning.

Data Analysis

In this research, qualitative data analysis is used to describe autonomy behaviors which were derived from the stages of autonomy and metacognitive strategies in writing class.

AUTONOMY BEHAVIORS	VIEWED	NOT VIEWED
Access Information Sources Use the internet or other reference about writing.		
Evaluating Work Reviewing and determining the strengths and weaknesses in writing		
Using Discourse Discussing ideas with each other and teacher.		
Critiquing Providing feedback to other students about writing in a constructive way.		
Revising Return final draft after receiving writing feedback.		
Transcendence Studying outside classroom		
Involvement Creating their own writing rubrics based on their standard.		

Discussion

In this section, the writer focuses on the result of research data covering the observation, the pre-test and post-test, the questionnaire, and the discussion of the findings.

Analysis of Observation in Experimental Class

The writer fully described the process of autonomous learning in Writing I class to analyze the observational data. The detail of observational data from autonomy's behavior list above would be described below:

Access Information Sources

This behavior is included as the characteristic of autonomous learner that has a willingness to choose their own materials in internet or other reference which fits in them. Technology supports also important to enrich their insight about writing materials. Rubena asserts that internet offers many beneficial sources that make students survive outside the sheltered environment classroom when the teacher is no longer there for support. From the writer's observation, the students had low awareness of thinking in finding the writing material in other references. It was viewed that they were too lazy to look for another reference outside since they had so many random reasons including limited time to have an internet connection. In this occasion, the writer also considered about their interest over the course whether it was high or not. She thought that this student's behavior was still need improvement to foster the learner autonomy.

Using Discourse

As stated by Hammond, using discourse makes thinking more concrete and helps students learn to ask questions, identify gaps in their own knowledge, and learn from others' thoughts and ideas. In this observation, the writer gave the students opportunity to discuss materials they still could not understand. However, when the writer observed, the discussion between the writer and the students was not running smoothly. There were a few students who participated in questioning and raise ideas.

However, the rest were still remaining in silent because they were not confident to convey their thoughts directly.

Involvement

In this autonomy's activity, the student's involvement is needed to foster the autonomous learning in the classroom. After introducing the steps and showed various example of rubric for writing, the writer guided the students in discussing and deciding the rubrics criterion. Every student was divided into seven groups that consist of four members to get involved in deciding each rubric criterion that covered topic sentence, grammar, and organization of ideas.

CRITERIA	SCORE			
	A	B	C	D
Topic Sentence	Topic sentence is clear, in the right place and mentioned again in the last sentence	Topic sentence is unclear and not in the right place. No reference to topic in last sentence	Topic sentence is unclear and in the wrong place. The idea is not brought up again.	Topic sentence is unclear and in the wrong place. The ideas is not brought up again and hard to understand
Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling	There is no serious grammar, punctuation & spelling error	There are fewer than three grammar, punctuation & spelling errors	There are fewer than five grammar, punctuation & spelling errors.	There are more than five grammars, punctuation & spelling errors.
Organization of ideas	Ideas state in the paragraph and clearly support the main idea and have a clear meaning.	Ideas in the paragraph support the main idea, but could be organized more clearly.	A few ideas in the paragraph do not support the main idea or are out of place, causing a confusion of meaning.	Ideas in the paragraph are disorganized and do not support the main idea, causing a confusion of meaning.

From this activity, researcher viewed that not all the students enjoyed being involved in creating rubric. Three groups assumed that they still could not understand how to decide the criteria properly. To do this activity, they cooperate with the rest of groups about how to determine the rubric criteria.

Critiquing

The critiquing process is classified into social mediation in autonomous learning strategy. It is a context where students can play role to socially share their opinion, ideas, feedback about their friend's writing. Badger (2006) argues that besides beneficial effects on the quality of writing, peer feedback has advantages such as developing critical thinking, learner autonomy and social interaction among students. During the observation, almost every student was already doing well in commenting and giving constructive comment on their friend's writing. The plus point was seen because the students did this activity seriously. However, in first session of doing peer assessment, the way they commented and assessed was so vague and unclear. It means that their comment was full of generalities, providing little or no specific direction for revision or comments that simply praise or disagree with the writing. Here is the

example of various unhelpful comments that anonymously given by students in a paragraph about "My Hobby":

Comment A:

"Your grammar is quite good, I found nothing problem there. But you should repair."

Comment B:

"I think the topic sentence is clear."

Comment C:

"This writing is very good because the topic sentence is very clear. Then grammar and spelling are also clear. No serious error."

Then the writer rechecked their quality of feedback and reminded them how to assess constructively. Their commenting improvement can be seen in the following example:

Comment A:

"There are some error sentence structures. First example: "Are you have a hobby?". You should write "Do you have a hobby?" After that, please don't put "and" in the beginning of sentence.

Comment B:

"About your transition word, please put it in the right place. For example: "...in our country. Also to travel..." actually you should not stop it with period, just continue it."

Comment C:

"I think your ideas are good. But you have to write more ideas to make your paragraph become strong" (This comment showed so general, but useful)

Evaluating Work

This autonomy's behavior is categorized as metacognitive skill where it allows students to know exactly the learning step they go with. Hammond (2013) states that one common approach to developing metacognitive skills involves teaching study strategies that ask students to think about the way they learn best. Students must learn to become aware of their capabilities, strengths, and weaknesses as learners in order to develop as learners.

Based on the writer's observation, the willingness of students to review and determine their writing progress was developed through several course meetings. Here is some example of student's statements that reflect the strengths and the weaknesses of whole student's writing:

"Strengths: I think I'm done with the structure of topic sentence and controlling idea.

"Weaknesses: I still have a problem with grammar error. I still have a general word that I use in my writing, e.g : thing. Everything is a thing so it should be more specific So, I need to improve grammar and word choice. I suggest myself to keep practicing in writing and learn more about grammar" (Student's initial name: SH)

"Strenghts:

- *I'm done with the structure or grammatical but sometime I'm still making some mistakes*
- *I can give some example*
- *I prefer to write free writing"*

Weaknesses:

- *I can't think about new idea when I'm gonna write something*
- *I spend hours to write broadly*
- *Do not understand to create how to build introduction word, body word, conclusion, I don't know the difference of them.*

I think I need to learn step by step and need someone that wants to teach me about writing" (Student's initial name : MAR)

"My strength: I think I can arrange the words into beautiful sentences, but I know, in a time I got some grammar error.

My weaknesses: let me to be honest, I don't really watch main grammatical to make my writing better.

Things need to improve: paragraph organization and grammar. I will read more about grammatical and I hope as soon as possible it happened" (Student's initial name: NB)

Those statements above showed that the students know exactly their strengths and weaknesses of their writing. It made students find better strategies and solution for their writing progress.

Transcendence

This autonomy's stage is stated by Nunan, as cited in Chitasvili (2007), explains about the learner responsibility to learn beyond the classroom and make links between the content of classroom learning and become fully autonomous learner. The result showed that the student's interest to learn outside classroom such a social media was viewed since they felt enjoy and confident interacting and learning over their writing progress.

Here is the student's interaction in commenting and giving feedback for their partner's writing that being captured by the writer:





Revising

After receiving numerous feedbacks from their peers, the students revised their writing that they posted in Facebook. In this activity, only several students showed their final draft to the writer without being required. They raised many questions over their draft and asked more suggestions for improvement. Accordingly, the writer concluded that their awareness of thinking was high. The students became aware and responsible for learning progress to improve their writing skill.

Analysis of Observation in Control Class

From the observation, she saw the students act very dependent on lecturer. The control students were under lecturer's control thoroughly. The students waited for the decision from the lecturer about their learning constructs such as what is to be learned, how the class is to be run and what is to be tested. The control class students also viewed passive in responding their learning. They only wrote the topic required and listened the lecturer's explanation. In this process, the existing of autonomous learning was not viewed since they often limit themselves to actively involved in writing stages. If they had a problem, they received help from the teacher.

Analysis of Test

Analysis of Pre-test

a. The Experimental Class

Based on the data above, the mean of the score can be calculated as follow:

$$\begin{aligned}\bar{X}_1 &= \frac{\sum X_1}{n} \\ \bar{X}_1 &= \frac{1831}{28} = 65,39\end{aligned}$$

b. The Control Class

Based on the data above, the mean of the score can be calculated as follow:

$$\begin{aligned}\bar{X}_2 &= \frac{\sum X_2}{n} \\ \bar{X}_2 &= \frac{1526}{23} = 66,34\end{aligned}$$

In line with the calculation above, it was found that the mean of the experimental class (\bar{X}_1) is 65,39 and the mean of the control class (\bar{X}_2) is 66,34. The range of both scores did not significantly show the differences. In other words, the achievement of the control class students was in the same writing proficiency level as in the experimental class when the pre-test was conducted.

Analysis Post-Test

a. The Experimental Class

Based on the table 4.4, the mean of the score can be found as follows:

- Mean of post-test in the experimental class

$$\begin{aligned}\bar{X}_1 &= \frac{\sum X_1}{n} \\ \bar{X}_1 &= \frac{2165}{28} = 77,32\end{aligned}$$

According to the calculation above, it could be seen that the mean score of the experimental class' post-test (\bar{X}_1) is 77,32. The result showed that the experimental class students' score of the post-test (77,32) was higher than the pre-test (65,39).

b. The Control Class

Based on the table 4.4, the mean of the score can be found as follows:

- Mean of post-test in the control class

$$\begin{aligned}\bar{X}_2 &= \frac{\sum X_2}{n} \\ \bar{X}_2 &= \frac{1547}{23} = 67,26\end{aligned}$$

According to the calculation above, it can be seen that the mean score of the control class post-test (\bar{X}_2) is 67,26. The result shows that the control class students' score of the post-test (67,26) was higher than the pre-test (66,34).

Analysis of Questionnaire

The detail of questionnaires will be elaborated in the following result tables:

Table 1. Student's Likeness Towards Writing in English

No	Options	F	%
1	a. Strongly Agree	6	21,42
	b. Agree	18	64,28
	c. Disagree	4	14,28
	d. Strongly Disagree	-	-
Total		28	100%

Table 2. Student's Likeness Towards Learning English Writing Autonomously

No	Options	F	%
2	a. Strongly Agree	3	10,71
	b. Agree	15	53,57
	c. Disagree	8	28,57
	d. Strongly Disagree	2	7,14
Total		28	100%

Table 3. Students's Interest towards The Application of Peer Assessment Technique in Learning English Writing Autonomously

No	Options	F	%
3	a. Strongly Agree	5	17,85
	b. Agree	15	53,57
	c. Disagree	8	28,57
	d. Strongly Disagree	-	-
Total		28	100%

Table 4. Having No Difficulty in Assessing Peer's Writing in doing Peer Assessment

No	Options	F	%
4	a. Strongly Agree	-	-
	b. Agree	10	35,71
	c. Disagree	18	64,28
	d. Strongly Disagree	-	-
Total		28	100%

Table 5. Having No Difficulty Towards Commenting Peer's Writing in doing Peer Assessment

No	Options	F	%
5	a. Strongly Agree	-	-
	b. Agree	12	42,85
	c. Disagree	15	53,57
	d. Strongly Disagree	1	3,57
Total		28	100%

Table 6. Students's Convenience Towards Assessing Peer's Writing in doing Peer Assessment

No	Options	F	%
6	a. Strongly Agree	1	3,57
	b. Agree	14	50
	c. Disagree	13	46,42
	d. Strongly Disagree	-	-
Total		28	100%

Table 7. Students's Convenience Towards Commenting Peer's Writing in doing Peer Assessment

No	Options	F	%
7	a. Strongly Agree	1	3,57
	b. Agree	18	64,28
	c. Disagree	9	32,14

d. Strongly Disagree		
Total	28	100%

Table 8. Student's Opinion Whether Peer Assessment Motivates Students in Developing English Writing Skill

No	Options	F	%
8	a. Strongly Agree	11	39,28
	b. Agree	17	60,71
	c. Disagree	-	0
	d. Strongly Disagree	-	0
Total		28	100%

Table 9. Student's Opinion Whether Peer Assessment Can Improve Student's English Writing Skill

No	Options	F	%
9	a. Strongly Agree	12	42,85
	b. Agree	16	57,14
	c. Disagree	-	0
	d. Strongly Disagree	-	0
Total		28	100%

Table 10. Student's Opinion Towards The Apropriateness of Peer Assessment Technique for Learning English Writing

No	Options	F	%
9	a. Strongly Agree	12	42,85
	b. Agree	15	53,57
	c. Disagree	1	3,57
	d. Strongly Disagree	-	0
Total		28	100%

Conclusions

Peer assessment can bring and increase the autonomous effect especially in Writing class. It was proved from the writer's field notes during the observation in which the autonomous learning situation was viewed from behaviors that indicated as learner autonomy. Also, autonomous learning through peer assessment brings an outcome to student's writing skill. Peer assessment is also considered useful to facilitate student-student interactions that will increasingly aid students in becoming more skillful peer assessors. In order to improve students' ability and capability in learning English, especially in learning writing, the writer proposed some suggestions that could be applied in teaching learning process as follows:

1. Teachers should construct more alternative assessment techniques and materials in teaching English writing in order to encourage students to be an autonomous learner. Designing an assessment of autonomy such a peer assessment is needed to be applied since it brings significant outcome for student's writing skill. This method suggest that students can build skills in the process, increase their level of responsibility, and facilitate their own learning effectively.
2. Autonomous learning through peer assessment has a potential to reduce and save teacher's time. This teaching strategy makes the process grading will be much less time-consuming. It also can create a learning system to be more independent, continuous, and responsible without a tutor's control.

3. Peer assessment is likely to be an appropriate technique to put in practice for another English skills. A better implementation will bring a positive result either for students or teachers. For instances, in fostering learner autonomy in English skills, the teacher is suggested to get involved the students in an active way to set their assessment by creating a rubric. Also, giving them opportunities to reflect over their skill about things they have achieved well or which one needs more improvement. This will activate student's metacognition as a essential requirement of learner autonomy in language learning.

In this global era, the learning process that involves technology supported helps the student to learn autonomously. An essential part of making students as independent learners is to help them become responsible for their own learning; motivate themselves, know their strengths and weaknesses, which is done through interaction with their classmates. The internet, through chat or e-mail, or social media such as Facebook offer a wide space that can continuously provide them the option of communicating with their teacher or with other classmates outside classroom.

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