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*Research Article*

# “Did They Review My Work Correctly?”: Students’ Perspectives towards the Implementation of Peer Review

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## Abstract

The notion of utilizing peer review to assist student’s performance in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms has been the focus of research, yet there are still some shortcomings emerged in its implementation from both students’ and teachers’ sides. This study aims to determine students’ perspectives towards the implementation of peer review technique in their English writing class. The relevant data of this study are obtained by giving online survey questionnaire consisting of 14 questions regarding their perception towards the implementation of peer review technique in the students’ previous *Argumentative Writing* classroom of Syiah Kuala University. The responses are analyzed by employing both of quantitative and qualitative method. The result of the analysis indicates that most of the students perceive that peer review is useful for the success of their learning, while at the same time 50% of them still get anxiety while giving feedback due to lack of English competence. Students’ responses also suggest that teacher intervention is the most essential factor in giving appropriate feedback since students are unconfident of their friends work and still favor teacher’s correction.

## Keywords

Peer review; students’ perspectives; English competence; anxiety; teacher intervention

## Introduction

Peer review widely takes part in the scope of language learning as discussions among scholars focus on how this matter improves the learner’s performance in the target language. Duchesne, McMaugh, Bochner, and Krause (2013) state that the growth of the use of peer review in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes is motivated by the shift of learning orientation from teacher-centered to student-centered. The term peer review per se has been well-known to refer as activity undertaken by learners in providing revisions, editing, and responses to their peers’ writing work (Philp, Adams, & Iwashita, 2014). This provision has been associated with beneficial outputs such as activating students’ awareness of their current linguistic performance (Philp et al., 2014) and may produce more understandable and negotiable feedbacks compared to those that are produced by teachers (Liang, 2010).

What is mentioned in Philp et al.'s (2014) and Duchesne et al.'s (2013) studies is in line with the perspective of how feedbacks from peers induce student's critical thinking by giving valuable correction. Moreover, those who attempt to accommodate their peer's work with their reviews are possibly to enhance their own performance in writing. Since cooperation is taken into account in successful learning outcome, peer reviews are also perceived more specific and tolerable as these are given by learner's own friends with whom they always study (Rollinson, cited in Behin and Hamidi, 2011).

Despite its numerous positive results, peer review, however, indeed reflects in some prevalent drawbacks primarily surrounding the EFL area (e.g. Allen & Mills, 2016; Chong, 2017; Fariduddin & Parlindungan, 2018; Ghahari & Farokhnia, 2017; Zhao, 2014). Accuracy from feedbacks given are debatable, as an instance, and such low accuracy is found in Allen & Mills' (2016) study of Japanese student's peer correction. It was caused by inadequacy of language proficiency possessed by the learners. Consequently, instead of improving the quality of their friends' writing composition, those poor feedbacks, without intervention from teachers might hamper their English learning development process. A similar circumstance is also found in Chong (2017) study of the feedbacks from Hong Kong students in which he located some errors committed by them. Though most of the mentioned flaws of peer review may be overcome if a facilitator or teacher presents in the process of reviewing peer's work, and attentively chooses each working pair (Zhao, 2014), the result of this effort has yet to be proved to enhance student's feedback validity.

The confusion is also escalated in the condition of determining specific procedures on when and in what situations support and efforts from teachers are needed to involve peer review without students being unmotivated and reluctant to participate. The reason may vary from students' perception of their own language competence and proficiency as shown in Ghahari and Farokhnia's (2017) study of their Iranian students who hesitate to correct their friends' works due to feeling anxious of their own ability in English. Another reason why it seems pretty difficult for students to adopt peer review in their learning is that they favor teacher over friends to assess their work which then leads to the assumption that students still familiarize themselves in the shift of teacher-centred to student-centred focus of learning (Azarnoosh, 2013).

To this extent, the nature of peer review still unfamiliar for students, and thus, they are unable to really understand its benefit and this becomes one of the factor of why some particular EFL learning are unable to benefit from it (McGarr & Clifford, 2013; Azarnoosh, 2013). Teachers, as the facilitator in the classroom, are expected to optimize the utilization of peer review technique and deliver relevant insight to give meaningful and comprehensive understanding of the importance of feedback from learner's friends. However, the efforts made by teachers are not optimized especially in EFL learning scope (Zhao, 2014) as there are many cases where teachers ignore and refuse to give further attention after students give feedback to their friends' works. This matters then are still causing hardships in implementing a proper peer review technique in English classroom.

Regardless many obstacles and problems encountered in the implementation of giving and receiving peer reviews, this technique are still preferred and continue to be used worldwide (McGarr & Clifford, 2013). Thus, the researchers found it significant to investigate English students' point of view in regards the implementation of peer review technique in their writing classroom. Furthermore, having to determine the factors influencing the provision of proper peer review according to the students also plays an important role in assisting students to grasp its full benefit. On the other side, determining those factors might benefit the teacher as well by properly implementing it to improve their students' English ability.



## Method

The perspectives of the effectiveness of peer review are investigated from university students' responses after they took a writing class. The justification for this criterion is to suit the purpose of study which is to examine the effectiveness of the implementation of peer review in a writing class. The students involving in this study are English Education students from Syiah Kuala University. At the time of collecting the data, the students just finished taking an *Argumentative Writing* class, in which the teacher have applied peer review technique in some of their meetings. The number of students who submit their reflections on the peer review technique implemented in their class is eight students, consisting of six females and two males. The inclusion of this small number of respondents is aimed to deeply and comprehensively examine the submitted responses. The students are 20 to 22 years old and they share similar first language, Indonesian, and have relative equal level of English proficiency, B1 referring to their TOEFL score.

The responses are collected through an online survey questionnaire. The questionnaire used is the adoption version of McGarr and Clifford's (2013) which seeks students' opinions on the implementation of peer review. The rating scale used in their study is transformed into open-ended questions, in consideration to obtain richer data and to allow the students to express their opinion more freely, in which rating scale cannot do. In addition, by referring to previous literatures that state teachers' role in peer review process is important, the questionnaire used in this study also add some questions asking the students the things that their teacher did or did not do during the peer review implementation. The number of questions is also shrank from 22 questions to 14 questions by eliminating relatively similar questions which can result to the easiness of the students in answering them. Since the students are deemed to have enough proficiency to comprehend and answer in English, the questions are presented in English. The questionnaire is sent to students' personal email addresses and they can contact the researchers back if they need further explanation about the questions.

Once all the responses received, the researchers analyze the data using both quantitative and qualitative technique. The quantitative one is carried out to measure the number of students who have the same perspectives over the implementation of peer review. This is done for the questions which start by yes or no questions. On the other hand, the responses given by the students in the open-ended questions is be analyzed following the procedure of open-ended question analysis in Brown (2009). Firstly, a comprehensive analysis over the responses to figure out similar codes is carried out. After that, common categories are established for groups of the similar codes. Finally, these codes are elaborated one by one.

## Results and Discussion

The results of this study indicate that most students perceive peer review beneficial for their writing learning and improvement. The students express that they love receiving feedbacks from their friends despite the majority of them are not certain about the quality of the feedbacks. Nevertheless, half of the number of students feel anxious to perform peer review even though they have carried out this method previously. The number is also split into half when asked to choose teacher review over peer review. The number, however, is slightly higher for those who feel they do not possess sufficient skills or knowledge to assess their peers' writing.

Apart from the students' perspective on their own contribution towards the implementation of peer review, they believe that teacher's interference is contributing to the effectiveness of the implementation. This statement is conveyed by almost all students in this study and they are certain that the teacher's intervention could overcome the problems existing in peer review implementation. Most students agree that their teacher has done such interference, including describing the advantages



of peer review and elaborating how to do peer review. Nevertheless, the number is split when they were asked whether their teacher look at their English proficiency before pairing them up and examine their peers' review to give further feedback (See Table 1).

*Table 1. The responses of students for yes or no questions*

Question	N	Yes	No	Not Sure
Prior to this class, have you ever carried out peer review?	8	8	0	0
Did you feel anxious to assess your peers' writing?	8	4	4	0
Did you think you possess sufficient skills and knowledge to assess your peers' writing?	8	2	6	0
Did you love your writing being assessed by your peers?	8	7	0	1
Did you think your peers provide you an accurate review?	8	2	0	6
Do you prefer your teacher to assess your writing compared to your peers?	8	4	4	0
Did your teacher describe the advantages of peer review?	8	6	2	0
Did your teacher elaborate the procedures of the peer review?	8	6	2	0
Did your teacher look at students' English proficiency when pairing them?	8	0	4	4
Did your teacher examine the review provided by your peers and offer further follow-up?	8	4	4	0
Do you think peer review is beneficial for your writing learning and improvement?	8	7	0	1
Do you think teacher should provide interference to overcome the weakness of peer review?	8	7	0	1

The analysis for the students' responses in explaining their preferences for the previous answers result to the following findings. The most prevalent factor that motivates these preferences is the students' English proficiency. This factor is clearly shown as the general reason for students who are nervous to perform peer review. This indication can be seen from this response sample:

I'm anxious if I make errors in reviewing my friends' writings and may miss the mistakes that my friends do. (P3)

On the other hand, students who are not anxious to perform peer review deem that peer review will give them more benefits for their writing improvement. They state the advantage of delivering opinions freely and being exposed with more ideas as the examples. It is as shown in this response:

I can express my opinions and ideas without being afraid by performing this (peer review) and I can discuss them freely with my friends. (P1)

While it is clear that students' English proficiency plays a role for their confidence in reviewing their friends' writing, some students also point out that more than linguistic knowledge is needed in reviewing someone's writing. They believe the knowledge of clarity of idea presentation as well as organization is also important, as stated by this student:

I believe I can easily spot my friends' mistakes in grammar but I find it difficult to comment on their content, such as whether this is important or not, interesting or not. But I think this is more important in writing. (P2)

Despite most students are not certain with the quality of their friends' review, interestingly, they consider peer review beneficial for them to spot their mistakes to then make correction on them. However, one student argues that this benefit is indeed can be achieved if the person provides accurate feedback:

I would say it depends on who assesses my writing. If he provides feedbacks that are accurate and can develop my writing, I'd be happy love to be reviewed. However, if he does not have enough knowledge to review my writing, I'd hate it. (P5)

Not only does the factor of English proficiency influence the students' confidence and trust in carrying out peer review, but it also leads them to choose teacher's review over their peer's review. They claim that teacher possesses more skills and knowledge, and can provide more critical feedbacks. This claim is strongly conveyed by this student:

I absolutely choose it (choose teacher's review over peer review), because it is not arguable that teacher has better knowledge and compared to my peers. (P8)

Nonetheless, some students still deem that the reviews provided by their peers are worthwhile to help them in drafting their writing. Friends can be good readers and they can express their opinion about the ideas of the writing, including the grammatical aspects as well. This perspective is as shown in this comment:

I find peer review is helpful in the stage of drafting my writing. My friends can provide me a lot of insights for my writing from many points of views. (P7)

While English proficiency becomes the most prevalent factor for students having different opinions on peer review, another factor that underlies these differences is students' relationship bias. The responses submitted by the students show that some of them perceive this bias influences the fairness aspect of peer review. This effect is the result of uneasiness felt by the students to assess their friends' work, as presented in these responses:

I feel uneasy to review my friends' writing because I can hurt their feeling. (P4)

I think we will hesitant to perfectly correct the mistakes since it is the work of our close friends. (P5)

Nevertheless, other students assume the close relationship they have with their friends helps them to easily express opinions on their friends' work. They also do not feel intimidated to accept truthful feedbacks since they are from their close friends:

I like my writing being corrected by my friends because I am close to them and it makes me feel relaxed to receive their feedbacks. (P1)

Peer review makes us easy to correct our friends' work since we can be more honest to them and do not feel shy to say what we want to say. (P3)

The responses above indicate that the students' focus on their own abilities that affect the quality of feedbacks in peer review. Nevertheless, they begin to consider that the role of teacher is also significant in a good implementation of peer review after answering the last six questions of the questionnaire. Most of the students agree that their teacher has performed some useful actions during

the peer review process, including explaining the procedures and benefits of it, but they perceive that these actions are not optimal. This assumption can be drawn from the following responses:

I didn't receive any rubrics from my teacher, so it made me difficult to review my friends' writing only from my own opinion. (P1)

My teacher did tell us that the feedbacks we gave could improve our friends' writing, but he didn't point out what kinds of feedbacks should we give. So we just write 'it's great, 'it's interesting.'" (P2)

The results found in this study align with the previous studies that investigate the topic of peer review implementation. The major factor that may hamper a successful peer review found in this study, which is students' English proficiency, in fact, is also the most prevalent factor appeared in the studies of Allen and Mills (2016), Azarnoosh (2013), Chong (2017), Ghahari and Farokhnia (2017), and Zhao (2014). The factor of English proficiency in this study is found out to have a contribution towards students' confidence in giving feedbacks to their peers as well as towards their trust in the feedbacks given by their peers. This findings again are similar with the results found by Allen and Mills (2016), in term of the effect of English proficiency on the quality of feedbacks, and Azarnoosh (2013), Chong (2017), and Zhao (2014), in term of the confidence and trust in carrying out peer review resulted by different English proficiency. In addition, another factor that influences students' perception on the implementation of peer review found in this study, which is friendship bias, is also found to be a problem in Azarnoosh (2013).

This study, besides, supports the findings of previous studies on peer review, also answers some suggestions proposed in the studies. As such, Allen and Mills (2016) predict that the persistency of students' English proficiency becoming the main obstacle in implementing peer review may be caused by the ignorance of teachers for this factor when pairing the students. This prediction is found true in this study where almost all students state that they are not certain that their teacher consider their English proficiency before pairing them. In addition, this study suggests that peer review is more appropriate to be conducted in advanced class. Not only because it can assure the problem of students' English proficiency, but also it is caused by the absence of some teachers in providing further feedback on the review given by their students, as found in this study. Thus, this study again answers the suggestion delivered by Zhao (2014), which states that teacher's further feedback is crucial in solving the problem of students' English proficiency.

Teacher's role in peer review implementation is further shown essential to ensure its effectiveness. Besides teachers are expected to provide further feedback on students' review, this study also highlights the importance of teacher's explanation about the benefits of peer review and correct procedures to carry it out. The students in this study believe that when their teacher provide sufficient intervention, including the two mentioned, it can overcome the problems existing in peer review. Hence, this study responses to McGarr and Clifford's (2013) inquiry, in term of the necessity of teacher's explanation on peer review benefits, and to Zhao's (2014) solution, in term of the importance of teacher's elaboration on peer review procedures.

Some pedagogical implications can be drawn from this study. Teachers' consideration on factors that can impede the success of peer review, such as students' English proficiency, confidence, and trust, is greatly encouraged because these factors constantly occur in the implementation of peer review. Referring to students' English proficiency in pairing them is crucial in assuring their satisfaction due to the accurate reviews produced and received by the students. The provision of teacher's feedback on students' review, in addition, can help to solve the problem caused by imbalanced students' English proficiency. Moreover, thorough explanation on the procedures and benefits of peer review is also needed as they influence the effectiveness of peer review implementation. On the other hand, students



should be also active in the process of peer review since this method is strongly believed to benefit them in term of offering more inputs and assisting in improving their writing quality. In short, teacher's intervention and students' activeness is quite needed in implementing a meaningful peer review process. Nonetheless, these implications perfect fit the teaching context in this study scope, thus to ensure the appropriateness of these implications outside this study scope, further research is needed to carried out.

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