

Integrating Blogging into Peer Assessment on College Students' English Writing

Su-Lien Liao

Abstract—Most of college students in Taiwan do not have sufficient English proficiency to express themselves in written English. Teachers spent a lot of time correcting students' English writing, but the results are not satisfactory. This study aims to use blogs as a teaching and learning tool in written English. Before applying peer assessment, students should be trained to be good reviewers. The teacher starts the course by posting the error analysis of students' first English composition on blogs as the comment models for students. Then the students will go through the process of drafting, composing, peer response and last revision on blogs. Evaluation Questionnaires and interviews will be conducted at the end of the course to see the impact and students' perception for the course.

Keywords—Blog, Peer assessment, English writing, Error analysis

I. INTRODUCTION

WHEN writing in English for EFL learners, they need not only accurate words and phrases, but also correct grammar to make themselves be fully understood. It is not easy for most students in Taiwan to have such English proficiency. The statistics of CEEC (College Entrance Exam Center) shows that the average scores of English composition are 7 to 8 out of 20 points. Less than 8% examinees can get 12 out of 20 points. That means that most examinees in Taiwan do not have sufficient English writing proficiency.

Teachers spent a lot of time correcting students' English writing, but the results are not satisfactory. Lin, Lu and Lee point out that is because of the big class and the pressure of fixed curriculum [1]. Ho, Liao, and Nakasone suggest that teachers can adopt the method of peer assessment to error correction [2]. In peer assessment, the students who are reviewed feel less stressful than being reviewed by a teacher. The levels of a peer may be a more accessible and motivating example than that of a teacher. The students who take the role of a reviewer would challenge their own language skills while correcting or commenting on other students' work. But applying peer assessment in class also takes a lot of time. Therefore, Wen suggests that online peer assessment might be a solution to this problem [3]. With the popularity of smart phone and online social network, blog become an important instrument for people to socialize, to get information and to express their opinions. Internet is now a must in students' life. This study investigates not only the effects of integrating blogging into peer assessment on college students' English

writing but also students' attitude toward online peer assessment.

The rest of this article is organized as follows. Section II reviews the theory of peer assessment and error analysis. Section III describes the methods and instruments employed in the study. Section IV presents the results and the finding from the study. Section V provides a summary of conclusions.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Error Analysis

Error Analysis proposed by Corder [4], aims to analyze learners' errors in order to understand the process of second language acquisition. It is an alternative contrastive analysis which is an approach influenced by behaviorism. Contrastive analysis uses the formal distinctions between learners' first language and second language to predict their errors. Error analysis argues that contrastive analysis cannot predict a great majority of learners' errors. Corder suggests that there are three functions of analyzing learners' errors. The first function is for the educators to understand the process of learner's second or foreign language learning. The second one is to identify the strategies that the language learners use. And the third one is for learners to review their learning, and learn from their errors.

Corder [5] specifies the steps of error analysis: collection of data, identification of errors, description of errors, explanations of errors, and evaluation of errors. These five steps are still widely used today. Remediation is added as the sixth steps by Gassn and Selinker [6]. Weiner [7] proposed that an individual has his/her perceptions as to why he/she succeeded or failed at an activity. The perceptions also determine the amount of effort he/she will engage in similar activities in the future.

B. Peer Assessment

Topping defines peer assessment as a group of similar academic background students play the roles of learners and educator at the same time in a counterfactual social situation [8]. The advantages of applying peer assessment in class are as follows. First, it can save instructor's time [9]. All the works or tests can be viewed together instead of viewing one work or test by the teacher. Therefore, the students can take their time viewing their classmate's work thoroughly. Second, peer assessment is a strategy of cooperative learning. The students who are reviewed feel less stressful than being reviewed by teachers. The feedback given by a peer enhances the reviewed students think deeply. It helps the students construct their knowledge [10]. Third, the levels of a peer may be a more accessible and motivating example than that of a teacher.

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Teacher's evaluation sometimes makes the students focus more on the grades instead of the feedback itself [11]. Fourth, the students who take the role of a reviewer would challenge their own language skills while correcting or commenting on other students' work.

C. Online Peer Assessment

Although there are a lot of advantages of applying peer assessment in class, some previous researches also indicate that there are also some obstacles to prevent students from adopting peer assessment [12]. First, under the tight schedule, heavy teaching load, and constraints from exams, it is hard for teachers to apply such a time-consuming activity in class. Furthermore, Chinese students are reluctant to say or receive something negative in public because they are afraid of losing face [13]. There are some advantages of applying online peer assessment, such as, the independence of time and space, less stress of quick response and losing face in public, and improvement of negotiation ability. Owing to the inadequate English knowledge of students, some scholars proposed that the training course or practice for peer assessment is important to the effect of peer assessment [14]. Before applying peer assessment, teachers should spend time training students to learn and familiarize the strategies to review and assess their peer's English writing [15].

III. METHODS

A. Participants

Participants involved in this study are thirty-seven freshmen from a university of technology in central Taiwan. three out of thirty-seven participants passed the Intermediate Level General English Proficiency Tests (GEPT), ten out of thirty-seven participants passed the Elementary Level. That means one third of the participants are intermediate English learners.

B. Instruments

1) *Platform*: The instructional blog of school (Learning Management System) is adopted as the platform of this research. The functions and tools for teachers are: announcement, teaching material, course information, course calendar, forums, teams, assignments, survey, quizzes, and the statistics of attendance, members, and grading. Fig. 1 shows the functions and tools for students.

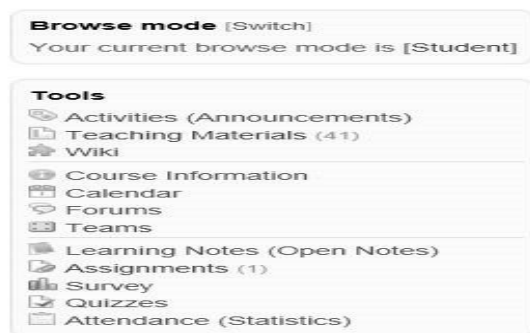


Fig. 2 Tools of the Learning Management System

The functions and tools for students are: announcements and activities, teaching materials, course information, course calendar, forums, teams, open notes, assignments, survey, quizzes, and statistics of attendance. Students and the teacher can post articles and messages, exchange opinions and conduct the online peer assessment on the platform. If the students have any problems using the platform they can pop the questions on line; the assistants from computer center will offer technical help to students.

2) *Interview*: Informal interviews were undertaken during the semester in order to understand students' opinions about peer assessment.

3) *Questionnaire*: In order to identify students' responses to peer assessment, Wang's questionnaire was referred to [16]. Five students did the pilot test and three experienced teacher reviewed the draft of the questionnaire. The questionnaire survey was conducted before the end of the semester.

4) *ATLAS.ti software*: In order to understand students' accuracy of written English before and after the reearch, ATLAS.ti was conducted in this study to collect and analyze students' errors in written English. ATLAS.ti is a qualitative data analysis and research software. Lin points out the four characteristics of ATLAS.ti [17]: visualization, integration, serendipity and exploration. It is a powerful workbench for the qualitative analysis of large amount of textual, graphical, audio and video data. It offers a variety of sophisticated tools for accomplishing the tasks associated with any systematic approach to data.

C. Procedures

The participants took the researcher's Freshman English course in fall of 2012. During the first month of the semester, all the students have to get familiar with the function of the instructional blog of school and they have to post their English autobiography on the blog by the end of the month.

In order to classify the various errors in students' composition; also to train students to learn and familiarize the strategies to review and assess their peer's English writing, ATLAS.ti software is used to code and group the errors. Fig. 2 shows an example of coding the errors with ATLAS.ti.



Fig. 2 Coding the errors with ATLAS.ti

Then all the students were divided into six groups. Each student had to post their monthly assignment on the blog. The group members should review other members' compositions and give feedback. After the peer assessing process, each student had to rewrite their composition and post it on the blog again. The writing-peer assessing-rewriting process went through for three times. The topics of their compositions were: My favorite city in Taiwan; An unforgettable experience, and New Year resolution. Researcher coded and grouped students' errors in students' fourth compositions and then compared the results with that of students' first compositions.

A questionnaire survey was conducted in the last class in order to understand students' opinions on peer assessment.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Student's opinions

As shown in Table I, 38% of the participants are very satisfied and 50% of them are satisfied with applying online peer assessment in class, while only 2% of them are not satisfied with online peer assessment. 36% of the participants are very satisfied and 52% of them are satisfied with the cooperation among group members. 38% of the students are very satisfied and 52% are satisfied with the online discussing activities. 40% of the students strongly agree and 51% of the students agree that the teacher offers sufficient technical assists.

TABLE I. STUDENTS' OPINIONS ON PEER ASSESSMENT

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unknown	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q1. I am satisfied with applying online peer assessment in English writing activity.	38%	50%	10%	2%	0%
Q2. I am satisfied with the cooperation among group members.	36%	52%	7%	5%	0%
Q3. I am satisfied with the discussing activities online.	38%	52%	8%	2%	0%
Q4. I think the teacher offers sufficient technical assist.	40%	51%	7%	2%	0%
Q5. I think the teacher provides enough guidance on helping students familiarize with strategies and knowledge of online peer assessment.	38%	50%	7%	5%	0%
Q6. I am satisfied with my performance and participation in online peer assessment.	35%	38%	12%	5%	0%
Q7. I think I learn a lot from online peer assessment.	35%	38%	12%	5%	0%

B. Changes in student's performance

Analyze the errors in students' first composition which is without online peer assessed and fourth composition which is with online peer assessed. Then compare the outcomes. It shows the changes in students' performance in English writing. Table II shows students' non-verbal errors decreased tremendously. Punctuation mark errors decrease from twenty-three to five; errors in the upper or lower case decrease from twenty-two to three.

TABLE II. NON-VERBAL ERRORS

Types of Errors	First Composition	Fourth Composition
Punctuation Marks Errors	23	5
Errors in the Upper or Lower Case	22	3
Total	45	8

Table III shows students' semantic improvements. Verb errors decreased from forty-seven to nineteen; noun errors

38% of the participants strongly agree and 50% of them agree that the teacher provides enough guidance on helping students familiarize with strategies and knowledge of online peer assessment. 35% of the participants are very satisfied and 38% of them are satisfied with their performance and participation in online peer assessment. 38% of the participants strongly agree and 50% of them agree that they learn a lot from online peer assessment. No students express strongly negative feedback to online peer assessment. It shows students' positive reactions and attitude toward applying online peer assessment in practicing English writing.

During the interviews conducted during the semester, students proposed that at first they are unconfident of reviewing other students' compositions. They did not think that their peers can review and assess their composition properly, either. After the training course, students felt less stressful; and they were willing to try. Owing to students' habits of using online social software, they were content with the reviewing, discussing, peer assessing activities on instructional blog. They thought it was less stressful than giving feedback in public. They enjoyed the discussing process very much. Some students said that they even started to review their own compositions that they seldom did before. They are content with the changes in their ways of learning, their attitudes toward English writing, and the assists they can offer to their peers.

decreased from thirty-one to ten; adjective errors decreased from seventeen to ten; preposition errors decreased from thirteen to five, and adverb errors decreased from twelve to three. Students became more familiar with the meanings of words after the practice of online peer assessment.

TABLE III. SEMANTIC ERRORS

Types of Errors	First Composition	Fourth Composition
Verb errors	47	19
Noun errors	31	10
Adjective errors	17	5
Preposition errors	13	5
Adverb errors	12	3
Pronoun errors	6	1
Spelling errors	3	0
Auxiliary errors	2	0
Conjunction errors	2	1
Phrase errors	2	1
Total	135	45

As we can see in Table III, students' syntactic improvements

are not as satisfactory as the improvements of the other two types. It shows that in peer assessment, it is not easy for students' to figure out and correct the syntactic errors of other students. Only a small amount of syntactic errors were found out and corrected during the process of online peer assessment.

TABLE IV. SYNTACTIC ERRORS

Types of Errors	First	Fourth
	Composition	Composition
Verb usage errors	55	42
Redundant words	41	37
Article errors	28	14
Tense errors	23	11
Run-on sentences	22	14
Singular or plural form errors	20	8
Chinglish	20	17
Word-order errors	19	14
Conjunction usage errors	16	10
Ambiguity in menaing	12	9
Incomplete sentences	8	6
Subject errors	7	4
Adjective usage errors	4	2
Adverb usage errors	2	1
Total	277	189

V. CONCLUSION

The findings of the research are as follows. First, students' responses to online peer assessment are positive. Second, students are content with their performance and participation in online peer assessment. Third, students propose that training course is essential to the success of online peer assessment. Fourth, students do well in correcting other's non-verbal and semantic errors, but not so well in applying online peer assessment to review other students' compositions. It shows the inadequacy English knowledge of students. Knowing how to use words and phrases in real context is essential to successful writings. Extensive reading can provide adequate exposure of target language to students. It helps students to consolidate previous learned language.

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