

Anonymous online peer reviews in writing classes:

A literature overview

การให้เพื่อนประเมินงานเขียนโดยไม่เปิดเผยชื่อทางออนไลน์ใน รายวิชาการเขียน: มุมมองจากงานวรรณกรรมที่เกี่ยวข้อง

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บทคัดย่อ

การศึกษาที่ผ่านมาชี้ให้เห็นถึงคุณค่าของการให้เพื่อนประเมินงานเขียนทางออนไลน์ว่าสามารถช่วยพัฒนาการเรียนรู้ของผู้เรียน โดยเฉพาะในด้านการเขียนภาษาอังกฤษ ในบทความนี้ ผู้เขียนได้ทบทวนวรรณกรรมที่เกี่ยวข้องเพื่อศึกษาการให้เพื่อนประเมินงานเขียนทางออนไลน์ ทั้งนี้ ผู้เขียนได้ศึกษาแนวคิดหลักๆ ที่เกี่ยวข้อง ความหมายของคำว่า การให้เพื่อนประเมินงานเขียน รวมถึงศึกษาประเด็นคุณค่าในการเรียนรู้ ความท้าทายในการใช้วิธีการนี้ การส่งเสริมกระบวนการเรียนรู้ และการประยุกต์ใช้ในห้องเรียน บทความนี้ยังนำเสนอโมดูลเวิร์คชอปในโมเดล (ระบบการจัดการเรียนการสอนผ่านเว็บ) เพื่อประยุกต์ใช้กิจกรรมการให้เพื่อนประเมินงานเขียนโดยไม่เปิดเผยชื่อทางออนไลน์ อย่างไรก็ตาม ผู้เขียนเห็นว่าบทบาทของผู้สอนในฐานะผู้ช่วยเหลือและออกแบบกิจกรรมมีส่วนสำคัญที่จะต้องเข้าใจกระบวนการเรียนรู้ในการให้เพื่อนประเมินงานเขียนโดยไม่เปิดเผยชื่อ ทั้งนี้เพื่อจะได้สนับสนุนผู้เรียนให้เกิดการ

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เรียนรู้ที่เหมาะสม ในตอนท้ายผู้เขียนได้อภิปรายและให้ข้อเสนอแนะเกี่ยวกับประเด็นต่างๆในการศึกษาการให้เพื่อนประเมินงานเขียนโดยไม่เปิดเผยชื่อทางออนไลน์ ในรายวิชาการเขียน

คำสำคัญ: การเรียนทางออนไลน์ การให้เพื่อนประเมินงานเขียนโดยไม่เปิดเผยชื่อ
การเขียนภาษาอังกฤษ

Abstract

Prior studies indicate the values of online peer reviews for enhancing students' learning, especially English writing performance. Drawing on relevant literature, this paper seeks to review online peer reviews in writing classes, educational values, and challenges for pedagogical purposes. The paper first explores key concepts, definitions of online peer reviews and values for pedagogical purposes. It then examines anonymous online peer reviews and challenges for classroom implementation. The use of Moodle Workshop is discussed to provide possible solutions to the implementation of such peer reviews. However, it is the role of teachers as facilitators and learning designers who need to understand learning processes in anonymous peer reviews in order to provide support appropriately. The article ends with a discussion and recommendations for further studies on issues related to anonymous online peer reviews in writing classes.

Keywords: Online learning, anonymous peer reviews, English language writing

Introduction

Recent literature shows that peer reviews in writing processes improve learning, including that in an online learning environment (Wilson, Diao, & Huang, 2015). Research indicates that learning gain is improved as a result of peer online discussion or feedback such as a structured questioning process (Michinov, Morice, & Ferrières, 2015). Theoretically, the learning gain is understood as a result of collaborative learning which is valued as a common feature of university courses for enhancing collaborative skills among students (Barkley, Cross, & Major, 2005). Online technologies can be used to support collaborative learning productively and differently from face to face settings as reported in many studies (Dennen, 2005; Gerbic, 2010). Such online collaborative learning should be understood through the interplay between groups of learners, a teacher and technologies in an online space (Waemusa, 2016).

Peer reviews, especially in terms of peer assessment, pose challenges of classroom implementation, and may have social impacts on learners such as peer pressure (Raes, Vanderhoven, & Schellens, 2015). However, it is suggested that anonymous peer reviews can reduce social effects in learning processes because of being in a situation of not knowing who provides reviews in students' writing and valuing others' responses (Phillips, 2016). It can be said that an anonymous peer review is one of the several learning situations that can encourage students' collaborative participation in writing revisions through engaging in the processes of modeling, coaching, scaffolding, articulation, reflection, and exploration

(Yang, 2011). Understanding how online peer reviews take place in an anonymity-learning environment helps teachers facilitate students to enrich online collaborative learning processes in writing classes. Such an understanding is not simple. There are still pedagogical challenges of peer learning in online contexts. For example, not every student actively joins in the communication or gives feedback to other peers (Michinov et al., 2015). In Thai higher education, evidence shows that cultural norms have restrained the level of collaborative learning in terms of enriching writing processes in online contexts such as editing the work of others (Waemusa, 2016).

To implement online peer reviews, especially in writing classes, a better understanding is needed of what it means by an online peer review. This paper first explores what defines a peer review as well as its values for educational purposes. It then examines online peer reviews.

A peer review: Definitions from a learning perspective

In general, an insight drawn from literature suggests that a peer review is a learning process whereby students engage in communication for work evaluation and reflection. Theoretically, this peer learning activity focuses on socially mediated learning environments with the interaction between or among students. In other words, it is infused with social constructivism since the activity entails collaborative learning processes with interpersonal development (Kollar & Fischer, 2010). In this regard, social constructivism is a theory of learning which helps

understand how socially mediated learning (e.g., learning in peer feedback processes) occurs. Influenced by Vygotsky's (1978) theory, this perspective emphasizes social interactions as the primary source of meaning making (Kanuka & Anderson, 1999; Palincsar, 1998). Socially mediated learning occurs in peer reviews as learners communicate ideas and interact with each other through evaluation of performance or product.

In defining a peer review activity, many scholars use different terms to refer to this activity. Some researchers use the term peer assessment to refer to peer learning and define it as an educational activity for learners to work collaboratively with peers to evaluate the quality of work or product or performance in oral or written feedback (Raes et al., 2015; Topping, 2005; Topping, 2009). However, Liu and Carless (2006) differentiated the two terms. For them, peer feedback deals with a communicative process through their constructive dialogues in relation to performance and standard. Unlike peer feedback, they define peer assessment as “students grading the work or performance of their peers” (p. 280) based on set criteria. They argued that peer feedback has to do with rich detailed comments, while assessment deals with grading. Both are intertwined in learning processes.

In the field of English language teaching and learning, many scholars use the term peer reviews to refer to a peer learning activity for learners working collaboratively in giving feedback and evaluating the quality of peers' work (Coté, 2014; Lu & Bol, 2007; Razi, 2016; Yang,

2011). The definition refers to a blend of two learning processes, giving feedback and evaluate the work of others, as defined by Liu and Carless (2006).

A peer review: Educational values

Liu and Carless (2006) suggested a mix of peer feedback and assessment for instructional reasons, and this is helpful for understanding peer reviews and how teachers can support learning processes when learners work together. They view that peer feedback has greater potential for learning than peer assessment due to constructive comments and communication processes.

In a recent study to justify the use of peer feedback as compared with tutor feedback, Hamer, Purchase, Luxton-Reilly, and Denny (2015) found that despite tutors' longer feedback texts on specific points, there was no difference between peer and tutor feedback in students' experiences in terms of perceived quality. Peer feedback also benefits the development of students' own writing by enhancing its effects on learning (Gielen, Peeters, Dochy, Onghena, & Struyven, 2010). Gielen et al. (2010) found that feedback constructiveness through the presence of justification for feedback improved performance of learning processes. In line with this, when providing feedback, students engage in "thinking carefully about how to provide critical feedback to their peers in a positive manner" (Brown, Honeychurch, & Munro, 2011, p. 2). In enhancing cognitive development, students in peer review activities engage in a reciprocal learning situation and teachers may use peer

reviews to reflect the work environment to the students (Phillips, 2016). In providing a significant point about this reciprocal learning situation, Phillips (2016) claimed:

In this context [peer reviews], students do not passively receive feedback but instead actively generate it for others, enhancing their cognitive engagement and developing lifelong skills that will be valued in any setting where they will appraise and comment on the work performed by others. (p. 14)

Wirtz (2012) argued that peer review is central to the writing classroom activities due to its focus on teaching writing as a process. Writing, by process, means “a recursive rather than a linear activity, where planning, formulation of ideas and revisions take place throughout the writing process” (Storch, 2013, p. 22). When students work together in writing class to give feedback and evaluation, they can learn from peers’ comments and return to their own work for polishing and improving original ideas. The evaluation and reflection in peer feedback messages allows learners to engage in learning reflection (Cheng, Liang, & Tsai, 2015).

Online peer reviews

In educational settings, peer reviews are not only implemented in face to face, but also in online learning contexts. Empirical studies

have indicated that technology-supported learning environments can offer opportunities for online collaborative learning (e.g., Bober & Dennen, 2001; Dennen & Wieland, 2007; Lim & Sudweeks, 2009). Online peer reviews refer to an educational activity for learners to work collaboratively to evaluate and give comments on the quality of the others' work in online learning environments. An online peer review, for example, is an alternative pedagogical strategy to face-to-face peer feedback in English language writing classes (DiGiovanni & Nagaswami, 2001). Such a strategy merits attention because of its pedagogical values. This section aims to explore how the implementation of online peer reviews can contribute to learning.

Opportunities for learning development

Although some research evidence shows that traditional face to face peer reviews provided more effective communication than online ones which lacked nonverbal cues for communication (Liu & Sadler, 2003), online peer reviews provide promising learning results. Strong support for online peer reviews, from recent evidence, comes from improving learning development in writing processes (Michinov et al., 2015; Razi, 2016; Wilson et al., 2015), and enhancing students' engagement in online learning processes (Ion, Barrera-Corominas, & Tomàs-Folch, 2016; Michinov et al., 2015). In supporting social interactions in promoting the learning processes during online peer reviews, it is believed that learners can develop real literacy which takes

place when they interact in a learning community and produce meaningful social interaction and collaboration (International Literacy Association & National Council of Teachers of English, 2016). Students need to develop the literacy in online contexts distinct from that in non-online ones. For example, through online peer review activities, students are provided with opportunities for practicing, evaluating and giving online feedback on attribute development (Wilson et al., 2015), thus supporting students' reflection and critical thinking in learning processes without restriction of time and place as well as flexibility in revising their comments online (Cheng et al., 2015) or higher-level learning skills (Davies & Berrow, 1998).

To implement peer reviews in an online learning environment is still a continuing discussion. To argue that online peer review has its place in language education, Cheng et al. (2015) noticed that “pedagogical issues regarding online peer assessment have continued to be explored” (p.78) and are crucial because of the advances of information and communication technology which have influenced the pedagogical practices in providing online collaborative learning environments (Lu & Bol, 2007). This exploration resonates with preparing students in order to meet the diverse needs of 21st century learners (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2009). Rasmussen, Lund, and Smørdal (2012) commented that when engaging in online learning, students require more skills and competences than those in the traditional textbook learning environments through complex source selection and

evaluation, judgment and assistance. They argued that online tools allow students to work with different Internet sources while providing reviews.

In online peer review, the implementation of technology-enhanced learning can support and manage peer learning in terms of regularity, frequency and timeliness of peer evaluation and feedback (Topping, 2005). Meanwhile, online peer review retains a text-written environment for students to write critical comments on others' writing (Guardado & Shi, 2007). Yang (2010) found that online tools can enhance self-reflection from peer reviews in students' writing processes. This study revealed that an online peer review tool enabled students to "monitor, evaluate, and adjust their writing processes in the pursuit of text improvement" (p. 1202) via technological functions. By looking back and forth between their own writing and peers' comments, students claimed that self-correction improved the correction of grammatical errors while peer reviews provided different views which helped them revise text development, organization and styles of writing (Yang, 2010).

Online peer reviews can improve students' writing performance. Cheng et al. (2015) found that peer reviews have a significant role in writing performance in online learning environments and their study indicated that "the students' writing performance was getting better the more they were involved in the learning activity" (p. 81). Online peer reviews provide opportunities for social interactions within an online space in linguistic and pragmatic functions. Wu (2006) listed several pragmatic functions for analysis of online peer reviews, namely

agreement, surprise, suggestions, praise, blessing, requests, questions and statements. His study revealed that online peer reviews for Taiwanese students served as a pragmatic function to give complimentary praise or blessing. Yang (2011) examined the roles of online peer reviews in college students' writing and found that web-based technologies could be used to support writing processes through "the processes of modelling, coaching, scaffolding, articulation, reflection and exploration" (p. 687). Through such online processes, Yang argued that teachers can understand students' learning processes, for example, externalizing and visualizing their writing processes by observing and learning from peers in writing and taking turn in helping others revise texts.

Despite the benefits of online peer reviews, in their substantial review of literature, Gielen et al. (2010) argued that not all peer reviews can foster performance improvement. Resistance to engaging in peer feedback and assessment remains among learners due to reliability, perceived expertise, power relationships and being time consuming (Liu & Carless, 2006). In providing critical comments on the online work of others, cultural norms influenced the ways Thai learners gave feedback, such as preferring a surface level of comments in terms of language form (Waemusa, 2016). In providing possible solutions to the challenges of peer reviews, Liu and Carless (2006) proposed the use of electronic communication and anonymous peer review. Anonymous peer review deals with an instructional strategy of designing peer reviews without identifying the persons who provide reviews. The following section

explores anonymous peer reviews and their relation to learning development.

Anonymous peer reviews in online learning environments

Anonymous peer review: What is it and why?

Lu and Bol (2007) defined an anonymous peer review as “a kind of peer review condition in which both reviewers and reviewees are kept unknown to one another” (p. 102). Research has found that anonymity in peer reviews helped Japanese students feel free from making mistakes and helped them productively engage in peer feedback (Miyazoe & Anderson, 2010). With this anonymous learning condition, students might provide critical comments to help improve work, feel more honest and less anxious (Lu & Bol, 2007). As compared with the identifiable peer review online, Lu and Bol (2007) found that students in the anonymous e-peer review provided critical feedback productively, assessed peers’ work with much more criteria-based evaluation, and performed better in writing. For these authors, online anonymous reviews allowed for different and multiple ideas for improving writing work, and they provided a comfort zone for sharing critical feedback because students did not feel worried about their comments on their peers.

Online anonymous peer reviews: Using technology-enhanced learning

In their recent study with anonymity in peer reviews, Raes et al.

(2015) found that using technology to increase anonymity in peer assessment via structured activities could add values of argumentation in both oral and written feedback as perceived by learners. Deploying Classroom Response Technology (CRT), a system for providing feedback in the classroom, these authors found that in online contexts, students valued the anonymous written feedback as the most valuable extension to the oral feedback activity. Their findings contributed to the knowledge of online peer reviews in how to design learning activities to support peer review processes in writing classes.

Although research shows that anonymity provides potential for enhancing students' learning in online peer reviews, little is known about how the use of certain technologies may influence leaning processes in online peer reviews and how teachers can support online peer reviews with online technologies. Different technologies shape different patterns of interaction in peer reviews. Research on online peer reviews showed different types of deployed technologies such as Classroom Response Technology (CRT) (Raes et al., 2015), online systems (i.e., peerScholar, Scaffolded Writing and Rewriting in the Discipline (SWoRD), and Calibrated Peer Review (CPR)) (Phillips, 2016), a discussion forum (Mwalongo, 2013) or blogs (Ducate & Lomicka, 2008). Some researchers employed Microsoft Word to support peer reviews (e.g. Davies & Berrow, 1998; Liu & Sadler, 2003). Others deployed Moodle Workshop (Brown et al., 2011; Dooley, 2009; Lumadue & Anderton, 2014). Not all technologies can provide equivalent learning opportunities for anonymous online peer reviews

practically due to each different technological potential for such a learning condition and the requirement of keeping member names unknown to the online community.

Moodle Workshop (hereafter referred to Workshop), a module in Moodle platform, has potential for providing self-assessment and anonymous peer reviews through its specific functions of hiding peer reviewers (Cooch, 2010). Dooley (2009), from software perspectives, defined Moodle Workshop as an application in Moodle to allow for peer assessment and feedback. By providing online peer reviews, teachers can design peer review activities through providing their own grading rubric and setting a grading strategy. In doing so, teachers can set work submission and assessment deadlines, and choose the learning conditions of how the students can view and assess the work of others (Dooley, 2009). Workshop can be a possible tool for exploring how the use of this tool for online peer reviews impacts on students' learning and how students perceive learning experience though using this tool.

Anonymous online peer reviews: Challenges for classroom implementation

More research is needed to provide a better understanding of peer interaction in online peer reviews shaped by a selected technology in a particular setting. Bouzidi and Jaillet (2009) recommended that online interaction during the peer assessment activity should be explored for better understanding of learning processes and for

supporting writing processes. Although the anonymity allows students to give online feedback and assess other's work in a related atmosphere, there is a limitation of peer interaction in terms of ongoing communication in an anonymous peer review. For example, in using Workshop, unknown peers could not continue communication with a reviewer since the anonymous review could be completed in one cycle of review process. There might not be a chance for seeking more explanation or clarification from unknown peers in one activity. However, students might find close peers and discuss the feedback in normal peer discussions. Within one cycle of the review process, normally the anonymous reviews would end with three steps: submission, assessment, and evaluation.

There is a need for teachers to design a learning support or activity for those who need to deepen their understanding of messages or feedback provided by unknown peers. This would be useful for teachers to facilitate students in engaging in “dialogues related to performance and standards [of writing]” (Liu & Carless, 2006, p. 280). In online peer reviews, Ertmer et al. (2007) pointed out three important aspects in exploring online peer feedback: the timeliness and quality of feedback, tutor intervention in online peer feedback, and building trust among learners. In a more specific type of student feedback, Yang (2011) found that two processes were involved in students' writing revision: “local revisions (grammatical corrections) and global revisions (corrections on the development, organization or style of a text)” (p.

687). If the online peer review is aimed to be effectively productive, it is interesting to explore how the use of web-based technologies [e.g., Workshop] can enhance students' interactive engagement in these two processes. There is need to understand how and why anonymous peer reviews in some online contexts are effective in a particular learning context supported by the use of a chosen technology (Lu & Bol, 2007).

Designing an online peer review activity is another area which should be explored for better understanding the use of such an activity. Cheng et al. (2015) proposed that providing three rounds of assessment and feedback would be beneficial for students' learning. Each round may include initial submission, peer review, and revision submission. Ducate and Lomicka (2008) found that students lacked communication skills in giving feedback, and needed specific guidance on how to participate in peer feedback, especially as to how to give appropriate comments to their peers. This should be explored further in terms of how to prepare students before participating in online peer reviews such as how to provide an orientation to students for online peer reviews (Brown et al., 2011; Cheng et al., 2015).

Based on the reviews above, more research is needed to explore how a design of anonymity and non-anonymity online peer feedback would affect students' learning experience in writing processes. How do the roles of both types of peer feedback (anonymous and non-anonymous peer feedback), for example, play in students' learning processes in English writing classes? This would add to the knowledge of

online peer reviews in writing classes.

Conclusion and suggestions

This paper has explored key terms that define an online peer review, and examined its educational values. The paper has further explored values of anonymous peer reviews in online learning environments. Drawn from pertinent literature, it discusses challenges of anonymous online peer reviews for classroom implementation, which can be further explored in the future, especially in relation to technology use.

A question to language teachers may arise: Why do we need to investigate and understand learning processes in relation to technological use? For example, why do we need to explore anonymous online peer reviews in writing classes? A possible answer would be the role of teacher as facilitator, who needs to understand learning processes and the nature of chosen technology, and to provide students with appropriate learning support. Future research in anonymous online peer reviews should respond to the use of new technological tools in language learning. In supporting this view, Selwyn (2009) has suggested that it is helpful to examine learners' interactions and collaboration within multi-dimensional contexts in order to provide these learners with appropriate learning support. Thus, the roles of teacher in supporting learning processes need to be examined and should remain in educational research.

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