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An Analysis of Using Scaffolding, Collaborating and Peer Reviewing Process in Blended Learning to Enhance Students' Writing Performance

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Abstract: - *This study is aimed at investigating the students from 4 tutorial groups in using the SCPP Program (Scaffolding, Collaborating, and Peer Reviewing) in order to help them prepare for a Report Writing project. It revealed the findings of successful collaborative environments by using the scaffolding, collaborating and peer reviewing process, while performing the task. The researcher administered a set of questionnaire and the findings showed that the level of confidence has increased among the target students and they found that writing the report has become less complicated using the intervention. Therefore, this research has provided insights into students' writing process and how their perceptions towards writing have reflected in their own performance and written product. SCPP Program has allowed them to collaborate with one another, and became participants in one another's writing processes.*

Keywords: - *Scaffolding, Collaborating, Peer Reviewing, writing skill, blended learning.*

1. Introduction

Writing is considered an important language skill and an essential productive activity specifically for second English language learners (Hussin et al., 2015). In order to be competent writers, second language learners not only need intellectual strategies but also certain linguistics and vocabulary knowledge as well as appropriate writing convention that would help them express themselves effectively (Erkan & Saban,2011). Despite many years developing their writing skills, most second language learners (L2) of English are confronted with obstacles in their endeavor.

Due to the complexity of writing and its various requirements, both novice and advanced English learners usually have negative perceptions towards writing which is generally known as writing apprehension or writing anxiety. Consequently, writing apprehension will lead to poor writing performance. They also suggested that factors contributing to second language apprehension might be tackled via the use of online learning environments and that the second language learners in such learning environment gain benefits in two ways. Firstly, they could get writing assistance

During the revision and editing stages in the form of feedback and comments from their peers and lecturers. Secondly, they would be able to gather information from the Internet and share knowledge and writing experience through the online discussion. Subsequently, learners would be able to reduce their writing apprehension and enhance their writing performance in these learning environments.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Blended learning

The student-centered learning approaches are a modern leading trend in the contemporary realm of education. Gain their popularity due to the emphasis on the flexibility of learning by taking into account learners' individual differences in learning, their learning styles, learning habits and learning pace. The student-centered learning approaches also believe in providing students with self-paced online learning opportunities along with traditional face-to-face classroom in enhancing students' learning performance in the English language. This integration of online and face-to-face is known as Blended Learning which propose innovative ideas

and educational practices and alter the roles to be played by the lecturer as well as students (Krasnova & Ananjev, 2015).

2.2. Collaborative writing

Collaborative writing can be defined as a process of social negotiating among several writers for the purpose of constructing meaning, knowledge and content of the text to be written (Ansarimoghaddam & Bee, 2013). As such the writers collaboratively contribute to all aspects of the written text: content, structure, organization and language (Storch, 2005). In developing writing skills collaboratively, students will benefit from the interaction during the various writing stages. For example, in brainstorming of ideas as a pre-writing activity, students will be motivated to write if it is done in a group. Group planning, for example, engages students in working collaboratively to organize content and discuss the pros and cons while making a decision. In addition, collaborative writing endorses group ownership of the written text, increases students' awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses and encourages collective learning. Moreover, writing collaboratively helps students to have multiple perspectives on the topic of writing and simultaneously shares ideas and knowledge easily. Consequently, this will develop their self-confidence and decreases the anxiety level associated with the challenges of the writing task itself especially when completing the task alone (Ansarimoghaddam & Bee, 2013).

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

A qualitative case study method was employed for the present study. Specifically, a descriptive single-case holistic research design was adopted. It is descriptive because the researcher was keen in giving a detailed and comprehensive description to the phenomenon under study in its actual setting. It is a single-case holistic research design because the researcher had focused on one case (single-case) and had analyzed it as a whole entity as one unit of analysis (holistic) (Yin, 2010). The main aim is to get in- depth and vivid information about the

participants' experiences, feelings and thoughts and their perception of that situation. As such, researcher focused on describing a particular event relevant to the case under study as well as describing all the actors or group of actors who participated in the event as well as their perceptions of the event.

3.2. Participants

The participants of the current study were 9 mechanical engineering students enrolled in Matriculation College since May 2016. They were in their second semester of the academic year 2016/2017. The students were purposively selected out of 57 students representing the total number of students in four tutorial classes taught by the researcher. The rationale behind this sampling procedure is to select information-rich case as emphasized by Cohen et al. (2007) that purposive sampling is helpful in obtaining in-depth information from those who are in a position to give it. Its purpose is getting saturation data rather than representing the population or generalizing the collected data to the whole population. The students were selected according to a predetermined criteria assigned by the present researcher depending on the variables of the study. These criteria were; students' level of WA, their writing ability, computer and Internet efficiency and the status of English language.

3.3. Data Collection

The current study had employed several data collection instruments to collect detailed information about the phenomenon under study and to triangulate, validate and cross-check the data obtained from the various research instruments. As such, the researchers had utilized a focus group semi-structured interview, online discussions and observations to gather the required data for answering the research questions. With respect to data collection tools, Creswell (2014) reiterates that qualitative researchers usually use multiple sources for data collection purposes such as interviews, observations, diaries and other qualitative data collection tools rather than depending on a single data source. In line with this, a post-study focus

group semi-structured interview was conducted involving the participants of the study after dividing them into three groups with equal number of students.

For the writing task, all participants were asked to continuously record their feelings, experiences and perceptions and the problems that they encountered throughout the SCPR Program immediately after completing each online and face-to-face writing task. The researcher also compiled observation notes throughout the semester documenting the important events and activities in both online and face-to-face modes that also serve as data for the study.

3.4. Procedures

Researcher briefed the students on how the SCPR Program works. Selected students who participated in the program followed the main stages and sub-stages of the process approach to writing based on the Hayes and Flower (1981) model; pre-writing, drafting and post writing stages. The lecturer and the students met face-to-face three times a week, each meeting lasting 60 minutes. For other times, they met online for individual and/or group discussion via a platform called GoogleDrive, w h i c h provided a fairly convenient channel for interactions between the lecturer and the students and among the students. Via this platform, the lecturer could make announcements, upload course materials, create new learning content, assign homework, check assignments, organize discussions, and answer questions. The lecturer and the students could communicate anytime and anywhere, commenting on each other's work, reflecting, editing, revising and re-publishing.

After dividing them into groups, they were assigned to do an academic writing project in 10 weeks' period of their second semester of the academic year 2016/2017. During this period of time, the researcher provided guidance to students on how to c a r r y o u t t h e a c a d e m i c w r i t i n g p r o j e c t by guiding them to a group of writing activities and online discussion in each stage of the writing process. For example, in the pre-writing stage, the students did the online brainstorming discussion via

Google Drive application installed on their hand phones or desktops. The aim of this discussion is to brainstorm ideas, discuss the ideas, make decisions and filter them, cluster, map and outline these ideas to be drafted in the next writing stage. Students then joined their normal class to discuss the ideas outlined and wrote the first draft of their essay online. At this stage the students in the groups did online peer-review activity following the guidelines of peer-review guide adopted from Moloudi (2011). At this stage, group members collaborated in the writing task and scaffolding session also took part where the high- achievers assisted the low-achievers.

By using Google Drive application, all their discussion can also be seen and read by all group members and the lecturer. It was brought to the next meeting in their normal classroom to be discussed after which the students wrote the second draft of their essay. The researcher also reviewed their written task along the way and gave comments and constructive feedback until the groups are able to complete it as a final form. Then, the final form of the essay was published in the shared document as a motivation for them to see their final form of essay published for others to view. Along the way, the lecturer observed the online discussion through SCPR Program and Telegram application and interviewed them to elicit information concerning their perceptions about their learning constrained with respect to time, place and activity.

4. Findings.

4.1. Functionality and usability aspects

A clear indication of the SCPR Program functionality and usability was the way in which students used the application outside the tutorial class. Initially, the students only used the application in class but quickly as their confidence grew they started to participate outside the tutorial classes. Furthermore, by using the application at home it increased motivation for some students to complete written homework tasks as they saw it as being 'easier editing than by hand' and 'more natural.' Moreover, it seemed a more preferable approach to doing homework. The lecturer also

found that she could detect the level of contribution among her students even when she was not with them for certain reasons as she always kept track of her students activities during the progress of writing using her mobile phone. Google Drive application gives the advantages of knowing who is online, doing some editing, adding new inputs and scaffolding the other team members. Besides, this practice saved a lot of papers which happened formally due to printing and reprinting of drafts and questionnaires to collect data for their projects.

The added motivational force that the SCPR Program introduced was the idea of writing for an audience instead of traditionally for their lecturer only. This can be seen when the student stated, 'To encourage for you to write more because more people can read it'. Publishing work for other students in the class to read was considered an advantage of using the application over other tools.

Despite the apparent benefits they could see of writing for an audience, in the early interviews students expressed concern at publishing their work for others to read, they said that they were 'hesitant at first' and were 'worried to start' and did not want their peers to 'find their mistakes'.

All of the students agreed that due to the fact that they were writing for other people they felt that they had to push themselves to do their best and that it was, 'a bit like extra pressure but in a good way.' They added that despite this extra push they did feel that it was worth it as they were exposed to other people's writing styles, opinions, new vocabulary or expressions and that this could help them to improve their writing. Students identified the stronger students in the class, people that they considered to be better than themselves and felt they could learn from them and looked at these people's writing when they logged on each time.

Table 1: Response on functionality and usability aspects.

Theme	Students	Comments
Functionality and usability aspects	S1	Easier editing than by hand
	S2	More natural
	S3	It is not as strict as if you just have paper at home
	S4	To encourage for you to write more because more people can read it
	S5	Not too bothered, I use it for learn and I don't care if people are going to read because in one way it's going to help me.
	S6	An exchange with experience between each other
	S7	Hesitant at first
	S8	Worried to start
	S9	A bit like extra pressure but in a good way

4.2. Peer review

4.2.1. Giving Comments

Even though the students were keen to learn from each other's work and did enjoy the exposure to other people's comments, one area of concern was the peer reviewing and commenting on their peers' posts. The initial interview revealed that students found commenting difficult as they were not confident informing their peers about their mistakes because this was something they did not have experience of. Student 1 revealed that even though he looked at the posts and could identify errors he had a tendency not to write a comment but to simply tell the student in the next class as it seemed 'friendlier to tell face-to-face'. The students' written ability in English also seemed to be one of the main reasons that some students felt unable to leave comments early on in the year. In the interview Student 3 explained that, 'If I am more sure of my writing I think I will be more sure to make comments for everyone.' On the other hand, Student 2 said; "I think I can comment now, at the beginning it was difficult because writing was not my strongest skill, but now, yeah, I can comment." Student 6 confidently stated that "The comments

helped me to correct my mistakes and so it's one way I can improve"

At the early stage of the program Student 5 said, 'I'm afraid if I write something my comment will be a mistake, so I have to be sure first before I write anything.' This student only left five comments throughout the project and it seemed that not only did students lack confidence in their own ability in English but was also worried that other students would question his ability and this, it appears, discouraged him from leaving comments. Therefore Student 4 said; "People will trust you (the lecturer) more than me, that's for me as well." Upon further investigation of this point it was noticed that the comment given by "Sometimes I highlighted my f r i e n d s' mistakes and left them comments. This was very useful for me to increase my knowledge"

by Student 7 showed that they are very happy knowing that by giving comments to their friends, they are actually learning as well. Students were encouraged to comment on these areas in order to help other students improve on their overall style and format of their text and their grammar, punctuation and spelling, as these are the criteria that would be assessed in the writing exams at the end of the year. Student 8 stated that "I do not know what to comment actually so I just praised them" This answer showed that he did not leave feedback that other students could use to improve their writing skills each time but made more personal comments of encouragement and approval of what he had read. On the other hand," I corrected and thought about why it was right" was the answer given by Student 9 proving that he really gave a lot of thought before giving his comments.

Table 2: Response on giving comments to peers aspects.

Theme	Students	Comments
Giving Comments	S1	Friendlier to tell face-to-face
	S2	I think I can comment now, at the beginning it was difficult because writing was not my strongest skill, but now, yeah, I can comment
	S3	If I am more sure of my writing, I think I will be more sure to make comments for everyone
	S4	People will trust you (the lecturer) more than me, that's for me as well
	S5	I'm afraid if I write something my comment will be a mistake, so I have to be sure first before I write anything
	S6	When I give comment, it helped me to correct my mistakes as well and so it's one way I can improve
	S7	"Sometimes I highlighted my f r i e n d s' mistakes and left them comments. This was very useful for me to increase my knowledge**"**
	S8	I do not know what to comment actually so I just praised them
	S9	I corrected and thought about why it was right

4.2.2. Receiving comments

In contrast to the initial apprehension students showed at leaving comments it was very apparent that the students interviewed all enjoyed receiving comments on their posts, whether from peers or solely from the lecturer. Student 1 considered the comment facility to be 'useful', 'a nice experience' and he received the largest number of comments at twenty three and just less than three quarters of these addressed areas of his writing that could help

him to improve. Student 2 did not receive a large number of comments and the comments she received were mainly praising her on her standard of English. However, she did receive a few comments focusing on sentence and text and despite the struggle technology had been in the early months she replied to these comments thanking them each time and responded to the interview stating that," I can improve my writing based on the comments given". Nevertheless, the students were keen to reflect upon the comments and their

mistakes before editing their texts and republishing them to make sure the comments left were correct but also to understand their mistakes. Student 3 said; "The comments helped me to correct my mistakes and so it's one way I can improve. I corrected and thought about why it was right." Student 4 stated that "Sometimes they highlighted my mistakes and left me comments" while Student 5 revealed that "This was very useful for me to increase my knowledge." Student 4 did not receive a lot of comments, only ten and this may reflect the fact the he did not leave many comments for the other students. However, the comments he received did address text, sentence and word errors in the post allowing him to improve his writing. Undoubtedly, the students could see the worth in receiving comments as it helped them to see their mistakes more easily. However, there were occasions when the students received a comment that they did not agree with and the reaction to this was very different from each of them. Some of the responses stated that on this occasion he laughed as he knew it was right, another explained that she left a comment to explain why her work was not wrong while the other's reaction was more emotional where he expressed his mistrust with anyone except an expert in English when it came to leaving comments.

The students were given time in class to reflect upon their mistakes and this process of editing the texts was seen as a fundamental part of the writing experience. Students highlighted that through this they really did improve their writing skills and they tried to avoid making the same mistakes in future posts. Student 6 noted that through the editing process his common errors were highlighted and this allowed him to identify his area for development in his writing;"I now know the mistakes I make every time and Student 7 stated that "I can change the spelling of words I always got wrong, sometimes I put extra articles in and it made me realize through the comments.' The use of the computer in the process approach to writing seemed invaluable as Student 8 expressed that they would not necessarily have done the corrections if they had to do them on paper but using the computer was 'easier' and 'quicker'. Student 9, being more motivated, expressed as "A great source of encouragement". They demonstrate how he tried to encourage other students to think about their writing to help them improve and did not just highlight their mistakes.

Table 2: Response on receiving comments from peers aspects.

Theme	Students	Comments
Receiving comments	S1	*Useful and a nice experience*
	S2	*I can improve my writing based on the comments given.*
	S3	*I corrected and thought about why it was right.*
	S4	*Sometimes they highlighted my mistakes and left me comments.*
	S5	*This was very useful for me to increase my knowledge*
	S6	*I know the mistakes I make every time*
	S7	I can change the spelling I *always got wrong, sometimes I put extra articles in and it made me realize through the comments.*
	S8	*Easier Quicker*
	S9	*A great source of encouragement*

RQ2: In what way can SCPR Program promote a collaborative environment which is conducive to developing writing skills?

The answer for this research question could be found through the observation by the researcher from the beginning of the project. Key advantages of the collaborative environment that the usage of blended learning provides have already been discussed. It is clear from this discussion that the program does provide students with a collaborative environment where both peers and the lecturer can help to develop an individual's writing skill (Refer to Appendix 1). Each of the students interviewed

expressed that throughout the year their writing had improved and that the approach had been 'interesting' and resulted in them feeling 'more confident in writing'. The program allowed them to interact with an audience and learn from it and in turn help others to learn.

Writing collaboratively can help develop students' writing ability since the process of peer writing and reviewing contributes towards improvement in organization and syntactical elements of the written text. The most important merit of collaborative writing is that it produces independent writers since they have acquired the important skills of self-editing and revision of their own written work (Rollinson, 2005). In short, it can be safely concluded that through collaborative writing, students can learn various language and writing skills more effectively than by working individually (Mulligan & Garofalo, 2011).

Additionally, it is worth mentioning that with the current technological advancements and the use of computer and Internet in the language classrooms, students have more opportunities to practice online collaborative writing activities and their collaboration is not only restricted to the classroom setting. They can share information and construct and exchange knowledge and meaning with each other in all stages of the writing process. An example of these activities is that learners can gain knowledge and feedback from the teacher and peers via online interactive programs irrespective of time or place. Online peer review allows room for flexibility for students and this can reduce their writing anxiety and emotional pressure when sharing feedback verbally which they normally experienced in a traditional face-to-face classroom. Online peer review is also more effective as opposed to face-to-face peer review whereby it allows careful monitoring of conversation and less pressure in providing responses and as such it can establish a sense of teamwork and partnership (Kim, 2010).

5. Conclusion

In summary, the evidence suggests that the use of the computer alone could be considered a motivational force for the students in their writing tasks. However, this coupled with the process approach to writing and the collaborative element of the blog has definitely had a big impact on the students and their writing skills. Comments from students at the end of the academic year included, 'a great idea' 'a brilliant thing' 'a good way to learn' and 'a necessity in the language classroom' even though initially there were some hesitation and confidence issues.

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