

Dealing with forty students: Peer-assessment as an alternative for English teachers in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

English teachers in Indonesia typically teach in large classroom size, with a high possibility to teach more than two classes. When it comes to assessing students' work, most of them tended to rely on teacher assessment, for it is considered as part of their duties as professional teachers. However, when dealing with students' work, students may also need superficial and substantial correction and feedback rather than receiving marks only. Nevertheless, to provide those corrections and feedback, English teachers need a considerable amount of time to complete the assessment process; estimated calculation has been provided in this paper. Therefore, this conceptual paper aims to provide an alternative way to assess students' work through peer assessment. Some benefits and challenges have been discussed to give insights for English teachers in Indonesia. This paper agrees that peer assessment can help teachers regarding time efficiency and help students regarding increased learning engagement. Moreover, English teachers need to pay tackle to some challenges such as shifting from a traditional perspective towards teacher authority and addressing issues of validity and reliability from students' marking results. This paper suggests that though teachers can minimize their workload, their presence is pivotal in assisting students during the assessment process.

Keywords: *peer assessment, English, language teaching*

Introduction

Teaching in large classroom size (an average of forty students) has been considered as one of English teachers' challenges in most of the Asian countries such as Indonesia (Dardjowidjojo, 2000; Kirkpatrick, 2007; Lie, 2007). With a significant number of students gathered in an English classroom, some studies reported that big classroom size also contributed to a poor learning environment, fewer students' engagement in the classroom (Dardjowidjojo, 2000; Wang & Finn, 2000). Lack of interaction, tendency to become passive students, and feeling worried about being embarrassed by other students have also been reported as the shortcomings of having a large class (Hammond & Gao, 2002; Ur, 1996).

While those issues occurred only during the teaching and learning process in the classroom, English teachers are involved in other duties outside the class, for example, when they

need to assess students' work. To illustrate, assuming an English teacher alone should assess four language skills, the teacher might be in burden for a large number of students' work to assess by himself or herself. Besides, English teachers themselves may run out of time in dealing with various duties from teaching-related duties to other administrative tasks. If attention not provided, a combination of an excessive number of tasks assigned to teachers and lack of support would lead to teacher burn-out—a psychological condition describing emotional exhaustion and reduced self-worth leading to decreased teachers' achievement (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000; Unaldi et al., 2013).

For those problems related to large classroom size, this conceptual paper aimed to justify peer assessment (PA) as an alternative for English teachers in Indonesia to reduce their workload when dealing with the assessment. Another motive drew from the possible benefits

and challenges when the students are given responsibility in the assessment process.

Why Peer Assessment?

In the Indonesian context, it is scarce that English teachers in the formal education institutions only teach in one class. They are often assigned to teach some classes either in the same grade (e.g., only eleventh grade) or even in different grades (e.g., tenth grade and eleventh grade). Therefore, for a massive number of students, teachers typically tend to find a type of assessment which can be administered within large groups and be scored in a shorter time; for example, multiple-choice test (Brown & Lee, 2015). However, this type of test is irrelevant when it comes to, for example, developing writing skills in which students need grammatical correction, substantial feedback, and justifiable grades to evaluate their learning progress. In some cases, many English teachers tend to provide the grades with unclear explanations and little feedback, which often makes the students confused about their learning progress. Below are the two cases to provide some illustrations.

Case 1:

Miss Nabila has forty students in one class and now arrives at a lesson that aims to develop students' skills to write an essay. When it comes to assessing students' work, she chooses to do it by herself, mainly because she is the teacher and thinks that assessment is her responsibility. In the real process, she typically takes an average of fifteen minutes to read students' work, provide relevant feedback, and grade the work. In total, we can see that Miss Nabila needs a minimum of 600 minutes or ten hours to complete her assessment process if this is a non-stop activity. Upon the completion of the assessment, students will receive the feedback and the mark they receive. In rare cases, students will question the mark they receive from their teachers.

Case 2:

Miss Tanti has forty students in one class and now arrives at a lesson that aims to develop students' skills to write an essay. When it comes to assessing students' work, she invites her students to take part in PA. In pre-implementation, she explains the marking criteria, what to assess and how each student can provide feedback to their peers' work. In whilst-implementation, Miss Tanti distributes students' work to their peers, with a guarantee of anonymity of the assessor. Moreover, during the assessment process, she also actively assists their students when they

need some help in assessing their peers' work. In the post-implementation, Miss Tanti asks the students to hand in their peers' work, return the paper to its owner, and ask for their confirmation regarding PA they receive. Also, she allows students to discuss possible grade revision, if any, by requiring them to explain why particular aspects deserve a better grade.

Time efficiency

From the two cases, it could be seen that Ms. Nabila's practice is a traditional way of assessment, which relies on her authority as the teacher. However, as we can see the amount of time to do the assessment, we should all relate to the possibility if she had more than one class with a similar number of students. Therefore, considering teachers' workload and a considerable amount of time needed to assess students' work, we viewed that PA would be more practical to be implemented in the way that forty students could assess their peers' work at the same time. What needs noticing is that Ms. Tanti has shown how important it is for her to have their students ready in the assessment process by providing initial preparation. In this matter, we would agree with the literature (e.g., Min, 2006; Topping & Ehly, 2001; Tsai & Chuang, 2013; Yarrow & Topping, 2001) on the importance of establishing and communicating certain standard for assessment through assessment criteria.

Boon (2015) has provided teacher guides to establish PA, namely defining success criteria, modeling by teachers, and practicing by students. In defining success criteria, both students and teachers could contribute to list what they are going to assess how they are going to assess, and which is considered as a 'good work.' Li et al. (2016) supported that when students are involved in the process of defining success criteria, PA can generate an equal degree of validity and reliability with teacher assessment (TA). Several previous studies also agree that students' involvement in this stage is crucial; All students agree on what is considered as good work, uses the same assessment instrument (Hafner & Hafner, 2003; Min, 2006; Topping, 2017; Topping & Ehly, 2001; Tsai & Chuang, 2013; Yarrow & Topping, 2001).

Learning engagement

Besides time efficiency, PA also allows students to be more engaged in their learning process. For example, To achieve comprehensible judgment, students should firstly reflect on their mastery of the materials (McGarr & Clifford, 2013; Reynolds & Trehan, 2000). Some studies (e.g., Boud, Cohen, & Sampson, 2001; Gibbs,

1999) also reported that through careful analysis of their peers' work, students become more critical in understanding their mistakes and the mistakes of others, which leads to more profound curiosity about the materials. Students who were previously excluded in the assessment process can even gain a better understanding of what they need to accomplish, how to achieve the goals, and how they are assessed. In other words, they perform not only as the assessors but also as active learners who observe and apply their knowledge to assess their peer's work (Topping, 2005, 2009).

Moreover, since students now perform as independent assessors, English teachers could maximize PA as a way to promote learner autonomy and to shift from the teacher-centred classroom, which is often attached to many English teaching practices in Indonesia (Dardjowidjojo, 2000). English teachers who are always seen as the local authority in the classroom can now involve their students in greater responsibility. What is important is that teachers need to shift their role from the primary source of knowledge to be a facilitator who learns with the students.

What challenges?

In implementing PA, English teachers in Indonesia may encounter some challenges, such as dealing with fossilized view contributing to the teacher-centred classroom, solving issues with friendship among students, and ensuring validity and reliability.

Teachers' authority

The education system in Asian contexts has put teachers as a figure with authority in the classroom; They are role models respected by the students. In some extreme cases, this longstanding cultural view has resulted in an attitude that the teacher is always right and, consequently, must always be right. In the Indonesian context, Indonesian people also hold similar moral values that Indonesian teachers are those who are trusted for being right (*digugu*) and should be imitated (*ditiru*) (Dardjowidjojo, 2001). While PA requires classroom participants (students and English teachers) to be open for shared responsibility and to build trust for objective, valid, and reliable assessment, English teachers in Indonesia indeed needs to deal with the widely accepted value.

Some previous studies (e.g., Paulus, 1999; Zhang, 1999) reported that students' denial to conduct PA is because they have a greater sense of acceptance to teachers' comments than their peers'. Students often feel that legitimation to

assess their work should be given to the teachers only because their teachers have more capacity and knowledge to evaluate their work. To this point, 'legitimation' should be underlined for clearly implying that students often view their classmates as less competent assessors (Nelson & Carson, 2006). In other words, English teachers in Indonesia also need to deal with building students' trust in PA.

Validity and reliability

Considering the assessment procedure, we should all agree that the way Ms. Nabila assesses students' work is a typical TA. By saying 'typical', it means that this practice is more likely representing what the majority of English teachers do in Indonesia, and this paper is not primarily on the position to argue whether TA is valid and reliable. Moreover, we understand that Ms. Nabila's beliefs are justifiable since TA could generate higher validity and reliability (Black et al., 2010; William, 2001, 2003) and reduce students' anxiety for the trust that they put on their teachers (Black et al., 2010; Harlen, 2005, 2007). Higher validity and reliability in TA indeed do not come instantly; it is from their long process to be considered as professional English teachers, such as going to English teacher education, attending to professional development, and so on. In other words, they are professionally trained for their profession. Therefore, when Ms. Tanti would like to implement PA in her classroom, she must tackle the issues with validity and reliability. To further explain, our review of the literature arrived at a point that, when compared to TA, PA can generate equal or higher validity and reliability if some conditions are met.

In the earlier section, we have addressed the first condition that emphasis on the presence of English teachers and their students in the process of defining success criteria. Alias, Masek, and Salleh (2015) reminded that PA and TA have a significantly different degree of validity and reliability due to various factors; one of them is because the students and the teachers look at and for different things. For example, students only focus on grammatical errors while the teachers advance up to readability and layout structuring. Secondly, van Gennip, Segers, and Tillema (2010) mentioned that to ensure students generate a high degree of validity and reliability, teachers should ensure that there will be no conflict among the students. In some cases, guilt for breaking relationship with other students or cheating in marking is also another factor contributing to low reliability in student's marking (Davies, 2002; Wang, Liang, Liu, & Liu, 2015).

The third condition is that teachers should understand that students are not an expert in the subject matter (Ghahari & Farokhnia, 2018; Gielen et al., 2010). This condition describes that giving greater responsibility should be supported by intensive guidance; Ms. Tanti understands that her position is crucial to scaffold the assessment process, and her presence for students' confusion is essential. Other conditions that should be met for PA have also been mentioned by Li and colleagues (2016), namely random distribution. They found that peer ratings have higher agreement with teachers' ratings if students' work is randomly distributed. It means that English teachers should instead randomly distribute the paper than categorize the assessor and the assessee based on their level of English skills.

Conclusion

This conceptual paper has addressed some benefits and challenges in implementing PA as an alternative for English teachers dealing with the assessment process in a large classroom. As for the benefits, this paper believes that PA can assist English teachers in Indonesia regarding time efficiency and increased learning engage-

ment. This paper also discussed some challenges which are rooted in widely accepted conception in many Asian countries that teachers are the primary source of knowledge. The fact that PA requires classroom participation, both teachers and students need to work together in shifting their perspectives from the teacher-centred classroom. Besides, issues with validity and reliability also need to be addressed because regardless of who assesses students' work, assessment is still assessment and should reflect actual learning progress of the students. This paper has mentioned some conditions to generate higher validity and reliability in PA, such as defining success criteria together, ensuring students' relationships with their friends, providing intensive support during the assessment process, and distributing the students' work randomly. Lastly, this paper would provide a suggestion that in establishing peer assessment, English teachers' presence is essential to help their students develop their assessing skills. Though their workload to assess students' work has been reduced, English teachers could allocate their time more on assisting the students, answering students' questions, and clarify students' confusion.

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