

Supporting students to prepare for higher education studies: Enhancing English writing skills with formative peer assessment

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Abstract

Studies report that writing skills of many beginner students in Norwegian higher education institutions are not adequately developed, showing a lack of critical thinking and referencing technique and a poor requisite language ability (Lødding and Aamodt 2015, Wollcheid et al. 2020). Literature also shows that a traditional lecture setting does not help students to enhance their learning autonomy (Rynning, 2014). Consequently, many beginner students struggle to achieve positive writing (Gourlay, 2009). This study aims to investigate the effects of formative peer assessment (FPA) on students' perceived learning outcomes in an English writing class for a preliminary course for engineering studies. After a training session, 25 students were instructed to perform FPA activities that include four major learning activities: assessment criteria creation, peer feedback and assessment, peer-revision and self-revision. This was followed by a questionnaire on students' evaluation on the learning method and on the impacts of FPA on their learning. The results of the questionnaire indicate that the students perceive that they have improved writing skills in the areas of grammar, formal language, referencing technique and audience awareness as well as critical thinking and a deeper understanding of what positive writing outcome is (cf. Topping, 1998, Lynch et al, 2012, Carnell, 2016). The results also imply that students perceive that they have enhanced self-regulated learning (cf. Butler and Winnie 1995). The study thus suggests that FPA is a vital learning form to develop writing skills of students of a preliminary course and helps them prepare for higher education studies.

Keywords: English as a Foreign Language (EFL, enhance students' self-regulation and learning; preliminary course for engineering studies, student-active learning, students' perceived learning outcomes