Peer Assessment in EFL Writing Classes

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Abstract

This article presents the findings of a seven-week case study which set out to investigate the benefits of integrating peer assessment into university level EFL writing classes and examine its impact on students' social skills. The study was carried out with 17 B1 English proficiency level students studying at an English preparatory programme of a foundation university. First, the students were introduced to using rubrics to assess a written product. Then, each week after the students had composed a writing, a paragraph for the first three weeks and an essay for the remaining four weeks, they were asked to anonymously assess one of their friends' writing by using the relevant rubric and filling in the peer assessment form. In addition, the students were interviewed in the 3rd week of the study in order to capture their early impressions regarding what they liked most and least about peer assessment as well as what they learnt from being an assessor and being assessed. The same interview was conducted again on the last day of the study to find out whether the participants changed their opinions. The results revealed that students benefited from peer assessment activities as they improved their understanding of the rubrics over time, which lead to more quality writings; they felt more accountable not only for their own learning but also that of their friends', which promoted a cooperative learning environment in which students offered quality feedback to each other; and finally they improved their collaboration and problem-solving skills, which contributed to their social skills which are in parallel with the needs of modern society and can be utilised outside the school environment.

Keywords: Peer assessment, assessment of writing, EFL writing, cooperation with peers.

İngilizce Yazı Yazma Derslerinde Akran Değerlendirmesi

Özet

Bu makale üniversite İngilizce hazırlık seviyesinde yabancı dil olarak İngilizce yazı yazma derslerinde akran değerlendirmesinin faydalarını bulmayı hedefleyen ve akran değerlendirmesinin öğrencilerinin sosyal becerilerine olan etkisini inceleyen 7 haftalık bir durum çalışmasının bulgularını sunmaktadır. Çalışma, bir vakıf üniversitesinin İngilizce hazırlık bölümünde okuyan ve B1 seviyesinde olan 5'i kız 12'si erkek olmak üzere toplam 17 öğrenci ile yapıldı. İlk olarak öğrencilere yazılı bir metnin değerlendirilmesinde kullanılan puanlama rubrikleri tanıtıldı. Sonra öğrenciler her hafta yazı yazdıkça, ilk üç hafta haftalık bir paragraf ve sonraki dört hafta haftalık bir deneme, öğrencilerden bir anonim olarak herhangi bir arkadaşının yazısını uygun puanlama rubriklerini kullanarak değerlendirmeleri ve sonra akran değerlendirme formunu doldurmaları istendi. Buna ek olarak, çalışmanın üçüncü haftasında öğrencilerin akran değerlendirmesinin en çok ve en az sevdikleri yanlarını ve bu çalışma boyunca akranlarını değerlendirmekten ve onlar tarafından değerlendirilmekten ne öğrencilerini saptamak amacıyla öğrencilerle yüz yüze görüşme yapıldı. Öğrencilerin fikirlerini değiştirip değiştirmediğini anlamak adına aynı görüşme çalışmanın son günü yine yapıldı. Çalışmanın sonuçlarına göre akran değerlendirme öğrencilere çeşitli faydalar sağladı. Öğrenciler zamanla puanlama rubriklerini daha iyi anladığı için daha kaliteli yazılar yazdılar, sadece kendi eğitimlerinden değil aynı zamanda arkadaşlarının da eğitiminden kendilerini sorumlu hissettikleri için işbirlikçi bir ortamda birbirlerine kaliteli geri bildirimler sağladılar ve en nihayetinde birlikte çalışma ve sorun çözme becerilerini geliştirerek okul dışında da kullanabilecekleri sosyal beceriler edindiler.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Akran değerlendirmesi, yazı yazma değerlendirmesi, yabancı dil olarak İngilizce yazı yazma, akranlarla iş birliği.

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Introduction

Most teachers find assessment of EFL writing rather challenging, for which several reasons could be listed such as students' background information and their first language. However, there is no doubt that teaching a foreign language in an academic setting requires teaching and assessing writing as well as other skills; thus, teachers need to be cognisant of the importance of the matter.

Considering how long assessment has been employed in teaching, it is safe to affirm that not only how educators view it but also how it is used in teaching has significantly changed over time. Assessment is no longer considered as something done to the product itself, but rather it is carried out throughout the whole process. Such assessment is referred as *formative assessment*. This newly attained viewpoint has brought assessment a new function as well. It is now seen as a way for teachers to monitor their students' learning process, and for students to keep track of their own learning in order to identify their strengths and weaknesses (Yorke, 2003).

One of the key aspects of formative assessment is that students are able to participate in the learning process so that they can help each other in a social setting and ultimately develop a sense of responsibility not only for their own but also for their friends' learning (Lee, 2006). One of the best ways of integrating formative assessment into EFL setting is to introduce *peer assessment* to EFL writing classes. Research suggests that peer assessment encourages the idea that students are not only individual, but they are also a part of a group in which they learn together by providing feedback for each other; hence, creating a sense of community where they work through cooperation and collaboration (Lee, 2006). However, it should also be noted that asking students to assess their friends is not an easy task. Therefore, it is advised that teachers should provide their students with enough training on assessment and feedback before introducing peer assessment (William, 1992).

Literature Review

Assessment

One of the essential constituents in the process of language learning is assessment since it offers numerous benefits for both teachers and students. According to Boud (1990), assessment is utilised in order to assist students to learn, become reflective learners and obtain formal documentation of information. It not only allows teachers to find out if the objectives of a lesson have been achieved, but it also informs students about their progress.

Teachers and researchers have long been discussing the issue of students' role in assessment (Moerke, 1996; Boud, 2000). However, within the light of recent studies and current understanding of teaching, assessment is not considered as something done to students at the end of a term, but rather a process gone through with students during the term. In this regard, students have the opportunity to monitor their progress and make changes when necessary. In addition, it offers instant feedback to both the teacher and student on the go (Patri, 2002). Rather than waiting for a quiz result to know about their progress, students are provided with constant feedback while they are learning.

Peer Assessment

Peer assessment is used in formative assessment procedures. It occurs when groups of students assess their classmates (Falchikov, 1995). Students could make this assessment quantitatively, for instance by giving a grade, or qualitatively, such as providing written feedback (Topping, 1998). It takes advantage of the classroom, which is a social setting, and helps students to learn from each other and be exposed to a variety of ideas from their peers.

In recent years, schools and universities have increasingly focused on implementing formative and peer assessment into their programmes as it emphasises that it should be the students, and not the teachers, who should be more accountable for assessment (Boud, 1995).

Peer assessment is reported to enhance the quality of education; thus, the performance of students. It helps students to become self-reliant learners who can also rely on their peers for assistance (Oldfield & Macalpine, 1995), it creates a student-centred social environment where teachers and students share their ideas freely (Cho, Schunn & Wilson 2006), and finally, it offers various affective and methodological benefits (Villamil & De Guerrero 1996).

On the other hand, there is a high possibility that students are not proficient enough to carry out peer assessment and provide quality feedback to each other. In addition, it is also possible that students sometimes may not show any interest in assessing their friends, or they may tend to give high scores in the name of friendship (Boud, 1989). Although this problem can partly be solved through making the assessment anonymous, the implication of it in a real classroom might still be problematic. Lastly, students may think that peer assessment serves no purpose and has no significance in their learning. Proving the benefits of such applications to students who have no expert knowledge might be very difficult for teachers.

To sum up, peer assessment is a process in which both teacher and students benefit. While teachers have the chance to monitor their students, students have the chance to get involved in the process of assessment. Although there are some concerns and possible problems to be sorted out, such issues should not mask the advantages of peer assessment.

Methodology

Research Questions

This study, informed by the literature on peer assessment in EFL settings, addressed the following questions:

- What are the benefits of peer assessment for university students regarding their EFL writing performance?
- How does peer assessment contribute to the social skills of university students?

The Research Design

As the research method, a case study approach was deemed most suitable for this study since the classroom in which the study took place necessitated an already planned writing syllabus to be followed, for which the researcher (the teacher) should be able to adjust the materials with regards to the needs of the students in order not to impede their normal learning process.

Participants and the Setting

Participants of this study were a class of 17 students, 12 males and 5 females, B1-level university students who were studying in the English Preparation Programme at a foundation university in İstanbul, Turkey. The students had a total of 20-hour of English courses a week, 6 of which were allocated for writing classes. For the first three weeks, the students wrote ungraded paragraphs each week. For the remaining 4 weeks, the students wrote ungraded essays each week.

Data Collection Tools

The first data collection tool used in the study was a peer assessment form (see Appendix A). Each time the students finished writing a paragraph or an essay, they were given a checklist to go through their papers and edit their writings if necessary. After editing, they were asked to assess one of their friends' paper by using the relevant rubric and fill in the peer assessment form. During this process, both the assessor and the assessed were anonymous by using only codes given by the researcher as their identifications.

The peer assessment form consisted of 3 parts, each of which required the students to have a critical viewpoint and analyse one of their friends' writing referring to the relevant rubric. The questions were as follows:

- What are the main strengths of this paragraph/essay?
- What are its main weaknesses?
- How do you think you can improve this paragraph/essay?

The second data collection tool was an interview adapted from the study of Falchikov (1995). The interview consisted of 4 questions (see Appendix B) and had the potential to clearly lay out the perception of the students of peer assessment. Students were interviewed twice, once in the 3rd week and once in the last week. In the 3rd week, the students were newly adapting to participate in the peer assessment activities in their classes. Therefore, the interview was planned to capture the early impressions of the students. They were asked what they liked most and least about peer assessment as well as what they learnt from these activities as assessors and as being assessed. The students were interviewed again in the last week with the same questions to check whether they changed their opinions after being involved in the peer assessment activities for 7 weeks in total. The answers of the students were recorded via a voice-recorder, then transcribed by the researcher to be analysed in detail.

Instructional Procedure

Data collection process lasted for 7 weeks. In Week 1, the teacher carried out a session and explained peer assessment. He went over the checklist and the rubric for paragraph. Then, using the rubric, he demo-assessed an anonymous paper composed by a student from another class. After that, he asked the students to practise assessing another anonymous paper using the same rubric. After the practice, the students wrote a paragraph. Once they finished writing, they went over the checklist to edit their paragraphs. After that, by using the rubric, they assessed one of their friends' paper anonymously and filled in the peer assessment form. In week 2 and 3, the students also wrote a paragraph, and the same assessment procedure was repeated. At the end of week 3, the teacher conducted the first interview to find out the early impressions of the students regarding peer assessment.

From week 4 onwards, the students started writing an essay. That is why, at the beginning of week 4, the teacher first went over the checklist and the rubric for essay. Then, as previously, using the rubric, he demo-assessed an anonymous paper from another class. After that, he asked the students to practise assessing another anonymous paper using the same rubric. After the practice, the students wrote an essay. Once they finished writing, they went over the checklist to edit their essays. After that, by using the rubric, they assessed one of their friends' paper anonymously and filled in the peer assessment form. For week 5, 6 and 7 the same assessment procedure was repeated. At the end of the study, the teacher conducted the same interview to see whether the students changed their opinions after involving in the peer assessment activities for 7 weeks.

Data Analysis

In order to analyse the peer assessment forms, the answers of the students in the forms were noted by the researcher. In addition to their writings, the students also received feedback on their peer assessment performance; thereby, expected to show an increase in the quality of reflection and the feedback they exhibited. When the research ended, all the data gathered were examined to check whether there was a progress in the students' peer assessment performance.

In order to analyse the interview, first, the researcher transcribed the text using various punctuation marks in order to identify different language elements and emotions. For example, a pause in a speech was marked with an ellipsis (…). After that, the researcher translated the transcribed text into English for the students who preferred answering the questions in Turkish. After reading the text multiple times, the researcher coded the common themes with broader patterns of meaning. In the end, the themes were organised, categorised and labelled. Consequently, a coherent narrative was composed along with examples from the transcribed text.

Findings And Discussions

The first section presents the findings from the interviews that were carried out in the 3rd week and at the end of the study. The second section presents the findings obtained from the analysis of peer assessment forms that the students filled in after writing a paragraph or an essay each week.

Interviews

Question 1: What did you like most about assessing your friends?

In the first interview, the students generally reported that what they liked most about assessing their friends was to find their mistakes. One said: "It is really fun to detect someone else's mistakes. It makes me feel like I know better." Another said: "I compare myself to my friend, and I try to find as many mistakes as possible in his/her writing." Three students expressed their appreciation on the fact that the papers were anonymous. One of them said: "I liked trying to guess whose paper I was reading, and I also think it made things a lot easier not to know the answer." In addition, four students reported they had learnt new vocabulary from the papers they assessed. One of them said: "I wanted to be fair, so I looked up the words I didn't know. Next time, I myself wrote those words because I liked them." Finally, two students stated that they enjoyed reading someone else's ideas. One said: "When I first read my friend's paper, I was surprised that he suggested wearing glasses at a job interview would help to make a good impression. He had some really interesting reasons to support his idea. I enjoyed reading his writing. I think my paragraph was a bit boring."

In the second interview, only one student said he liked finding mistakes in another student's writing without giving any reasons. However, eleven out of seventeen students suggested they felt they were helping their friends. One said: "I was trying really hard to give good suggestions to help my friends improve their essays. I was thinking about my words because I don't want to be rude." Another said: "I liked that I could do something to help my friend. For example, I suggested alternative ideas and high-level vocabulary instead of simple ones." In addition, five students stated that seeing almost everybody did the same mistakes made them feel comfortable because they were not the only one. One said: "I saw that some of my friends did not understand how to write a thesis statement like me. It is difficult to understand the difference between thesis statement and the topic sentence. I felt relieved because I wasn't the only one who didn't understand the difference at first. I had thought everybody was smarter than me."

The difference between the 3rd week and the 7th week is striking. Students' attitudes obviously changed over time. Rather than merely enjoying finding mistakes, at the end of the study, they reported they enjoyed the activity because they felt they were helping each other. The fact that they felt responsible for each other's success and try to suggest new ideas and vocabulary items to improve their friend's work is a clear indication of the sense of community they felt. Instead of only picking up on each other's grammar and vocabulary mistakes, they reported that they genuinely tried to write quality comments to improve the paper they read. In addition, some students openly stated they learnt alternative ideas from each other, so they found it useful to read another student's paper. Finally, it is surprising to see that some students felt they are the only ones who did certain mistakes or did not

understand some specific topics. Reading others' papers helped them understand and feel relieved that all the students was going through similar stages.

Question 2: What did you like least about assessing your friends?

In the first interview, the students had various answers making it difficult to group them under the same theme. Four students openly stated that they did not think it was something useful. One said: "To be honest, I felt like I was wasting my time finding grammar mistakes that I would never make." 7 students suggested it was difficult for them to use the rubrics. One student said: "I was confused which criterion to consider. For example, I like the ideas, but there are too many spelling and grammar mistakes. I didn't know how to react." Three students reported that they did not like the long paragraphs. One of them said: "It was really boring to read such long paragraphs written with a bad handwriting. I don't understand how teachers read all those papers." Four students complained about the part in which they had to write how they could improve the writing. One said: "Writing an explanation part was boring. I didn't like trying to find a good reason from the rubric." Finally, two students stated that they did not consider themselves as good assessors. One said: "I don't think my English is good enough to give suggestion to someone else. It is not realistic. I didn't like it."

In the second interview, six students stated there was nothing that they did not like. All the other eleven students stated they did not like the part where they had to write the weaknesses of the writing. However, they put forward different reasons. Some suggested that although the papers were anonymous, they found this part emotionally difficult. One said: "I didn't really know whose paper I was assessing, but I knew it was someone in my class. Everybody is my friend. I felt really sad when I had to emphasise the weak sides." A few students claimed they were not at the position of deciding weaknesses. One said: "I think it is good to make suggestions for our friends, but finding weaknesses and mistakes is something that only teachers can do."

The students' discomfort in assessing their friends is somehow understandable and explainable. Spending most of their time together in the same classroom, it is natural that they quickly bonded with each other. Pinpointing weak spots might be considered as a violation to their friendship. The pressure they felt at that point did not come from their peers, but rather it came from within. In addition, the students reported that they had never done such activities before. Although at the end of the 7th week most of them were feeling that they had been helping their friends to improve, it was still a radical change in their perception of being a student. Nonetheless, it was interesting to hear that unlike the first interview, they stated they did not have difficulty assessing, but instead they did not like it mostly for emotional reasons.

Question 3: What did you learn from being an assessor?

In the first interview, there were two main groups of students with regard to their answers. The first group, consisting of fourteen students, answered this question by stating it was difficult and time consuming. One student said: "All in all, I had a really difficult time in assessing. It took a long time to understand what I was supposed to do." Another student said: "I didn't really understand why I was doing it. I think it is better if the teacher does it." A student added: "I like my writing classes, but I didn't like these activities because they are difficult for me." The remaining three students exhibited a positive attitude. One said: "I think it was useful to see the criteria. I know how teachers are assessing my papers." Another one said: "I didn't know my papers are examined like this. I am glad to learn how to mark."

In the second interview, on the other hand, the students gave promising answers. Nine students suggested they understood their teachers better. One said: "I understood that the teachers had a difficult job. Teaching us and then assessing our writings must be very difficult." In addition, eight students stated they understood the criteria. One said: "I learnt that there is a good system for assessment. I thought teachers assessed and graded our papers as they wished." Another student said: "I learnt that not only grammar and vocabulary, but also our ideas are important. I know what the teachers expects in the quizzes."

After 7 weeks of involving in the study, the students clearly started changing their attitudes towards the peer assessment process. It was interesting to hear they sympathised with their teachers regarding the difficulty of assessment process. In addition, some students reported they were able to get used to the peer assessment activities and the criteria. In fact, some students explicitly stated that they understood the criteria; thus, knew what was expected from them in the writing quizzes.

Question 4: What did you learn from being assessed?

In the first interview, students have three different ideas. Two students openly stated that they did not learn anything from their friends. One of them said: "I didn't really learn anything. I prefer the teachers to assess my paper." In addition, thirteen students reported that they learnt their mistakes. One of them said: "My friends found a lot of grammar mistakes." Another student said: "After one of my friends assesses my paper, I have a look at it and see my grammar and vocabulary mistakes." Finally, two students suggested it was useful that different

people assessed their papers each week. One of them said: "A different student checked my paper each week. They don't give good advice like my teacher, but it was nice to read different comments."

In the second interview, the students tended to give more positive answers regarding the things they learnt from being assessed. To begin with, none of the students mentioned grammar or vocabulary mistakes. Seven students reported their friends helped them to see their weaknesses. One of the students said: "My friends pointed out some of my examples. They weren't relevant to my supporting sentences." Another student said: "After I got my paper back, I read my friend's comments and I realised my weaknesses." Three students reported that they enjoyed being appreciated by their friends, and this increased their self-confidence in writing. One student said: "I like reading about my strengths. I felt happy when one of my friends wrote positive things about my essay." The remaining seven students reported that they had the chance of seeing their papers from a different perspective each week. One student said: "Before this class, I only read my teacher's comment about my writings, but now I read a lot of comments from different students. They all give me different ideas."

At the end of the study, the students got more familiar with the rubrics, and they realised that the criteria do not only include grammar and vocabulary. Therefore, in the second interview, they considered their writings as a whole by addressing to the parts that need to be improved as weaknesses. While reporting what they learnt from being assessed, most of them referred to their ideas, and the examples they used to support them. Moreover, students started to appreciate the situation in which they have the opportunity to have a different student assess their papers each week in addition to the teacher. They stated that they had the chance to see their papers from different point of views.

Peer Assessment Forms

In the early stages of the study, the students tended to focus more on the mechanical aspects of the writings. While they were answering the questions in the peer assessment form, many students were only giving examples of grammar and vocabulary mistakes, and when they could not find any, they considered the writing as very good and filled in the weaknesses part with statements such as "There aren't many grammar mistakes. I think it is very good." For the strengths part, similarly, they showed a tendency to praise their friends for their accurate use of grammar and vocabulary. Except for few, most students did not even mention the range and level-appropriateness of grammar and vocabulary usage. Although the organisation and quality of the ideas had been explained to be of equal importance as the mechanical aspects of a text during the introduction of the rubrics, students failed to refer to such elements while assessing their friends.

Since most students had never assessed anyone before, the results of the first few weeks arguably were not surprising. It is possible that the reason why the students emphasised grammar and vocabulary mistakes so much could be due to being exposed to grammar-oriented language teaching. In the first interview, the students reported they found it easy and enjoyable to find grammar and vocabulary mistakes of their friends, which may support this argument. However, 3-week of practice for peer assessment seems insufficient for the students as they also reported in the first interview that they found it quite confusing to refer to the rubrics while filling in the peer assessment form.

Towards the end of the study, on the other hand, the students showed progress in their assessment performance after they started to get used to the peer assessment process. They were able to comment on the organisation and integrity of their ideas rather than only pointing out grammar and vocabulary mistakes in their friends' papers. For instance, for the part in which they were asked to mention the strong and weak sides of the writings, a student wrote: "He gave a lot of examples. They are relevant and interesting." Another student wrote: "He wrote an interesting idea but didn't explain it properly. He should give details." In addition, for the part where the students were asked to come up with some ideas to improve their friends' writings, instead of broad and vague statements, many of them wrote specific solutions such as "Your grammar and vocabulary are good, but you couldn't organise your ideas well. You should go from general to specific. It would be better."

In conclusion, when the peer assessment forms were analysed, a gradual increase in the students' performance in terms of quality of their assessment can be seen. The students managed to avoid commenting only on the mechanical aspects of the writings and included other elements from the rubrics in their comments. It could be suggested that the amount of time they spent participating in the peer assessment activities along with the ongoing feedback they received from their teacher had a positive effect on their understanding of the assessment process. In parallel with this, the students also stated in the second interview, which was carried out at the end of the research, they were able to make more sense of the criteria; therefore, they were able to refer to the rubrics.

Conclusion

At the end of the study, taking all the procedures including peer assessment as well as the interviews during the 7-week study, an overview of the benefits of peer assessment for students have been categorised.

An Enhanced Deep Learning Experience

Peer assessment activities are aimed firstly to improve students learning (Brown & Glasner, 2003). During the study, the students wrote, read, and assessed many papers using the rubrics. At the end of each assessment process, they received feedback for both their writings and their assessment performance.

In the early stages of the study, the students found the overall process difficult, and they could not refer to the rubrics as expected. Similar situations were also reported by other researchers (e.g. McDowell, 1995) that it is possible students may resist to such changes at first. However, after a while they managed to adapt to the procedures and made more sense out of the rubrics. They received plenty of feedback not only from their teachers but also from their peers. Although the students were not able to offer arguably decent feedback to each other at first, after the 4th week of the study, they began showing a significant improvement in their overall assessment performance. At this stage, the feedback they receive from their teacher has a significant value, as the students need simplification and explanation on the process (Ehly & Topping, 2009). Along with their teacher, the students constantly provided feedback to each other to improve their weaker sides and strengthen their stronger sides even more.

In addition, helping each other develops a sense of trust among students and reduces the stress of assessment process significantly (Keaten & Richardson, 1993). In the second interview, many students reported they enjoyed the feeling of helping one another. Moreover, the activities helped the students to create a strong emotional bond with their peers. The relationship among the students was so strong that most students reported in the second interview that although they were able to assess each other's papers, they preferred not to because they felt very sad when they had to point out the weaknesses. Similarly, in other studies (e.g. Williams, 1992) students reported they found criticising their friends uncomfortable.

Learning in Cooperation with Peers

As Keaten et al. (1993) states, one of the aims of peer assessment is to create an environment where students help each other to improve. Over the course of the 7-week study, the students took the peer assessment procedure seriously and did their best to offer help to their friends. In the beginning of the study, most students failed to give quality feedback to each other because they mostly pointed out grammar and vocabulary mistakes. Focusing only on the mechanical aspects of a writing could be an indication of the traditional education methods the students had been through (Black & William, 1998). In traditional methods, the focus of writing classes is usually on the correct use of the language (Cheung & Sun, 1999); hence; little effort and importance is given to the ideas and meaning of what students actually compose (Raimes, 1983). However, as time progressed and the students got more familiar with the rubrics, they managed to comment on various aspects of each other's writings and offered alternative ideas. In fact, the most enjoyable part seemed to be the actual assessment part as they were curious about both what their friends wrote and what feedback they would get from their friends. As suggested by Conway et al. (1993), the students enjoyed this new approach to assessment. In the second interview, most students stated that they really enjoyed reading others' writings because they could learn alternative ways to approach to certain ideas, and some students reported that enjoyed learning new vocabulary from each other's writings.

All in all, the peer assessment process allowed the students to interact with each other more; thus, they were able to recognise the needs of their peers and offer suggestions to improve them. Such activities did not only contribute to their educational success, but also their social life (Cheng & Warren, 1997) as they always interacted with each other, which created a small community in which the students worked in cooperation.

Implications

The study suggests that peer assessment improves students' EFL writing performance in several ways. It enables students to be in the centre of assessment process, which helps them become accountable for not only their own learning but also that of their friends' (Keaten & Richardson, 1993). In addition, as students have an active role in the assessment process, they also tend to participate in the lessons more in order to have a deeper understanding of the content, compose more quality writings and provide more quality feedback to others. It could be concluded that once peer assessment is integrated with the EFL writing courses, it is possible that the interaction between students increases creating an atmosphere in which students study in cooperation and collaboration (Loacker & Jensen, 1988).

Peer assessment activities in the classroom can also have a positive effect on students' social life outside the school (Sambell & McDowell, 1997). The study showed that such activities could improve students' problem-solving skills. In addition, interacting with their peers, the students developed a sense of cooperation, which is quite similar to the real-life situations where people need to work together to achieve a greater goal (Dochy et al., 1999). Consistent with the needs of the modern society (Moerkerke, 1996), the peer assessment activities enabled

students to successfully examine their own strengths and weaknesses, which is a skill they might as well utilise in their future careers (Dochy & McDowell, 1997).

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Appendices

Appendix A: Peer Assessment Form

Week Number: _____   **Date: _____**

Assessor's Code: _____   **Assessee's Code: _____**

Please answer the following questions.

    1.   What are the main strengths of this paragraph/essay?

    2.   What are its main weaknesses?

    3.   How do you think you can improve this paragraph/essay?

Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. What did you like most about assessing your friends?

2. What did you like least about assessing your friends?

3. What did you learn from being an assessor?

4. What did you learn from being assessed?