

IMPROVING THE STUDENTS' ACADEMIC WRITING THROUGH RUBRICS AND PEER CORRECTION

I Made Wardhana
STIPAR Triatma Jaya, Badung

ABSTRACT

This study attempted to find out the contribution of rubrics and peer correction as a technique of teaching academic writing in the process of academic paragraph writing, in terms of, what the students' perception on rubrics and peer correction is; what the students' writing achievement is through this technique; and what the correlation between the students' perception and their writing achievement is. Fifty one students taken from two classes, being exposed to the technique, were selected as the samples whose responses from the questionnaires showed that they had a very positive perception towards the use of rubrics and peer correction in guiding them to write an academic paragraph; and there is a positive correlation between the students' positive perception and their academic paragraph writing achievement meaning that rubrics and peer correction could help improve their writing achievement. Therefore, it could be suggested that rubrics could be applied as one of the favourable techniques to teach academic paragraph writing as they were appropriate to be used as a guide to organize all components of academic writing such as formats, punctuation and mechanics, content, organization and improve their ability in grammar and sentence structures (Oshima, 2007)

Keywords: rubrics, peer correction, academic writing.

ABSTRAK

Studi ini mencoba untuk menemukan apa kontribusi rubrics dan peer correction dalam proses penulisan akademik, dalam hal bagaimana persepsi mahasiswa terhadap rubrics dan peer correction; bagaimana nilai penulisan paragraf akademik mahasiswa dengan teknik ini, apakah ada korelasi antara rubrics dan peer correction dengan peningkatan nilai penulisan paragraf akademik mereka. Lima puluh satu mahasiswa yang diambil dari 2 kelas yang diekspos dengan teknik ini dipilih sebagai sampel, yang responnya terhadap kuesioner menunjukkan bahwa mereka mempunyai persepsi yang sangat positif terhadap rubrics sebagai pedoman pengorganisasian penulisan paragraf akademik; dan peer correction meningkatkan kemampuan grammar dan structure; serta terdapat korelasi positif antara persepsi mereka terhadap rubrics dan peer correction dengan prestasi penulisan paragraf akademik, yang berarti bahwa rubrics dan peer correction dapat meningkatkan kemampuan penulisan akademik mereka; sehingga bisa direkomendasikan bahwa rubrics dapat dipakai sebagai salah satu teknik yang baik untuk meningkatkan kemampuan penulisan paragraf akademik.

Kata kunci: rubrics, peer correction, penulisan akademik paragraf.

I. BACKGROUND

Teaching academic writing is such complex processes of activities that requires proper techniques in order to get the students engaged in the entire processes of pre-writing, drafting, responding, revising, editing, and post-writing (Widodo, 2008; Wardhana, 2015) with an integrated capability in structure, grammar, vocabulary, spelling, mechanics and, of course, ideas in order to organize and put them in a real piece of composition or writing. Several techniques have been investigated to try their effectiveness in teaching writing such as 'spider diagram' (Dian Natalia, 2013), 'peer review' (Kristi Lundstrom, Wendy Baker, 2009; Coffin and Curry, et al in Ekayanti, 2013), 'concept mapping' (Mary Kane and William M.K. Trochim in Sri Artini, 2014), 'collaborative writing' (Higgins et al in Wiratni, 2014). As one of the writing teachers himself, certainly, the writer was also curious to make better improvement of the students' gain in writing academic English.

Wardhana (2015) found that outlining could make it easier for the students to write academic essay writing especially in organising their ideas. Outline, which is beneficial for the improvement of academic writing as one element of rubrics as elements of assessment, arises another question whether rubrics also play an important role in improving the students' academic writing achievement although it is admitted that the fact shows that no wonder grammar puts its first place on the problems the students encounter in writing academic writing after organising ideas and thought. The writer's preliminary observation shows that rubrics especially on the elements of organization and grammar and sentence structure are also

beneficial through peer-correction or peer review activities (Kristi Lundstrom, Wendy Baker, 2009).

Supporting Kristi Lundstrom and Wendy Baker (2009) on peer correction activities, this study attempts to investigate whether rubrics can help support the students' ability in writing academic writing.

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Kristi Lundstrom, Wendy Baker (2009) who studied the benefits of peer review activities in the academic writing process found out that the reviewer or students giving feedback got more benefits to the improvement of their writing.

On the other hand, Widodo's (2008) study on Process-based academic essay writing instruction in an EFL context showed that within the process-based framework, writing is viewed as process which involves pre-writing, drafting, responding, revising, editing, and post-writing through which students recursively and reflectively reel. Here the place of the process-based academic paragraph writing is on peer editing or peer correction activities.

Furthermore, Wardhana's (2015) study on outlining suggests that students get benefits from outlining in prewriting steps especially in organising ideas from a thesis statement to developing ideas in a paragraph of introductory, in this case, the thesis statement and the body as well as the conclusion.

According to Oshima (2007: 196), there are 5 elements of rubrics for paragraph writing. They are (1) format in which the title must be centered; the first line of each paragraph is indented; there are margins on both sides, and the paragraph is double-spaced; (2) punctuation and mechanics in which periods (full stop), commas, capital letters, and spelling are

used; (3) content in which the paragraph fits the requirements of the assignment; the paragraph is interesting to read and shows care and thought of the writer; (4) organisation in which it begins with a topic sentence with a topic and a controlling idea, containing several specific and factual supporting sentences explaining or proving the topic sentence, including at least one example and ending with an appropriate concluding sentence; (5) grammar and structure in estimating grammar and structure score. According to the writer these are very significant guidelines for the students to write academic writing.

The procedures of the teaching are that the students are reviewed or exposed with all components of the rubrics, then the process of writing the paragraph begins followed by peer correction through all the rubrics elements. On the part of grammar and sentence structure the students have time to exchange ideas to discuss grammar they use with their peer writings

III. POPULATION AND SAMPLE

Since this investigation was a kind of semi classroom action research and expose-pacto, and a prolonged study of two semesters in order to know the role of rubrics in paragraph academic writing and essay academic writing, the population taken was Semester IV Classes and the samples were class G and H students in which the writer taught academic writing in the academic year 2015/2016. There were 34 students of Class G, 24 students of Class H on the Attendance Lists. Apart from that

for the sake of efficiency, Classes G, H were selected on purpose as the samples because the writer himself taught Writing III (Academic Writing) to these students so academically the writer recognizes the students well and quantitatively as the samples of the research, they were considered representative (28 percent) more than 15 to 25 per cent of the sample requirement (Suharsimi 2002).

3.1 Instrumentation

This study used the instruments of a pretest in the form of a preliminary questionnaire with a yes-no answer, a test and questionnaire. The questionnaire was meant to get information about the students' responses on their preferences or reactions or perception towards the activities of writing academic paragraph. The test which was a post test required the students to write a free topic on academic paragraph writing without purposely reminding the use of rubrics element in order to find out whether they already understood to write academic paragraph; the data of questionnaire responses would be confronted with the students' achievement in academic paragraph writing after being exposed on paragraph academic writing exercises with the help of rubrics to find out the correlation between the students' perception on the use of rubrics and their academic writing achievement.

3.2 Procedure of Data Collection

The data obtained from the questionnaires would be tabulated as the following table.

Table 1
Percentage of the Students' answers on the questionnaire
for each category

No	N	A	%	B	%	C	%	D	%	E	%	Posi tive	Nega Tive	Neu Tral	Re mark

As the investigation was a follow up investigation of the study on outlining (Wardhana, 2015), the writer would say, a semi classroom action research and ex post facto in its nature which was a kind of applied research to examine a specific issue (Goodenough 2011: 4) conducted in the classroom by the teacher in order to improve or solve the problems of teaching learning process (Elisabeth, in Burns 2010:5) carried out in only one cycle depending on the improvement of the teaching learning process. The data of which were made about the new knowledge through conclusion drawn from validated evidence (Mc Niff and Whitehead 2002: 16). Rubrics are considered to be an important base of teaching academic writing.

The teaching learning processes would start by explaining the elements of rubrics required for writing academic writing i.e formatting, punctuation and mechanics, contents, organisation, grammar and sentence structure emphasising on writing the topic sentence, supporting sentences with details, organising the supporting sentences, giving examples. On the parts of grammar and sentence structure the students were supposed to discuss Oshima's (2007: 151 – 240) English sentence structure comprising types of sentences, noun clauses, adverbial clauses, relative clauses, and participial phrases on which for a better students' soft skills, a few groups were required to do

presentations followed by discussion with a reward of points for members of presenters and to the floors from asking questions and explaining the structural items. The students' paragraph writings were then reviewed and corrected by their peers by referring to the rubrics. On the parts of grammar and sentence structure the errors and peer corrections were finally discussed with the teacher to find the more appropriate and grammatical forms, in case, the students corrections could have got errors themselves. This process was also, the writer thought, a very beneficial teaching learning process of academic writing. Points of reward were given to both parts, the correctors and the *correctees*, the one being corrected. Finally, the students were engaged in a post test.

Therefore, the procedures of data collection were as follows. Preliminary questions about rubrics were given to the students to find out whether the students already understand what rubrics really were; then for a pretest the students were supposed to write a paragraph from a few given topic sentences; after they were exposed with the process of academic writing referring to Oshima's rubrics (Oshima and Hogue, 2007), at the end of semester they were supposed to respond to a Likert's (1932) scale of five categories questionnaire which was also supplied with open questions (Dwyer, 2000: 86) which would show the positive and negative perception of the students' towards rubrics

and peer correction. The questionnaire items distributed to the students were to response on a score of a scale of A (absolutely agree) = 4, B (agree) = 3, C (neutral) = 2, D (disagree) = 1 and E (absolutely disagree) = 0 to positive statements such as rubrics make it possible for the students to write academic paragraph easier (item 1); understanding the outline of a paragraph makes it easier to write academic paragraph (item 2); rubrics make it easier to evaluate other's academic paragraph (item 3); understanding the elements of rubrics makes it easier to write an academic paragraph (item 4, 5); one topic idea is in a paragraph (item 7); element of organisation makes it easier to organise a paragraph (item 9); rubrics make it easier to evaluate other's and to learn on one's own writing (items 11,12); use rubrics as a guidance (item 14); and to negative statements such as without rubrics it's easy to write paragraph as it is too complicated (items 8, 10); it's easier to evaluate others' work without rubrics (item 6); rubrics are not understandable and without rubrics it's easy to understand the elements of a paragraph (items 13, 15). Next, after they already learned how to write academic paragraph they were given a post test of writing an academic paragraph from a number of provided list of optional topic sentence to find out their academic writing achievements referring to

the rubrics. Then, the average score of every sample on all questionnaire items were confronted with their achievement in academic writing to find out the correlation between their perception on rubrics and peer correction and their writing achievement. Additionally, the means score of pretest could be compared with that of the post test to find out the students gain in writing academic English through rubrics. The preliminary questions and questionnaires were written in the students' native language (Bahasa) as to avoid misinterpretation.

As the questionnaire comprised positive and negative types of questions (see the Table), expecting to get more objective respons, the data of which were treated properly so as to show the appropriate perception. In other words, the positive respons to the positive items (items 1,2,3,4,5,7,9,11,12,14) would be treated as positive perceptions; on the other hand, the negative respons to the negative items (6,8,10,13,15) in reverse, as positive perceptions.

To find out the influence of the students' perception on rubrics and their academic paragraph writing achievement, the correlation between the rubrics and the students' achievement in academic writing would be obtained by using Pearson's product moment conversion correlation fomula:

$$r_{xy} = \frac{N \cdot \Sigma XY - (\Sigma X)(\Sigma Y)}{\sqrt{\{N \cdot \Sigma X^2 - (\Sigma X)^2\} \{N \cdot \Sigma Y^2 - (\Sigma Y)^2\}}}$$

In which N is the number of respondents

X is the students' perception on rubrics

Y is the students' achievement on academic writing.

As for the open answer questions from the questionnaire the answers would be analised by using percentage to find out their positive and negative responses to be confronted with the result of the Likert'

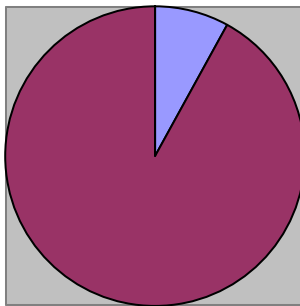
scale questionnaires and the reasons of their preferences.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The preliminary questionnaire or pretest distributed to the students inquired about their knowledge about rubrics such as whether they had learned or understood about the elements, the use of rubrics as a guide to write an academic writing; whether they agreed that the students were obliged to use rubrics as it enabled them easier to write the format and organize the

content of an academic writing; evaluate the other's writing especially on structure and grammar which, promptly, they themselves could learn about grammar and structure. The outcome of the questionnaire showed that majority of the students (92 per cent said "no") did not understand about rubrics so they had not yet learned it (see the pie chart), therefore, this study was proper to be conducted.

Chart 1: Percentage of the students who had not learned about rubrics



Note: The large slice is the "No" answer and the small slice is the "Yes" answer

After the teaching learning process was conducted, at the end of the semester the questionnaire was distributed and the data as

the responses to the use of rubrics and peer correction can be seen on the following table.

Table 2
Percentage of the Students' answers on the questionnaire for each category and everage of positive and negative answers

No	N	A	%	B	%	C	%	D	%	E	%	Posi Tive	Nega tive	Neu Tral
1	51	20	39	28	55	3	6	0	0	0	0	94	0	6
2	51	32	62.7	18	35.3	1	2	0	0	0	0	98	0	2
3	51	31	60.8	19	37.2	1	2	0	0	0	0	98	0	2
4	49	30	61.2	17	34.7	1	2	1	2	0	0	96	2	2
5	51	11	21.6	36	70.6	4	7.8	0	0	0	0	92.16	0	7.84

6	47	0	0	3	6.38	5	10.64	32	68.1	7	14.93	82.98	6.38	10.64
7	51	12	23.5	33	64.7	6	11.76	0	0	0	0	88.24	0	11.76
8	50	0	0	4	8	6	12	36	72	4	8	80	8	12
9	50	9	18	36	72	5	10	0	0	0	0	90	0	10
10	51	0	0	1	2	3	5.88	36	70.58	11	21.57	92.15	2	5.89
11	51	24	47.1	24	47.1	2	3.9	1	1.96	0	0	94.11	3.92	1.97
12	51	25	49	24	47.1	2	3.9	0	0	0	0	96.07	0	3.93
13	46	0	0	1	2.2	7	15.2	28	60.87	10	21.74	82.61	2.17	15.22
14	51	11	3.9	30	58.8	10	19.6	0	0	0	0	80.39	0	19.61
15	51	0	0	4	7.8	10	19.6	29	56.86	8	15.69	72.55	7.84	19.61
Percentage of average scores on positive and negative respons												89.15	2.15	8.70

The students' response from the questionnaires shows that the students had a very positive attitude (89.15%) towards rubrics. According to them, rubrics made it easier for them to write academic paragraph (94%) because of understanding its outline (98%); and its elements (96%); it made them easier evaluate others' paragraph (98%); led them to understand one paragraph only had one topic idea (88.24%); by evaluating others' one could learn one's own writing (94.11 %); and so rubrics should be used as a guidance (80.39 %). The interesting things are that when they were encountered with negative statements majority disagreed with the statements that they could write easily without rubrics (80%); rubrics was too complicated (92.15%); rubrics was not understandable (82.61 %); and they could write elements of paragraph without rubrics (72.55 %); the rest of the response on negative statements fell on category of neutral also meaning that they didn't have negative responses. Therefore the result of the questionnaire both from positive and negative statements shows that the students had very positive responses towards rubrics.

From the open-ended questions which were mainly enquiring about the reasons of rubrics' and peer correction advantages to academic paragraph writing, the students' responses (see Table 3), in agreement with

the result of the questionnaire (question no.14), showed that rubrics functioned as a guide to academic paragraph writing through its components such as the topic idea, the developing or supporting sentences (the body) and the concluding sentence (90.70%); in other words, it helped them be more organized, understand to use mechanics. Furthermore, peer correction would give benefit to them in the sense of understanding to assess or correct other's work which was at the same time to learn new grammar or structure as well as vocabulary items both for the *assessors and assessees* which, in comparing and contrasting both pieces of work, also meant as a reflective corrective learning strategy to one's own academic writing process. However, very few of them (4%) admitted that they still got very confused about the use of rubrics whose reason was assumed to be their absence from the class meetings and that they didn't really understand what rubrics were.

When requested their recommendations about the use of rubrics, out of those positive responses, majority (83.78%) recommended that rubrics and peer correction were very favorable to be applied as a guide in the process of academic paragraph writing; the rest suggested to do more class discussions

about the result of peer correction and more explanation on the elements of scoring.

Table 3
Percentage of the responses on open-ended questions

Question's Number	The students responses & reasons	Frequency	Percentage	Remark
IA	Rubrics gives benefits	41	95.35	Positive
	Reason: 1. As a guide to write the components of academic paragraph	39	90.70	negative
	2.No benefit	2	4.65	
IIB	In what way rubrics helps writing an academic paragraph			
	1.paragraph format, and structure from evaluating others' work. 2. Write paragraph organization	18 22	45 55	Positive positive
IIC	Necessity of using mechanics No responses from the rest	33	76.74	positive
IID	Reasons for being easier to write to write academic paragraph guided by rubrics (n = 35)			positive
	More organized	24	68.57	
	There is a guidance It is easier to score and revise it	12 5	34.28 14.28	
IIE	The advantages of rubrics as a guide and peer correction(n=93)			positive
	1.It is easier to write a paragraph and there is a feedback	24	25.81	
	2. To learn grammar	23	24.73	
	3. Own writing evaluation	23	24.73	
	4. To compare own's and others' writing	13	13.98	
5. To learn new vocab. items	10	10.75		
IIF	Benefits of peer correction(n=50)			Positive
	1.To understand the correct grammar	23	46	
	2. To learn new grammar	14	28.80	
	3. Understand how to asses others' work	11	22	
4. Being confused	2	4	negative	
IIG	Recommendations (n = 37)		83.78	positive
	1.Use rubrics as a guidance	31	10.81	
	2. peer correction discussion 3. more explanation on each element	4	5.41	

	& scoring	2		
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In order to find out the correlation between the use of rubrics and the students' achievement in academic paragraph writing the study applied

Pearson's product moment conversion correlation formula whose computation result was as follows.

$$r_{xy} = \frac{N \cdot \Sigma XY - (\Sigma X)(\Sigma Y)}{\sqrt{\{N \cdot \Sigma X^2 - (\Sigma X)^2\} \{N \cdot \Sigma Y^2 - (\Sigma Y)^2\}}}$$

$$r_{xy} = \frac{51.568,733 - 170,533.168}{\sqrt{\{51.575,1467 - 170,533^2\} \{51.574 - 168^2\}}}$$

$$r_{xy} = \frac{29005.383 - 28649.544}{\sqrt{(29332.48 - 29081.51)(29274 - 28224)}}$$

$$r_{xy} = \frac{355.839}{\sqrt{250,97.1050}} = \frac{355,839}{513.34} = 0.6932$$

The value of rxy is 0.6932

In order to get the value of rxy the score of each respondent's response on all questionnaire items (x) and the score of each respondent academic paragraph achievement (y) must be multiplied, then both are squared, and finally the total scores of which are then computed using Pearson correlation formula; the result is 0.6932. The closer the value R_{xy}^2 to figure 1 shows that there is a stronger correlation of both variables. On the contrary, the closer the value to figure 0 the weaker the correlation is. If the value of R_{xy} is positive it means that both variables have linear correlation but if the value of R_{xy} is

negative the correlation is negative or contradictory (Eko Budiarto, 2001: 248). So the value of rxy is 0.6932 showing that there is a strong positive correlation between the students' perception on the use of rubrics and peer correction in academic paragraph writing and their academic writing achievement (Sugiyono (2007). This also means that the positive linear value of variable x (perception) and variable y (achievement) show the higher the students' perception on the positive use of rubrics and peer correction is, the higher their academic paragraph writing achievement is.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Although rubrics were meant to be used as the framework for writing assessment,

the investigation of the use of rubrics and peer correction in the process of academic paragraph writing in this study showed that they were also advantageous to function as one of the proper academic writing

teaching techniques. The conclusion of the study can be put forward as follows:

1. The students had a very positive perception towards the use of rubrics and peer correction as a teaching technique of academic paragraph writing as they could function as a guide not only to help them write with proper use of format, mechanics and content but also organize their ideas into a paragraph writing as well as improve their ability to use grammar and structures both for the *correctors* and *correctees* (Kristi Lundstrom, Wendy Baker, 2009) This also meant a reflective corrective learning strategy to one's own academic writing process and therefore, consequently, it also brought about the improvement to the students' achievement in paragraph academic writing because through peer correction both correctors and correctees could have positive and more relaxed atmosphere of teaching learning process.
2. Thus, it could be recommended that rubrics could be one of the favourable techniques to teach academic paragraph writing as they were appropriate to be used as a guide in organizing all components of academic writing such as formats, punctuation and mechanics, content, organization and grammar and sentence structures (Oshima, 2007)
3. The investigation also suggested that the result of peer correction should be discussed in the classroom to ensure that the correctors and correctees got the maximum gain of appropriate possible alternative expressions or sentences used in the context being corrected by both correctors and correctees as well as the entire class.
4. Further study is recommended to find out whether this technique could enhance to improve the students' academic essay writing.

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