The Power of Peer Assessment as an Inclusive Learning Strategy in Management Education: Fostering Social Justice at the Tertiary Level

Short abstract (200 words)

Peer assessment (PA) is one of the most popular forms of formative assessment currently used in Higher Education Institutions worldwide. As an inclusive assessment practice, PA presupposes that individual learners' needs and tastes are taken into consideration, as far as possible, to ensure that all students have an opportunity to succeed focusing on their strengths rather than their weaknesses. The overall aim is to unravel areas for improvement and supporting students throughout their learning journey. In the current study, PA was used as an inclusive assessment strategy to enhance students' writing skills and motivation towards writing. Forty-four undergraduate students attended an Academic Writing Module for one academic semester. The overall aim was to develop their writing skills taking into consideration their individual differences. Students received training in PA and were then involved in reciprocal anonymous PA. Findings indicated that learners improved their writing skills considerably and became more independent learners. Their motivation also increased as they could better understand the assessment criteria. However, they confessed that they needed more training and support in PA. The findings of the current study also indicate that PA should be initiated at a younger age to enhance student collaboration and reflection.

Keywords: peer assessment, Assessment for Social Justice, Inclusive Assessment, undergraduate students, writing, motivation

Long abstract (800 words)

Peer assessment (PA) is an alternative assessment method which enables learners to engage in fruitful conversations about their learning process and academic performance ensuring that they take responsibility for their own learning by relying on themselves and their peers rather than their lecturer. It is also defined as a communication process through which learners enter into dialogues related to performance and standards (Adachi et al., 2018; Topping, 2018). The current study explored the use of PA as an inclusive assessment method that enhances undergraduate students' writing performance and willingness to write and learn in Higher Education Institutions (HEI).

As lecturers welcome extremely diverse cohorts nowadays, inclusive assessment does not necessarily refer to students with special educational needs or disabled learners. HEI are increasingly concerned about adopting inclusive teaching and assessment practices to cater for the needs of multilingual and multicultural students who should be offered equal opportunities to succeed first in their academic contexts and later in an increasingly complex workplace that has high expectations from individuals who wish to secure career-enhancing positions. As universities increasingly stress autonomous and collaborative learning (Voogt et al., 2013), lecturers tend to use more collaborative activities that actively engage students in learning to write (Yang et al., 2021). When participating in PA, students can socially construct knowledge through the exchange of peer feedback which allows learners to detect problems with their writing skills and urges them to take action to rectify their errors and resolve their cognitive conflict (Zhao, 2018).

Moreover, limited research is available on using group PA in combination with a game-based technique to enhance students' writing skills and improve their motivation towards learning. Game-assisted learning offers an evolutionary way of "improving engagement in learning and

motivation in order to extend and challenge the ways in which learning takes place," (BECTA, 2006, p. 2). The research questions that guided this study were:

- What is the impact of PA on undergraduate students' writing achievement?
- What are undergraduate students' perceptions of PA as a learning tool while experimenting with this innovative approach?

The current study explored the implementation of PA of writing with 44 undergraduate students who engaged in PA of writing in terms of a mandatory module at the University of Cyprus for one academic semester (13 weeks). Students attended a series of workshops on Grammar and Academic Writing. All students had to take a pre-test and a post-test. The aim of the module was to familiarize these students with basics of paragraph writing and help them improve their essay writing skills.

Students were invited to participate in two PA activities every week. The lecturer and researcher used a popular game-based activity to implement PA in her classes. Students provided PA which included both marks for each one of the categories in the marking rubric and comments. Students provided PA in pairs first and then in groups of 4. They were also encouraged to use self-assessment to improve their essays before they received the final mark and comments from the lecturer. The aim was to allow students to experience and benefit from two kinds of PA, face-to-face pair PA and anonymous group PA.

All students participated in a rater calibration session to increase the reliability of their marks by allowing learners to better understand the assessment criteria (Li & Grion, 2019). Students were asked to provide anonymous feedback regarding the PA implementation every 3 weeks by completing a document which was used as a form of a diary to record students' experiences during the academic semester. Students were also asked to take part in focus group discussions twice during the implementation to discuss any challenges they might have faced and indicate the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the implementation. The lecturer also kept a diary during the implementation of PA and added field notes each week.

The outcomes of the current study indicated that students demonstrated a positive attitude during the learning process and improved the quality of their paragraphs and essays. Training students before the implementation and coaching and mentoring them during the PA implementation developed students' confidence in their PA skills and enhanced their motivation. This is turn improved their writing performance which is in line with previous research (Lin et al., 2001). The value of the current study lies in the fact that it explored students' attitudes during the implementation rather than at the end like numerous other studies (Chen, 2010; Xiao & Lucking, 2008; Vickerman, 2009). It further confirmed the effectiveness of PA in enhancing academic writing performance in HEI reported in previous studies (Cartney, 2010) adding a game-based element to the PA intervention. To sum up, the current study supports that PA is a sine qua non for the preparation of work-ready graduates who value inclusivity, teamwork, and self-reliance in HEI worldwide.