

ESL writing achievement and grades



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STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD WRITING ESL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS PEER RESPONSE

Graham, Berninger, and Fan (2007) emphasized that attitude is an effective component of motivation. Concerning (Second Language Acquisition (SLA), Cook (1993) elaborated on the Affective Filter Hypothesis proposed by Krashen's 1982 theory of second language acquisition. Cook (1993) stated that Krashen theorized that motivation is an essential variable that has a facilitative, affective role in L2 (second language) learning. Cook (1993) explained that Krashen claimed that Language learners who are highly motivated are more inclined to acquire the target language. Unmotivated learners who are highly anxious on the other hand, usually have difficulty understanding the target language because of a high "affective filter" which results in a "mental block" that hinders "comprehensible input" from being acquired.

The question here is; how about peer reviewers' affective state? More critically, and in direct relation with (ESL) writing, Anderman and Wolters (2006) indicated that the affective states may influence the different types of strategies which are utilized by students while writing (as cited in Graham et al., 2007). Along similar lines, Isen (1990) stipulated that students with negative affect tend to use obsolete and dead-end writing strategies whereas students who are characterized by an affirmative and more encouraging attitude towards writing tend to get engaged in more flexible and adaptive self-regulated strategies which help them be cognitively engaged to the writing task (as cited in Graham et al., 2007).

According to Graham, Berninger, and Fan (2007) the sole researcher who investigated students' attitude towards writing in a systematic way during the 90s was Knudson (1992, 1993, 1995) whose main area of focus was elementary age children. Kear, Coffman, McKenna, and Ambrosio (2000) found out that children's attitude toward writing actually worsens as they move to upper grades. Same results were reported in earlier research done by Knudson (1991, 1992, 1993) who also found out that older students tend to have less positive attitudes towards writing than younger ones (as cited in Kear et al., 2000). Therefore, Knudson (1995) insisted that since research indicates that writing anxiety and apprehension have a negative effect on students' success in school, practitioners should be more involved in research that has to do with writers' attitudes towards writing and how it evolved in school environment. Knudson (1995) also emphasized that educators should be knowledgeable about their students' understanding of the writing tasks so that they would be better able to assess their students' engagement, involvement, and interest. Knudson (1995) conducted a field study which examined how writing attitude and achievement are correlated in addition to the correlational relationship between writing attitude and grade level in addition to gender. The participants were 430 students enrolled in an elementary school in the USA / English language native speakers who came from either low or lower socio-economic status. The researcher administered a questionnaire for each student grade level. Hence, students in grades (1-3) responded to the writing Attitude Survey for Primary grade students; whereas older students in grades (4-8) responded to the Writing Attitude Survey for Children. It must further be noted that the aforementioned attitude scales were both developed by the researcher. In <https://assignbuster.com/esl-writing-achievement-and-grades/>

addition to the questionnaires, students were asked to respond to a given prompt. Each essay written by students was read and graded by two raters who had achieved acceptable terms of inter-rater reliability. Knudson (1995) triangulated her data collection procedures by randomly selecting 12 students from all grade levels and interviewed them to elaborate on their answers they have given in the writing attitude survey. The children were also interviewed to elaborate on their beliefs towards the writing tasks done at school and how they were directly related to their achievement as well as to explain how they perceived writing to be important. The interview contained 10 open-ended questions which provided the researcher more insights about students' understanding of writing tasks and activities at different grade levels as well as more explanations on students' responses given in the questionnaires administered earlier.

Results indicated that writing achievement was directly related to students' grade level as well as their perceptions and attitudes towards writing. Hence, Knudson (1995) reported that students who have positive attitudes towards writing regardless of age and gender tend to be better writers. On the other hand, concerning grade level and gender and their relation to writing achievement, the researcher also reported that older students and females in particular have a better inclination towards becoming proficient writers than younger writers and males in particular. What is interesting is that Knudson (1995) claimed that the questionnaires and interviews she conducted also measured how students' attitudes towards writing changes as a result of specific writing strategies they learned in class. Hence, students in grade 4 for example were able to verbalize the process strategies they

used in writing such as planning, organizing, and goal setting. So, the researcher concluded that the process writing approach became more prevalent in writing instruction where students engage in prewriting activities and this strategy was verbalized by the participants as “ planning the entire composition”, drafting which was voiced by the interviewed students as “ thinking what to include and leave out”, in addition to revising which was verbalized by Knudson’s participants as “ being sure they stayed on topic” (Knudson, 1995, p. 94). These results are consistent with what Knudson (1991) suggested when she was in the process of developing her writing attitude scales back then. Hence, she recommended that “ it is useful for researchers, program evaluators, and researchers to assess children’s attitudes towards writing and the effect of instruction on their attitudes, including treatment, grade, and times of measurement” (Knudson, 1991, p. 814). Of direct relevancy, Graham, Berninger, and Fan, (2007) investigated one aspect of motivation; specifically, attitudes of young, beginning writers. The participants were 128 first grade level students (70 females and 58 males) and 113 third grade level students (57 females and 56 males) who were English language native speakers. The educational level of the parents was used as a socioeconomic status as well. The participants’ writing proficiency was average ranged.

To begin with, each student wrote a composition and three measurements were conducted for each written composition. The first measure aimed at assessing the sophistication of vocabulary use by students. Therefore, two scorers counted 7- letters or more vocabulary words and transformed into portions (based on TOWL-2). The second measure was the average length of

the right word sequence. The average length was measured by obtaining the “ average length and correct word sequences that occurred in sequence before an incorrect word sequence occurred” (Graham, Berninger, and Fan, 2007, p. 525). Two scorers revised and discussed the rules for obtaining a correct word sequence and inter-rater reliability coefficient was 0. 85. The overall quality of written essays was calculated by the third measure which was a holistic rating scale based on (Cooper 1977) . The papers were scored on a 7-point Likert scale, 1 being the lowest quality of writing and 7 being the highest by two former elementary grade school teachers (inter-rater reliability coefficient was 0. 93).

As for students’ attitude towards writing, students had to cater to seven questions which measured their attitudes toward writing. The researchers used the Garfield the cat scale developed by McKenna et al. (1995). Hence, students chose images ranging from the image of a very happy Garfield the cat (score of 4) and ending up with a score of 1 that is the very unhappy or sad Garfield. Later on, structural equality modeling (SEM) approaches based on (Bollen, 1989, and Kline, 1998) were used to identify the structural relationship between attitude and achievement. It should be noted that in addition to examining the structural relationship between attitude and achievement, the researchers examined age differences (younger / older) and gender differences (male/ female). Results indicated that writing attitude does influence writing achievement because the relationship between them was found to be statistically significant. Moreover, girls were found to have more positive attitudes toward writing and therefore favored writing more

than boys did. However, no statistical difference was reported concerning the writing achievement variable.

Interestingly enough, Musgrove (1999) conducted a different kind of study concerning students' attitudes toward writing. The researcher had her students write self-evaluative narratives that reflect how writing attitudes are usually shaped by how successful students' writing experiences are. The participants were English majors prospective secondary teachers and college students registered in a first-year writing class. At the beginning of the term, Musgrove (1998) identified for her students what is meant by attitude “one's predispositions toward particular tasks, ideas, or people” and provided them with lexical terms of attitude. Then, in a series of mini-lessons, she provided her students with literary works which demonstrated particular attitudes (positive and negative critical attitudes) which were discussed by students.

The researcher then asked students to track down how their attitudes towards writing developed by keeping records and compiling portfolios. Musgrove (1999) announced that the portfolios included “a resume, an initial attitudinal survey, learning goals, personal grammar and usage handbook, in class writing, homework assignments, essays, and portfolio self-evaluations written at midterm and end of semester” (p. 5).

Musgrove (1998) concluded that drawing students' attention to their attitudes gave them the opportunity to examine how their beliefs and what they bring to their writing definitely affects their writing achievement. Moreover, the self-evaluations written by students helped them connect to

their backgrounds as writers because their writing background actually directly affects their attitudes towards writing.

However, Katstra, Tollefson, and Gilbert's (1987) study was the only study; to my knowledge, that examined the effect of peer response on students' attitudes toward writing. To elaborate, the study was conducted to investigate whether peer response in a process approach to writing environment could yield to positive attitudes towards writing along increased fluency. The participants were ninth grade native speakers in the USA who registered in seven English classes which were taught by three teachers. The subjects were randomly assigned to experimental and control groups in such a way that each teacher had a control group and an experimental group to teach. Both the control groups and the experimental groups responded to two attitude instruments before treatment. Then, both groups wrote the first draft of a personal narrative. The first drafts' word number was tallied and recorded as a pretest measure for fluency in writing. The treatment was introduced over a period of four days. First, the experimental group explicitly received training in peer response and participants rewrote their second drafts according to comments suggested by the peers in each response group. The students in the control group on the other hand, wrote their second drafts based on assistance offered by the teacher due to specific questions asked by students in the control group. The two groups then counted the number of words they had written in their second drafts and this became the post-test measure of writing fluency. Finally, the two attitude instruments which were administered to both groups as pretest were administered again as post-tests measures. Analysis of covariance (ANCOVA)

was administered in order to measure the three - way interaction between the independent variables which were (1) teachers (three levels) (2) gender of students (3) and treatment condition. Results indicated an increased positive attitude towards writing on behalf of the experimental group. However, no significant differences were noticed in post-test writing fluency. Therefore, peer evaluation does not affect students' writing fluency.

Some studies tackling the affective benefits of peer response examined students' perceptions toward peer feedback. Chong (2010) examined student teachers' perceptions and attitudes toward peer response and the likelihood to how they are willing to use the aforementioned approach in L2 writing classes. Results indicated that student teachers did not favor the usage of peer response in their classes due to “ external reasons such as class size, time restrictions, authority control, as well as internal factors such as inability to see the benefits of peer response, insufficient experience or training in using this technique” (p. 58).

As for the affective factor of peer feedback of ESL university students, Zhang (1995) made it clear the majority of his 81 ESL students (75%) who were enrolled at a university in USA actually favored feedback provided by teachers as opposed to feedback provided by peers.. The findings coincide with Nelson and Carson (1998) whose ESL college students expressed their tendency to favor teachers' feedback rather than their peers' feedback. Moreover, cultural differences were perceived to negatively affect peer response as some of the participants' goal in peer review sessions particularly Chinese students was mainly maintaining good harmony by refraining from providing their pees with critical peer response. However,

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another study actually contradicted Nelson and Carson's (1998) findings concerning the Chinese group's perception of peer response. Hence, Roskams (1999) who examined Chinese EFL learners' perceptions toward peer response. The university-bound Chinese students actually reported their openness to engage in peer response and expressed that this approach could be beneficial to their ESL language learning. Hence, participants generally perceived peer feedback as useful. However, only 5 % of participants did not enjoy the collaborative learning arrangement.

Therefore, many studies revealed conflicting results which reported inconsistency in findings which reflected that peer response is problematic due to students' cultural schemata, their ability to review their peers; work and their attitudes towards peer response. However, Hu (2005) indicates that these problems are not inherent in peer response as research literature suggests that carefully designed training in peer response can help assist L2 writing students as well as their teachers gain understanding of the benefits of peer response (Berg, 1999; Min, 2006; Ting and Qian; 2010).

THE ROLE OF THE COMPUTER IN CONVEYING MEDIATED FEEDBACK

The role of computers in conveying mediating feedback in L2 (second language) settings has become central for research concerned with technology-enhanced peer response lately. However, the results on the effects of integrating computer-mediated communication (CMC) into peer response have been conflicting, mixed, and even inconsistent (Schultz, 2000; Hu, 2005; Liu and Sadler, 2003; Tuzi, 2004; DiGiovanni and Nagaswami, 2001). Hence, many researchers (Braine, 1997; Leh, 1999; Biesenbach-Lucas and

Weasenforth, 2001; Liu and Sadler, 2003) have expressed concerns about using computer-mediated communication as a substitute for the face-to-face venue of peer response, especially that its ultimate benefits for ESL learners have not been yet established fully by researchers. However, consensus have been researched among researchers that CMC-based peer response should be seriously blended with face-to-face communication in the peer response process (Schultz, 2000; Hu, 2005; Liu and Sadler, 2003; Tuzi, 2004; DiGiovanni and Nagaswami, 2001).