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Supporting students to prepare for higher education studies:

Enhancing English writing skills with formative peer assessment

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# Introduction

Some challenges for beginner students

- Low learning skills (Wollcheid et al. 2020)
- Low/lack of academic writing skills (Lødding and Aamodt 2015,Wollcheid et al. 2020)
- Traditional lecture does not work well (e.g. Rynning 2014)

Research topic

Promote students' learning and their writing skills in preparatory course through formative peer assessment (FPA)
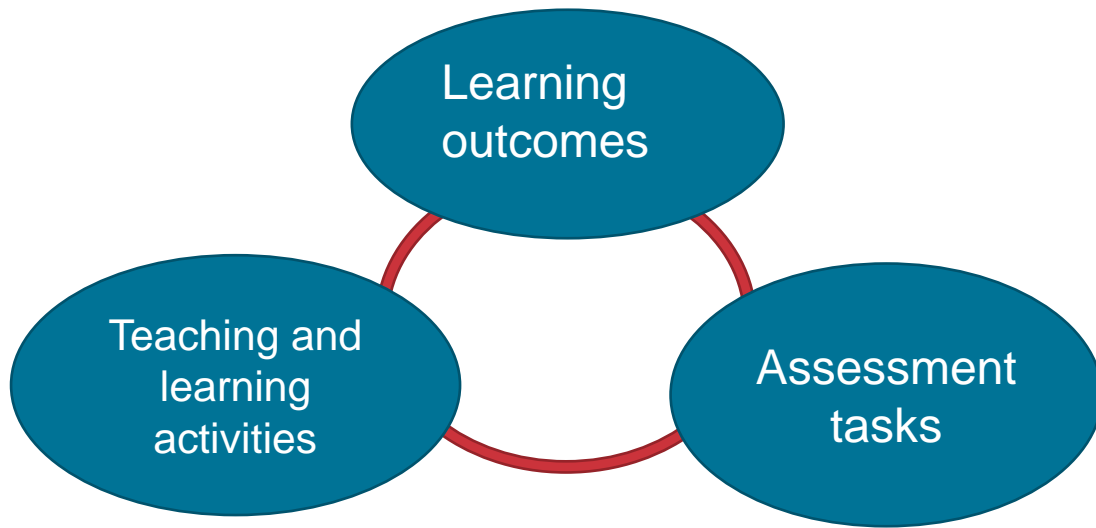
Research questions

1) Does FPA in writing lessons enhance students' engagement in learning?
2) Which learning outcomes do students believe they have achieved after FPA?
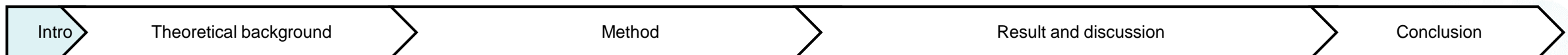
Theoretical background

Biggs (1999) "Constructive Alignment"

FPA enhances learning autonomy (Topping 1998, Lynch et al, 2012, Carnell 2016)

Zimmerman and Schunk (2012): Proactive self-regulators
1) set learning goals
2) implement effective learning strategies
3) self-monitoring
4) establish a productive environment for learning
5) maintain a sense of self-efficacy for learning.

FPA gives positive effects on students' writing (Min, 2005, Lundstrom & Baker, 2009, Zhao, 2014)

However, how PFA should be conducted has been "overlooked and limited" (Wanner and Palmer, 2018)

FPA in English essay writing lessons

- Types of learning activities: English argumentative essay writing in a preparatory course

- 25 students, 2,5 weeks

- Intended learning outcomes: grammar, structure, academic language, audience-awareness, argumentation and reference technique.

- Type of peer assessment: Formative peer assessment + peer revision

- Organization: 2 rounds of FPA activities

Round 1 "FPA training with sample essays"
1) Read previous students' essays (individual work)

2) **Make assessment criteria** (group work)

3) **Give peer assessment with a response sheet** (individual/group work)

4) **Revise a peer's essay** (individual/group work)

5) Peer assessment to revisions (group work)

Round 2 "Write an argumentative essay and FPA"
1) Write a short argumentative essay (individual work)

2) **Make assessment criteria** (group work)

3) Self-assessment (individual work)

4) **Give peer assessment with a response sheet** (individual/group work)

5) **Revise a peer's essay** (individual work)

6) Revise own essay (individual work)

Student questionnaire

- 20 questions that ask about
  - Students' evaluation of FPF as a learning method
  - Students' evaluation of effects of FPF on their learning

- 12 open questions.

- Anonymous online questionnaire after round 2

- 12 out of 25 students answered.

- Some text analysis in addition.

Results and discussion

RQ 2) Which learning outcomes do students believe they have achieved?

1) The majority (83%) perceived that they have improved their writing skills.

2) Perceived improvement in
   - **grammar**
   - structure
   - argumentation
   - **academic language**
   - **reference technique**
   - **audience-awareness**
     - *"(I could use my knowledge from FPA to) (m)ake the text easier to read."*

- Limitation of FPA? (cf. Villamil & de Guerrero, 1998).
- Beason (1993) surface-level revision also benefits the writer.

3) Achieved a deeper understanding of what English essay is
   - *"Got a better understanding of how to write a good essay."'*
   - *"It gave me good ideas how to write a good text"*

- Writing is a complex skill (Brown 2000). "Creating assessment criteria" may help?

Results and discussion

RQ1. Does FPA in writing lessons enhance students' engagement in learning?

1) **Positive experience and attitude towards FPA**
   - the overall experience: 91,7 % positive, 8,3 % negative.
   - the experience of peer-assess and peer-revise: 91,7 % positive, 8,3 % negative.
   - Many want to use peer revision (58%) and peer assessment (41%) as learning activities in future.
     - *"I think it (my knowledge and experience from FPA) will be <u>useful when taking a bachelor, and also when we are working as engi(n)eers</u>"*

   - → **Enhance motivation for learning**

2) **Develop strategy for better writing**
   - *"(The process of reading and assessing peers' text) (g)ave me an opportunity to see how other people write essays and <u>take notes on what I could do better in my own essay.</u>"*

   - *"(FPA activities were) Positive, because I could see how my Peers did the essay, and <u>take out some pointers of the essay and put it in mine to improve and make it better</u>."*

   - Enhance transferrable knowledge and critical thinking (e.g. Topping, 1998; Lynch et al, 2012; Carnell, 2016)
   - →**Implement effective learning strategy**

Results and discussion

3) **More aware of their goal progress in writing**
   - *"(FPA was positive because) (t)he task reminded me what parts of my written texts I need to focus on improving. Finding and correcting the mistakes of others reminded me what mistakes are common, and that I should look out for them."*

   - *"I learned a lot from it in terms of my own writing, and grew conscious to common mistakes that I might make."*

   - *"The prosses of revising the text was positive because it is a chore to do, and I need more practice in it."*

   - **→Self-monitoring and increased awareness of promotion of own learning** (Villamil and De Guerrero 1998, Lynch et al, 2012)

4) **The majority believe that they can write better text in English after FPA.**
   - **→ maintain a sense of self-efficacy**

- Implies that FPA contributes to enhance students' self-regulation of learning. (cf. Villamil and De Guerrero 1998, Lynch et al, 2012)

Conclusion

1) **FPA may enhance students' self-regulation of learning**
   - May promote self-efficacy and motivation to learn.
   - May enhance deeper understanding of the subject, critical thinking, effective learning strategy and self-monitoring in line with Topping (1998), Lynch et al. (2012), Carnell (2016)

2) **Enhance writing performance**
   - Achieved a deeper understanding of the subject
   - Many of the intended learning outcomes are perceived to be attained.
     - The lack of improvement wrt. "structure" and "argumentation". (cf. Villamil and De Guerro 1998).

- FPA may help students prepare for the higher educational studies.

- **Transferable results?**
  - To English teaching of beginner students at higher education
  - To other teaching fields
    - Self-regulation of learning and good writing skills are important across the disciplines. (cf.Llado et al. 2014)

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