



Importance of Peer Review Technique for Enhancing Learning and Teaching Quality at University Level

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Abstract: *This research paper explored the peer review strategy's use at the university postgraduate classroom level for enhancing students learning and quality teaching. A phenomenological study design was adopted to capture the experiences of the teachers and students. The findings indicated that peer review enhances students' understanding of curricular tasks, ability to review their own work, and ability to provide constructive feedback to others. While peer review improves one's reasoning, writing, and communication skills, in contrast, students also experience negative behaviours during peer reviewing tasks such as lack of attention related to process, biasedness, favouritism, a lack of patience, and improper language usage. University postgraduate students must be trained in peer review training because it enhances their analysis capabilities and productiveness and promotes academic integrity and ethics among students, while teachers can benefit from enhanced teaching quality.*

Key Words: Peer Review, Feedback, Students, Quality Teaching, Enhanced Learning

Introduction

The students at the university level need training in developing critical and effective evaluation skills regarding the other student's research work because it enables the students to do more valuable and constructive work that facilitates the development of defect-free and organized research work. Students may become better writers and self-reviewers by learning how to spot logical flaws, organizational issues, and other flaws in their own work and those of others ([Ferris, 2003](#); [Thompson, 2002](#)). Teaching assistants may help students gain more feedback on their papers and practice various skills, such as meaningful interaction between students and other insights into the writing and editing process itself that can be provided by professors

([Hansen & Liu, 2005](#)). Peer reviews play an important role in developing the basis of the academic journal system because it gives the writer's work scrutiny by other specialists in the profession. Aiming to generate high-quality research that will advance the area urges writers to do so. Additionally, peer review is an important tool for ensuring the integrity and validity of scientific research. Teachers may use it to help create a classroom where students are empowered to evaluate and improve their own transcribed effort ([Braine, 2003](#); [Kamimura, 2006](#)). Peer review, a frequent practice in academic and professional environments, has been lauded by both researchers and teachers. Scholars and teachers agree that peer review, which happens a lot in both academic and professional settings, has a lot of good things going for it. As [Topping \(2009\)](#) points out, peer

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review occurs in a variety of settings, both official and informal, and students who participate in the process learn "transferable skills for life" (p. 21).

Literature Review

Peer reviews play an important role in developing the basis of the academic system, and a peer review is an important tool for ensuring the integrity and validity of scientific research (Mulligan, 2005). Teachers can help their students get more feedback on their papers by encouraging them to participate in peer review, which is an important activity that helps students develop these skills (Hansen & Liu, 2005). Peer feedback is a type of collaborative learning in which learners of the same level give each other feedback (Van et al., 2010). One other area that has to be looked at is how students may learn more about the material being covered in class via the use of peer assessment. Students gain knowledge of the subject matter from the work of their peers if they are given a chance to offer comments to their classmates in the classroom. A connection between learning and peer appraisal has been found in studies conducted by Yang (2010); Thomas et al. (2011); Gielen, Lies, Filip, and Onghena (2010); and Kelly (2014). According to Yang (2010), after receiving feedback from their classmates, students incorporated both new and previously learned knowledge into their final draughts of their work. Peer evaluation was shown to be beneficial to students' overall learning of outdoor leadership skills by Thomas, Martin, and Pleasants (2011) throughout the course of their research conducted in an outdoor education classroom. One study discovered that students who provided feedback to one another had stronger longer-term learning benefits than students who learned via the standard classroom technique of lecturing and assessment. This means that students are better able to remember what they have learned (Gielen et al., 2010, p. 157). Compared to more traditional methods, peer review has been shown to be an effective technique for evaluating student work because of its ability to

facilitate students' ability to build new abilities and foster their ability to guide their own education (Ibarra Sáiz, Rodrguez Gómez & Gómez Ruiz, 2012). In previous research, such as Nicol et al. (2014), students' evaluative judgments of their own and their peers' work improved during the review process, and comments were created. They were also able to have a better understanding of the course subject via the study of alternative viewpoints (Guilford, 2001). First-year students, who may be unfamiliar with professional norms and expectations and unwilling to critique work and provide critical criticism, have demonstrated an increased capacity to give constructive feedback during peer review (Dowse, Melvold & McGrath, 2018).

In this learning process, there are also notable advantages to be noted, such as encouraging individual learning, enhancing student enthusiasm, and fostering problem-solving abilities. Many studies have been done on peer review, and it has been widely used and studied. This technique is discussed in Saiz et al. (2012), with a focus on its advantages and the difficulties of implementing it in the university setting.

As a result, all aspects of peer review, including training, forming groups (Hansen & Liu, 2005), and conducting activities (McMurry, 2004), are based on the individual needs of the students. Setting up peer review can be overwhelming for instructors since there are so many options and the ideal way depends on the circumstances. Due to the versatility of peer review, instructors may become perplexed as to what peer review entails and how to effectively use it (Rollinson, 2005). Studies show that peer review may be incredibly useful for a variety of reasons when applied appropriately, and students are taught how to offer and use comments (Min, 2006).

Research Objective

- To explore the experience of participants related to the usefulness of the peer review technique for enhancing learning and teaching quality at the university level.

Research Questions

- 1- What are the teacher's feelings and perceptions regarding the lived experience of the effectiveness of peer review at the university level?
- 2- What were the students' feelings and perceptions about their lived experience of the effectiveness of peer review at the university level?

Research Design

In order to ascertain the usefulness of the peer review technique in a postgraduate, a qualitative transcendental phenomenological approach was adopted. This approach is more concerned with describing the participants' own experiences rather than the interpretation by the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2016). An open-ended interview with the class teacher and a focus group with students who participated in all peer review-related activities during the semester were conducted. The data was analyzed using the interpretive phenomenological analysis technique.

Selection of Participants

The target population of this study was one public university where the peer review technique was used as a teaching-learning strategy. The selection of participants was completed using a criterion based as well as

purposive teachers and undergraduate students in Lahore. Researchers gathered data from students who met the study's set requirements. Such sampling, according to Creswell (2013) and Merriam (2009), entails selecting people who satisfy specific criteria. For this reason, the researcher also collected data from instructors who were able to offer peer evaluation. Students at the University of Education's MPhil program (4th semester) were interviewed by the researcher to learn about their understanding of peer review and how successful it is in their context.

Findings

In this section, the key findings are summarized. This research concluded that a) peer review enhances the student's learning. Peer review is a source of skill development and has become an effective source of learning. Peer review improves one's reasoning, writing, and communication skills; b) during peer review, a lot of problems, e.g. broken or unsystematically followed process, including biasedness, favouritism, a lack of patience, and improper language usage, affects the quality of learning and teaching quality and; c) peer review training is essential for teachers and students because it enhances the analysis capabilities and facilitates the production of more productive work. The themes are summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Effectiveness of Peer Review for student learning and teaching quality

Theme 1: Effectiveness of Peer Review

- Teacher Perception
- Students' Perceptions
- Conclusion

This describes the teacher and students' perceptions regarding effective feedback.

Theme 2: Source of Knowledge and Skills

- Teacher Perception
- Students' Perceptions
- Conclusion

This describes the teacher and students' perceptions regarding what kind of abilities and skills develop among students and how knowledge enhance due to giving effective feedback.

Theme 3: Problems in Effective Peer Review

- Teacher Perception
- Students' Perceptions
- Conclusion

This describes what kind of issues and problems are faced by teachers and students during peer review.

Theme 4: Importance of Peer Review Training

- Teacher Perception
- Students' Perceptions
- Conclusion

This describes the importance of a peer review training program that enhances the teacher's and students' abilities to provide constructive feedback.

Theme 1: Effectiveness of Peer Review

In this theme, teachers, and students' perceptions regarding effective peer review are explored. Each of the participants shared their educational experiences without any hesitation.

Teacher's Perceptions about Peer Review Lived Experience

The participant gave her opinion and views regarding effective feedback. The teacher considered that peer review plays an important role in the development of the essential skills among students at the university level that facilitate them in producing more constructive and feasible research in the future. Participant A believed that peer review demanded full consideration and focused because someone who is doing the research gives importance to our opinions, so it is our responsibility to give them an honest opinion so they can produce more reliable research. As participant A said,

"I believe that peer review is an activity when students of the same age level or skill level critique each other's work. It provides an opportunity to learn from each other and enables them to produce more constructive and reliable research in the future".

The participant shared her experiences as a teacher. Participant A believed that in today's classroom situations, we could not force our students to give professional views but suggested using peer review software on which the criteria of effective peer reviews have already been settled. As participant A said,

"My colleagues and I provided guidelines regarding giving effective feedback but always suggested they use peer review software on which the criteria are already established, and the chances of biasedness or halo effect never destroy the authenticity of research work".

Students' Perceptions about Peer Review Lived Experience

The collected views from MPhil students who studied in the fourth semester provided data in the focus group interviews and shared their perceptions regarding the effectiveness of peer review. They said that peer review is the opinion that we give to others to make research work authentic and constructive.

All participants considered peer review important for analyzing flows in work. As participant B said

"It's quite good to analyze the problem during peer interaction."

All the students considered that peer review is a way of providing criticism on others' work, and it depends on whether it is taken personally or professionally. As participant D said:

"Peer review is an activity when students of the same age level or skill level critique each other's work, but most of the students during criticism take it personally. Personally, I believe that students always take such criticism professionally because it improves their work and helps them develop patience".

All the participants considered that during peer review, reasoning ability develops, and it enables a person to think more logically and constructively; participant E said that

"It's a good thing for students, and they learn creative thinking through peer review." It is really helpful to develop reflective thoughts among students. "

Theme 2: Source of Knowledge and Skills

Teacher's Perceptions about Peer Review Lived Experience

Participant A believed that peer review is the source of knowledge in which peers learn

from each other's and develop a variety of skills. It develops better writing skills and enhances students' knowledge and understanding, but it all depends on the type of feedback. As participant A said,

"The ability to self-reflect, knowledge about feedback's meaning, purpose, types, and effects, and a good understanding and skill about ways of providing positive and constructive feedback matter a lot."

Participant A also believed that peer reviews have many positive and negative effects because they develop better understanding, while on the other hand, due to biasedness, they have a negative effect on each other's work. The teacher shared her experience when she was a student and said:

"My training was my own peer-reviewing activity as a student. At that stage, I learned the positive and negative effects of giving positive and negative feedback. Moreover, the ability to self-reflect is also a blessing in this regard".

Participant A believed that she could teach the importance of peer review because she considered that this activity develops motivation among peers, develops patience to accept and respect others' opinions, and enables someone to evaluate themselves. Peer review becomes the cause of the development of social skills among peers while interacting and asking for peer review. As participant A said,

"It develops motivation, acceptability, openness, self-awareness, social skills, etc."

Students' Perceptions about Peer Review Lived Experience

All participants agreed that peer review develops multiple skills among students. Peer review is a source of better communication skills during giving or getting peer review; improving vocabulary, as participant B said,

"peer review develops excellent communication skills."

All the participants believed that peer review improves the writing skills of students because when peers evaluate their work, sometimes their sense of elaborating a concept

is due to poor writing skills, and the peer does not communicate well with each other due to writing flows. After analysis or peer review, when peers misunderstand some concept, it provides an opportunity for the students to enhance or elaborate on the concept with better writing skills or use that kind of vocabulary that is easy to understand. As participant G said,

"I think through peer review; we can improve our spelling, grammar, and writing skills."

All of the participants agreed that peer review could help improve reasoning and mental abilities. Peer reviews enable a student to think more logically and constructively.

"Peer review is important for achieving goals and developing creative and critical thinking," said participant B.

Theme 3: Problems in Effective Peer Review

Teacher's Perceptions About Peer Review Lived Experience

Participant A used peer review as a teaching method because she considered it crucial for the development of various skills. The participant believed that at the university level, peer review enables students to understand the opinions and points of view of people of the same age or knowledge level. Peer reviewers encourage and motivate, while, on the other hand, they have a negative impact also. As participant A said,

"Since a teacher is on a little higher level than his or her students in terms of knowledge or skill, his or her assessment goes the same. Choosing peer review in a teaching-learning process helps students understand the opinions and points of view of people of the same age or knowledge level more comfortably. Positive feedback also improves their motivation and social skills. That's why we involved them in this activity. But peer review also had a negative impact".

Participant A believed that peer review has flowed because many students do not have the patience to accept others' opinions, especially when they are studying in the same class. As

participant A said, *"sometimes conflict occurs because students take peer reviews from their classmates or fellows, they take their opinions personally, and due to poor patience level, they fail to improve their writing, grammatical, and sometimes produce poor content just to show ego by not accepting other people's opinions on their write-up."*

Participant A believed that sometimes just to bully other students, they often did not provide honest opinions and tried to misguide. While on the other hand, sometimes emotional attachment also causes trouble giving honest and fair opinions. As participant A said,

"Sometimes peers, due to their friendships, don't want to criticize, while on the other hand, sometimes because of personal issues, they misguide each other."

Students' Perceptions about Peer Review Lived Experience

All the participants shared their views openly regarding the problems they faced during peer review. All the participants perceived criticism after giving their opinions because most of the peers took it personally instead of accepting others' opinions. As participant G said:

"I faced severe criticism after giving feedback. Some peers didn't accept the feedback wholeheartedly and took it as personal, and then they also attacked me personally. It happens when we do not understand the peer review process as a basis for our improvement".

The participants agreed that emotional attachments also become a restraint on giving honest opinions because they don't want to hurt their beloved ones. As participant H said,

"Emotional attachments retain us from being neutral." Biasness is a major problem which all participants talked about and considered that it spoils the whole process of peer review".

As participant C said,

"Bias ruins the peer review because mostly students apply some pressure to agree with their point of view."

Sometimes favouritism, friendship, and conflicts ruin the effectiveness of peer review. As participant D said,

"Due to a little bit of pressure, I often hesitate to share my opinions because some fellows are dear to me. I faced some bad comments from a female student because she did not like my feedback. That really hurt me".

Many students shared their experiences as they faced a lot of problems during giving feedback. As participant D faced criticism and conflict arising due to giving an honest opinion because he did not agree with her point of view, as he said that "I faced some bad comments from a female student because she did not like my feedback. That really hurt me."

All the participants agreed on it that patience is the key to peer review, but most students do not have it, due to which many problems occur not only for students but teachers as well

Theme 4: Importance of Peer Review Training

Teacher's Perceptions about Peer Review Lived Experience

Participant A considered that peer review training must be emphasized, especially at the university level, because it is a means of developing multiple skills among students. The participant believed that the teacher must emphasize the importance of peer review and use it as a teaching method in a class. As one participant said,

"Choosing peer-review in a teaching-learning process helps students understand the opinions and points of view of people of the same age or knowledge level more comfortably."

"Positive feedback also improves their motivation and social skills. That's why we involved them in this activity".

Participant A is believed to provide help to each student to provide honest feedback and is believed to enable a student's socially and linguistically better reviewer. As participant A shared an experience and said:

"I organized a peer review activity in class after elaborating on the importance of peer review. I made groups and asked people to write something and asked their fellows to give their views on it. This activity really became helpful for them because they understood the process of peer review after applying it in a real situation".

As participant A believed, before the start of research work, all the students must experience the peer review process in this way. They develop multiple skills in them that will facilitate them in their research project in the future. As participant A said,

"peer review practice is important before the students' research work because it enables them to produce more feasible and reliable research in the future."

Participant A believed that not only students but teachers also get training in peer review programs. In this way, teachers elaborate on the importance of peer review and train their students more appropriately. As participant A said,

"I personally consider that teachers also get training on peer review".

This enables them to teach about the importance of peer review and also enables their students to become better peer reviewers in future.

Students' Perceptions about Lived Experience

All the participants agreed that peer review training is crucial. This way, all the students understand the true meaning of peer review. All the participants claimed that their teachers provided them with peer review guidance from which they all learned a lot. All the participants shared their experiences after getting the training. As participant G said,

"I learned to critically review my own work, accept others' points of view, and understand others' standards of doing an activity or performance." It also enhances my motivation level and social skills. "

The participant H said that

"training on peer review enables the students to develop lifelong skills in assessing and providing feedback to others, and also equips them with skills to self-assess and improve their own work." Participant E said that "training develops analytical, truthfulness, and judgment abilities in me and develops patience in me to some extent".

All the participants agreed that training on peer review enables them to behave better with that person who comes to them for feedback and develop the ability to communicate well with them. As participant D said,

"peer review training enables me to communicate in an appropriate way and develop confidence in me and, to some extent, objectivity also develops."

Discussion

Teachers and students considered the peer review an excellent source of learning in which reviewer analytical skills enhances. Peer review enhances socialization skills and develops good language skills as well. Peer reviews play an important role in developing the basis of the academic system, and a peer review is an important tool for ensuring the integrity and validity of scientific research ([Mulligan, 2005](#)). Peer review is an important activity that helps students develop a range of skills that are important in the development of language and writing ability, such as meaningful interaction with peers and exposure to ideas. Teachers can help their students get more feedback on their papers by encouraging them to participate in peer review, which is an important activity that helps students develop these skills ([Hansen & Liu, 2005](#)). Peer feedback is a type of collaborative learning in which learners at the same level give each other feedback (Van et al., 2010). The research findings claimed that peer review develops the ability of evaluation among students. Compared to more traditional methods, peer review has been shown to be an effective technique for evaluating student work because of its ability to facilitate students' ability to build new abilities and foster their ability to guide their own education ([Ibarra Sáiz, Rodríguez Gómez & Gómez Ruiz, 2012](#)).

In previous research, such as [Nicol et al. \(2014\)](#), students' evaluative judgments of their own and their peers' work improved during the review process, and comments were created. They were also able to gain a better understanding of the course subject via the study of alternative viewpoints ([Guilford, 2001](#)). First-year students, who may be unfamiliar with professional norms and expectations and unwilling to critique work and provide critical criticism, have demonstrated an increased capacity to give constructive feedback during peer review ([Dowse, Melvold & McGrath, 2018](#)).

The research findings claimed that peer review enhances the writing skill of students and enable the students to become a good writer in future. [Jensen and Fischer \(2005\)](#) conducted research on students enrolled in a construction management program at a university. They found that students who participated in peer writing evaluations

improved their written communication skills more than those students who only received feedback from a teaching assistant or an instructor while they were enrolled in the program.

Recommendations and Further Research

The topic of this study is significant as it was a crucial phase of university life when the students gave their opinions to their peers. The role of the teachers at this phase is important because teachers' guidelines and their emphasis on giving honest feedback really improve the learning abilities and skills among students. In future, a larger sample should be focused on various data collection methods. Moreover, studies should be conducted to explore the differences between public and private sector students' and teachers' perceptions. In the paper, a phenomenological study approach was used. However, in future, multiple methods can be used to give a broader picture.

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