

Organizing peer-feedback for a group report

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Introduction

The assessment of the learning process can be done in two different ways: summative (certification purpose) or formative (learning purpose). Summative feedback is the evaluation of the students' learning at the end of the course or project, whereas formative feedback is the monitoring of the students' learning during the learning process, so both students and teachers can use the feedback to improve its learning and teaching respectively. Formative feedback is described as an efficient means of stimulation and enhancing student learning in education systems (Black, 2015).

Feedback is an essential element on the learning process, which allows students to reflect on their own learning, identifying weaknesses to improve it and providing the students the opportunity to self-assess their skills and capabilities. Furthermore, it is insufficient to provide feedback only at the end of the course of project that tells students what they did wrong. Fortunately, the provision of feedback had substantially changed in the last years, from a passive student receiving feedback from the teacher, to a more active participation of the student in the feedback process.

Feedback can be very diverse, including individual feedback, generic feedback, informal feedback, self-evaluation or peer feedback, and the method to deliver the feedback can be written feedback, annotations, oral feedback or seminar discussion. Moreover, feedback can be given by tutors, mentor or peer. Peer feedback involves students giving feedback to each other to grade their work or performance using relevant criteria (Boud, Cohen, & Sampson, 1999), so the students learn from both giving and re-

ceiving feedback. Several studies have reported the benefit of the peer feedback (Liu & Carless, 2006; Topping, 2009; Van den Berg, Admiraal, & Pilot, 2006; Wheeler, Langan, & Dunleavy, 2005). According to Falchikov (Falchikov, 2013) the benefits of peer feedback for students are: i) high quality learning (higher transfer of learning, reflection, better understand of the assessment criteria and better understand of the concept from seeing other students' successes and weaknesses), ii) skills development (negotiation and work cooperatively), iii) personal development (higher responsibility, autonomy and independence), and iv) affective disposition (higher student confidence and motivation and less stress). While the peer feedback also has some benefits for the teachers, because peer-feedback is an efficient and effective way to monitor the progress of the students reducing the lecturer workload and provide and extra feedback to the students.

The aim of this study was to investigate how the implementation of a peer-feedback activity on written reports in groups influences the learning process, and what is the students' perception in giving and receiving feedback from their colleagues.

Methodology

In this year 2017/2018, I taught in Environmental Impact Assessment course (EIA) (LNAK10010U) that is a 7.5 ECTS course taught in block 4 and offered in seven different MSc programmes at Copenhagen University (UPCH). The aim of the course is to introduce the components and the structure of an Environmental Impact Assessment, as well as discuss how national guidelines and requirements for EIA influence the outcome. During the course, students work in-group in six exercises on the same case (road construction in Zambia). Every exercise is about one of the steps that a consultant has to follow when carry out a real EIA report. In all these exercises, the teachers give feedback to the students. After that, students have to develop two reports for the exam. The first report is the Term of Reference (ToR), which is the document that sets out what the EIA report has to cover, the type of the information to be submitted, and the depth of analysis that is required. In this case, every group develops the Term of Reference for a different project. Later, we swap the ToR between groups, so they have to develop a full EIA report on a different project based on the ToR elaborated from another group. Both reports are the written part of the exam, where there is also an individual oral exam where both reports and

some general questions on the EIA process are discussed with the student. After the oral exam, the teachers provide feedback for both reports the ToR and the EIA for the group.

In general, the students evaluations from the course in the previous years are good, but they claimed for more feedback during the course. Therefore, the development of peer-review session in the ToR could provide some benefits for the students because they receive more feedback in the report that is part of the oral exam, but also they can learn from the revision of similar reports, and the revision can also help the students to identify weaknesses in their own reports. During the planning of this course, the activity was discussed with the previous teacher of the course who taught the part of the course that I teach this year, but also with the other teacher of the course. Both of them have been running the course for more than 10 years and they agreed that the peer-review session is a good activity that can help the students to learn how to develop a good ToR. They also suggested the importance of giving a guideline to the students on how to carry out a good revision.

Two weeks before the exam when the students were working on the EIA report, I did a peer-feedback session. For this session, 24 students were present. Firstly, I did a short introduction explaining the rationale and the benefits of having a peer-review. After, I gave the exercise instructions and I gave the students a guideline (Appendix A) on how to develop the revision, and which criteria or questions they have to follow to review the Term of Reference based on the requirements for this report and the ILOs of the course. Finally, when all the revised reports were uploaded in Absalon, I handed out a questionnaire to the students (Appendix B) to evaluate the activity and get their perception of giving and receiving feedback for a peer.

Results and Reflections

During the peer-feedback session, students worked actively revising their colleague's reports, and showing a good acceptance of the activity. The results from the questionnaire showed that the peer-review activity helps the students to understand better the purpose of the ToR report, being around 70% of the students agreed (4-5) with this statement (Figure 12.1a). Similarly, around 87% of the students manifested that also the peer-review activity helped them to identify weaknesses in their own report (Figure 12.1b). The students also learnt different ways to develop a ToR with the revision

of the others colleagues' ToR (Figure 12.1c). These three statements confirmed that the review of similar report helps the students to understand better the purpose and required information to develop a good ToR.

The next statement was if the peer-review activity helped the students to learn how to evaluate a ToR, around 42% replied that they did not agree or disagree, whereas 50% of them said that they agreed with this statement (Figure 12.1d). This statement reveals that even the peer-revision is a good exercise for students to learn how to evaluate a report; they need more training and practices on how to evaluate a report, which is also an essential skill as an EIA consultant.

The next statement was about how general were the feedback obtained for the students, and in this case, the responses were more homogeneous (Figure 12.1e), suggesting more specific details should be given to the students on how specific should be the comments in the introduction of the exercise. The last two questions revealed that most of the students (70%) agreed with the statement that the feedback from their peer help them to understand better the purpose of ToR (Figure 12.1f), and around 90% said that the peer-review activity helped them to identify weaknesses in the ToR. These statements suggest that in general most of the students were satisfied with the feedback that they received from their colleagues and were positive for the learning process. Later, in the next open question about what was the most useful part of the peer-review, the students said that the activity was very useful to see different ways of doing the same, and to identify strengths and weaknesses in the colleagues' report but also in their own report (Appendix C). Finally, in the statement on how to improve the activity, some of the students suggested that they would like to have an extra time to discuss the feedback given, or even to give a short presentation, whereas some of them claimed for more specific feedback or more detailed information about how to it.

In the course, it was not possible to correct and handle the report again because the report was part of the oral exam. However, in the oral exam all the students answered all the questions about the ToR well, showing that although the report did not get the higher grade, they students knew the process, the purpose and the relevant information to make a good ToR.

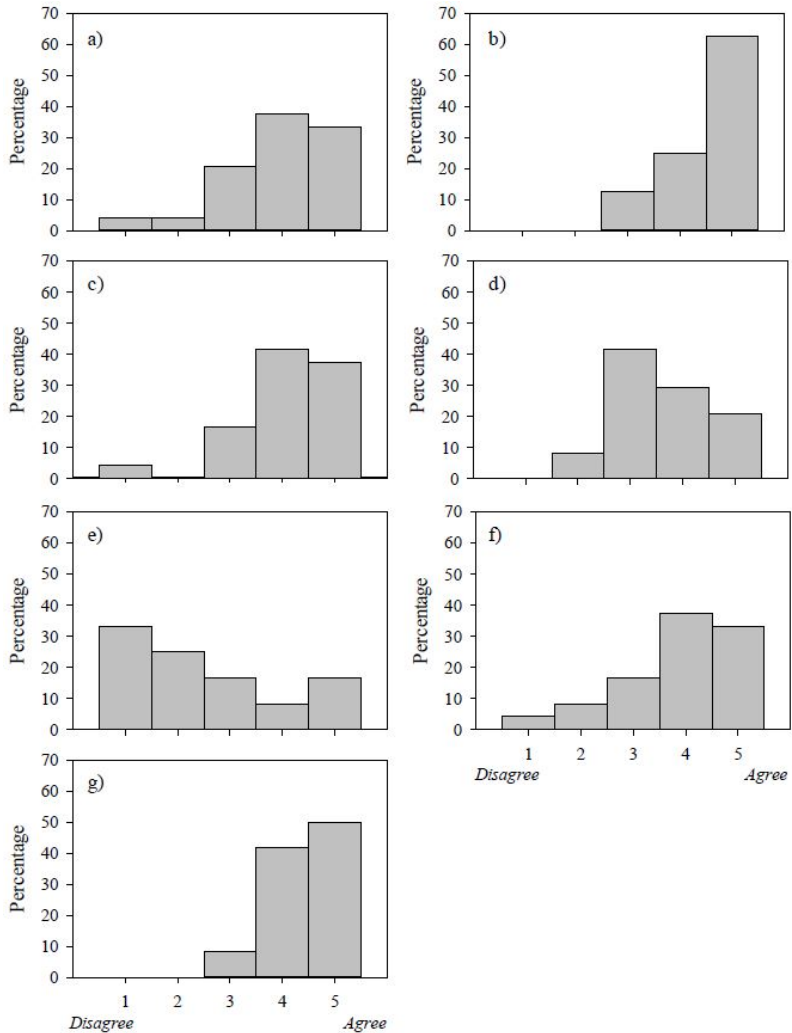


Fig. 12.1. Percentage of students responding the statement described in x-axis (from disagree to agree, 1-5) for the questions: a) The peer-review help me to understand better the purpose of the ToR, b) The peer-review help me to identify weaknesses in my own ToR, c) I have learnt different ways to develop ToR, d) The peer-review exercise show me how to evaluate a report, e) The feedback from my peer are very general, f) The feedback from my peer help me to understand better the purpose of the ToR, and g) My peer help me in identifying weaknesses in my ToR.

Conclusion and Perspectives

It can be concluded that the peer-review activity is a good exercise to give a formative assessment to the students, where the students get more feedback without an increase in the workload of the teachers. Giving feedback to peer makes the students to see others options to develop similar reports, but also to reflect and be critical with their own reports, identifying weaknesses and strength in their own report. The results of the questionnaire show that students would like to have some time to discuss with their reviewer the feedback. Furthermore, for the future I would allocated more time to the peer-feedback including some extra time for discuss the feedback. Finally, to successfully use the peer-activity more specific instruction on how specific the comments should be must be given to the students.

References

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A**Peer-Feedback Exercise on Term of References - Environmental Impact Assessment****Guideline:**

1. Please read carefully the report to review.
2. Use pdf comments option to evaluate the ToR
3. Please remark/comment any positive or negative aspect that you consider in the ToR
4. Please describe the strengths and weaknesses of the ToR
5. Suggestions for improvement.
6. Further comments

Questions to consider:

1. Does the ToR follow the standard structure including at least: Objective and background, activities, impact identification, boundaries of study, staff and timing?
2. Are the objective and background detailed enough to understand the project?
3. Are the main activities and impact identifies in the ToR?
4. How adequate are the boundaries of study?
5. Are the provision for staff and timing realistic?
6. Is there any mention to an alternatives or public involvement provision?

B**Appendix B****Questionnaire**

1	The peer-review help me to understand better the purpose of the ToR	<i>disagree</i>	<i>agree</i>
		1	2 3 4 5
2	The peer-review help me to identify weaknesses in my own ToR	<i>disagree</i>	<i>agree</i>
		1	2 3 4 5
3	I have learnt different ways to develop ToR	<i>disagree</i>	<i>agree</i>
		1	2 3 4 5
4	The peer-review exercise show me how to evaluate a report	<i>disagree</i>	<i>agree</i>
		1	2 3 4 5
5	The feedback from my peer are very general	<i>disagree</i>	<i>agree</i>
		1	2 3 4 5
6	The feedback from my peer help me to understand better the purpose of the ToR	<i>disagree</i>	<i>agree</i>
		1	2 3 4 5
7	My peer help me in identifying weaknesses in my ToR	<i>disagree</i>	<i>agree</i>
		1	2 3 4 5

8 What was the most useful part of the review process?

9 What could have been done better?

C

Students answers for the open questions 8 and 9 from the questionnaire (Appendix B)

8 What was the most useful part of the review process?

1. To have an idea on what we miss in our ToR
2. It was very good with the review questions that we can use to give feedback to the ToR
3. To see different ways of doing ToR, what to specify and where put emphasis on, etc.
4. To see how someone else did the ToR, and to repeat the necessary parts of an ToR
5. It was useful to consider the ToR and five feedback
6. Getting an opinion from other point of view and seeing their perception of ToR
7. The review process allowed me to reflect on what the other group did well that we could have also incorporated. It is useful to see different approach to the ToR structure
8. Learning about weaknesses and strengths is helpful for future reports
9. Good exercise with giving and receiving comments, to have a clearer picture of our own ToR and the other group's ToR. Also good that all the comments are available for all of us.
10. I think that talking with my groupmates about the others ToR and see the different opinions. I have like to have a review of our ToR and all the rest from the different groups.
11. To see what other groups' opinion and also when we evaluated other groups' feedback, we evaluated ourselves at the same time
12. It points out parts of our report that we would not have seen otherwise. Good to have an external voice.
13. To have several people reviewing to get more comment, even though some of them contradicted each other
14. To get different view on how different people write a ToR, to get general feedback, and to get other people view on you work, you learn how to do it better next time

15. To know the structure of the ToR
16. Even though getting feedback is scary, good to acknowledge weaknesses that you can improve on
17. It forces you to reflect on your own ToR and its strengths and weaknesses, good exercise prior to the exam
18. Identifying weaknesses, what information is useful?
19. The possibility of comparing my ToR with a different one what I will need to sue for the EIA in a critical way.
20. Having to look all the papers objectively and try to find both strength and weaknesses of the report
21. To think about different aspect more in –depth and to be trusted in having an evaluator’s perspective
22. Finding discrepancies in what we say in introduction/purpose/description and the rest of the project

9 What could have been done better?

1. Specify whether we are supposed to do it in groups or by ourselves.
2. An actual presentation would have been interesting. Meaning getting question from the review group
3. More focus and repetition of necessary parts and objective of a ToR
4. Have more time to talk with the people who has reviewed our ToR
5. More of a conversation between groups might be nice
6. Maybe a small and short presentation of each review in front of the everybody to share with the rest
7. Maybe give an opportunity for feedback group and original groups to talk and discuss it
8. Some of the comment could have been more specific
9. Shorter time, it took really long time for the different group to get done
10. To actually talk with the other group to understand their rationale and hear their defence for it.
11. More specific questions to evaluate/consider for each section
12. More specific guidelines for the ToR assignment itself would have make a review process more streamlined

13. Maybe discussion in class all together random parts of each ToR
14. Maybe we could have prepared some in advance; that said being “forced” to doing it within a very short time, is an exercise in itself
15. More detailed feedback on specific things