



Wiki to Enhance the Quality of Students' Academic Writing

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Most students entering university may have a negative writer identity, especially in relation to academic writing [1]. As a consequence, the quality of work produced is compromised. To enhance students' written communication, focus is primarily given to teaching form, structure and disciplinary writing conventions at the individual level. Reflective writing is also another approach taken to help students challenge negative identity construction. However, in International Medical University, an innovative approach to meet the needs of the reluctant writer was addressed through a wiki activity. The wiki is a web technology that allows a document to be collaboratively constructed and edited. An academic writing module offered to first year Pharmacy students was selected for the study. The module involved formal face to face teaching as well as e-learning. Students had to complete two formative assignments, one individually and one collaboratively during the course. The collaborative essay was written by groups of 5 students in the wiki over a period of five days. The individual essay was written in class. Both essay required students to write about 350 words and graded on 20 marks. This study focused on the quality of written work produced by comparing the grades acquired in the individual essay compared to the wiki essay and relates the use of wiki as an effective and motivating tool to enable students to write. The mean score for the wiki essay was 16 and was considerably higher than the mean score for the individual essay which was 13. More than 80% of the students agreed that the wiki made them aware of the conventions of writing; being aware of the audience, use of formal language, mechanics of writing, editing and organization of ideas. Of the students who achieved scores of 16 and above for the essay, 73.9% reported that the wiki task was an effective tool for writing. However, of these who scored 16 and above for the individual essay, only 13.6% found the wiki effective. As for being motivated to use the wiki again, 89.1% said they would. Those who had reservations commented on challenges with internet connection and collaboration. Writing need not be an individual task, depending solely on the individual to be aware of areas to improve the self. When writing collaboratively, students have more exposure to learn from peers and are motivated to improve through comparisons with peers, therefore improving the quality of work. Students in the early semesters can be motivated through the wiki task to write formally on a shared platform as preparation for individual tasks they may take on as they progress into higher semesters.