The Relationships among Online Question-Generation, Peer-Assessment and Academic Achievement

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Abstract: This study examined the relationships among student performances in question-generation, peer-assessment, and academic achievement in four different online peer-assessment learning environments. Eight fifth-grade classes (N=253) were randomly assigned to one of four different identity revelation modes (real-name, anonymous, nickname, and self-choice) and participated in the study for six weeks. An online learning system that allows students to contribute to and benefit from the process of question-generation and peer-assessment was adopted. Data analysis revealed significant relationships among the three examined variables. Additionally, the identity revelation modes moderated the predictive power of online question-generation performance on academic achievement. Specifically, the predictive power in the self-choice mode was the greatest. Finally, self-choice identity mode strengthened the relationships between peer-assessment and question-generation performances. The empirical significance of the study and suggestions for learning system development and instructional implementation are provided.

Introduction

In response to the call for the diversification of question sources and an emphasis on engaging students in the process of learning and knowledge construction, student question-generation has been increasing in popularity over the past decades (Brown & Walter, 2005; English, 1998; Silver, 1994). Studies on student question-generation have substantiated its efficacy in enhancing learners' retention of information, reading comprehension, motivation, in-group communication and interaction, satisfaction with past learning experiences, and problem-solving abilities (Abramovich & Cho, 2006; Barlow & Cates, 2006; Brown & Walter, 2005; Dori & Herscovitz, 1999; Leung & Wu, 1999; Silver, 1994; Yu & Liu, 2005; Yu, Liu, & Chan, 2005). Even though most studies have supported the student question-generation approach, investigations into factors that may affect learning performances during student question-generation activities are scare.

The effects of differences in personal characteristics and technology integration methods on adoption and use of student question-generation have been examined and yielded useful suggestions for instructional implementation (Wu & Yu, 2009; Wu & Yu, 2010). In view of the fact that students normally have limited experience generating questions during formal schooling (Moses, Bjork, & Goldenberg, 1993; Vreman-de Olde & de Jong, 2004; Yu & Liu, 2009), their performance in the task itself (i.e., question-generation) and its relationship to academic achievement in the applied contents is one area worth examining.

Moreover, to allow question-authors to receive timely and personalized feedback about contributed question items, peer-assessment is coupled with question-generation activities in most systems (Yu, 2009). Empirical evidence, which spans more than two decades, supports its facilitative effects for learners' motivation, higher-order thinking, cognitive re-structuring, level of performance and attitudes (Brindley & Scoffield, 1998; Falchikov & Goldfinch, 2000; Gatfield, 1999; Hanrahan & Isaacs, 2001; Purchase, 2000; Topping, 1998; Tsai, Lin, & Yuan, 2002; van Gennip, Segers, & Tillema, 2009; Venables & Summit, 2003; Wen & Tsai, 2006; Wen, Tsai, & Chang, 2006). However, students' performances in peer-assessment activities itself in relation to their learning (as reflected in their academic achievement) have rarely been investigated.

In an attempt to gain some knowledge on these areas, a study was conducted to examine whether students' performances in question-generation are related to academic achievement. Moreover, issues on what the relationships between peer-assessment performances and academic achievement and whether students with better question-generation performances offer peers better comments were also examined. Finally, since different forms of user identification in student question-generation and peer-assessment has been reported to lead to different psychological reactions (Yu & Liu, 2009), whether user identification moderates the relationships among question-generation, peer-assessment and academic achievement was investigated. The research questions of this study are:

- 1. Are learners' question-generation performances correlated with academic achievement? If the hypothesized correlation is supported, will the relationship vary with the use of different identity revelation modes?
- 2. Are learners' peer-assessment performances correlated with academic achievement? If the hypothesized correlation is supported, will the relationship vary with the use of different identity revelation modes?
- 3. Are learners' question-generation performances correlated with their peer-assessment performances?

Method

Two hundred and fifty-three 5th graders from eight intact classes participated in the study for six consecutive weeks. Students were informed that the introduced activity was intended to support their science education. To ensure that participants possessed the fundamental skills for the activity, a training session about generating questions and peer-assessment, including hands-on activities, was held at the beginning of the study. For the duration of the study, students were directed to individually generate at least one question in accordance with the instructional content covered and assess at least two questions each week after attending three instructional sessions allocated for science.

A learning environment that allows students to contribute to and benefit from the process of constructing question items, as well as exchanging ideas with their peers about the composed questions, was used. The system allowed interacting parties to communicate back and forth electronically about a specific question item. Essentially, assessors gave evaluative feedback using an online assessment form (with assessment criteria and type-in open space) (see Fig. 1). Alternatively, question composers were able to provide an elaborated explanation for their assessors to further respond to (the very moment the feedback form was submitted) (see Fig. 2). In short, the system allowed both of the interacting parties to engage in argumentative dialogue.

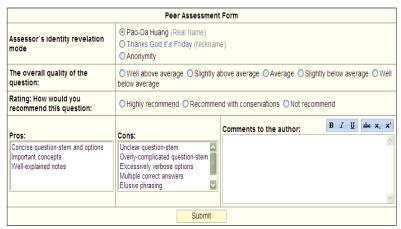
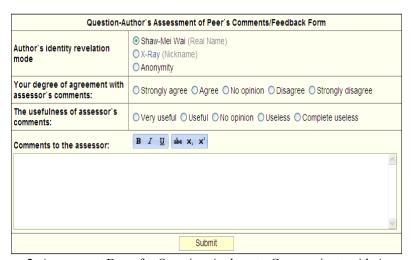


Figure 1. Assessment Form for Assessors to Provide Feedback to Question-Authors.



<u>Figure 2</u>. Assessment Form for Question-Authors to Communicate with Assessors.

Students' performances in question-generation and peer-assessment were defined as all questions students generated and assessed during the study. To assess students' performances in each respective activity, a set of criteria were developed. Specifically, in reference to the Torrance creativity index, King's question cognitive levels (1992) and questions generated by students, the following criteria were adopted: fluency, flexibility, elaboration, originality, cognitive level and importance. Each of the indexes was further operationally defined to ensure objective assessment. For example, the fluency index (score ranging from 0 to 3) was determined by correctness, clarity and conciseness of the composed question. A composite score was created for each generated question. As for peer-assessment, it was evaluated in terms of 3 discrete levels: (1) quality judgment, (2) quality judgment with identification of strong and weak areas, and (3) quality judgment

with explicit suggestions for further refinement of questions. Students' academic performance was based on the mid-term and final exams, which were centrally administrated at the participating school.

To test the moderation effects of the different identity revelation modes, four treatment conditions were devised. In the real-name condition, the student's full-name was retrieved automatically from the database and shown on screen when questions and feedback were viewed (See Figure 3). In the anonymous group, information about the question-author and assessor were not shown, and only the word "anonymous" was marked (See Figure 4). In the nickname group, the student's self-created identity was shown at the top of the generated questions and rendered comments (See Figure 5). Finally, to take into account the recent finding that participants exhibited statistically significant different preferences for different user identity revelation modes when rendering comments (Yu & Liu, 2009), a self-choice group was created. In the self-choice group, rather than being assigned a specific and fixed identity revelation mode, the identity mode used was chosen by the user (see Figs. 1 & 2 top portion: identity revelation mode choice space). Students were free to change to whichever mode each time they generate or assess a new item. Eight participating classes were randomly assigned to four different treatment conditions (i.e., two classes per group).

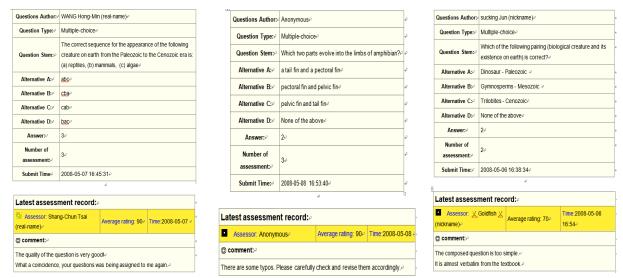


Figure 3. Real-Name Mode.

Figure 4. Anonymity Mode.

Figure 5. Nickname Mode.

Results

The means and standard deviations of students' performances in generating questions, peer-assessment, and midterm and final exams are listed in Table 1. The potential effects of gender and prior experience in the introduced strategies have been reported (Topping, 2010). As can be seen in Table 1, gender and prior experience in either online question-generation or online peer-assessment were approximately the same across different treatment conditions. Data was analyzed using partial correlation while controlling for the influence of the mid-term exam scores.

<u>Table 1: Descriptive statistics of the examined variable.</u>

Treatment Gender		Online QG		Online PA		QG	QA	Mid-	Final	
		idei	Experience		Experience		Performance	Performance	term	exam
	Male	Female	Yes	No	Yes	No	Averaged Mean(SD)	Averaged Mean(SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
Real- name	33	32	25	40	26	39	5.02	4.50	85.48	91.32
(n=65)							(2.37)	(2.91)	(7.74)	(6.75)
Anonymous	32	31	35	27	35	26	6.07	5.23	86.10	92.24
(n=63)							(2.48)	(3.20)	(8.83)	(7.08)
Nickname	32	32	25	39	27	37	4.52	3.96	84.41	91.75
(n=64)							(2.25)	(2.74)	(9.6)	(8.29)
Self-choice	28	33	29	32	27	34	4.54	4.15	87.39	90.57
(n=61)							(2.39)	(2.65)	(9.86)	(10.07)
Total	125	128	114	139	115	138	5.04	4.46	85.82	91.48
(n=253)							(2.44)	(2.91)	(9.04)	(8.10)

Note: QG refers to Question-Generation; PA refers to Peer-Assessment

Relationships between Question-generation Performances and Academic Achievement

The partial correlation analysis results indicated a significant relationship between performances in generating questions and academic achievement (r= 0.14, p = 0.02). A hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to explore the moderation effect of different identity revelation modes on the strength of the relationship. The analysis showed that performances in question-generation and the different identity revelation modes interacted significantly with regard to their relationships with achievement (β = 0.34, p =0.03). As shown in Table2, the significant effects of the mid-term exam, the treatment and the interaction between question-generation performances and treatments on achievement were found. However, a direct effect of question-generation performances on achievement was not found. In short, identity revelation modes fully moderated the predictive power of question-generation performances on achievement. A series of follow-up regression tests, which uncovered the moderation phenomena, indicated that the question-generation performances of students in the self-choice mode significantly positively predicted achievement scores ($\beta_{\rm opt}$ = 0.20, p= 0.04) and that the predictive power of the self-choice group was the greatest of the four modes.

<u>Table 2: Hierarchical regression model summary of the question-generation performance.</u>

Model	Achievement		
Variable	(Dependent		
	Variable)		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Controlled Variable			
Mid-term Exam	0.56**	0.56**	0.56**
Independent Variable			
Question-generation performance	0.12*	0.11*	-0.14
Treatment		-0.05	-0.28**
Interaction			
Treatment X Question-generation performance			0.34*
R-square	0.36	0.36	0.36
F	70.99	47.60	37.56
Sig	0.00	0.00	0.00
Δ R-square	0.36	0.00	0.01*
ΔF	70.99	0.88	5.09
Sig	0.00	0.35	0.03
Note:			
a. predictor:(constant), Mid-term Exam (controlled),			
Question-generation performance			
b. predictor:(constant), Mid-term Exam			
(controlled), Question-generation performance,			
Treatment			
c. predictor:(constant), Mid-term Exam (controlled),			
Question-generation performance, Treatment,			
interaction			

Relationships between Peer-assessment Performances and Academic Achievement

The partial correlation between performances in peer-assessment and achievement is statistically significant (r= 0.15, p = 0.02). However, the moderation effects of the different identity revelation modes on the strength of the relationship was not supported by the hierarchical regression analyses, as reported in Table3 (β = 0.1, p =0.48).

Table 3: Hierarchical regression model summary of peer-assessment performance.

Model Variable	Achievement (Dependent		
	Variable)		
	Model 1 ^a	Model 2 ^b	Model 3 ^c
Controlled Variable			
Mid-term Exam	0.56**	0.56**	0.56*
Independent Variable			
Peer-assessment performance	0.13**	0.12*	0.04
Treatment		-0.05	-0.11

Interaction			
Treatment X Peer-assessment performance			0.1
R-square	0.36	0.37	0.37
F	71.44	48.00	36.05
Sig	0.00	0.00	0.00
Δ R-square	0.36	0.00	0.001
ΔF	71.44	1.07	0.49
Sig	0.00	0.30	0.48
Note:			
a. predictor:(constant), Mid-term			
Exam(controlled), Peer-assessment			
performance			
b. predictor:(constant), Mid-term			
Exam(controlled), Peer-assessment			
performance, Treatment			
c. predictor:(constant), Mid-term			
Exam(controlled), Peer-assessment			
performance, Treatment, interaction			

Relationships between Question-generation and Peer-assessment

The correlation analysis result showed a significant relationship between performances in generating questions and peer assessment (r= 0.66, p <0.01). Additionally, real-name, anonymous, nick-name, and self-choice all reached statistical significance with scores of r= 0.69 (p <0.01), r= 0.58 (p <0.0), r= 0.61 (p <0.01) and r= 0.71 (p <0.01), respectively. The relationship with the self-choice mode was the strongest.

Conclusion and Implications

In this study, relationships among question-generation, peer-assessment and academic performances were first explored, followed by an examination of how different identity revelation modes strengthen or weaken the relationships. The current study confirmed that the correlations among the three examined variables were significant. First, this study substantiated that students who performed better at question-generation tended to perform better in academic achievement. Additionally, the results, which supported the moderation effects of the identity revelation modes, evidenced that students in the self-choice mode who performed better in question-generation could be expected to perform better in academic achievement. Second, correlations between students' performances in peer-assessment and academic performance were also indicated for all four different identity revelation modes; however, the intensity of the relationships was similar in different modes. Third, the study confirmed that there was a high degree of correlation between question-generation and peer-assessment, and the intensity of the relationship was strongest in the self-choice mode.

These findings have important empirical significance as well as implications for online system developments and instructional implementation. First, the current study substantiated the relationships between performances in question-generation, peer-assessment and academic achievement on the applied content. In light of these findings, instructors interested in using the student question-generation approach for promoting academic performance are advised to address the issue of supporting question-generation and peer-assessment performances by, for instance, including deliberate training or building question-generation or peer-assessment scaffolds (Yu, 2009; Rosenshine, Meister, & Chapman, 1996), etc.

Furthermore, moving away from assessee's subjective perceptions of gains and attitudes towards peer-assessment, this study included objective measures (learning gains in academic contents) and evaluate its relationship with students' performances in question-generation and peer-assessment. In this study, students with better question-generation performances tended to offer peers better feedback and excelled better in academic assessment afterwards. A word of caution, however, is warranted. Since the activities of question-generation and peer-assessment were implemented simultaneously, no cause-and-effect but correlations can be inferred from the study.

Third, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, this is the first study examining and supporting the moderation effect of self-choice identity revelation mode on the relationship of question-generation, peer-assessment activity and academic achievement. It was found that the predictive power of question-generation performances for academic achievement in the self-choice identity group was the greatest, and that the self-choice identity mode strengthened the relationships between question-generation and peer-assessment performances. Taking psychological safety into consideration (van Gennip, Segers, & Tillema, 2010), the results of this study, and the fact that almost all online peer-assessment systems adopt a fixed user identity mode

(rather than dynamic mode that is adjustable by the user), designers of online systems should consider embedding functions that permit users to choose their own identity revelation mode.

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Acknowledgments

This paper was funded by research grants from the National Science Council, Taiwan, ROC (NSC 96-2520-S-006-002-MY3; NSC 99-2511-S-006-015 -MY3). The author would like to thank research assistants, Meiju Chen and Knem Chen for their assistance during the data collection process.