



Employing Peer Feedback (Improving English Writing Proficiency Among Intermediate School Students in Second Language Writing Settings)

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ABSTRACT

English writing proficiency is a crucial skill for second language learners, yet traditional teaching methods often fall short in effectively enhancing students' writing abilities. Peer feedback has emerged as a promising approach to address this challenge, fostering collaborative learning environments and providing students with valuable feedback on their writing. Despite the growing interest in peer feedback, there remains a need to investigate its effectiveness in improving English writing proficiency among intermediate school students in second language writing settings. A quantitative research approach utilizing questionnaires was employed to gather data from 80 intermediate school students in Palestine. The study underscores the importance of incorporating peer feedback activities into English writing instruction to enhance students' writing proficiency and foster collaborative learning environments.

Keywords: Peer Feedback, Writing Proficiency, Intermediate School Students, Effectiveness.



1. Introduction

The art of writing is a skill that garners significant attention, particularly for second language learners striving to master the intricacies of written tasks. English writing skills have long been deemed crucial, yet the traditional teaching methods in writing classes, especially within ESL/EFL contexts, often fall short in fostering proficient writers. Current approaches inadequately address the need to elevate both the caliber of writing and the effectiveness of writing instruction. It necessitates diligent effort to improve writing quality and instruction through thoughtful commentary, suggestions, and high-quality feedback aimed at enhancing learners' writing competence. Notably, there has been a shift in writing strategies towards incorporating peer feedback alongside teacher feedback, highlighting the importance of peer involvement in multi-draft process-oriented writing instruction for second language learners (Khalil, 2018).

Peer feedback is recognized as a means of engaging students in the exchange of ideas, facilitating the provision and reception of constructive criticism to enhance their writing abilities (Farrah, 2012). Furthermore, it is pedagogically acknowledged as an effective approach for enhancing students' writing proficiency. The utilization of peer feedback in L2 writing offers numerous benefits, including the bolstering of students' confidence and the cultivation of critical thinking skills through the examination of texts annotated by peers (Ferris, 1995). Moreover, peer feedback serves to stimulate students' learning motivation and foster the development of social interaction skills, as it is viewed as a social practice that influences students' engagement in the task (Koka & Hein, 2006).

1.2 Statement of Problem

Despite the growing recognition of the importance of peer feedback in language learning contexts, and its effectiveness in different educational settings, and the fact that peer feedback is often touted as a valuable tool for improving writing proficiency (Corbin, 2012), there exists a notable gap in academic literature regarding the specific relationship between peer feedback and the enhancement of writing skills among intermediate school students.

The academic gap this research seeks to address lies in the insufficient exploration of the effectiveness of peer feedback methods for improving writing skills among intermediate school students. While some studies have examined the general benefits of peer feedback in language learning among high school and college students, there is a lack of comprehensive research focusing specifically on its impact on writing proficiency among this particular demographic.



1.3 The Significance of the study

The significance of this study lies in its potential to address a critical need in language education: the improvement of English writing proficiency among intermediate school students in second language writing settings. By investigating the effectiveness of employing peer feedback methods, the study offers insights into innovative pedagogical approaches that have the capacity to positively impact students' writing abilities.

Furthermore, as writing proficiency is a crucial component of language learning and academic success, particularly in second language contexts (Dheram, 1995), understanding the role of peer feedback in enhancing writing skills holds significant implications for educational practice.

1.4 The Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of employing peer feedback methods in enhancing English writing proficiency among intermediate school students in second language writing classes.

1.5 Research Questions

The study answers the following questions:

1. What is the effectiveness of employing peer feedback methods in improving the overall English writing proficiency of intermediate school students in second language writing classes?
2. What are the perceptions and attitudes of intermediate school students towards participating in peer feedback activities in English writing instruction?

2. The Literature Review and Related Studies

2.1 Background of Peer Feedback

Peer feedback, as a pedagogical approach in writing instruction, involves students providing feedback to each other either in written or oral formats as part of collaborative teaching practices, with the aim of enhancing the quality of writing (Liu & Hansen, 2002). Employed in both ESL and EFL writing instruction, peer feedback facilitates the improvement and cultivation of students' writing skills through interactive learning experiences. Research indicates that peer feedback in writing instruction began to gain traction and evolve in the 1980s, as evidenced by studies conducted by Brannon & Knoblauch (1982) and Zamel (1985). The emergence of peer feedback can be attributed to two key factors.



Initially, peer feedback arises from a transition from teacher-centered to student-centered language learning paradigms. Traditional English writing instruction typically revolves around behavior-based teaching methods, characterized by rote learning with teachers in authoritative roles, often neglecting the development of students' communicative skills. However, the evolution of teaching theories prompts a shift in focus from writing outcomes to the writing process in contemporary writing instruction (Chaudron, 1987).

Secondly, guided by the student-centered approach, peer feedback serves as a remedy for the trade-off between quality feedback and heavy workload, thereby addressing the limitation of teacher feedback. In traditional teacher-centered classrooms, teacher feedback holds absolute authority in the writing process, leaving students with little agency beyond passive acceptance and subsequent modifications to their writing (Mendonca & Johnson, 1994). It is worth acknowledging that in ESL or EFL writing instruction, particularly in many Asian countries, educational focus often leans towards achievement-oriented methods. Consequently, teacher feedback, being the most prevalent feedback approach, is widely acknowledged by students, and its authoritative nature is believed to contribute to enhancing students' writing skills (Ferris, 1995; Ferris, 1997).

2.1.1 Students' Perception to Feedback

Research presents divergent perspectives on teacher feedback. Zamel (1985) contends that teachers' comments are frequently perplexing and subjective, failing to adequately emphasize the significance of revision to students. Truscott (1996) goes as far as proposing that feedback on grammatical errors is generally ineffective. Conversely, Ferris (1997) discovered that detailed and precise teacher feedback can effectively guide students in revising their compositions. This notion is further supported by Kepner's (1991) findings, indicating that teacher feedback not only enhances the accuracy of expression but also fosters the improvement of students' writing skills.

Existing research predominantly utilizes questionnaires to delve deeper into students' attitudes towards different feedback methods. Numerous studies, such as those conducted by Radecki & Swales (1988) and Ferris (1995), indicate a general preference among students for teacher feedback. However, attitudes towards peer feedback exhibit variability across studies. For instance, Mangelsdorf (1992) discovered that 55% of respondents favor peer feedback, while Mendonca & Johnson (1994) found that students perceive peer feedback to be equally significant as teacher feedback. Conversely, Nelson & Murphy (1993) observed a preference for teacher feedback among Chinese and Spanish students, as did ESL respondents in Zhang's (1995) study.



2.1.2 Advantages and Disadvantages of Peer Feedback

Numerous researchers have highlighted the value of peer feedback as an effective hands-on learning opportunity, facilitating the enhancement of students' writing proficiency by enabling them to assume the roles of authors and reviewers responsible for providing feedback on their peers' work (Hansen & Liu, 2005). Additionally, peer feedback is widely perceived as advantageous for students' writing development due to its timely and informative nature, which are essential factors for fostering active participation and giving students agency in scaffolding and constructing their own writing abilities, ultimately facilitating the sharing of ideas (Lu & Law, 2012).

Despite the perceived advantages, several studies have identified lingering negative attitudes towards the use of peer feedback. As noted by Rollinson (2005), peer activities can become excessively time-consuming, particularly when learners are unfamiliar with the peer feedback process. This process involves extensive tasks such as reading, note-taking, collaborating with peers to reach a consensus, and providing written or oral commentary, all of which consume a significant amount of time. Moreover, students' reluctance to engage in peer feedback may stem from dissatisfaction with the feedback they receive from their peers, leading to frustration. Consequently, there is a recognized need for peer feedback training (Min, 2005), overcoming time constraints (Leki, 1991), and ensuring the provision of qualified and credible feedback (Torwong, 2003). Thus, intensive peer training becomes essential to equip students with the necessary skills to effectively provide and receive feedback on their compositions.

2.2 Related Studies

Students can derive benefits from both receiving and providing peer feedback. According to Liu, Lin, Chiu, and Yuan (2001), the utilization of peer feedback allows students to achieve outcomes beyond the cognitive processes required for the writing task, as it enhances their engagement in the process. Topping (2000) further asserts that peer feedback serves to augment students' motivation, fosters a sense of responsibility, and enhances their self-confidence. As Topping (cited in Kurt and Atay, 2007) suggests, in peer feedback sessions, students assume the roles of attentive readers and commentators, aiding each other in refining their written texts. This collaborative endeavor not only enhances a variety of social and communication skills, such as verbal communication, the ability to give and receive criticism, justification of one's stance, and objective assessment of suggestions.

When examining the effects of implementing received feedback or making revisions, numerous studies have consistently found that students who receive more feedback tend to implement a greater number of changes based on this feedback (Wichmann et al., 2018). Additionally, recipients of peer feedback have been observed to make more revisions, even if not directly related to specific feedback points. In terms of



providing feedback, it has also been associated with implementing a higher proportion of received feedback (Berggren, 2015) and a greater overall number of revisions (Y. H. Cho & Cho, 2011). These studies employed a variety of research methodologies including correlational analyses, surveys, interviews, and experimental designs. Collectively, the evidence across these studies strongly supports the benefits of both providing and receiving feedback for enhancing the quality of documents undergoing feedback. Furthermore, when directly compared, the benefits of providing versus receiving feedback appear to be approximately equivalent (Huisman et al., 2018).

Significantly, several of these studies have indicated that the outcomes varied depending on the language proficiency level, with higher levels encompassing aspects such as argumentation, evidence, and genre awareness, and lower levels pertaining to grammar and spelling. For instance, Y. H. Cho and Cho (2011) and Berggren (2015) found that the primary advantage of providing feedback was evident in higher-level aspects of writing rather than lower-level ones. On the other hand, receiving feedback was found to sometimes lead to enhancements in higher-level aspects (Lundstrom & Baker, 2009), sometimes in lower-level aspects (Huisman et al., 2018; Wichmann et al., 2018), but at times showed no discernible improvement in document quality at all (Y. H. Cho & Cho, 2011).

3. Methodology

3.1 Study design

For this study, participants will be recruited from intermediate school students specifically from Artah High School in Tulkarm, Palestine, undergoing English language learning as a second language. A quantitative method employing a questionnaire will be utilized to gauge students' perspectives on the efficacy of peer feedback, their writing proficiency, and their attitudes towards writing.

3.2. The Participants

Participants for this study will consist of 80 intermediate school students enrolled at Artah High School in Tulkarm, Palestine. These students have been exposed to the English language for a minimum of four years, indicating a substantial foundation in the language. Their ages range from 13 to 15 years old, reflecting the typical age group for intermediate school students.

3.3 Research Instruments

A questionnaire served as the primary research instrument for this study. It was designed to assess several key aspects related to students' perceptions of peer feedback effectiveness and attitudes towards participating in peer feedback activities



in English writing instruction. The questionnaire consisted of multiple-choice questions and Likert scale items ranging from 1 to 5 to gather quantitative data.

The data collected through the questionnaire were entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software for analysis. Quantitative analysis techniques such as descriptive statistics, like mean and standard deviation, were used to gain deeper insights into students' experiences and perceptions.

3.4 The Procedures

Eighty intermediate school students from Artah High School in Tulkarm, Palestine, who had been exposed to the English language for at least four years and were between the ages of 13 and 15, were recruited for the study. Participants were selected based on the specified criteria and informed consent was obtained from both the students and their parents or guardians. A questionnaire was administered to all participants before and after the intervention period. Data from the questionnaires were collected and entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software for analysis. Quantitative analysis techniques, such as descriptive statistics, were used to analyze the data collected through the questionnaire.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of employing peer feedback methods in enhancing English writing proficiency among intermediate school students in second language writing classes.

The demographic factors were analyzed according to the age of the students as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic of the participant according to their age (N= 80) participants

		age			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	13.00	25	31.3	31.3	31.3
	14.00	32	40.0	40.0	71.3
	15.00	23	28.8	28.8	100.0
Total		80	100.0	100.0	

Table one shows the percent of the participants' age in the range between 13 and 15, which is the average age of students in intermediate schools.

**Table 2. Students' perception pf the effectiveness of peer feedback****Descriptive Statistics**

Questions	N	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. How effective do you believe peer feedback is in improving your English writing skills?	80	352.00	4.4000	.66751
2. To what extent do you feel that peer feedback helps you identify strengths and weaknesses in your writing?	80	349.00	4.3625	.64128
3. How confident are you in providing constructive feedback to your peers during peer review sessions?	80	360.00	4.5000	.59534
4. Do you believe that receiving feedback from your peers is valuable for improving your writing skills?	80	356.00	4.4500	.59321
5. How motivated are you to participate in peer feedback activities during English writing instruction?	80	349.00	4.3625	.69799
6. To what extent do you find peer feedback sessions helpful in clarifying confusing aspects of writing assignments?	80	338.00	4.2250	.67458
7. How comfortable are you in receiving feedback from your peers during peer review sessions?	80	341.00	4.2625	.70699
8. How important do you think it is to actively participate in peer feedback activities for improving your writing skills?	80	342.00	4.2750	.61572



9. How much do you trust the feedback you receive from your peers during peer review sessions?	80	354.00	4.4250	.59054
10. How satisfied are you with the peer feedback process in improving your English writing skills?	80	347.00	4.3375	.65495
Valid N (listwise)	80			

The results of the ten questions indicate a high level of consensus among the 80 participants regarding the effectiveness and value of peer feedback in improving their English writing skills.

1. For Q1, peer feedback is perceived as highly effective, with an average rating of (4.4000) out of 5. In addition to relatively low standard deviation (.66751).
2. In Q2, participants find peer feedback highly effective in identifying strengths and weaknesses in their writing, with an average rating of (4.3625) out of 5 and low variability (.64128).
3. Participants in Q3 are highly confident in providing constructive feedback to their peers, rating their confidence level at (4.5000) out of 5, with little variability (.59534)
4. As for Q4, receiving feedback from peers is considered highly valuable, with an average rating of (4.4500) out of 5 and low variability (.59321).
5. Participants in Q5 are highly motivated to participate in peer feedback activities, rating their motivation level at (4.3625) out of 5, with low variability (.69799).
6. In Q6, Peer feedback sessions are perceived as highly helpful in clarifying confusing aspects of writing assignments, with an average rating of (4.2250) out of 5 and low variability (.67458).
7. Participants in Q7 are highly comfortable in receiving feedback from their peers during peer review sessions, rating their comfort level at (4.2625) out of 5, with low variability (.70699).
8. Regarding Q8, actively participating in peer feedback activities is perceived as highly important, with an average rating of (4.2750) out of 5 and low variability (.61572).
9. In Q9, participants trust the feedback they receive from their peers during peer review sessions, rating their level of trust at (4.4250) out of 5, with low variability (.59054).
10. Participants in Q10 are generally satisfied with the peer feedback process, rating their satisfaction at (4.3375) out of 5, with low variability (.65495).



4.2 Discussions

The study's findings indicate that participants have a consistent and positive perception of the value and efficacy of peer feedback in improving their English writing skills. Participants also consistently rated their experiences highly, indicating a strong consensus. First, participants rated peer feedback as highly effective in improving their writing proficiency, with an average rating of 4.4 out of 5, suggesting that they believe it to be a valuable tool for improving their writing proficiency. Secondly, the low variability in responses suggests that participants generally agree that peer feedback has a positive impact on their writing abilities.

In addition, participants demonstrated competency and preparedness for peer feedback activities by expressing confidence in their ability to offer constructive criticism to their peers during review sessions. This illustrates a supportive atmosphere among peers and collaborative learning.

The significance of actively engaging in peer feedback activities was also recognized by the participants, who emphasized its role in skill development and learning enhancement. The participants' high levels of motivation further highlight their involvement and dedication to the peer review process.

Additionally, the confidence that participants had in the comments they got from their peers during review sessions emphasizes the validity and dependability of peer feedback as an important tool for learning. A friendly and constructive feedback environment that promotes optimal learning outcomes is fostered by this trust.

5. Conclusion and Suggestions

5.1. Conclusion

As a result, this study clarifies the role that peer input has in helping intermediate school students who are writing in a second language gain more ability in English. The results highlight how useful and successful peer feedback is as a technique for improving writing abilities and creating cooperative learning settings.

It is clear from the participant response analysis that peer input is well-received in a variety of ways. Peer feedback was frequently recognized as extremely beneficial by participants in helping them understand their writing strengths and flaws and offer constructive critique. Peer interactions during writing instruction are encouraging, as seen by the participants' confidence in providing and receiving comments.



5.2. Suggestions for Further Research

1. Longitudinal Studies: To investigate the long-term impacts of peer feedback interventions on students' writing skills, conduct longitudinal studies.
2. Comparative Studies: To determine the best methods for enhancing writing abilities, compare various peer feedback models and techniques.
3. Cultural Considerations: Examining how cultural elements affect how well peer input is received and how effective it is.

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