**Research Article**

# PEER FEEDBACK AS A STRATEGY TO TEACH WRITING TO FIRST YEAR STUDENTS

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**Abstract**

This paper aims to look at Peer Feedback as a strategy to teach writing to the first year stents in Bangladeshi universities. It would like to suggest every teacher teaching writing to change the misconception that most students have towards peer review and feedback in the writing classroom. The study show improvement in terms of overall quality and individual components,like language, content, organization and cohesion.

## Introduction

The process-oriented approach requires teachers to use various teaching techniques to teach writing in ESL classes. Included among the teaching strategies is a technique called peer response. During the peer-response activity, the student writers engage in the collaborative activity of reading, critiquing and providing feedback on each other's drafts to secure immediate textual improvement and to develop stronger writing competence via mutual scaffolding (Hu 2005).

Benefits:

- ✓ Students gain **confidence, perspective and critical thinking skills** from being able to read drafts by peers on similar tasks.

- ✓ Students get **more feedback** on their writing than they could from the teacher alone.

- ✓ Students get feedback from a more **diverse audience** bringing **multiple perspectives.**

- ✓ Students receive feedback from **non-expert readers** on ways in which their texts are unclear as to ideas and language.

- ✓ Peer review activities build a sense of **classroom community**.

After the trained peer response, students believed that peer feedback was **less traumatic** than teacher feedback, and although they still preferred teacher feedback for learning, they also felt **more comfortable** with receiving peer feedback (Lin &Chien,2009).

ESL students tend to view their first draft as a finished productand have difficulty in seeing revision as anything that goes beyond the editing for surface errors like spelling, grammar and mechanics (Woods, 2002). Some students may not welcome their partners' feedback because they

do not believe that someone who is also in the process of learning the target language is capable of making worthwhile comments (Ferris, 2002).

"Peer-response is nothing more than the blind leading the blind with unskilled editors guiding inexperienced writers in a process neither understands well." (Michael Graner. 1997, p. 40) Rollinson (2004) recommends that any peer response activity should involve training activities.

The training should focus on:

- ✓ how to read and respond to a peer's writing

- ✓ how to participate in a discussion about students' own writing and that of another student

- ✓ how to react to feedback from peershow to make revisions based on this feedback

- • Types of activities to be conducted

- • Forming groups for peer-response

- • Identifying unique needs of students

- • Training methods to be used

The Study

| Approach | Qualitative Case Study |
|---|---|
| Research Context | ESL writing class at a public university in Bangladesh<br>Medium of Instruction: English |
| Course | English for Academic Purposes<br>Process Writing Approach |
| Duration | 1 semester (14 weeks)<br>3 two hour meetings per week (Speaking, Reading & Writing) |
| Task | Students are required to write a text of an academic nature.<br>450-600 words. Outline. First draft and a final paper. |
| Participants | Purposeful Sampling<br>30 undergraduates (8 for indepth study) |
| Text | WRITING ACADEMIC ENGLISH By Alice Oshima& Ann Hogue |
| Research Question 1 | What is the nature of the interaction when ESL students in a trained peer-response group respond to the first draft of the writing task? |
| Research Question 2 | What is the connection between the interaction during the peer-response session and the changes made to the final draft? |

Procedure



**RQ1: What is the nature of the interaction when ESL students in a trained peer-response group respond to the first draft of the writing task?**

**The ideal peer-response group is one in which the members have:**

- ✓ **diverse perspectives and experiences**

- ✓ **similar academic abilities**

- ✓ **at least one member has leadership skills to keep the group on task as well as serve as a mediator.**

**Session 1:**

**The Causes and Effects of Credit Card Use**

**Initiating the Peer Response Session**

Cragan, Kasch and Shields (2009) refer to this phase of the discussion as the **orientation stage** which helps the group create the environment for the peer-response session.

It also enabled the group to familiarize itself to the task. By making these kinds of comments, the participants were actually preparing themselves to get on with the bigger task.

R1: Okay, your essay is about credit cards … why did you guys choose this topic?
W2: Well … Credit card … problem is becoming a serious problem mmm … in Malaysia.
R1: … you guys have credit cards?
W1: No la … no money … how to apply credit card … can students get credit card?
W2: PTPTN money … not enough … (laughter)
R2: Good topic. I like your essay. Nice to read …

W1: Thank you, thank you ...

W2: So … no problem lah … (laughter)

R1: I said nice essay … okay … okay … let's start at the first paragraph …

R2: Introduction paragraph … is the introduction interesting and mmm … does the writing hold the readers' interest …  (reading from the Peer Evaluation Checklist)

R1: Emmm … yes, it's interesting … nice to read …

W1: Any problems in the first paragraph … I hope everything okay …

R1: No, some problems … Here … I underlined your citation …

W2: Why? Okay what … why you underline it?

R1: (reading from draft) The statistic show there are 176.8 million credit cardholders in 2008 in the US.  Errr … why your example is about America? You said just now credit card problem is serious in Malaysia …

R2: Yes, Sir (instructor) said use local examples …

W2: Oh, yake … we can't find … in the articles …

W1: We try to search again … but look here … we use Malaysian example.

R2: Can you read?

W1: Yes, this line … According to statistics from Bank Negara, the total amount of credit card fraud in 2004 was RM68 million.

R1: But in the first paragraph, you have to … err … say the total credit card holders in Malaysia. That will be good …

**Session 2:**

**Causes and Effects of Early Marriages** When student writers **collaborate to solve a problem** they must make their ideas and proposals known and understood by  the peers so that that particular solution can be **utilized in the revision**.
(Wells & Wells, 992)

R1:  Can you read the draft so that we all can listen.

W2: Sure. Our essay is on Causes and Effects of Early Marriages. (W1 and W2 take turns to read the draft) (**Reading Aloud**)

R2: You guys are actually discussing the causes and effects of early marriages.

W2: Ya la.

R1: Sorry, just want to confirm.

R2: I think your points are mixed up.

W2: What? Mix up!

R2: Here! In this paragraph you are talking about child marriage. That's not your topic.
**(Localization)**

R1: Yes, this is confusing. Suddenly you talk about children forced to get married. You must only talk about early marriage, like getting married after SPM. Seventeen or eighteen years old.

W1: Oh, yes … mistake.

W2: What to do now?

R2: Take out this paragraph. Put new effect of early marriage – like not enough money or not ready to have baby. **(Offering Solution)**

W2: Not ready to have baby is better. We take that point. **(Agreement to Feedback)**

## Session 3:

### Causes and Effects of Early Marriages

When learners are engaged in social interaction, they are given the opportunity to see for themselves**what gaps are present in their L2 linguistic knowledge** (Swain, 2000).

The participants accepted peer feedback with a certain amount of **reservations**. (Miao et al, 2006)

R2: Your second paragraph is good. We didn't spot any errors.

R1: Ya, nice. Ideas good. Very touching. Parents getting their teenage daughters married to money-lenders to settle their loans. [**Praise**]

W2: Yes, this problem mostly happens in Africa, Nepal, Pakistan and India.

R2: But you guys did not have any citation to support that the problem id happening in Africa, Nepal, Pakistan and India.

R1: Yes, if you put in a citation, it will be better. Sir (lecturer) said if you include facts, like the name of countries, must have citation. [**Bringing in outside voice**].

W2: I think we forgot la …

W1: Yes, we will take from the article.

R1: Another point here – the young girls are forced to become slaves after marriage.

W2: Yes, they have to work hard. Like work in the farm and house work.

R1: So you don't have to use the word "slaves".

W1: Why?

R2: We feel not suitable la. But up to you. [**Mitigation**]

R1: Maybe you can say work hard like slaves. Yes, I think that will be better. [**Diplomacy**]

W2: Mmmm … okay, we will think about it.

## Session 4:

### The Impact of Reality Programs on Television

ESL learners may not be competent enough to correct each other's **grammatical errors**. (Blake, 2000).

The ability to notice and correct grammatical errors is a difficult task for ESL learners. (Williams, 2001).

ESL learners have the ability to focus on form and highlight them to their peers but their feedback is usually a simple mention of the error without a suggestion for correction. (Sato, 2007).

R1: Your last paragraph … the conclusion … is good.

R2: Yes … restatement of thesis statement ada (is there) …

W1: Okay … so no problem la …

R2: Can improve grammar a bit la …

W2: Which one …

R2: Look at this … (reading from draft) to conclude, reality programmes are more of a bane than a boon. It gives bad effects to the community, especially to the participants themselves and among teenagers.

R1: You start with "to conclude" … transition signal for last paragraph … good … but … the second sentence … (reading from draft) "It gives bad effects" … this is wrong.

W1: Salah! … Why wrong?

R2: At the first sentence … here … you said "reality programmes" … plural kan (right)?

W1: Reality programmes … ya … plural. So?

R2: Arrrr …. So the next sentence must be … they give … not it gives … betultak (right)?

W1: What you think …

W2: Macambetulaje…(Looks correct)

R1: First sentence kau orang kata (you said) … "reality programmes" …here … this one ...

W2: Yes … plural

R1: Now look at second sentence … It gives bad effects … what is the "it"?

W1: Errr … Reality programmes … la  …

R2: So must be plural kan (right) …

W2: Ohhh … okay … okay …

- Encouraged students to approach writing as a socially constructed, meaning-making process and develop productive attitudes toward writing.
- Helped to establish the social basis for the development of cognitive processes that are essential to revision.
- Enhanced students' awareness of revision strategies, which constitute a crucial component in the development of ESL writing skills.
- Provided opportunities for students to detect mismatches between intended and understood meaning and helping them develop a sense of audience.
- Helped to foster a sense of text ownership by giving students opportunities to explain, defend, and clarify their points of view.


**RQ2: What is the connection between the interaction during the peer-response session and the changes made to the final draft?**

**Quantity**
- Length of Drafts
- Size of Revision

**Source of Revision**

- Peer-Initiated
- Writer-Initiated

**Types of Revision**

- Substitution
- Permutation
- Distribution
- Consolidation
- Re-order

**Functions of Revision**

- Grammatical
- Cosmetic

**Initiating Own Changes**

**Not Incorporating Feedback**

- Changes to Draft

Changes

### First Draft

Many people today are attracted to face book. Everyone around them is connected to it. Facebook is become a fashion. Most of them normally spend their time in face book about five to six hours per day. Other gadgets such as IPad, cell phone and broadband phone have applications that is easy to connect to the internet. Because of technologies, they can also update their status at any time and any place. This will make other people want to get these facilities too.

### Revised Paper

Many people today are attracted to Facebook because everyone around them are connected to it. In fact, it has become a trend. Facebook addicts normally spend about five to six hours per day checking the status. This is bad, especially when they are still studying. In addition, gadgets such as IPads, cell phones and broadband phones also have applications that can connect to the internet easily. As a result of these technologies, Facebook users can also update their status anywhere and anytime. Furthermore, they can also download videos and games. This will make other people desire to get these facilities too.

**Cosmetic Changes**

Cosmetic changes paraphrase existing concepts without altering the essential meanings (Paulus, 1999).

Post-revision Interview:

The writers said, *"We too found that sentence a little odd – especially the 'Last time'. So we changed it."*

**Title**

**The Impact of Reality Programs on Television**

| First Draft: |
|---|
| Last time young children loved to watch cartoons. However, nowadays they are changing from cartoons to watching reality shows. This brings negative impacts on the children and teenagers. |
| Feedback |
| |
| *R2: I get your idea, but the sentence … not nice la … What do you think?*<br>*R1: Yup, like not clear. May be you guys must refer to your articles for some ideas.*<br>*W2: But what's wrong? Change what?*<br>*R1: Yang last time tu… Peliksikit (A little odd)*<br>*W1: Oh, so we change that …*<br>*R2: Join the sentence, maybe …* |

Revised Draft:

Children nowadays are now switching from watching cartoons to watching reality shows. As a result, they are involved in unhealthy activities such as bullying and violent behaviour.

**Improvement to Draft**

**Contributors to Draft Improvement:**

Learning from Mistakes
Point of View
 Broadening the Writers' Knowledge
Selective Implementation of Feedback
Reorganizing Information
Writing for an Audience
The Act of Writing Multiple Drafts

*Development*

"Writing is concerned with developing a structure of meaning: the specification of what one wants to say becomes clearer and more complete in the actual writing and revising of the text for a particular purpose and audience." (Haneda& Wells, 2000).

**Title**

**Suicide among Teenagers**

| |
|---|
| First Draft:Teenagers commit suicide because parents have very high expectations. Being a parent is not a simple thing. Parents love their children and want the best for them. For instance, parents force their children to excel in academics. However, some children are not good in their studies and feel disappointed because they cannot make their parents proud. |
| Feedback: R2: *Your topic sentence… the controlling idea is 'parents have very high expectation of them (their children)' but your supporting details are not clear.*<br>R1: *Yes, you must talk about the high expectations. Like force the children to be the best.*<br>R2: *Like scold them when they don't get As in all subjects.* |
| Revised Paper:Some teenagers commit suicide because their parents have very high expectations of them. <u>Even though parents love their children and want the best for them, some parents put too much pressure on them.</u> For instance, the parents want their children to excel in academics, <u>sports and all other activities.</u> However, some children are not good in their studies or sports. When they cannot do what their parents want, they feel sad because they cannot make their parents happy and proud. |

- The revised papers showed improvement in terms of overall quality and individual components such as language, content, organization and cohesion
- Positive changes linked to peer-feedback were higher than that of the writer-initiated revision.
- However, some of the participants were unable to provide textual suggestions that were able to change the direction, overall structure or substantial content of the drafts.
- The revision process helped the participants become more conscious of their own writing.

Results of this study do not support the belief held by some that ESL students are unable to take on what many consider to be the teachers' role of critic who also has all the answers.

Taking into account the amount of time it takes to train students on peer review and the intensive work they do writing, giving feedback to peers, and rewriting their essays, the crucial question is, "Did my students become appropriate peer reviewers?" A post-activity analysis of the 22 student essays in my class revealed a total of 112 comments and questions and 419 corrections offered to peers. Of course, not all the suggested changes or feedbacks were right, but at least the original writer's attention was refocused on certain parts of the essay that could be improved.

Follow-up interviews with my students revealed that most of them found the peer-review experience to be beneficial to them as writing students. Praising the activities, many of them rendered comments. Positive comments included, "Reading essays could give me ideas to improve my writing and to avoid errors"; "It helped me with my mistakes"; and "I am more critical now and I find the mistakes easier;" "I learnt from my peer's mistakes". One student hinted at recognizing a sense of audience, writing, "[It] is a good way to improve your skills in writing putting yourself on the teacher's side." One comment by another student showed that the peer-review process, for him, met one of my most important objectives. He stated, "I would like to add that the experience helped me realize mistakes that I would not have noticed before." Clearly, students found benefits beyond simply grammatical or surface corrections, which some opponents of peer review feel is the main focus for students.

## Conclusion

It is wise to suggest every teacher teaching writing to change the misconception that most students have towards peer review and feedback in the writing classroom—namely, that its purpose is "to be finding mistakes or problems in each other's essays" (Nelson and Carson 1998, 121). Peer review is a productive, worthwhile, and beneficial activity in the writing classroom, if students are given sufficient time for training, practice, and execution. It requires time and effort for training writing students in peer review. It is a skill that students can use for the remainder of their writing careers, not just in English, as well as an ability that they can share with other students. One of my students, who had never experienced peer review and feedback before taking my course, told me that he would ask his future English composition instructors to include peer review in their courses, since "it (you are) was the most useful thing I did all years."

## Reference

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