

The Effect of Peer Feedback on EFL University Students' Writing Performance and Revision Strategies

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Abstract

This study investigates how peer feedback affects EFL university students' writing and revision practices. This study included 58 second-year non-English majors from two full writing classes at Jiaxing Nanhu University. Students used structured feedback forms to provide peer evaluation on content, organization, and language accuracy over eight weeks. Students' amended drafts, pre- and post-test writing assignments, and a post-treatment peer feedback questionnaire provided data. Performance differences were examined using paired-sample t-tests and an analytic rating scale for pre- and post-test compositions. Frequency and chi-square analyses were used to identify revision pattern shifts in content, organization, and language-related revision categories. Student writing improved most in organization and language accuracy after peer input. Students made more higher-order content creation adjustments after peer review sessions. The study proved that most students found peer input helpful for identifying writing issues, but some worried about its accuracy. The study suggests using organized peer feedback in EFL writing classes to improve performance and strategic revision.

Keywords

peer feedback; EFL writing; revision strategies; writing performance; university students

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

Writing in a foreign language is widely recognized as one of the most challenging skills for EFL learners, requiring the integration of linguistic knowledge, organizational skills, and critical thinking. Peer feedback—defined as the process in which learners provide evaluative and constructive comments on each other's work—has gained increasing attention as an instructional strategy in process-

oriented writing pedagogy^[1].

In the Chinese EFL context, writing instruction is frequently characterized by instructor feedback, which, although beneficial, may be constrained by time limitations and class size. Peer feedback is a different way that encourages active learning, encourages studying together, and may even help students improve writing performance.

1.2. Problem Statement

Even though it could be useful for teaching, there has not been much research on how peer feedback affects writing performance and revision strategies in Chinese EFL settings. Specifically, there is less understanding regarding whether peer review facilitates a transition from superficial corrections to more substantive revisions, as well as how students assess its utility and precision.

1.3. Research Questions

This study addresses three main research questions: Does peer feedback significantly improve students' writing scores across content, organization, and language accuracy? How does peer feedback influence the distribution of revision types, including content, organization, and language? What are students' attitudes toward the peer feedback process?

1.4. Significance of the Study

This study helps the literature by showing empirical evidence of peer feedback's effectiveness in the Chinese EFL context. Pedagogically, it offers practical recommendations for integrating peer review into writing curricula to improve both performance and revision strategies.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Peer Feedback in EFL Writing

According to social constructivist theory^[2], peer feedback promotes social learning. Prior research has found that peer review can improve the quality of the writing quality, increase learners' awareness of audience, and promote self-regulated learning in teaching English language^[3]. However, concerns remain regarding the accuracy and usefulness of feedback, especially in foreign language contexts.

2.2. Revision Strategies

Taxonomy categorizes revisions into surface changes (grammar, vocabulary) and meaning changes, which include content and organizational adjustments. The cognitive process theory of writing strongly supports the idea that high-quality writing is linked to extensive meaning-level revisions^[4].

2.3. Research Gap

Most studies in the Chinese EFL context have focused on either writing performance or peer perceptions, but few have simultaneously examined changes in revision strategies. The present study addresses this gap by combining quantitative analysis of performance gains with coding of revision behaviors.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

A quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test design was adopted. Data were collected from writing tasks, revision drafts, and a questionnaire.

3.2. Participants

The participants were 58 second-year non-English majors from two intact writing classes at Jiaxing Nanhu University. Both classes were taught by the same instructor to control for teaching style differences.

3.3. Instruments

The study employed multiple instruments for data collection. Writing tasks consisted of two argumentative essays, administered as a pre-test and a post-test. A structured peer feedback form was used to guide students in providing comments on content, organization, and language accuracy. Essay scoring was conducted using an analytic rating scale adapted from^[5]. Revisions were analyzed according to a coding scheme based on. In addition, a questionnaire combining Likert-scale items and open-ended questions was administered to gather students' perceptions of the peer feedback process.

3.4. Procedure

A structured eight-week study was conducted. Two raters independently rated a Week 1 pre-test writing exercise. Every two weeks from Weeks 2 to 7, peers used the structured feedback form to provide content, organization, and language input. Week 8 saw students complete the post-test writing and questionnaire. All revision drafts from the intervention were tagged for change type and frequency.

3.5. Data Analysis

Data analysis involved conducting paired-sample t-tests

to examine differences in writing scores between the pre-test and post-test, chi-square tests to analyze changes in the distribution of revision types, and descriptive statistics to summarize questionnaire responses on students' perceptions of peer feedback.

4. Results

This section presents the findings of the study in response to the three research questions: whether peer feedback improves EFL students' writing performance; how it affects students' revision strategies; and students' attitudes toward peer feedback.

4.1. Effect of Peer Feedback on Writing Performance

A paired-sample t-test was conducted to compare students' writing scores before and after the peer feedback intervention. As shown in **Table 1**, there were statistically significant improvements across all three dimensions—content, organization, and language accuracy—as well as in the total writing score. The largest mean gain was observed in organization (M increase = 1.70, $p < .001$), followed by language accuracy (M increase = 1.60, $p < .001$) and content (M increase = 1.50, $p < .001$). These results indicate that structured peer feedback had a positive and significant impact on students' overall writing performance.

4.2. Changes in Revision Strategies

To examine how students' revision behaviors changed after receiving peer feedback, the frequency distribution of revision types (content-related, organization-related, and language-related) was analyzed using a chi-square test. As presented in **Table 2**, there was a significant increase in the proportion of content-related revisions from 22.5% in the pre-test to 35.0% in the post-test ($\chi^2 = 12.45$, $p < .001$). Organization-related revisions also increased modestly from 25.0% to 30.5% ($\chi^2 = 4.32$, $p = .038$). Conversely, language-related revisions decreased from 52.5% to 34.5% ($\chi^2 = 15.20$, $p < .001$). This shift suggests that students became more focused on higher-order concerns—such as content development and text organization—after participating in peer review activities.

4.3. Students' Attitudes toward Peer Feedback

Descriptive statistics from the post-treatment questionnaire revealed generally positive attitudes toward peer feedback (**Table 3**). The highest-rated item was "Peer feedback helped me identify problems" (M=4.35, SD=0.60), followed closely by "Peer review improved my awareness of good writing practices" (M=4.25, SD=0.62). Students also reported that peer feedback improved their writing organization (M=4.10, SD=0.72) and motivated them to revise more (M=4.20, SD=0.65). However, the lowest-rated item was "I trust the accuracy of peer feedback" (M=3.80, SD=0.85), indicating that

Table 1. Paired-sample t-test results for writing performance

| Dimension | Pre-test M(SD) | Post-test M(SD) | <i>t</i> | <i>p</i> |
|--------------|----------------|-----------------|----------|----------|
| Content | 12.35 (1.82) | 13.85 (1.75) | 5.12 | 0.000 |
| Organization | 11.20 (1.60) | 12.90 (1.55) | 6.45 | 0.000 |
| Language | 10.80 (1.50) | 12.40 (1.40) | 6.02 | 0.000 |
| Total Score | 34.35 (3.20) | 39.15 (2.95) | 8.25 | 0.000 |

Table 2. Chi-square test results for revision type distribution

| Revision Type | Pre(%) | Post(%) | χ^2 | <i>p</i> |
|---------------|--------|---------|----------|----------|
| Content | 22.5 | 35.0 | 12.45 | 0.000 |
| Organization | 25.0 | 30.5 | 4.32 | 0.038 |
| Language | 52.5 | 34.5 | 15.20 | 0.000 |

while students valued the process, concerns about peers' language proficiency and feedback quality remained.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for questionnaire items

| Item | Mean | SD |
|--|------|------|
| Peer feedback helped me identify problems. | 4.35 | 0.60 |
| Peer feedback improved my writing organization. | 4.10 | 0.72 |
| I trust the accuracy of peer feedback. | 3.80 | 0.85 |
| Peer feedback motivated me to revise more. | 4.20 | 0.65 |
| Peer review improved my awareness of good writing practices. | 4.25 | 0.62 |

4.4. Summary of Findings

Overall, the results suggest that structured peer feedback is effective in improving EFL students' writing performance, particularly in organization and language accuracy. It also encourages a shift from surface-level to higher-order revisions. While students generally hold positive perceptions of peer feedback, teacher guidance and peer training remain important to address concerns about feedback accuracy.

5. Discussion

This study set out to investigate the effects of peer feedback on EFL university students' writing performance, their revision strategies, and their perceptions of the peer review process. The findings provide empirical evidence that structured peer feedback can yield significant improvements in writing quality while promoting more substantive revision practices.

5.1. Improvement in Writing Performance

Students' content, organization, and linguistic accuracy improved significantly after peer feedback, according to the paired-sample t-test. The biggest gain was in organization, suggesting peer review helped students focus on text structure and coherence. Previous research ^[6] showed peer input particularly useful in improving student writing's logical flow and paragraph development. The gain in language accuracy supports earlier study that implies peer feedback helps learners spot and correct grammatical

and lexical problems they might miss. Content gains were statistically significant, but they were smaller than structure and language, suggesting that ideation may require more scaffolding beyond peer input ^[7].

5.2. Shift toward Higher-Order Revision Strategies

The chi-square analysis of revision types revealed a shift from predominantly surface-level (language-related) changes to higher-order revisions involving content and organization. This pattern supports ^[8] assertion that substantive revisions are more likely to occur when writers receive feedback that challenges them to rethink their ideas and structure rather than merely correct surface errors. Similar findings have been reported by ^[9], who emphasized that peer comments often stimulate writers to make more global changes. In the current study, the provision of a structured feedback form may have helped guide students toward addressing higher-order concerns, thereby enhancing the depth and quality of their revisions.

5.3. Positive Perceptions with Caution on Accuracy

The questionnaire showed that students usually liked peer feedback, especially for recognizing writing issues and promoting strong writing. These views agree with Hyland and ^[10] that peer review promotes audience and collaborative learning. However, the lower trust score in feedback accuracy implies that students still worry about their peers' language and evaluative skills. It also ^[11] found that EFL learners doubt peer-provided linguistic adjustments. Training in constructive, factual criticism and teacher moderation to validate peer comments may help solve this problem.

5.4. Pedagogical Implications

Based on these data, EFL writing teaching can be improved in several ways. Using a consistent feedback form for organized peer evaluation regularly can help students focus on content, organization, and language to provide a fair review. Second, short workshops or practice sessions on peer evaluations can enable students to give constructive and accurate feedback, which will increase their trust in the process. Third, combining peer and teacher feedback, with teachers monitoring peer

comments, improves accuracy and revision practices. Finally, reminding students why they made particular adjustments based on criticism may help them understand writing metacognitively.

5.5. Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This study contains flaws. First, the sample size was small and from one university, limiting generalizability. Second, the intervention only lasted eight weeks; longitudinal studies may reveal longer-term effects of peer feedback on writing. Third, the study largely used statistics to measure writing quality and revision. Qualitative data like student interviews or think-aloud techniques may help us

understand brain reconfiguration. To evaluate if digital mediation improves peer review in EFL situations, future research may use Google Docs or AI-driven feedback systems.

6. Conclusion

Structured peer feedback significantly improved EFL students' writing performance and fostered a shift toward higher-order revisions. While students valued the process, training and teacher involvement remain critical for ensuring feedback quality. Future research should explore technology-mediated peer feedback and long-term impacts.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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