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## College Students' Experience and Attitudes Towards Peer Feedback in Writing

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**Abstract:** College education is heavy on essay writing, term paper, book reports, etc. The class size in a university is rising, so individual writing instruction for a class with 35-45 students is impractical. The number of students would reflect the quantity of paper that the teacher receives and the amount of time he/she needs to be able to check and write meaningful feedback. Apparently, teachers cannot compromise the teacher feedback on students' output because students value and use it to write better. Hence, teachers should consider a variation in teaching writing beneficial for their students and for them. Recent studies introduced a collaborative work in the context of writing, the peer-feedback. This paper examines the usefulness of peer feedback in college students' writing by presenting their experience and attitude towards it, and proposing the potential of peer-feedback in content-based instruction. Theoretically, in the writing process, peer-feedback is placed in the "reviewing" stage as part of the "monitor" which teachers facilitate. In this study, an adopted questionnaire was modified based on the current research context to monitor the college students' experience and attitudes towards peer feedback in their Language classroom's writing activities. To validate the college students' answers, classroom observation and unstructured interview with the professors were conducted. Results confirm that peer-feedback is positively experienced by college students and their attitude towards it remains the same. However, since electronic peer feedback is seldom done in class, some college students in a local city university do not find it interesting and efficient. Nevertheless, they suggest the potential of peer feedback in content based instruction which is an indication of a more confident content and form critique for college students. Thus, teacher feedback is irreplaceable, but students should consistently be given an opportunity to comment to improve others' written output.

**Key Words:** peer feedback in writing; peer review; electronic peer feedback

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Writing is always the last in the syllabus and if time does not permit to follow the academic calendar, teachers would cover this instantly in class or sometimes never. This is the reason why many would claim that writing is the most neglected skill. As a result, students are influenced by this practice; they do not see writing as equally important as reading.

The class size in a university is increasing, so individual writing instruction for a class with 35-45 students is unfeasible. The class size would reflect the quantity of paper that the teacher receives multiplied to the amount of time he/she needs to be able to check and write meaningful feedback. Teachers cannot compromise their feedback on students' output because this is the students' reference to improve and write better.

Undeniably, responding to students' writing has been a challenge to teachers, "a perennial topic for research on L1/L2 writing (Leki, 1990; Silva and Brice, 2004, as cited in Hu, 2005) and a central concern in writing instruction (Campbell, 1998; Harmer, 2004; Reid, 1994, as cited in Hu, 2005)." Customarily, teachers are the only ones who write corrections and feedback to their students' writing, though sometimes the students are asked to check their objective-type quizzes or test. Thus, teachers are introduced to a familiar classroom practice of collaborative work, but in the context of writing. This is popularly called as "peer feedback (also referred to as 'peer review', 'peer response', 'peer revision', 'peer tutoring', and 'peer critiquing'), which is now a prominent feature of process-oriented writing instruction (Caulk, 1994; Nelson and Murphy, 1992; Paulus, 1999, as cited in Hu, 2005).

The claims about peer feedback are thriving, positive and negative. Teachers and students are torn between the advantages and disadvantages of this attractive pedagogy. The dearth of studies conducted on this concept is not even enough to impose generalizations which the researchers themselves admit. However, the potential of peer feedback especially for college L2 learners and writing teachers is inevitable.

This paper examines the usefulness of this peer feedback in college students' writing particularly in their English classes. Specifically, it presents the writing experience of college students

using peer-feedback; their attitude towards peer-feedback in their classroom writing activities; and the potential of peer-feedback in content-based instruction.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

Peer feedback has benefitted L2 writing teachers because it is "prominent in process-based writing instruction for at least two important reasons. First, it matches the conceptualizations of writing and learning to write promoted by advocates of process approaches: that writing is a recursive, socially constructed process of invention, meaning-making, and knowledge-transformation (Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1987; Berg, 1999; Susser, 1994; Zamel, 1983, as cited in Hu, 2005); and that learning to write is best supported by an 'environment in which students are acknowledged as writers, encouraged to take risks, and engaged in creating meaning' (Zamel, 1987, as cited in Hu, 2005).

This was also discovered by Hyland (2003, as cited in Wu, 2006); that the process approach was accepted by L2 writing teacher because of the planning-writing-reviewing framework (Figure 1) established by Hayes and Flower (1980). In this framework the writer's world is divided into three major parts: the task environment (writing activity, description of the topic, and intended audience), the writer's long term memory (writer's prior knowledge), and the writing process (planning-translating-reviewing).

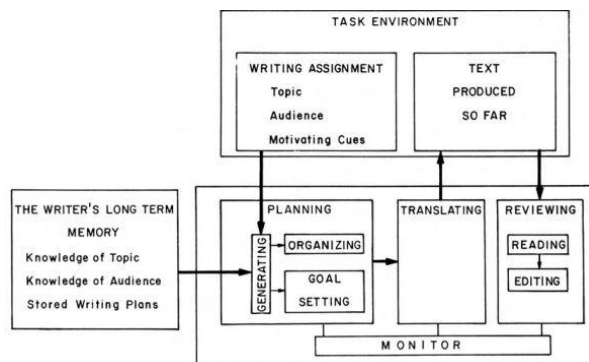


Figure 1. Model of the Writing Process by Hayes & Flower (1980)



The peer-feedback is incorporated in the “reviewing” section of the writing process model by Hayes and Flower (1980). “It functions to improve the quality of the text produced by the translating process by detecting and correcting weaknesses in the text with respect to language conventions and accuracy of meaning, and by evaluating the extent to which the text accomplishes the writer’s goals (Hayes & Flower, 1980).”

In this study, the quantitative instrument (questionnaire) was used to monitor the experience and attitudes of 100 college students towards peer feedback in their Language classroom writing activities for the whole semester. The content of the instrument was adopted from Lei (2017) and modified based on the current research context. The 13-item Likert-scale questionnaire was divided into two latent constructs of attitudes and experiences of the respondents towards peer feedback. It has 4-point response scales such as 1=Strongly Disagree (SD), 2=Disagree (D), 3=Agree (A), and 4=Strongly Agree (SA), which undergone statistical analysis.

The college students’ answers were validated through classroom observation and unstructured interview with the 13 professors handling Language courses for first year BSE English students in a local city university with two (North and South) campuses in Caloocan. Lastly, the same instrument has identified the potential of peer-feedback in content-based instruction (CBI). CBI is classroom-based instruction where the content is taught in a language that the students are still in the process of learning (Teddick & Cammarata, 2012).

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The college students experience on peer feedback is very prominent in their Language classes. In fact, they confirm that their professors always use peer feedback in class (28%=SA, 64%=A), especially in their writing activities in Language classes (20% SA, 68%=A) to comment and correct their writing content, grammar and mechanics (37%=SA, 57%=A). They prove that language professors present peer-feedback in writing activities with clear instructions before the writing activity (42%=SA, 54%=A) and use rubrics to guide them in giving feedback (44%=SA, 45%=A).

Moreover, the results affirm that the language professors facilitate the output of the peer

feedback on student’s writing with the class (30%=SA, 62%=A). Thus, the results substantiate the claim of Thokwane (2011) that the 21st century teachers use peer review more frequently than before because some scholars and researchers report that peer review is very effective in improving students’ writing performance.

However, the class observation and interview with the language professors give a different feedback. Ten out of 13 language professors admitted that the process of peer feedback is time consuming because aside from giving a number of instructions to the class, they could not monitor the students especially with populated classes. This is also attested by Grimes and Warschauer (2010), and Lee, et al, (2009, as cited in El Ebyary & Windeat, 2010) since feedback on writing is a time-consuming task for instructors because they may not be able to give individualized, immediate, content-related feedback to multiple drafts. In addition, Rollinson (2005) mentioned that these issues particularly on the teacher who might find it difficult to hand over a significant degree of responsibility to the students, since he/she will not be able to oversee each group simultaneously, particularly if the response groups are providing oral feedback; and the fact that the teacher’s role as trainer and supervisor may be rather arduous.

Meanwhile, the college students’ experience in electronic peer-feedback (using computer/internet) in their writing in class gives divided responses of those who agree (52%) and disagree (48%). The interest of more than half of the respondents is justified by the following reasons: (1) the use of computers in assessing written responses is pedagogically desirable as it can be integrated with existing assessment methods and strategies, increase the frequency of feedback, and broaden the range of assessed skills (Bull & McKenna, 2004, as cited in El Ebyary & Windeat, 2010); (2) using electronic communication can avoid the possible embarrassment students may experience in face-to-face interaction (Lu and Bol, 2007); and (3) computer mediated corrective feedback methods and techniques may support students when receiving corrective feedback in a manner that may aid them more in the development of their writing performance (AbuSeileek, 2012, as cited in Al-Olimat & AbuSeileek, 2015).

On the other hand, almost half of the respondents (42%=D, 6%=SD) deny the electronic peer feedback in their writing activity in class which



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was affirmed by the language professors during the interview. This experience could be the result of the following: (1) lack of computer facilities available for students in the local city university and at home; (2) Internet and Wi-Fi service in the local city university and at home are limited; (3) and, most of the members of the faculty are senior citizens who have limitations in using technology in class.

In terms of the college students' attitudes towards peer feedback, the majority (42%=SA, 53%=A) are positive about the use of peer-feedback in writing activities. They trust their classmate's ability to provide qualified feedback (24%=SA, 69%=A). These results validate the findings of Lei (2017) because obviously peer-feedback is favorable to the students than to the teachers because it is definitely a student-centered writing pedagogy which is very much applicable in an outcome-based class.

Finally, the college students' attitude towards peer-feedback in their writing activities gains constructive response. Peer feedback, compared to teacher feedback, creates a relaxing atmosphere which lessens the student's stress in writing (40%=SA, 48%=A). It encourages them to involve more in English writing (49%=SA, 46%=A). It is a way for them to know their own weakness in writing and reciprocate it with knowledge and suggestions from others (57%=SA, 38%=A). As Kröll (2003) said, peer-feedback in writing can make students take active roles in their own learning. They gain a clearer understanding of audience (readers') needs by receiving feedback on what they have done well and on what remain unclear.

Likewise, college students' find electronic peer feedback (using computer/internet) in students' writing interesting and efficient (19%=SA, 50%=A). However, some of them (28%=D, 2%=SD) feel differently. Thus, it is significant to recognize that students' preference on processes that involve computer and internet could not be generalized. Even the proponents of assertions on electronic or computer mediated peer feedback admitted that further studies need to be done to prove the improvement on students' writing performance.

Lastly, majority of the college students suggest the use of peer-feedback in content-based instruction (65%=SA, 32%=A). According to Oxford (2017), in content-based instruction, students practice all the language skills in a highly integrated, communicative fashion while learning content such as science, mathematics, and social studies. The Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach

(CALLA), created by Chamot and O'Malley (1994, as cited in Oxford, 2017) shows how language learning strategies can be integrated into the simultaneous learning of content and language (p.9).

Likewise, since more comments and revisions were done in the form of writing using peer-feedback (Lei, 2017), the results of this study reveal that college students now are more confident and capable of giving content comments.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Any form of feedback is expected from teachers, but students should also be given an opportunity to comment to improve others' work. The results of this study: (1) strengthen the positive assumptions, experimentations, and explorations done in peer feedback in language writing; (2) judge the different characteristics of electronic peer feedback in ESL classrooms; and (3) reveal the potential peer feedback in content-based instruction, so teachers may maximize the advantages presented in this study and work on its limitations.

Thus, this paper suggests that: (1) teachers may incorporate peer-feedback in other classroom strategies to showcase opportunities for students' interaction and sharing; (2) peer feedback imposes students' roles in writing tasks which may give them positive attitude towards writing; (3) peer feedback helps students reach their full potential to master content using their L2 independently in verbal and written form; and (4) teachers can use peer feedback to scaffold content-based instructions because it bridges learning gaps to students who are unable to complete a task without support.

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