



Alzahra University

Faculty of Literature, Languages, and History

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts in Teaching English as a Foreign Language

Thesis Title

The Impact of Peer Review on EFL Reviewers'
Writing Proficiency

Thesis Advisor

Dr. Elaheh Sotoudehnama

By

Afsaneh Pilehvari

March 2012

*In the Name of God,
the Compassionate, the Merciful*



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Thesis Reader

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کلیه دستاوردهای این تحقیق متعلق به
دانشگاه الزهراء (س) است.

To My Beloved Husband,

Mahdi,

Who has brightened my world with the
warmth of his presence

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I am grateful to the Almighty for all His blessings and for granting me the ability and opportunity to learn. Then I would like to sincerely express my deepest appreciation and gratitude to all, who in one way or another, contributed and extended their valuable assistance in the preparation and completion of this study.

My heartfelt thanks go to my dear advisor and professor, Dr. Sotoudehnama for her tolerance, constant encouragement, and insightful comments and suggestions. One simply could not wish for a more helpful and friendlier advisor.

Moreover, I wish to express my deep sense of gratitude to my dear reader, Dr. Marandi for her remarkable insights and her kind and creative guidance.

An honorable mention goes to all my eminent and illustrious professors at Alzahra University, Dr. Ghahremani Ghajar, Dr. Nafisi, Dr. Akhavan, and Dr. Faghih whose tireless endeavors are unforgettable.

Words are inadequate in offering my thanks to my dear mother who has been a source of inspiration throughout my life and the reason of all my efforts; my devoted father who has supported me in all my pursuits; my beloved husband, whose presence is a blessing in my life, for his endless patience and faithful encouragement and help during different stages of developing this MA thesis; and my caring and loving sisters, Atefeh and Shadi, who have enriched my life with their affection and kindness.

Furthermore, my utmost gratitude goes to Dr. Abdolreza Zakat Roshandel, my first English teacher, from whom I learned among many other invaluable things that teaching is the best thing I can do throughout my single opportunity of life on the face of the Earth.

Last but not least, I wish to avail myself of this opportunity and express a sense of gratitude and love to my friends and classmates for their support and help in the successful completion of this project.

Abstract

Today peer review is considered as an inseparable component of process-oriented writing instruction in student-centered classrooms (Paulus, 1999). The abundance of its beneficial effects on EFL learners' development has convinced teachers to apply it in their writing classes even though it entails a great deal of time, energy and effort (Tang & Tithecott, 1999). This study reports on the impact of peer review on EFL learners' writing ability by quantitatively comparing two groups of participants in order to determine where the most advantageous effects of peer review can be found: In giving feedback or receiving it. The participants in this study were 122 female EFL learners studying in high-intermediate levels at Iran Language Institute, Tehran. At two proficiency levels (high vs. low), the participants were divided into two groups of givers and receivers. Training sessions were held over the course of a twenty-session term; and all the students received extensive instruction regarding global (organization/unity, development, cohesion/coherence) and local (vocabulary, structure, mechanics) aspects of writing. The participants in the experimental groups (i.e., the givers) reviewed a number of example essays and provided feedback for the participants in the comparison groups (i.e., the receivers) who were supposed to revise those texts based on the givers' comments. By analyzing the results obtained by comparing the performance of the participants in a pre-test and post-test and conducting a two-way ANOVA, it was realized that the participants who provided feedback improved more significantly, regardless of their proficiency level, than the participants who did not review any essays and just received feedback. The

findings also revealed that the participants in the experimental groups improved almost equally in both global and local aspects of writing.

Table of Contents

Dedication	I
Acknowledgements	II
Abstract	IV
List of Tables	X
List of Figures	XI
List of Abbreviations	XII

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1. Introduction	2
1.2. Statement of the Problem and Purpose of the Study	7
1.3. Significance of the Study	9
1.4. Research Questions and Null Hypotheses	11
1.5. Definitions of Key Terms	12
1.5.1. Peer Review	12
1.5.2. Peer Editing	13
1.5.3. Peer Response	13
1.5.4. Revising	15
1.5.5. Global Aspects of Writing	16
1.5.6. Local Aspects of Writing	16
1.5.7. Writing Proficiency	17
1.6. Limitations and Delimitations of the Study	18

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

2.1. Introduction	20
2.2. Teachers' Views of Peer and Teacher Feedback	27
2.3. Students' Views of Peer and Teacher Feedback	36
2.4. The Impact of Peer Feedback on Receivers and Givers	41
2.5. Local Research	44

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1. Introduction	50
3.2. Participants	50
3.3. Instrumentation	51
3.3.1. Writing Proficiency Test	51
3.3.2. Checklist	52
3.3.3. Texts	52
3.3.4. Essay Scoring Rubric	53
3.4. Design	54
3.5. Procedure	54
3.6. Raters and Rating Rubrics	67
3.7. Data Analysis	68

Chapter Four: Results and Discussion

4.1. Restatement of the Problem and the Null Hypotheses	71
4.2. Results and Findings	72
4.2.1. Determining the Proficiency Level of the Participants	74
4.2.2. Answer to the First Research Question	75

4.2.3. Answer to the Second Research Question	81
4.3. Discussion of the Findings	84
4.3.1. Necessity of Holding Training Sessions	85
4.3.2. Who Gains More?	89
4.3.3. The Role of Proficiency Level	94
4.3.4. Comments on Global and Local Aspects of Writing	96

Chapter Five: Conclusions, Pedagogical Implications, and Suggestions for Further Research

5.1. Overview	100
5.2. Conclusions	102
5.3. Pedagogical Implications	105
5.4. Suggestions for Further Research	107

References	109
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List of Appendices

Appendix A: The Peer Feedback Sheet	118
Appendix B: The Essay Scoring Rubric	122
Appendix C: The First Assignment for the High Experimental and Comparison Groups	126
Appendix D: The First Assignment for the Low Experimental and Comparison Groups	128

Appendix E: The Second Assignment for the High Experimental and Comparison Groups	130
Appendix F: The Second Assignment for the High Experimental and Comparison Groups	132
Appendix G: The Third Assignment for the High Experimental and Comparison Groups	134
Appendix H: The Third Assignment for the High Experimental and Comparison Groups	136
Appendix I: The First Assignment Reviewed by a Student in the High Experimental Group	138
Appendix J: The Second Assignment Reviewed by a Student in the High Experimental Group	142
Appendix K: The Third Assignment Reviewed by a Student in the High Experimental Group	147
Appendix L: The First Assignment Reviewed by a Student in the Low Experimental Group	151
Appendix M: The Second Assignment Reviewed by a Student in the Low Experimental Group	153
Appendix N: The Third Assignment Reviewed by a Student in the Low Experimental Group	156
Appendix O: Statistical Figures	159

List of Tables

Table 4.1. Descriptive Statistics for Pre-Test Scores	73
Table 4.2. Results of One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test for Pre-Test Scores	73
Table 4.3. One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test for the Results of Pre-Test for Four Groups of Participants	75
Table 4.4. One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test for the Results of Post-test for Four Groups of Participants	76
Table 4.5. Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances	77
Table 4.6. Descriptive Statistics for Post-test Scores of High and Low Givers and Receivers	77
Table 4.7. Results of Tests of Between-Subjects Effects	78
Table 4.8. Descriptive Statistics for High and Low Givers' Gain Scores	80
Table 4.9. Results of the Independent Samples Test for High and Low Givers' Gain Scores	81
Table 4.10. Descriptive Statistics for Gain Scores of the Local and Global Aspects of Writing	82
Table 4.11. Results of Paired Samples Correlations between the Local and Global Aspects of Writing	83
Table 4.12. Results of Paired Samples Test for Gain Scores of the Local and Global Aspects of Writing	83

List of Figures

Figure 3.1. An Excerpt from the Third Assignment Reviewed by a Participant in the Low Experimental Group	64
Figure 4.1. Estimated Marginal Means of Scores	79

List of Abbreviations

CUP	Cambridge University Press
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ESL	English as a Second Language
Fig.	Figure
ILI	Iran Language Institute
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
OUP	Oxford University Press
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1. Introduction

It has been a while that having the students get involved in the learning and assessment process has turned into a significant issue in ESL/EFL learning contexts. By getting the students to participate more actively in various types of activities done in the classroom, which are supposed to finally lead to their educational success, the teachers can hope that the great burden on their shoulders in teacher-centered classrooms can be decreased and as Richards and Renandya (2002, p. 335) point out, "The students are given a better sense of control for their own learning." The necessity of training the students to be autonomous and self-sufficient learners who are able to identify and assess their own needs and choose and apply their own learning strategies or styles (Penaflorida, 2002) is felt more in writing classes as the skills involved in writing are more complex and the complicatedness of mastering these skills lies not only in generating and organizing ideas but in converting them into a readable text (Richards and Renandya, 2002). The idea of having lively, energetic, independent and responsible students seems fascinating to teachers, most of whom make great efforts to add a pinch of enjoyment characterized by pair work and group work to their traditional classrooms in which most interactions happen between the teacher and the students.

Among the many changes which seem to be necessary in order to fulfill this desire, there has been a great concentration on the modifications required in the field of feedback and revision process in writing classrooms. Teachers can encourage their students to work hand in hand and certainly under the supervision

of their teachers in order to take advantage of the implementation of peer feedback activities which are scarcely applied in our language classrooms. As Rollinson (2005) points out in spite of the fact that both research and practice support the use of peer feedback activities in L2 writing classes, still a large number of teachers and students are doubtful about the benefits of such activities. Besides, the process of providing a perfect piece of writing, from the first draft to the final product, can be a fantastic experience for both the teacher and the students who normally regard it as a boring and exasperating activity. A great deal of time and effort goes into correcting and grading the students' writing papers, and then witnessing their repeated errors in the next papers makes the teachers feel helpless and frustrated. Ferris (2002) admits that there has been a great improvement in the writing proficiency of the students over the past couple of decades; however, she reiterates that regardless of the fact that the students ideas are getting more and more interesting and original, the excess of their sentence-level and discourse-level errors distracts and daunts the teachers and the audience.

Peer review as a nontraditional form of assessment is considered to be a significant component of the feedback and revision process in ESL writing classes (Paulus, 1999). Participating in peer review activities can be a fascinating adventure for our students as it enables them to step out of their own selves in order to see what they have created through the eyes of others, not only their teacher as the sole reader of their product, and discover the impact and influence of their words, viewpoints, and ideas on their readers' thoughts and then use the received feedback to improve what they have written, to make it clearer and more convincing (Brown, 2001). Research on ESL peer review has primarily focused