

*In the Name of God*

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**AL-ZAHRA UNIVERSITY**

**Faculty of Literature, Foreign Languages and History**

**Thesis Title**

**The Study of the Effects of *Trained Peer Review* on the Revision Types & Writing Quality of the Iranian EFL Students**

**Thesis Advisor**

**P.Karkia Ph.D**

**BY**

**Leila Kordi**

**Dec, 2007**



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## **Abstract**

The aim of the present study is to investigate the effects of trained peers' reviews on Iranian EFL learners' revisions, both in terms of revision types and the writing quality. The training took place through a 4-hour in-class demonstration including the teacher modeling during think aloud sessions and a 30-minute after-class reviewer-teacher conference with each student ( $n = 15$ ), the instructor/researcher collected students' drafts and revisions and reviewers' written feedback, and compared them with those produced prior to training. Two independent raters and the instructor carefully read the drafts and revisions prior to and post peer review training to assess essay quality and to identify the types, sizes, and functions of revisions. Results show that peer-influenced revisions comprised the majority of the total revisions, and the number of revisions with enhanced quality was significantly higher than that before peer review training. The researcher concludes that with extensive training inside and outside of class, peer review can impact Iranian EFL learners' revision types and quality of texts directly and in a positive way.

# **Chapter 1**

## **Introduction**

## **1. Introduction**

As a teacher of advanced writing in an English Language Institute who was eagerly involved with improvement of the students' writings, I experimented with immediate, direct corrections on the students' papers and then one day watched my students throw their corrected "written production" into the wastepaper basket before leaving the classroom! At this disappointing moment I started asking whether teachers should spend hours correcting their students' written productions, sharing the same fundamental question with EFL teachers who are trying to help their students' fluency and accuracy in their foreign language.

### *1.1. Overview*

Both theory and research (Ferris, 2003; Hyland, 2003; Paulus, 1999) favor a role for written teacher feedback, but attempts to identify the kind of feedback that most effectively motivates writers to undertake draft revision have had mixed results.

From a social-interactionist perspective, a cause of revision is seen to be the discrepancy between intended and understood meaning. Nold (1981) makes an additional point about the causes of revision. She explains that although a perceived mismatch can cause revision, it does not mean that once one is detected, the writer will revise. Furthermore, the issue is made more

complex by the fact that no guarantee exists that a revision results in a less dissonant version than the original. Thus, it can be concluded that, in order to revise successfully, writers not only need to realize constraints, they also need the ability to produce a clearer alternative to the current text. Studies on experienced versus inexperienced writers' revision strategies (e.g., Sommers, 1980; Zamel, 1983) indicate that experienced writers are able to revise successfully by first sensing a mismatch in meaning and then having a viable solution to the problem of incongruity. These findings are paralleled by discoveries about inexperienced writers' revision strategies. Such discoveries suggest that the lack of skills in detecting incongruities and finding appropriate text alternatives in part prevents inexperienced writers from attempting revision of their texts (Sommers, 1980; Nold, 1981). It can be assumed, then, that if a goal for an inexperienced writer is to develop better revision strategies, this writer must develop skills in detecting incongruities and in formulating viable text alternatives. Furthermore, it can be assumed that an inexperienced writer's revision strategies would benefit from two types of aid, one in detecting constraints and the other in discovering effective alternatives to unsatisfactory text. We can then conclude that assistance in detecting incongruities between intention and understood text, especially on a text rather than on a word or sentence level, could be a first step towards learning more sophisticated revision strategies for inexperienced writers. Moreover, it can be understood that peer response to writing is a potential way of helping inexperienced writers see the mismatches in their writing, especially if peer response is conducted with the explicit purpose of helping a peer discover if his or her text is clear and conveys intended meaning to another reader.



Indeed, the currently emerging social-interactionist views of writing and revision might be seen to support the idea of peer response being useful in helping students discover incongruities and find viable text alternatives.

Research has even suggested that while re-writing does facilitate writing improvement and that teacher intervention may not play a significant role in developmental process of writing (Fathman & Whalley, 1990; Polio et al., 1998; Robb et al., 1986), in this respect there are two major types of feedback used by teachers to assess students' writings, on the one hand, evaluative feedback, expresses to a writer how well the instructor's instructional priorities have been met. This type of feedback typically passes judgment on the draft in terms of some abstract, undefined notion of an 'ideal' paper, reflects a preoccupation with sentence-level errors, and takes the form of directives for improvement on present or future assignments. Teachers who provide this sort of feedback may assume that addressing the curricular purpose of the assignment is enough to inspire 'improvement'. On the other hand, formative feedback (also sometimes referred to as facilitative or intermediate feedback) typically consists of feedback that takes an inquiring stance towards the text.

Addressing the particular needs of individual writers, formative often consists of questions intended to raise awareness of the reader's understanding of the meaning of the text as a means to encourage substantial revision on the next draft. This feedback is rooted in the assumption that writers create their own communicative purpose—the story or ideas that they wish to share—beyond the instructional purpose of the assignment that needs to be tapped in order to motivate revision and then improvement.

Peer review as a type of formative feedback is now commonplace as one

part of the revision process of ESL writing classes. Research has begun to address the effectiveness of peer review for ESL writing instruction. Peer feedback and teacher feedback can complement (without contradicting) each other, with students at times being more adept at responding to a student's work as truly being in progress than the teachers, who tend to judge the work as a finished product (Caulk, 1994; Devenney, 1989).

Feedback is widely seen as crucial for encouraging and consolidating learning, and this significance has also been recognized by those working in the field of second language (L2) writing. Its importance is acknowledged in process-based classrooms, where it forms a key element of the students' growing control over composing skills, and by genre-oriented teachers employing scaffolded learning techniques. In fact, Feedback has long been regarded as essential for the development of second language (L2) writing skills, both for its potential for learning and for student motivation.

Peer review is a feature of 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 ( Berg, 1999; Zamel, 1983), that learning to write is best supported by an " environment in which students are acknowledged as writers, encouraged to take risks, and gain insights into the nature of writing and contribute to the creation of a supportive environment for learning to write ( Villamil & de Guerrero, 1996; 1998), by providing such opportunities they will be able to discover and negotiate meaning, to explore effective ways of expressing meaning, to practice a wide range of language and writing skills,

and to assume a more active role in the learning process (Nelson & Carson, 1998). The second reason is that peer review meshes well with writing cycles, multiple drafting, extensive revision and pair/group work, all main pedagogical activities of process approaches ( Paulus, 1999; Susser, 1994), which can provide reason and content for, or a natural follow-up to them.

In process-based, learner-centered classrooms, peer review is seen as an important developmental tool moving learners through multiple drafts towards the capability for effective self expression. As Susser (1994) argued, the term process can be defined in three ways: (1) the act of writing itself, (2) the emphasis of writing instruction on process writing pedagogies, and (3) theories of writing. When writing essays, students go through a process in its first usage; writing, composing, or transcribing. The term process in this study is used in its second sense, where process signifies a process of discovery in which ideas are generated and not just copied. Teaching writing as a process of discovery aims to raise student awareness of the "recursive nature of the composing process" while allowing teacher and peer collaboration and intervention during the process as they negotiate meaning (Susser, 1994; Reid, 1994). Brainstorming, journal writing, multiple drafting, feedback practices, revision, and final editing, are all steps in this process during which the teacher and students can read and respond to the writing as it develops into the final product. Researchers in recent years have stressed the need for ESL writing instruction to move to a process approach that would teach students not only how to edit but also to develop strategies to generate ideas, compose multiple drafts, deal with feedback, and revise their written work on all levels (Chenowith, 1987; Raimes, 1985, 1987).

From an interactionist perspective however, peer review is regarded as an important means of establishing the significance of reader responses in shaping meanings (Probst 1989). In genre classrooms feedback is a key element of the scaffolding provided by the teacher to build learner confidence and the literacy resources to participate in target communities.

In the belief that "instruction usually precedes development," Vygotsky (1986, p. 184) offers writing as "a good illustration" (p. 180) of the role that instruction has in fostering development. Writing is a highly abstract, voluntary, and conscious activity, even more so than oral or inner speech, and thus, in Vygotsky's view, its development depends upon the "contributions of instruction" (p. 184). Instruction based on assistance, imitation, and cooperation has a critical role in providing the individual with the psychological tools, usually semiotic in nature, that are necessary for higher mental functioning (Vygotsky, 1978, 1934/1986). These and other notions rooted in Vygotsky's theories (Bruner, 1985; Lantolf & Appel) provide many of the underpinnings of the analysis of peer interactions. Furthermore Vygotsky (1978) asserts that an individual's mastery of higher mental functions is derived from social interaction which has been mediated by communicative language. His concept of "zone of proximal development", "recognizes the importance of assistance in the solution of tasks and, consequently, in learning, seems particularly applicable to the kind of collaborative instructional activity that occurs during peer revision".

The importance of engaging developing writers in draft revision is almost unquestioned. Many writing teachers have adopted suggestions by Zamel (1982), among others, to make redrafting a key point of instruction.