PEER-WRITTEN FEEDBACK: PERSPECTIVES FROM EFL UNDERGRADUATES

Watcharee Kulprasit[1*]

[1] Lecturer, Department of Western Languages, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Thaksin University.
[*] **Corresponding author, E-mail:** watcharee.tsu@gmail.com

Abstract

In order to raise both teachers' and students' awareness of an implication of peer-written feedback as an alternative and formative assessment in the EFL writing classrooms in a collaborative and interactive atmosphere, especially at the undergraduate level in order to help improve the students' English writing proficiency, this study was conducted to explore the EFL undergraduates' attitudes toward the peer-written feedback process based on their responses to the questionnaire as the major research instrument of the study. The data obtained from the questionnaire were collected, computed, and analyzed. The findings showed that the subjects had positive attitudes toward the peer-written feedback process because it increased their motivation to polish their writing as well as improved their writing products, especially in terms of organization, accuracy, word choice, ideas, and sentence structures. However, the subjects still lacked confidence in providing written feedback on their peers' second drafts. According to their perspective, although peer-written feedback was considered as another effective and useful feedback source for the subjects, it was still a doubt in terms of its value when being compared to teacher-written feedback.

Keywords: EFL undergraduates' attitudes, peer-written feedback, formative assessment

Introduction

Since writing or "the composing process" is social, "peer review is an integral part of that process" (Brammer, 2007, p. 72). With an implication of peer-written feedback as a formative assessment in the writing class, students' language learning and skill development are based on Vygotsky's concept: ZPD (zone of proximal development) and scaffolding (Hyland, 2003).

Although several studies have paid more attention to the quality of peer feedback, its effect on the revision, or even both teacher and students' attitudes toward peer feedback (Brammer, 2007), some certain issues, especially those concerning its positive efficacy according to learners' perspectives, are still controversial though some studies were carried out, and some research findings were claimed for its positive effects

according to students' point of view, such as the study of Morgan, Fuisting, White (2014), Sukumaran and Dass's study (2014), etc. Hence, the present study was carried out to challenge such controversial issues. The EFL undergraduates' attitudes toward the peer-written feedback process were then investigated.

Objectives

The study aimed to investigate EFL undergraduates' attitudes toward the peer-written feedback process after the experience of peer-written feedback in their writing class: Basic Writing Course, a required course for English major sophomores in the academic year 2016 at a university in the south of Thailand. More specifically, the present study was conducted to answer the research question: What are the EFL undergraduates' attitudes toward the peer-written feedback process?

Concept theory framework

According to Hyland and Hyland, (2006, p. 1), "Feedback is a central aspect of ESL writing programs across the world." It significantly fosters language learning and skill development, particularly in second language writing context where autonomous learning in the process-based classrooms is promoted (Hyland & Hyland, 2006).

Peer feedback is a process in writing pedagogy relating to sociocultural theory (SCT) i.e. social interaction and meditation to self-development. SCT is "a system of ideas on the origin and development of the mind," (Villamil & Guewero, 2006, p. 23). Learning according to SCT is, hence, "a social phenomenon," (Villamil & Guewero, 2006, p. 23). Peer feedback is engaged in some SCT concepts, for instance, meditation, internalization, developmental stage, and cultural embeddedness. ZPD (the zone of proximal development) metaphorically referred to scaffolding is, thus, a key concept of SCT in the peer feedback process (Villamil & Guewero, 2006). According to Hyland (2003), peer feedback is a social interaction for language learning and development in a nonthreatening context. Nonetheless, students' cultural background has a crucial effect on its efficacy. Although peer feedback probably engages with surface errors rather than problems of meaning, the problem of the validity of peer feedback judgment, difficulty in specifying writing problems, miscorrection, confusing or misleading advice, or negative responses to peer feedback, it provides a certain degree of value in writing instruction (Hyland & Hyland, 2006).

Materials and Methods

Twenty-four sophomores taking Basic Writing Course, a required course, in the first semester of the academic year 2016 were the subjects of the study. Since this group

of the subjects was majoring in English, they were guaranteed to have a certain level of English proficiency to contribute to the present study.

In the first week of the study, the instructor (the researcher) enthusiastically introduced the subjects to peer-written feedback and its benefits to give some ideas of what they were required to do with their seven writing assignments in this course as well as encouraged them to take part in this activity. Regarding the seven writing assignments, the subjects were asked to produce seven genres of writing in this course: narrative writing, descriptive writing, process writing, definition writing, expository writing, comparison/ contrast writing, and opinion/ persuasive/ argumentative writing. In the process of producing each type of writing product, they had to experience the peer-written feedback process. In the peer-feedback process, the subjects were randomly paired up according to their English writing proficiency level to provide the written feedback in terms of conventions, sentence fluency, ideas, organization, and word choice on their peers' second drafts of each writing assignment. Apart from that, they were asked to change their peers every time they did the next writing assignment. That is, all subjects had seven different peers to provide peer-written feedback on their seven second drafts of their writing assignments. However, in order to develop the second drafts, the subjects had gone through the self-editing writing process, a chance to revise their own writing after their first drafts. In the final week of the study, the subjects were asked to respond to the attitude questionnaire about their attitudes toward the peer-written feedback process.

The attitude questionnaire, which was the main research instrument in the present study, was constructed and developed in the form of a five-point Likert-rating scale ranging from 5 to 1 (5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neutral, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree) in English based on the questionnaire used in the study of Kulprasit & Chiramanee (2012). As it was treated as a post-treatment questionnaire, the subjects were asked to complete it after they experienced the peer-written feedback process; that is, in the final week of the study. According to the Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha, the reliability of the questionnaire was .85 which affirmed that the questionnaire was reliable.

In order to answer the research question, the subjects' responses to the attitude questionnaire about their attitudes toward the peer-written feedback process were analyzed for the mean scores and interpreted item by item according to the criteria as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1 Criteria for Rating Scale Interpretation

Range of the Total Mean Value ($\bar{x}$)	Level of Agreement
4.21 – 5.00	Strongly agree
3.41 – 4.20	Agree
2.61 – 3.40	Neutral
1.81 – 2.60	Disagree
1.00 – 1.80	Strongly disagree

Results

After the subjects did the peer-written feedback activity for all of their seven writing assignments, they were asked to respond to the attitude questionnaire in the form of a five-point Likert scale ranging from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree) in order to investigate their attitudes toward the peer-written feedback process. Their responses were computed for the mean scores, analyzed, and displayed in Table 2 as follows.

Table 2 Subjects' Attitudes toward the Peer-Written Feedback Process

No.	Statement	Mean	S.D.	Level of Agreement
1	I like to have my writing reviewed by my classmates.	4.17	0.76	Agree
2	Peer-written feedback helps improve my English writing in general.	4.21	0.66	Strongly Agree
3	Peer-written feedback helps reduce grammatical mistakes in my writing.	3.96	0.62	Agree
4	Peer-written feedback helps produce a variety of sentence structures in my writing.	3.58	0.72	Agree
5	Peer-written feedback helps enrich clearer, more focused and impressive details/ ideas in my writing.	3.79	0.93	Agree
6	Peer-written feedback helps organize my writing structure.	4.13	0.80	Agree

No.	Statement	Mean	S.D.	Level of Agreement
7	Peer-written feedback helps express ideas with better word choice in my writing.	3.92	0.97	Agree
8	I am confident of my ability to give appropriate written feedback on my classmates' writing.	3.17	0.87	Neutral
9	My classmates can give appropriate written feedback on my writing.	3.58	0.72	Agree
10	I find it difficult to give written feedback on my classmates' writing.	3.50	1.06	Agree
11	Peer-written feedback motivates me to improve my writing.	4.29	0.86	Strongly Agree
12	I need to do a peer-written feedback activity in the writing class.	4.08	0.88	Agree
13	Peer-written feedback is valuable in the writing process.	4.17	0.78	Agree
14	Peer-written feedback is another useful feedback source that improves one's writing in general.	4.04	0.69	Agree
15	Peer-written feedback is as valuable as teacher-written feedback.	3.79	0.93	Agree
16	Peer-written feedback is more effective than teacher written feedback.	2.75	1.26	Neutral
	Total	3.82	0.84	Agree

According to Table 2, the mean scores of the subjects' responses range from 2.75 to 4.29 with an average mean score of 3.82 falling into the level of agree. This finding could be interpreted that the subjects had positive attitudes toward the use of peer-written feedback process as they strongly agreed that peer-written feedback motivated them to improve their writing, and it helped improve their English writing in general (item 11, $\bar{x}$ = 4.29; item 2, $\bar{x}$ = 4.21).

Moreover, the subjects agreed with the following statements. That is, they preferred to have their drafts peer reviewed because they recognized it as a significant and valuable activity in the writing process and perceived it as another useful feedback source in the writing class since it helped enhance their writing, especially organization, for example (item 1, $\bar{x}$ = 4.17; item 13, $\bar{x}$ = 4.17; item 6, $\bar{x}$ = 4.13; item 12, $\bar{x}$ = 4.08; item

14, $\bar{x}$ = 4.04). Furthermore, peer-written feedback improved their writing in the following aspects respectively: reduce grammatical mistakes, express their ideas with better word choice, enrich clearer, more focused, and impressive details/ ideas, and produce a variety of sentence structures (item 3, $\bar{x}$ = 3.96; item 7, $\bar{x}$ = 3.92; item 5, $\bar{x}$ = 3.79; item 4, $\bar{x}$= 3.58). Nevertheless, although they realized that peer-written feedback was as valuable as teacher written feedback, and their classmates could give appropriate written feedback on their writing, they found that it was still difficult for them to give written feedback on their classmates' writing (item 15, $\bar{x}$= 3.79; item 9, $\bar{x}$ = 3.58; item 10, $\bar{x}$ = 3.50).

However, the neutral agreement with two statements can be interpreted that the subjects were not confident of their own ability to give appropriate written feedback on their peers' writing (item 8, $\bar{x}$ = 3.17). Apart from that, they hesitated to guarantee that peer-written feedback was more effective than teacher written feedback (item 16, $\bar{x}$ = 2.75).

In sum, the subjects had positive attitudes toward the peer-written feedback process because of its main advantage; that is, it helped improve their writing in various aspects; for instance, organization, accuracy, ideas, sentence structures, and so on. Therefore, the peer-written feedback process was regarded as an important and useful activity in the writing process even though it was not more effective than teacher-written feedback according to their point of view.

Conclusions and Discussion

According to the responses from the subjects toward the questionnaire asking about their attitudes toward the peer-written feedback process integrated in the writing process, it was discovered that the subjects had positive attitudes toward the peer-written feedback process. This finding is in line with the research of Wakabayashi (2008), Morgan, Fuisting, and White (2014), and Sukumaran and Dass (2014). This could probably be explained that the subjects were motivated to improve their writing through the peer-written feedback process. Thus, when their writing skill was developed as well as their final products were well-polished based on peer-written feedback they received in terms of organization, accuracy, idea expression, word choice, or fluency based on the results of the present study, no doubt, they recognized the value of this activity and had positive attitudes toward this process.

It was also worth discussing that although the subjects considered peer-written feedback as valuable as teacher-written feedback since peer-written feedback they received evidently had a positive effect on their writing products, they did not guarantee that it was or could be more effective than teacher-written feedback. This was probably

influenced by the lack of confidence in doing the peer-written feedback process because the subjects revealed that it was difficult for them to do this process, and they were not sure if the feedback they gave on the peers' second drafts was appropriate. In such a case, it could be assumed that it was their first time to do this process, and it was also a short-term process. If the subjects had been trained for doing the process for some time, their confidence in giving feedback on their peers' writing would have possibly been increased. Furthermore, if they had done this process in a long haul, they would have probably been accustomed to the process and made the best out of it.

Recommendations

This study is significant in its nature in terms of exploring EFL undergraduates' attitudes toward the peer-written feedback process. Regarding the findings and certain limitations of the study, some recommendations for further studies are given. The peer-written feedback process in the present study is a paired-peer written feedback activity. It would be interesting to investigate whether EFL students would have the same attitudes if a group-peer written feedback process is employed in their writing class. Additionally, to confirm the findings of the present study, this study should be replicated with the larger sample size at different levels of education for a longer period of time to see if the impacts of this process will produce the same findings.

References

Brammer, C. (2007). Peer review from the students' perspective: invaluable or invalid? *Composition Studies*, 35 (2), 71-85.

Hyland, K. (2003). *Second language writing.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Hyland, K., & Hyland, F. (2006). *Feedback in second language writing: contexts and issues.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Kulprasit, W., & Chiramanee, T. (2012). Boosting EFL students' positive attitudes toward writing in English: The role of writing with peer feedback, *ABAC Journal*, 32 (3), 20-28.

Morgan, B., Fuisting, B., & White, J. (2014). University student attitudes towards peer review in EFL writing: A quantitative study. *Language Education in Asia*, 5(1), 93-116.

Sukumaran, K., & Dass, R. (2014). Students' perspectives on the use of peer feedback in an English as a second language writing class. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Research in Education*, 4(1), 27-40.

Villamil, O. S., & Guerrero, M.C.M. de. (2006). Sociocultural theory: A framework for understanding the social-cognitive dimensions of peer feedback. *Feedback in second language writing: contexts and issues*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Wakabayashi, R. (2008). The effect of peer feedback on EFL writing: Focusing on Japanese university students. *OnCUE Journal*, 2(2), 92-110.