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Instructor versus Classmate Feedback in Written Tasks

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Abstract

This study, conducted in Abu Dhabi, UAE, explores the impact of instructor versus classmate feedback on student writing tasks. It explores the growing educational landscape, where modern teaching methods, including feedback mechanisms, are reshaping traditional teacher-student dynamics. The study examines the effectiveness of peer education strategies, where students engage in mutual teaching and learning, against traditional instructor feedback methods. The research incorporates a comprehensive literature review, highlighting the increasing importance of blogs in language learning and the role of peer feedback in writing classes. The study methodology involves a questionnaire distributed to 150 secondary school students, assessing the influence of teacher and peer feedback on writing tasks. Results indicate that peer reactions hold more control over student performance than instructor feedback, a finding consistent with global educational trends emphasising collaborative and student-centred learning approaches. This study contributes to the broader discourse on the efficacy of modern teaching methods in enhancing student-learning outcomes.

KEYWORDS

*Peer feedback, instructor
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Introduction

Today, the world is experiencing a renaissance and development in all fields, especially the field of education, as it is a true investment of human potential. Therefore, countries began to compete by developing curricula and teaching strategies because of its impact on employing the energies and abilities of their children. In the current century, interest in curricula and teaching strategies has increased, and for this reason, many conferences were held that called for attention to curricula, teaching methods, strategies, and methods. Among these conferences is the First International Curriculum Conference at the Red Sea University, held in Sudan (2015 AD), which recommended the necessity of developing effective teaching methods that contribute to in developing the capabilities and preparations of graduate students and community members, the conference also recommended developing the teaching skills of faculty members. The opinions of teachers have a great influence on the educational status of students. It has become considered one of the widely used educational methods in educational institutions. The method of feedback from teachers is a modern method that has changed the pattern of the teacher-student relationship. It also opened new

horizons for communication between them and gave more effective results than traditional and stereotypical education.

The peer education strategy is a method based on learners' cooperation and interaction with each other. It is an educational method in which learners teach to each other, so that the teacher peer who has mastered the skill teaches to the learner peer, who is less proficient in mastering the same skill. The peer education strategy is one of the cooperative learning strategies. They are cooperative educational groups that the teacher forms, trying as much as possible to make them heterogeneous groups. In this type of group, students work together for a period ranging from one session to a number of sessions carried out over the course of weeks, in order to achieve.

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Common educational goals.

Feedback is considered a modern educational strategy, defined as an educational system where learners cooperate, with one (the peer or teacher) transferring their mastered knowledge and experiences to others (peers/learners) who are less proficient, under the teacher's supervision and guidance. It is also described as a method for training students in specific skills through fellowship, offering mutual aid and support via observation and feedback during actual teaching, aimed at enhancing skill performance and acquiring new skills. Previous studies have highlighted this teaching method's significance and effectiveness. It boosts student confidence, encouraging them to seek help from their peers without hesitation. Moreover, it fosters a spirit of cooperation among students and allows teachers to engage in other beneficial educational activities. This approach also helps teachers move away from traditional, stereotypical lecturing methods, promoting increased trust and cooperation between teachers and students. As an interactive teaching method, it serves a therapeutic role in addressing academic deficiencies and enhancing learners' interest in their studies.

Literature review

Blogs have emerged as a dynamic, motivational, and authentic tool for enhancing writing skills in language learning. Arnold & Ducate (2006), Richardson (2005), and others have recognised the interactive nature of blogs in foreign language teaching. Studies by Arslan & Sahin-Kizil (2010), Dippold (2009), and Vurdien (2013) highlight blogs' effectiveness in developing writing proficiency. Through blogs, learners can engage creatively in writing, choosing their own topics and engaging in reflective and personal writing. This platform also facilitates peer interaction and feedback, contributing to a more relaxed, student-centered learning environment, as evidenced by research from Aljmah (2012), Godwin-Jones (2008), and others. The pedagogical utility of blogs extends beyond the classroom, promoting student-centered learning and enhancing individual accountability (Sun & Chang, 2012; Du & Wagner, 2007). Additionally, Ward (2004) and Sun (2009) assert that blogs provide an authentic context for learners to develop their writing skills and build social networks.

In the realm of writing classes, peer feedback has been increasingly recognised for its importance alongside traditional teacher feedback. Rollison (2005), Wu, Petit, & Chen (2015), and Vygotsky (1978) emphasise the role of social interaction in learning, with peer feedback serving as a crucial component. Peer feedback on blogs, being asynchronous and less pressured, allows for more thoughtful and paced responses (Chang, 2012). Nicol and MacFarlane-Dick (2006) note that peer feedback benefits both the giver and receiver, as it requires critical reading and self-editing skills. However, there are challenges in implementing peer feedback effectively. Concerns about the time-consuming nature of pre-training and doubts about the expertise of peers in providing quality feedback (Rollinson, 2005; Hanrahan & Isaacs, 2001; Liu & Carless, 2006) have been raised. Min (2006) suggests that training is essential for effective peer feedback. The study acknowledges the mixed views on peer feedback, advocating for more input from EFL students and teachers in real classroom settings. Ur (1996) and other researchers highlight the preference of L2 students for teacher written feedback over other forms, such as oral or peer feedback. This preference is particularly strong in cultures where teachers are viewed as the primary authority. Teacher written feedback, involving comments and suggestions on students' drafts, is seen as a key tool for helping students identify their strengths and weaknesses and improve their writing skills.

The debate over the effectiveness of error correction in written feedback is a central theme in this discourse. Truscott (1996) challenges the utility of error correction, suggesting it might be detrimental to students' writing fluency and quality. Conversely, Ferris & Roberts (2001), and Lee (1997) provide evidence supporting the benefits of error correction, particularly when errors are marked or underlined. The text also delves into the nuances of feedback types - direct versus indirect. Direct feedback involves explicit written corrections, while indirect feedback hints at errors through underlining, circling, or coding. Studies by Lalande (1982), Frantzen (1995), and Ferris (2002) suggest indirect feedback is more effective for long-term writing development. However, contexts and student proficiency levels must be considered, as direct feedback can be more beneficial in certain situations. Additionally, the text emphasises the role of teachers in providing effective feedback. This includes motivating students, modelling revision strategies, and raising awareness about the importance of self-assessment and revision. Barkaoui (2007), Hyland (2003), and Chandler (2003) assert that feedback should be more than just marking mechanical errors; it should involve classroom discussions and specific guidance to foster students' writing development. The importance of teacher written feedback as a motivational tool is underscored. Brookhart (2010) notes that feedback serves both cognitive and motivational purposes, helping students understand their learning progress and feel in control of their learning journey. Many studies have touched on the issue of modern teaching methods and their impact on the educational process. The feedback method is considered one of the important methods that has been discussed and studied to identify its importance and positive impact on the educational process. It was mentioned in the study (Adedeji TELLA, 2013), which aimed to know the effect of peer teaching and some educational strategies on basic stage students' learning in mathematics. The researcher followed the quasi-experimental method. The study sample consisted of 170 primary school students who were selected by a simple random method from eight schools. The results resulted

in statistically significant differences in favour of the experimental group, which confirmed the effectiveness of this method and the quality of the results it achieved. As for the study (Al-Ghamdi, 2012), which aimed to find out the effectiveness of the peer teaching strategy in developing the skills of memorising the Holy Qur'an and the persistence of its effect among fifth-grade female students in schools for memorising the Holy Qur'an, the researcher followed the quasi-experimental approach. A note card was applied to a sample of 38 fifth-grade female students in Qur'an memorisation schools in Mecca. The results resulted in statistically significant differences in each skill of memorising the Qur'an in favour of the experimental group. That is, the peer feedback method achieved more effective results. The study (Al-Hayali and Yalda 2011 AD) came to identify the effect of using the peer education strategy in developing and retaining some aloud reading skills among special education students in the reading subject, where the sample amounted to (20) male and female students from the third grade of special education primary school. The researchers took into account parity. Between the two groups on several variables, they followed the quasi-experimental approach and used three tools to measure these skills. The results showed that there were statistically significant differences in favour of the experimental group. As for the study (Abdul Karim, 2007 AD), which aimed to find out the effectiveness of using the peer teaching strategy in developing the self-concept of students in the Geography Department at the College of Basic Education at the University of Mosul, the quasi-experimental design was used and the research sample consisted of one group, numbering (23) male and female students. A previously prepared self-concept scale was applied, and the results showed that there were statistically significant differences in favour of students' responses in the post-application of the scale due to the peer teaching strategy in developing the self-concept.

Al-Rahawi's study (2006), which aimed to reveal the effect of using the peer teaching strategy on the cognisative academic achievement of the subject of teaching methods for third-year students in the College of Physical Education. The study sample included (44) students, and the researcher prepared a test to measure cognisative achievement, and followed the semi-method. Experimentally, the study found the effectiveness of the strategy in cognisative retention.

Methodology

Sample

This study implemented a straightforward method of random sampling to gather data from a varied group of participants. The sample included 150 students of both genders from state-run secondary schools in Abu Dhabi. The process of random selection was structured to ensure fair representation and reduce any bias in selection. Each student was provided with a distinct identifier, and a system generating random numbers was employed to choose participants. This method was to ensure that the sample was impartial and accurately reflected the student body.

Data Collection

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire, which was distributed electronically to the participants. The questionnaire was meticulously designed to encompass two primary axes: demographic information and main research questions. The demographic section included questions about gender, age group, and marital status, assisting in classifying and understanding the background of the respondents. The main questions section examined the core aspects of the study, probing students' experiences and perceptions regarding instructor and peer feedback in their writing tasks.

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Data Analysis

The subsequent stage of data analysis was pivotal in synthesising the collected data into coherent and meaningful results. Utilising the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), the responses were meticulously transcribed and analysed. The analysis focused on comparing the effectiveness of teacher comments versus peer comments in enhancing students' reading and writing proficiency. Various statistical tests were employed to determine patterns, correlations, and significant differences within the data.

Results

The research sample comprised students aged between 15 and 17, with an average age of 16 years. The majority of participants were in the tenth grade. The participant demographics and responses are summarised in Table 1, which shows the descriptive statistics of the research sample.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of the Research Sample

Variable	N (Number of Students)	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Deviation	Range
Age	150	16.5	16	16	1.5	6
Grade	150	10	10	10	1.45	5
Response	150	11	10.5	10.5	1.13	5

The analysis showed a clear consensus among participants: peer feedback had a significantly greater influence on their writing task performance than instructor feedback. This observation was not just subjective; it was supported by robust statistical evidence, which demonstrated a marked preference and positive reception towards peer-based feedback in the educational setting. This data suggests a potential shift in student perceptions, valuing the feedback process more when it involves collaborative and peer-supported environments. The implications of these findings are significant, indicating that peer feedback not only facilitates learning but also substantially enhances academic outcomes, particularly in developing writing proficiency and skills.

Discussion

The advent of modern teaching strategies, epitomised by the First International Curriculum Conference at the Red Sea University (2015), marked a significant shift in the landscape of education. This conference, and others like it, emphasised the need for innovative methods in teaching to harness the full potential of students and faculty alike. The focus on developing effective teaching methods underlines a global recognition of education as a pivotal investment in human potential, with countries vying to optimise their curricula and teaching strategies. One of the most influential developments in this regard has been the incorporation of feedback methods in education. Feedback, as an interactive strategy, has redefined the traditional teacher-student dynamics, fostering a more engaging and collaborative environment. This method is not merely a tool for imparting knowledge; it is a framework that encourages mutual learning and growth. Feedback strategies allow for a two-way flow of information and insights, enabling teachers to tailor their approach to the individual needs of their students while also empowering students to play a more active role in their learning process. The peer education strategy, a subset of cooperative learning strategies, has emerged as a particularly effective approach. This method, based on mutual cooperation and interaction among learners, sees peers teaching each other, with more proficient students guiding their less skilled counterparts. Such a strategy not only enhances the learning experience but also fosters a sense of community and cooperation. It aligns with the view that learning is a social process, as asserted by Vygotsky (1978), and that peer interaction is crucial in this context.

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Contemporary research underscores the efficacy of these modern teaching methods. Arnold & Ducate (2006), Richardson (2005), and others have recognised the dynamic role of blogs in language learning, exemplifying how digital tools can enhance interaction and feedback. These platforms allow for creative engagement and personal reflection, facilitating a student-centred approach that has been praised for its effectiveness in fostering writing proficiency (Arslan & Sahin-Kizil, 2010; Dippold, 2009; Vurdien, 2013). The role of feedback, particularly from peers, has gained prominence in writing classes. Rollison (2005) and Wu, Petit, & Chen (2015) emphasise the importance of social interaction in learning, with peer feedback playing a key role. This type of feedback, being asynchronous and less pressured, allows for more thoughtful responses, fostering a conducive learning environment. However, challenges exist in its implementation, including the time required for pre-training and concerns about the quality of feedback provided by peers (Hanrahan & Isaacs, 2001; Liu & Carless, 2006). Min (2006) suggests that training is essential for effective peer feedback, highlighting the need for a structured approach. Despite the growing emphasis on peer feedback, there remains a strong preference among L2 students for teacher-written feedback, particularly in cultures where teachers are viewed as primary authorities (Ur, 1996). This preference underscores the enduring value of traditional feedback methods, where teachers provide direct comments and suggestions on students' drafts. The debate over the effectiveness of error correction in written feedback continues, with scholars

like Truscott (1996) questioning its utility, while Ferris and Roberts (2001), and Lee (1997) argue in its favour.

The nature of feedback—direct versus indirect—also plays a critical role. Studies by Lalande (1982), Frantzen (1995), and Ferris (2002) suggest that indirect feedback, which hints at errors through underlining, circling, or coding, is more effective for long-term writing development. This approach requires consideration of the specific contexts and proficiency levels of students, as direct feedback may be more beneficial in certain scenarios. Moreover, the role of teachers in providing effective feedback is pivotal. Teachers need to motivate students, model revision strategies, and raise awareness about the importance of self-assessment and revision (Barkaoui, 2007; Hyland, 2003; Chandler, 2003). Feedback should extend beyond marking mechanical errors to include classroom discussions and specific guidance, thus fostering students' writing development. The motivational aspect of teacher-written feedback cannot be overlooked. Brookhart (2010) notes that feedback serves both cognitive and motivational purposes, aiding students in understanding their learning progress and feeling in control of their learning journey. Empirical studies have further validated the impact of modern teaching methods. Adedeji TELLA (2013) demonstrated the effectiveness of peer teaching in enhancing learning outcomes in mathematics among primary students. Similarly, Al-Ghamdi (2012) found that peer teaching significantly improved memorisation skills among fifth-grade students. Al-Hayali and Yalda (2011) and Abdul Karim (2007) highlighted the positive effects of peer education strategies on reading skills and self-concept development, respectively. Al-Rahawi's study (2006) confirmed the strategy's effectiveness in cognitive retention among physical education students.

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In light of these findings, it becomes evident that modern teaching methods, particularly those involving feedback and peer education, offer a range of benefits. They not only enhance academic performance but also promote personal development, such as increased self-confidence and cooperation among students. These methods represent a shift from traditional, teacher-centred approaches to more interactive, student-centred strategies. They address the diverse needs of learners and prepare them for the challenges of the modern world, emphasising the development of critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaborative skills. The renaissance in education, propelled by conferences like the one held at the Red Sea University and supported by empirical studies, underscores the importance of innovative teaching strategies. Methods like feedback and peer education have proven to be effective in improving learning outcomes, fostering personal development, and transforming the educational landscape. As education continues to evolve, embracing these modern strategies will be crucial in realising the full potential of learners and preparing them for the challenges of the 21st century.

Conclusion

Peer tutoring methods have been shown to have a positive impact on learning, resulting in progress equivalent to an additional five months on average over the course of an academic year, and studies have indicated benefits for both teachers and students of different age groups. Although all students

benefit from peer tutoring, there is some evidence that students with low achievement and special educational needs benefit most. Peer tutoring is particularly effective when students are supported to ensure high-quality peer interaction; such as providing sample questions to be used in teaching sessions, and providing training and feedback to teachers. In peer teaching of different age groups, some studies have found that it is ideal for the difference between the teacher and the student to be less than three years, and ensuring that the age difference is large enough for the work to be difficult for the student and easy enough for the teacher to support the student is essential. Regular teaching sessions (4-5 times a week) over a period of up to 10 weeks appear to be more effective than less intensive or longer programmes. Successful methods may also have other benefits; such as supporting the social and personal development of students, and enhancing their self-confidence and motivation to learn.

While a wide range of interventions can be classified as peer tutoring, there is still a lack of research conducted in the Arab world linking these interventions to educational outcomes. The few relevant studies focused mainly on peer teaching at the grade level and reciprocal teaching and their impact on students' attitudes and motivation towards learning. More research must be conducted, including larger samples, to investigate the relationship between peer tutoring and students' academic achievement in various subjects. There is evidence that promising results are achieved when testing these methods. A study conducted on ninth-grade students in Jordan found a link between reciprocal teaching strategies and critical listening skills. While another study found that the results of Al-Azhar students who used the reciprocal teaching method were higher than the results of those who did not use it. In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, studies have shown positive results for peer tutoring interventions at the grade level on mathematics at the primary level, and on cooperative learning for students with and without learning difficulties. Other studies have also indicated evidence of promising results in higher-order thinking skills, students' attitudes toward learning, and more general positive effects on students' learning relationships.

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