

# Evaluating the Efficacy of Peer and Teacher Feedback on Writing Development among Secondary Students in Bologna, Italy

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## Abstract

The study aims to undertake an investigation regarding the different effect of teacher vs. peer feedback on varied sections of writing proficiency among secondary students in Bologna, Italy. The research employed a structured questionnaire to a sample of 150 students in an inquiry that sought to establish the effectiveness of these feedback modalities in enhancing writing tasks. The analysis was also supported by SPSS, which helped in reaching a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics within feedback. The results provide a much more nuanced picture in which peer feedback, under certain conditions, actually has the potential to be as effective as traditional teacher feedback in facilitating writing development. More specifically, the peer feedback resulted in substantially improving the content, organization, and vocabulary to the same degree as teacher feedback, with the lone exception of grammar increase. The results point toward a peer-feedback experience that is a potentially valid addition to teacher-led revisions, provided initiatives to integrate it with feedback literacy are focused on putting student empowerment at their core. The research has therefore added to the broader discussion of feedback mechanisms in language learning by proposing a re-evaluation of the nature of peer feedback within educational paradigms.

**Keywords:** peer feedback, teacher feedback, writing proficiency, secondary education, feedback literacy

## Introduction

With this, during the global rebirth, education is on the vanguard of human development, the epitome of genuine investment in human resources. Countries of the world are actively involved in competitive dynamics towards improvement and further refinement of their curricula and pedagogical strategies with full realisation of the intense impacts that such improvements and refinements have on harnessing the latent energies and talent reservoirs of their youth. This growing interest in educational innovation has been underscored with the help of many international conferences; of special note is the First International Curriculum Conference at the Red Sea University in Sudan (2015), which is the most significant amongst the latest venues, pushing for the development of effective teaching approaches. Then, the methods would aim to enrich the ability of the faculty and students together with enhancing better pedagogical skills. Feedback mechanisms in education, which could be described as a form of transformative power, increasingly have come to be recognized as a departure from the traditional methods of teaching. This modern technique has been successful in revolutionizing the equation between a teacher and a student, bridging new lines of communication to the students and giving results better than the same old conventional education. In this line, the very strategy of peer education, based



on a collective mode of cooperation and interaction among learners, exemplifies this paradigm shift toward collaborative learning. Thus, the approach gives emphasis to the role of peers in teaching each other and, therefore, engenders a learning situation in which knowledge and skill are shared and fostered in a collaborative situation. Moreover, the much-researched role of corrective feedback, especially in the domain of second language (L2) or foreign language (FL) writing, has become increasingly nuanced. Research efforts have diversified into measuring the effectiveness of various feedback modalities: dynamic correction feedback, feedback from automated systems, and peer-reviewed mechanisms. Such studies have again emphasized the importance of feedback in the process of language learning but with an attention preponderant in the traditional classroom setting. Less well understood, however, is the negotiation of the feedback dynamics that take place within the course space of an online English-as-a-Foreign-Language (EFL) writing course—offering what may be construed as a relatively rare opportunity to investigate the subtleties at play in feedback engagement within such a digital environment.

### ***The Dynamics of Feedback in ESL/EFL Writing Instruction***

Writing feedback has emerged as one of the pivotal aspects, particularly in the English Second Language (ESL) and English Foreign Language (EFL) settings, in the emerging English Language Teaching landscape of higher educational contexts. The favored effects of their effectualness are carried within the learner's teacher feedbacks, continuing within the complexities of language acquisition (Connor & Asenavage, 1994; Ferris, 1997; Yang et al., 2006). Such feedback, while championed to be promoting linguistic development, is also presented with substantial challenges in terms of the workload for educators, especially in the most common and expansive classroom settings at universities. This would, therefore, be a very rich situation in terms of feedback, though not very responsive to the needs of each learner and may fail to cover all areas or stages of learning. From this perspective, peer feedback becomes an attractive alternative or even adjutant, for it should afford venues in which cognitive, social, and even linguistic enrichment should take place in the course of the exchange of feedback amidst peers (Cho & Schunn 2006; Rollinson 2005). On one hand, however, during the implementation of peer feedback, among other factors; it met resistance because, based on their linguistic background, they were so different from that of the English language in which they seem to be timid about their language and observe cultural norms against authority figures as preventing its effect (Nelson & Murphy, 1993; Zou et al., 2018).

Such a subtle interplay of this argument with regard to teacher- and peer-based mechanisms touches upon the larger question of the effectiveness of different feedback modalities in improving the writing competencies among ESL and EFL learners. Research, in fact, shows that the sometimes complex interaction of these two forms of feedback commonly results in teacher feedback yielding more serious revisions than peer feedback but, at the same time, often supporting active and autonomous engagement with the learning material (Connor & Asenavage, 1994; Ruegg, 2015). The potential of post-training peer feedback to catalyze meaningful revisions and raise the quality of writing begs a reevaluation of its role within language learning paradigms (Berg, 1999; Min, 2005).

### **Literature review**

Improving students' feedback literacy: the literature reflects a multidimensional construct. It is crucial for the academic development of the students. Initially, Sutton (2012) defined feedback literacy for students as the capability for decoding, interpreting, and using feedback appropriately. Carless and Boud (2018) extended this founding view on feedback by articulating it as encompassing feedback literacy needed by students, including necessary understandings, capacities, and dispositions to effectively process and apply feedback,

and thereby improve learning strategically. Some of the characteristics that the brain tries to develop for the improvement of performance include appreciation of feedback, ability to make judgments, manage feelings, and take action. If one fails to do this, it might demand some sanctions due to poor operation. Han and Xu (2019) further operationalized this degree of feedback literacy within the domain of written corrective feedback by noting that cognitive and socio-affective dimensions are crucial for engagement with feedback. Despite these shifts, theoretical and empirical rigor in treatments of the value and implications of developing student feedback literacy are at best scant—especially in how this is implicated or may implicate the quality of peer feedback. It means that peer feedback has been a subject of great importance in complementing teacher-student interactions for the establishment of a sustainable, dialogic process of feedback that brings about student engagement (Nicol, 2010; Boud & Molloy, 2013). However, the effectiveness of peer feedback depends on advanced feedback literacy from the students. They have to negotiate a number of roles for effective peer feedback. In this kind of peer review, students will need to position themselves as writers, readers, assessors, and encouragers and be able to have that evaluative skill (Pitt, Bearman, & Esterhazy, 2019). First of all, one of the very first difficulties that can be readily noted with regards to peer feedback is the fact that if students are working in an English as another language environment, there will necessarily be this added degree of challenge and difficulty represented within such a process (Allen and Katayama, 2016; Wu, 2019). The present areas researched on, for example, peer feedback in writing performance, have included the full array of research methodologies and comparative analyses to discern its effectiveness. The literature is awash with quasi-experimental mixed designs that focus on comparing peer feedback against other alternative feedback mechanisms on the one hand and investigate the varied impacts that different peer feedback methodologies carry for writing capabilities of the students.

Results of a number of studies show that peer feedback was on a different level. According to Ruegg (2015), peer feedback has been eliciting similar improvement for content, organization, vocabulary, and in general, stratagems in preparing reasoned conclusions. Ideally, this has resulted in writing scores like teacher feedback produced, except for grammar scores. On their journey towards laying the ground for this claim, Zhang and McEneaney (2020) highlighted that peer feedback outperforms collective feedback in significantly enhancing overall EFL writing performance with comprehensive training among Chinese university students. Wong and Storey (2006) indicated that peer feedback was more influential than self-feedback on organizational quality and organizational and overall writing quality, respectively. However, Birjandi and Tamjid (2012) were able to single out a more successful hybrid in which combining peer and teacher feedback resulted in significantly more effectiveness compared to the use of only teacher feedback in general overall improvement of writing, and combining peer and self-feedback was less effective. The different peer feedback interventions conducted are further elaborated in this sense in relation to the roles of the feedback givers and receivers. Works by Crinon (2012), Crinon and Marin (2010), and Lundstrom and Baker (2009) also similarly researched and collectively came up with feedback givers' depiction of more significant improvements in writing quality than receivers of the same. Gielen et al. (2010) assessed the efficiency of different kinds of peer feedback within the Belgian context and drew a conclusion that individualized sorts of feedback were more efficient than traditional ones. Researches focus on training in terms of research, such as the study by Rahimi (2013), which determined that trained Iranian EFL students had performance improvements overall in writing. These indexes cultured the quantitative dimension in measuring the effect of reporting on peer feedback in: complexity, accuracy, and fluency (CAF). Besides, the mixed findings in the efficacy of peer feedback by Ghahari and Farokhnia (2018) and Shang (2019) used these indexes on writing complexity, accuracy, and fluency. Rather, studies by Soleimani and Rahmanian (2014) and Rayati (2014) extricated from these findings by comparing self-, peer-, and teacher-assessments through CAF measures to reveal differential gains from differently

formatted feedback. On the one hand, these studies inform a peer response's potential for improving writing motivation; on the other hand, they re-emphasize the need for methodological refinements and careful use of CAF indices, since the indices have been found to be too sensitive to textual variables like length of the text. The literature reviewed seemed to concur that training is indispensable in peer feedback, and it is especially required within the L2 context. The majority of the highlighted studies primarily centered on pre-intervention training programs that were aimed at preparing students for engagement in peer feedback activities. Zhang and McEneaney (2020) and Zhao (2014) record that more positive effects have been realized in putting more than one training session into practice throughout the intervention, which is a technique used in implementation to address practical constraints, such as large class sizes and limited hours of teaching. The present review brings out the multiple dimensions of peer feedback in writing education that underscore its strengths, limitations, and future opportunities for research so that it improves its application and efficacy.

Works have consequently argued, concurrently, through these cognitive and social-affective requirements of feedback from peers, the literature has advanced more complex and high-level understandings of feedback literacy of students vis-à-vis peer feedback mediated by readiness, be it comprehensive of cognitive capacities, language proficiency, metacognitive skills, and a strong store of knowledge (Sutton, 2012; Carless and Boud, 2018). Readiness is thus social-affective in terms of self-efficacy, interpersonal empathy, and willingness of engagement, along with emotional regulation (Sutton, 2012; Carless and Boud, 2018). Much attention should be accorded to the pedagogical interventions that are indispensable in grappling with the complexity of student feedback literacy and the challenges of such. These interventions are meant to equip the learners with skills and dispositions that can make them effective during peer feedback activities. This points out some areas that are critical whereby academic development is concerned. Quality teacher feedback on peer feedback is being exercised as a mechanism for increasing understanding and engagement (Xu and Carless, 2017). The literature emphasises how there certainly is a pressing need for such additional empirical research into the development of student feedback literacy dynamics and impacts on pedagogical practice. In fact, a line of inquiry into how students develop and use literacy in feedback, particularly in cases of peer feedback, will provide educators with a lot of salient information on how best to excite the development of strong and compelling learning environments. This will provide key findings that will enhance an awareness of a poor or high level of student feedback literacy and the development of instructional strategies that help students improve in their capacity to be able to manage and utilise feedback.

## **Method**

### ***Sample Selection***

Data and information needed for this study were collected through simple random sampling. The choice of the sampling method herein was based on the guarantee that all the parties involved will have an equal chance of being eased, not only reducing the possibility of biases rising from selection but also the improvement which sample representativeness. The target sample included male and female learners attending government state secondary schools in the city of Bologna, Italy. Another important enabler that gives access to the needed data involves the placement of data collections that are important for use in the formulation of results of the particular study.

### ***Data Collection Method***

The data for this research were mainly collected using a structured questionnaire designed to probe areas outlined in the research questions. The questionnaire was divided into two main axes in a systematic way to cover the study objectives.

#### ***The First Axis: Demographic Information***

This is the section that was going to list the research sample classified according to selected criteria that are perceived relevant to the research, such as gender, age group, and marital status. These demographic questions are key to understanding the profile of the participants and giving way to subsequent analyses that may explain differences and tendencies along these demographic lines.

#### ***The Second Axis: Core Study Questions***

The second part of the questionnaire aimed to solicit direct responses associated with the research objectives. It contained questions that sought to explore further the key issues in question in order to allow a clearer and better view of the matters in focus.

### ***Data Analysis Procedure***

The process of data analysis is one of the most critical phases within the research process. Systematic and organised scrutiny of the data collected is performed in this phase so that it can provide meaning to answer the research questions. The careful analysis through which it is able to transit from raw data into insightful conclusions in this research has been based on the analysis of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Hence, the use of the questionnaire responses keyed in SPSS for statistical analysis is to help find out the relative efficiency of teacher comment and peer feedback in enhancing reading proficiency among students. This body of analytic procedures has to describe data in such a way that it demonstrates, in clear terms, the influence of different mechanisms on the learning outcomes by the students. This is the valuable finding related to the existing body of knowledge and feedback dynamics in educational settings through this meticulous approach.

## **Results**

The current research sought to observe the effect of teacher versus peer feedback on writing tasks within a group of Bologna secondary school students. The research was conducted with a sample study of 150 students from government secondary schools, both female and male. The primary objective was to ascertain the differential effects of teacher and peer feedback on students' writing. This used questionnaires as the main instrument of data collection and subjected them to statistical analysis through the Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS).

### ***Descriptive Statistics***

The participants' ages ranged from 15 to 17 years, with a mean age of 16, and they represented secondary classes in the education system. Descriptive statistics for the study's participants are set forth below in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
Descriptive Statistics of Participant Ages, Grades, and Responses

Variable	N	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard deviation	Range
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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 following are the results tabulated, in which the average age group of the participants was found to be 16.5 years, and most of them were studying at the tenth class level. Findings further determined that the research sample agreed with the effect of peer feedback in writing tasks, as being more powerful than teacher feedback.

## **Discussion**

Feedback is very necessary within the context of education, especially with the classroom setup of English as a Second Language (ESL) and the classroom of English foreign (EFL). The debate on the relative effectiveness of teacher versus peer feedback in writing assignments is reflective of much bigger discussions of the pedagogical strategies that would optimally support student learning and development. This paper has probed into the dynamics of feedback within the context of ESL/EFL writing instruction and has provided critical insights toward understanding how different feedback mechanisms might be interrelated and what implications they might hold on issues of language acquisition for pedagogical practice.

### ***Teacher Feedback versus Peer Feedback***

Therefore, teacher feedback was one of the traditional paradigms in learning reinforcement and potential fostering for linguistic development among learners. Targeted, corrective feedback from the authoritative knowledge of teachers provides the key toward guiding the students through the maze of language learning (Connor and Asenavage, 1994; Ferris, 1997). Such flexibility at scale, in varied educational contexts—more so where large classrooms are a norm—has been a big challenge. The workload involved can therefore result in the production of generic feedback, which does not effectively address the individual learning needs of the learners and solicits passive engagement of students in the feedback process (Hyland, 1998; Lee, 2007). On the other hand, peer feedback brings about a more viable alternative where feedback is exchanged not only between students; however, in the actual sense, students are able to provide feedback among themselves. This serves to make the work of the teacher lighter, while the activity and independence of the learner are enhanced in their learning. From another point of view, it means that peer feedback contributes to building such a friendly and collaborative learning environment, in which students have a possibility to share their perceptions and learn from the viewpoints of others (Cho and Schunn, 2006; Rollinson, 2005). It, however, must be considered that these potential benefits from peer feedback may be hamstrung by reasons such as linguistic ability and cultural views on authority and competence by peers. Such contextual factors may include the preparedness of the students to receive such feedback from their peers. This is especially so considering that the linguistic and cultural norms taken and practiced glaringly show a deviation from those taken within an English-speaking setup.

### ***The Efficacy of Feedback Modalities***

Empirical research on the effectiveness of teacher- and peer-feedback modalities points at a complex landscape. While teacher feedback is very often linked with more substantive revisions of student writing, empirical research shows that peer feedback may encourage higher student engagement and a sense of authorship for the learners. "This ability to really influence the revision of the text and hence develop the quality of the writing means peer commentary might deserve more attention and credit for its role in learning

contexts (Berg, 1999; Min, 2005). The concept of feedback literacy, as reviewed from the literature, means the students have to understand and know how to use feedback effectively. In turn, the development of feedback literacy would be very necessary for the attainment of the highest possible benefit from the mechanisms of teacher feedback and peer feedback. High feedback literacy of students would mean that such students could interact with the feedback given in a manner that would enable them to further their learning and even the development of their academic work (Carless and Boud, 2018; Han and Xu, 2019).

### ***Pedagogical Implications and Future Directions***

As such, the implications the present study brings about bear a great deal on pedagogical practice, more so on ESL/EFL writing instruction. Firstly, peer feedback as a complementary feedback mechanism toward teachers' feedback may add to the improvement in the present feedback process for making it more easily manageable for teachers, but at the same time, interesting for students. Secondly, development of the feedback literacy of students has emerged as another key area of focus. This means that pedagogical interventions targeting improvement in feedback literacy, such as pre-activity and continuing scaffolding activities, help students gain experience in the effective handling of both teacher and peer feedbacks (Xu and Carless, 2017). This would seem, then, to make it incumbent upon the educator to offer feedback strategies that are both culturally responsive and take into account the linguistic proficiencies of such a culturally and linguistically diverse classroom. These, in turn, will inform developing feedback practices that are sensitive to the students' needs and support their engagement and learning. Comparing teacher- versus peer-feedback in ESL/EFL writing assignments brings to the fore the interrelated, if not chaotic, interplay of different feedback mechanisms and their influence on student learning. While teacher feedback keeps being the base of language instruction, the potential of peer feedback for contributing to a collaborative, engaging, and autonomous learning environment is undeniable. Feedback literacy subsequently develops as a pivotal factor to maximize its benefits. This led the present study to conclude that future research, motivated by a course that critically helps develop pedagogical strategies for the effective engagement of feedback in promoting the language and academic development of students, would have to continue looking into the dynamics of feedback across these different educational contexts.

### **Limitations and Future Research Directions**

It thereby adds a valuable insight to the domain of pedagogical methodologies; however, it is not without weaknesses. The main limitation lies with the difficulty associated with generalizing this to a further, even broader area of education, such as the faculty across the nation, which this study was not able to reach due to scale. The study targeted students at the secondary level of education, thus limiting its results to this demographic. Its findings, therefore, cannot adequately capture the experiences and needs of the students at different levels/stages of education or be applicable to all the learners at the secondary level of education universally. Although the sample of 150 was very large enough to bring in some statistical significance, on the other hand, it represented another constraint to the very large and heterogeneous secondary-school students' population. Suffice it to say, this sample size is sufficient for first-time explorations but might miss out on capturing the complete diversity and all subtleties of experiences and responses of the student body to the teacher versus peer feedback in writing assignments. Within the confines of such limitations, it can be said that now the most compelling opportunity for future research is to build further on the foundations laid down by this study. Further study may be directed toward more diverse and larger samples in the future that can include the whole spectrum of educational levels and settings. In doing so, future researchers will not only put themselves in a better position to improve the generalizability of their own findings but contribute to a more

nuanced understanding of the influence that feedback mechanisms have on students within many different learning environments and, of course, student demographics. For future research to do, it will be necessary to take an even broader and thorough approach to more fully enlighten the complicated dynamics of the feedback process in educational settings. This might further be explored regarding the relationship between teacher and peer feedback across different instructional contexts to provide an even more complete and actionable view that would be helpful in guiding pedagogical practice and policy. Though this seems an important step in understanding the role of feedback in educational settings, the way ahead seems to point to bigger and more inclusive efforts in regard to research on this very critical aspect of pedagogy. Such endeavors will be vital toward ensuring that a comprehensive and nuanced view of effective teaching practices and their ability to support learning and development for learners is better appreciated in any and every educational setting.

### Conclusion

This, therefore, was able to bring out a number of critical roles that both teacher and peer feedback play in ESL/EFL writing instruction and bring out subtle insights into the comparative impacts of the two on student writing development. The results support a complex relationship that feedback has in educational contexts, attuning the subtle benefits and challenges associated with each modality of feedback. Although peer feedback is lively and can ensure independent learning in a more engaging way by pushing the student to be an active agent of both their and their peers' learning, teacher feedback, through the correctiveness it allows, remains highly supportive in the development of the linguistic skills of the learner. Therefore, for all its considerations, the study has a few inherent limitations. For example, it is on the smaller side of the scale with regard to samples, and this study focuses wholly on secondary education students. However, it does bring valuable perspectives to the ongoing discourses concerning effective pedagogical strategies for the language learning and teaching continuum. The research points the way forward for studies on more subtle feedback mechanisms across a wider educational ambit. These foundational insights may be used as a basis for further future research that broadens the scope of the study to include additional educational levels and settings that would shed more light on feedback in various forms and how it can best support student learning and achievement. The ultimate goal still remains lucid: to harness the full potential of feedback, both from teachers and peers, in order to enrich the educational experiences of learners and enable them to reach their highest linguistic and academic aspirations. This is not only through giving more thought to practice but a commitment to building up feedback literacy with students, for them to engage with, get more from the feedback, and become involved in meaningful dialogue about what they need.

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