



PEER AND SELF EDITING IN THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM

English Language

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ABSTRACT

The EFL (English as a foreign language) world is encountering a great challenge in terms of writing pedagogy. Reflecting on EFL writing pedagogy within university contexts, the current paper exemplifies how self versus peer editing was practiced by a number of learners studying at a private university in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, throughout the winter semester of the academic year 2016-2017. Peer editing refers to the ways in which students discuss their essay with each other for productive feedback, so as to use this feedback for enhancement of writing skills. Participating in peer editing discussions, students are expected to provide constructive feedback and accept positive criticism. Self editing, by contrast, does not require any collaborative work since the student is expected to edit his/her essay without receiving any feedback from his/her class peers. As indicated by the findings of this research study, peer and self editing are not significantly different from each other.

KEYWORDS

Peer-editing, self-editing, writing within EFL contexts

INTRODUCTION:

Augmenting the skill of foreign language writing may not be easy to accomplish. For an EFL student, learning to write academically effective essays in English is an immense challenge which can be due to a number of reasons. The student, for example, has to obey linguistic conventions, write for unfamiliar audience, and employ rhetorical strategies (Al Alami, 2013). With promoting EFL writing skills in mind, the current paper is concerned with writing at the university level, focusing on self and peer editing in particular. Peer editing requires that students discuss their essay with each other for productive feedback, in order to ultimately develop their writing skills. The peer editor's task is to spot another student's mistakes and offer guidance as to how the essay can be made better in terms of writing mechanics and conventions. Self editing, on the other hand, does not involve any pair or group discussions on a student's written work. Using editing strategies, students learn how to reflect on their own work whilst *diagnosing* areas of weakness for them to address and improve.

The current paper is comprised of seven parts. Part two is a literature review, shedding light on a number of relevant studies. Part three describes the research study, and part four proceeds to highlight the study's findings. Part five offers recommendations for researchers to take into consideration, and part six presents the references documented in the article. The paper concludes with four appendices exemplifying related points.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

A number of researchers from different parts of the world have explored the actual process of what writers do while they write. This part of the current paper portrays a number of studies conducted on self and peer editing within English as a foreign/second language contexts. It is worth mentioning that the studies delineated in this part of the paper involved both university and school students.

To start with, Al-Jamal (2009) conducted a study in an attempt to examine the effect of peer response techniques in improving English writing skills and in instilling positive attitudes towards such skills. The study population included all ninth grade learners at the School of King Abdullah the Second for Excellence in Irbid Directorate of Education. The study sample was comprised of fifty-five students and was divided into two experimental groups: twenty-seven female and twenty-eight male students. Data gathering instruments included a writing test, peer response sheets, pre-post training questionnaires, and teacher observation reports of students' behavior in the classroom during training sessions of peer response. Data analysis indicated that both groups benefited from the training in peer response which lasted for six weeks respectively. Some differences in the revision behavior between females and males were cited. These differences were in the quantity and quality of responses between the two groups. The findings revealed that peer response techniques affected the participants' attitudes positively in a way that upgraded the enhancement of their writing skills.

In his study, Ferreira (2008) focused on constraints to peer scaffolding which possibly happened due to subjects' de-motivating learning environment. Analysis was based on the video and audio recordings of the performance of two beginner Brazilian students performing two oral tasks in an EFL class. Task one consisted of an information gap activity and task two of a communicative drill. The constraints were the less capable peer's object-regulation, the more capable peer's hindrance to scaffolding, and the more capable peer's lack of EFL proficiency. According to the researcher, these hindrances could be explained by the learners' pervasive and frustrating foreign language learning experience and the lack of socialization and scaffolding.

In an effort to improve English writing skills of low proficiency Saudi university students studying in a foreign language context where product-based teaching methods were dominating, Al-Hazmi and Scholfield (2007) conducted a research project involving two groups. Using a checklist, a regime of enforced draft version was imposed on two groups over three writing tasks completed partly in class and partly at home. One group was trained in peer revision, while the other revised solely alone. There were significant draft improvements in quality especially in mechanics most of which being meaning preserving. However, final draft quality improved slightly on performance prior to the intervention and fell significantly in a time limited test situation following it. There was little difference between the revision groups even though peer revision was favorably commented on. In spite of positive attitudes, the findings proved that neither peers nor the emphasis of the checklist on higher level concerns succeeded in directing attention substantially towards organization and content. The researchers surmised that these students were not ready to abandon the traditional surface error focus they had been used to for a long time.

Hansen and Liu (2005) define peer response as the use of sources of information and interaction between students. This interaction, according to these researchers, can lead to meaningful revision. Students should be trained in this practice in order for it to function successfully. Depending on EFL proficiency, however, one practice may work more effectively than the other.

Interested in co-operative learning impact, Storch (2005) investigated the effectiveness of collaborative writing in ESL (English as a second language) settings. The study involved twenty three participants who were given a choice to write individually or in pairs. The research compared texts produced by pairs with those produced by individual participants, investigated the nature of the writing processes evident in the pair talk, and elicited the participants' reflections on the experience of collaborative learning. The results indicated that pairs produced shorter but better texts in terms of grammatical accuracy, complexity, and task fulfillment. Collaboration offered participants an opportunity to pool ideas as well as provide each other with feedback. Most participants expressed positive attitudes towards the experience of collaborative writing.

Hirvela (2000) recommends using writing groups in the ESL classroom; that is, small groups of students working together on a writing task which normally occurs in the form of peer review where students working in groups offer authentic audience feedback from which they learn to revise their papers. Through collaborative group production, students experience valuable opportunities to improve their ability to read and write, because the on-going community orientation of this approach enables them to draw upon the strengths and resources of their peers, whilst sorting through their own growing knowledge of ESL reading and writing.

In their study, Sumangala and Dicarolo (2000) found that students employed a variety of functions during negotiations: asking questions, offering explanations, making suggestions, restating what their peers wrote, and correcting grammar mistakes.

According to a number of specialists in the field, classroom talk can be a positive aspect in supporting all phases of the writing process. Berg (1999), for instance, advocates the idea that collaboration provides writers with a chance to read their drafts and discuss them face-to-face with a peer audience while the written product is taking shape. Moreover, collaboration can help blocked or apprehensive writers become more fluent and can provide an audience that assists the writer in revising.

Bruffee (1999) argues that peer response has turned classrooms into communities of learners. As the focus of writing pedagogy shifts from written products to writing as a process, and as ways of acquiring knowledge are seen from a collaborative or social perspective, Bruffee maintains that learning is a socially constructed activity that happens through communication with peers. Peer revision provides a chance for students to discuss and formulate ideas about the content of their writing and to help each other in augmenting writing skills. It also makes students aware of their problems in writing, through thorough discussions.

Examining the extent to which peer response impacted revision strategies, Bruffee (1998) used an ethnographic study in a high school classroom context. The study investigated whether writers' intuitions and revision strategies, amongst other factors, could be strengthened within a supportive classroom environment. It was concluded that the development of a peer community enhanced growth from egocentrism to audience awareness, and that knowing the audience helped students in becoming more aware of suitable strategies for revising the written message.

One way of defining peer response is through highlighting its modes of response. In their research, Guerrero and Villamil (1994) proposed a number of activities involving peer response groups. The activities consisted of reading, assessing, dealing with trouble sources, and discussing task procedures. The study noted different social aspects of students' behavior, categorizing them as control, collaboration, or adopting of reader/writer roles. It was found that the issue of collaboration was highly related to the social context of the group and the group dynamics, and that social relationships fluctuated during peer interaction.

Students' perceptions about peer response effectiveness play a role in the teaching and learning processes. In her study of advanced ESL students' attitudes towards peer review, Mangelsdorf (1992) found that sixty-nine percent had positive reactions. Peer review feedback was often seen as an improvement on self feedback in relation to identifying written mistakes (see also Tsui & Ng, 2000; Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005). Peers can help writers spot mismatches between intended meaning and that understood by the reader (Berg, 1999). Some studies involving lower proficiency learners, however, do not fully support these beliefs (see for example Mooko, 1996).

It can be concluded from the studies presented above that peer and self editing contribute to enhancing EFL/ESL students' writing skills. Apparently, peer feedback better raises students' awareness about their common mistakes in English, for, as we know, two heads can be better than one when it comes to identifying mistakes. Whether self or peer, however, it is essential that teachers provide students with adequate training in editing to ensure quality education.

THE RESEARCH STUDY:

The study the current paper describes explored students' perceptions of their abilities to edit their own work or another student's work and the

perception of the effectiveness of such practices within different English proficiency levels. There is no one single procedure that can be employed whilst students are engaged in the editing process. Keeping in mind the varying results of these studies on peer editing only, and peer and self editing, the research question for this study is: What are the participants' perceptions of peer/self feedback within different levels of English language proficiency?

The following procedure was used in class during study implementation: Read the paper through to get an overview making marks/symbols in the margin to specific points when needed, read through a second time providing written comments on the quality of writing, and while peer editing, engage in dialogue with the student whereby possibilities for modification, expansion and/or correction can be discussed in detail.

A total of twenty university students were recruited from two intermediate and two advanced English language classes at a private university in Dubai where the researcher works. The task chosen for this experiment involved three parts: pre-post surveys, writing exercise, and editing exercise. The pre-post surveys (Appendices A & B) explored attitudes towards peer or self editing and consisted of twelve statements about peer and self editing practices. Students checked whether or not they *strongly agreed*, *agreed*, *no opinion*, *disagreed*, or *strongly disagreed* with each one. The survey included eight positive statements such as 'I enjoy writing in English' and four negative statements such as 'I do not like my English essays to be evaluated'. A few statements differed slightly between peer and self surveys. For example, in the peer survey there was a statement 'I am embarrassed to volunteer comments in the writing class,' whereas in the self-survey the statement was 'I am embarrassed to try and correct my own writing'. In the writing exercise, the students wrote either a descriptive paragraph or an argumentative essay depending on their class level (intermediate/advanced). In the editing exercise, students were advised as to what corrective feedback meant and then given a handout with correction symbols and examples on how to use each symbol. They were also given another handout to answer questions about the format of the writing sample (Appendices C & D).

Each class level was randomly assigned to either peer or self editing. The experiment was divided over two weeks. In week one, the students were first given the pretest survey. Following the survey, students were asked to write either a descriptive paragraph (for the intermediate level), or an argumentative essay (for the advanced level). In week two, the classes were given either a tutorial on peer editing or self editing and then had to take part in the editing process of either their own work or a fellow student's work. Students were given a handout with questions to answer about the writing sample. At the end of the editing process, students were given a posttest survey with the same statements given prior to experiment implementation to see whether their perceptions and attitudes towards the editing process had changed.

Out of the twelve statements given in the pre-post survey, three positive and four negative statements were selected randomly for analysis. In each class, the responses were counted and tallied in each answer column. After the answers had been tallied, each answer choice was given a number weight. *Strongly agree* was given a weight of 5, *agree* 4, *no opinion* 3, *disagree* 2, and *strongly disagree* 1. Responses were added up for each statement and divided by the number of students to get a mean. The means between the three positive statements were added up together and then divided by three, and the four negative statements were done in the same way. The positive and negative statements were separated due to the fact that one would want a student to answer favorably on these questions and therefore the mean would be higher given the weight of the *agree* columns. On the negative statements, the weight of the *disagree* columns is lower which would mean if the student's perception of editing either self or peer is favorable, the mean would be lower. Therefore, high means are preferred for positive questions and low means for the negative questions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

This part of the paper presents the findings of this research study. Table 1 below, qualitatively speaking, does not show any vast differences between the groups or between the peer and self surveys. This could be due to the sample being small and the duration of the experiment only lasting two weeks. The exception is the unfavorable responses to the

negative statements in the peer group pre versus post survey. In the pre survey, students may have had a negative perception of their abilities as peer editors but by the post survey, gained more confidence in the editing practice.

Table 1: Peer & Self Group Means (Intermediate Level)

Editing Type	Positive Pre	Negative Pre	Positive Post	Negative Post
Peer	3.1	3.4	2.7	2.25
Self	3.3	2.7	3.4	2.6

Viewing Table 2 below, there was no recognizable difference present in this level. The mean numbers were also much closer together than the mean numbers for the intermediate level. The main exception was the difference between the pre and post negative statement responses in the self-group. The pre survey had a positive perception and the post survey had a more negative perception. It is possible that the students felt they had high abilities as self-editors and towards the end, became discouraged and decided they could not or did not like the editing process as much as they had thought in the pre survey. However, the peer group felt the opposite. There were a few more unfavorable responses in the negative statements in the pre survey than the post survey showing a slight shift in perception. Be that as it may, the difference is very small in comparison to the self-group.

Table 2: Peer & Self Group Means (Advanced Level)

Editing Type	Positive Pre	Negative Pre	Positive Post	Negative Post
Peer	3.7	3.6	3.8	3.3
Self	3.8	2.8	3.8	3.8

As far as the editing handout is concerned, students were only capable of correcting basic surface errors in both the intermediate and advanced levels. This finding is in line with the study of Al-Hazmi and Scholfield (2007). It was challenging for students to correct more than the basic punctuation or spelling errors. Students avoided corrective feedback on the format of the writing sample. This could be due to the short time given for the learning and implementation of the editing procedure.

CONCLUSION:

This study aimed to explore students' perceptions of peer and self

editing. Some previous studies indicate positive results from peer editing. Some other past studies reveal that peer editing is an improvement to self-editing, and some show that there is not much of a difference between peer and self editing. Addressing this issue, pre and post perception surveys were used with two English language proficiency levels. In both groups, there were only a few cases where a difference between peer and self-editing perceptions was apparent between pre and post surveys. What was interesting is that while the peer group in the intermediate level improved their positive perception on editing by the post survey, the self-group in the advanced level had decreased their positive perception as indicated by the post survey. This could be due to the level of English proficiency of the students and the size of the task of either editing a paragraph versus an essay.

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that peer and self-editing do not show many significant differences from each other. However, it is surmised that with a longer duration of experiment implementation and more exposure to the editing practice, the findings might be vastly different. A recommendation for further research within the same area is to use a larger sample size for a longer duration. Also, using a variety of writing tasks as well as exploring the actual editing practices of the students is to be encouraged.

To end with, augmenting the skill of writing within a foreign/second language context is demanding in a number of ways. As explained earlier, students may struggle with some issues like selecting proper words, using correct grammar, generating ideas about specific topics, and developing functional language skills such as proper natural language use in different social contexts. It is essential; therefore, to note the directions being undertaken by scholars as we look forward to a less compartmentalized academic world. Relating the discussion to the issues the current paper discusses in particular, it is the author's conviction that students need explicit instruction in both revising and editing strategies. Through guiding the editing process, teachers can ensure that students' paragraphs and essays reflect thoughtful revision. Additionally, since each learner is unique in his/her own learning styles, encouraging learners to devise their own strategies whilst performing tasks such as editing would inspire them to maximize their potential, hence yielding in effective learning outcomes.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Peer Editing Pre/Post Survey

Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. I feel confident writing in my native language.					
2. I enjoy writing in my native language.					
3. I feel confident writing in English.					
4. I enjoy writing in English.					
5. I enjoy discussing ideas with my classmate.					
6. I can express my ideas better orally in English than in writing.					
7. I understand written English well.					
8. I do not like rewriting my English essays.					
9. I do not like my English essays to be evaluated.					
10. I do not think that peer reviewing of essays is useful.					
11. I am embarrassed to volunteer comments in the writing class.					
12. I feel confident when asked to make suggestions about my peer's English work.					

Appendix B: Self-Editing Pre/Post Survey

Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. I feel confident writing in my native language.					
2. I enjoy writing in my native language.					
3. I feel confident writing in English.					
4. I enjoy writing in English.					
5. I enjoy editing my own work.					
6. I can express my ideas better orally in English than in writing.					
7. I understand written English well.					

8. I do not like rewriting my English essays.					
9. I do not like my English essays to be evaluated.					
10. I do not think that self reviewing of essays is useful.					
11. I am embarrassed to try and correct my own writing.					
12. I feel confident when I make corrections on my written work in English.					

Appendix C: Intermediate Students (Revision Checklist)

1. Is there any part of the paragraph that you find confusing?

2. Does the paragraph have a clear conclusion? Explain.

Use the symbols below to edit the paragraph appropriately.

Symbol	Example
C=Capitalization	Dubai
O=Organization	Sentences out of order
P=Punctuation	She went to the, park,
SP=Spelling	He livess in Abu Dhabi.
SS=Sentence Structure	Apples he ate in the morning.
VT=Verb Tense	I arrive yesterday.
WC=Wrong Choice	The sun sits in the west.
WO=Wrong Word	She interpreted the chairman during the meeting many times.
WVO=Wrong Word Order	The brown large building caught on fire.
A=Add a word/phrase	She playing the guitar now.
?=Meaningless	Into out the door ran she went.
/=Unnecessary Word	The children they went to school.

Appendix D: Advanced Students (Revision Checklist)

1. What is the thesis statement of this essay?

2. What are the main ideas of each body paragraph?

3. Are these main ideas relevant to the topic of the essay? Underline the ideas that you think are irrelevant.

4. Are the examples in each paragraph relevant to the main ideas? Explain your answer.

5. Are the main ideas coherently arranged?

6. Is there any part of this essay which you find confusing?

7. Does the essay have a clear conclusion?

8. What will you remember the most about this essay? Why?

Use the symbols below to edit the essay appropriately.

Symbol	Example
C=Capitalization	Dubai
O=Organization	Sentences out of order
P=Punctuation	She went to the, park,

SP=Spelling	He livess in New York.
SS=Sentence Structure	Apples he ate in the morning.
VT=Verb Tense	I arrive yesterday.
WC=Wrong Choice	The sun sits in the west.
WO=Wrong Word	She interpreted the chairman during the meeting many times.
WWO=Wrong Word Order	The brown large building caught on fire.
A=Add a word/phrase	She playing the guitar now.
?=Meaningless	Into out the door ran she went.
/=Unnecessary Word	The children they went to school.

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