

*Full Length Research Paper*

# **An investigation of university EFL students' attitudes toward peer and teacher feedback**

**Napaporn Srichanyachon**

Bangkok University, Thailand. E-mail: [napaporn.s@bu.ac.th](mailto:napaporn.s@bu.ac.th).

Accepted 6 August, 2012

**This study aims to investigate university EFL students' attitudes toward two types of revision methods, namely, peer feedback and teacher feedback. Data are collected using students' self-report questionnaires and face-to-face semi-structured interviews. The samples are 174 undergraduate students enrolled in Fundamental English course. Results show that the students have a neutral attitude toward the two revision methods. Most of the respondents choose teacher feedback as a more effective and preferable revision method. However, peer review should be introduced as an important complementary source of feedback in EFL classrooms because students will receive other benefits such as enhancing their awareness of what makes writing successful, developing critical thinking and encouraging more responsibility for their writing.**

**Key words:** English as foreign language (EFL) students' attitudes, peer feedback, teacher feedback, writing.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Feedback plays a central role in writing development. Previous research on student views of feedback has consistently shown that L2 students used more teacher than peer feedback in their redrafts (Zhang, 1995; Paulus, 1999; Tsui and Ng, 2000; Yang et al., 2006). L2 students believe that teacher feedback is more accurate and more trustworthy than peer feedback because teachers possess a better knowledge of English language than peer learners. However, Saito and Fujita (2004) investigated feedback provided to Japanese university EFL students and found that teachers and peers rated students' writing in broadly similar ways. In addition, a number of comparative studies conducted on the relative effectiveness of teacher and peer comments revealed the beneficial effects of peer comments in L2 writing. Tsui and Ng (2000) looked at the impact of peer and teacher feedback on the writing of secondary school EFL students in Hong Kong. All students addressed a higher percentage of teacher feedback than peer feedback. They found that students perceived teacher comments as more useful than peer comments. However, some students reported that they benefited from reading other students' work and suggested that using peer feedback may contribute to the development of learner autonomy.

Even if peer feedback has advantages, it can only be

introduced if students find it acceptable. Hu's (2005) study of Chinese students studying English in Singapore found that students welcomed peer feedback. However, L2 students from cultures that see the teacher as the only source of authority may consider their peers not knowledgeable enough to make sensible comments. Nelson and Murphy (1993) found that peer review worked less well with Chinese speaking students because Chinese speaking students were less likely to accept the right of other non-native speakers of English to judge their writing. Leki (1990) identified several problems with peer comments: students tend to respond to surface errors instead of semantic or textual ones, give advice that does not facilitate revision, and have difficulties deciding whether their peer's comments are valid. Such relations may make peer feedback particularly problematic in Thailand.

The literature suggests that teacher feedback is more valued than peer feedback, but there can be learning benefits for the peer assessor, arising from seeing other examples or approaches. While students believe peer and teacher feedback can be of use, attitudes are variable. Accordingly, the present study investigates whether peer and teacher feedback might be useful for developing writing proficiency based on Thai EFL learners' perception. The research questions was add-

ressed as follows:

1. To what extent do the students find the peer and teacher comments useful?
2. Which type of revision method do the students prefer?

## Purposes of the study

The objectives of this study were:

1. To study students' attitudes toward peer and teacher feedback.
2. To compare students' attitudes toward the two revision methods.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Participants

This study investigated seven classes taught by the teacher researcher. The participants in this study were 174 Bangkok University students enrolled in Fundamental English course, which lasted fourteen weeks, two 70 min periods each week. These students shared the similar educational backgrounds of studying English as their foreign language. For the study, each class was given parallel writing instruction and involved in a writing assignment. The students were received one hour of instruction in writing in English per week during a 14 week writing course and asked to participate in an in-class writing task. Peer feedback was provided after the task. The students were asked to read and offer written feedback on their partners' writing. Time allowed for this task was 30 min. Feedback consisted of symbols and marks in the margin, underlines of problems, corrections, and detailed text-specific comments and suggestions which could trigger revisions. Then, the teacher allocated 30 min for the students to discuss the provided feedback. After that, students' first drafts which contained peer written feedback were collected. After the peer feedback session, teacher feedback was provided outside class. The teacher wrote feedback on the scripts and provided oral feedback on matters of general interest.

### Research instruments

In response to the research objective regarding students' attitudes, data were elicited through the written questionnaire and the interview. The questionnaire was administered at the end of the feedback tasks. As the first half of the questionnaire, 5-point Likert-scale questions that ranged from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" were utilized. The students' responses to the questionnaires were coded and keyed into the SPSS/Window 12 for statistical analysis. The students' responses to two open-ended questions were the qualitative data. This part provided space for students to contribute individual points of view and thus reveal a wide range of participants' attitudes.

### Data analysis

The acceptable statistical significance level was set at alpha ( $\alpha$ ) < 0.05. After the receipt of the completed questionnaires, the data were statistically analyzed by using SPSS/Window 12 through the following steps:

1. The data of attitudes toward peer and teacher feedback were used to calculate for average means.
2. The means of attitudes toward peer and teacher feedback were divided into three levels and interpreted in the form of range based on the criterion of  $\bar{X} \pm 0.5SD$ .

a) Three categories of the students' attitudes toward peer feedback:

$3.31 \pm (0.5) (0.67) \rightarrow 3.31 \pm 0.33$

3.65 – 5.00 High/positive  
2.98 – 3.64 Moderate/neutral  
1.00 – 2.97 Low/negative

b) Three categories of the students' attitudes toward teacher feedback:

$4.39 \pm (0.5) (0.45) \rightarrow 4.39 \pm 0.22$

4.62 – 5.00 High/positive  
4.17 – 4.61 Moderate/neutral  
1.00 – 4.16 Low/negative

3. The data from open-ended questions concerning students' attitudes toward peer and teacher feedback were analyzed through percentage and frequency distribution.

4. Semi-structured interviews were carried out at the end of the study to capture the factors that affected students' decision-making processes of using peer and teacher feedback in their redrafts. Eighteen volunteer students (10% of the participants) were interviewed. The interviews were submitted to qualitative analysis.

## RESULTS

### Level of attitudes toward peer and teacher feedback

The average means of the attitudes toward peer and teacher feedback were used to find appropriate mean range based on the criterion of  $\bar{X} \pm 0.5SD$ . The data revealed that the level of attitudes toward teacher feedback (4.39) was higher than that of attitudes toward peer feedback (3.31). This means the students tended to have more positive attitudes toward teacher feedback. The results were presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1 revealed that the level of attitudes toward peer feedback in general was moderate ( $\bar{X} = 3.31$ ). Among five items, the highest means were items number 1, 2, 5 and 3 respectively ( $\bar{X} = 3.45, 3.36, 3.30, 3.26$ ). The lowest mean was item no. 4 ( $\bar{X} = 3.20$ ). All of them were rated at a moderate level. Table 2 revealed that the level of attitudes toward teacher feedback in general was moderate ( $\bar{X} = 4.39$ ). Among five items, the highest mean falling on item number 4 was at a high level ( $\bar{X} = 4.84$ ). Items number 2, 1 and 5 ( $\bar{X} = 4.61, 4.28, 4.23$ ) were at a moderate level. The lowest mean falling on item number 3 was at a low level ( $\bar{X} = 3.99$ ).

**Table 1.** Mean and standard deviation of students' attitudes toward peer feedback.

Attitude toward students' peer feedback	Scale					Mean	S.D.	Level
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree			
1. I like have my writing reviewed by my partner	18 (10.3)	64 (36.8)	73 (42.0)	17 (9.8)	2 (1.1)	3.45	0.85	Moderate
2. I benefit from my partner's feedback	15 (8.6)	59 (33.9)	76 (43.7)	21 (12.1)	3 (1.7)	3.36	0.87	Moderate
3. Peer review increased my learning motivation	11 (6.3)	57 (32.8)	76 (43.7)	27 (15.5)	3 (1.7)	3.26	0.86	Moderate
4. My partner's feedback was appropriate	8 (4.6)	46 (26.4)	97 (55.7)	18 (10.3)	5 (2.9)	3.20	0.80	Moderate
5. I will need to do peer review	16 (9.2)	54 (31.0)	77 (44.3)	21 (12.1)	6 (3.4)	3.30	0.92	Moderate
Total	(100.0)	(100.0)	(100.0)	(100.0)	(100.0)	3.31	0.67	Moderate

**Table 2.** Mean and standard deviation of students' attitudes toward teacher feedback.

Attitude toward teacher feedback	Scale					Mean	S.D.	Level
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree			
1. I like to have my writing reviewed by my teacher	81 (46.6)	67 (38.5)	20 (11.5)	5 (2.9)	10 (0.6)	4.28	0.82	Moderate
2. I benefit from my teacher feedback	115 (66.1)	53 (30.5)	5 (2.9)	0 (0.0)	1 (0.6)	4.61	0.60	Moderate
3. Teacher feedback increased my learning motivation	50 (28.7)	75 (43.1)	46 (26.4)	3 (1.7)	0 (0.0)	3.99	0.79	Negative
4. My teacher feedback was appropriate	149 (85.6)	24 (13.8)	0 (0.0)	1 (0.6)	0 (0.0)	4.84	0.41	Positive
5. I will need to have teacher feedback	72 (41.4)	77 (44.3)	20 (11.5)	3 (1.7)	2 (1.1)	4.23	0.81	Moderate
Total	(100.0)	(100.0)	(100.0)	(100.0)	(100.0)	4.39	0.45	Moderate

### A comparison between peer and teacher feedback

The learners' affective reactions toward the two different revision methods they engaged in were analyzed by the responses to two questions in the questionnaire:

1. Which revision method is more effective? Why?
2. Which revision method do you need to help improving your next writing assignment? Why?

Most of the respondents (94.8%) thought that teach-

er feedback was more effective than peer feedback. When they were asked to choose the method they would prefer to use in the future, the number of students who chose teacher feedback (68.4%) was higher than the number of students who chose peer feedback (31.6%) (Table 3). The interview results indicate that the major disadvantages of peer feedback included lack of language knowledge and confidence in giving comments and suggestions. According to the students, teacher feedback was regarded as the most successful revision method because they had had confidence in the teacher's knowledge and skill

in English. In addition, they wanted to make use of teacher comments to improve their future compositions. They believed that they could gain more benefits from teacher feedback. However, some students were stressed out about teachers' comments and preferred discussing problems with their classmates to asking the teacher. Peer feedback had a beneficial effect on writing development. The students reported that they got more idea, inspiration and motivation for improving their own writing skills as they read other students' work. Some of them suggested that peer feedback should be used as a means of aiding teacher

**Table 3.** Number and percentage of the respondents concerning peer and teacher feedback.

Revision method	More effective method		More preferable method	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
1. Peer feedback	9	5.2	55	31.6
2. Teacher feedback	165	94.8	119	68.4
Total	174	100	174	100

**Table 4.** Results of the post-task interview.

Revision method	Advantage	Disadvantage
Peer feedback	1. They feel free to discuss with their partners because this method seems more informal than teacher feedback.	1. They are not sure whether their partners' editing is correct.
	2. Peer review activities give students a chance to make friends with their classmates.	2. They feel that not all classmates are pleased to help them improve their papers.
	3. They have a chance to see new ideas and compare their works with their partners' papers.	3. They don't have confidence to edit sentences because their grammatical knowledge is not good.
	4. They can estimate their own knowledge level when they exchange ideas with other classmates.	4. They are afraid of giving inappropriate comments on their partners' papers.
	5. By comparing the quality of their papers and their partners' papers, they want to write better.	
	6. Peer review can reduce teachers' workload.	
	7. They see that peer review can be easily done anywhere and anytime.	
Teacher feedback	1. They can trust teachers' comments.	1. Sometimes they feel a bit stressed when they receive comments from the teacher.
	2. Teachers can give them clear explanations about grammatical items.	2. They do not dare to ask the teacher because they don't want to make themselves look stupid.
	3. They can deepen their knowledge and proficiency in English and learn to avoid common errors.	
	4. They get several ways to improve their writing.	
	5. They become more active to write and edit their papers.	
	6. The process of teacher feedback takes less time than the peer review process because teachers have more language proficiency than their partners.	

revision because it could help to reduce teachers' workload (Table 4).

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study attempts to compare EFL students' attitudes to-

ward peer and teacher feedback and to determine if one method is more effective than the other method based on the students' attitudes. The findings can be used as a guideline for EFL providers. Some significant implications for the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language for university students may be drawn as

follows:

### **Teacher feedback with a model of good writing should be given to EFL students**

The findings of this study demonstrate that the students preferred to receive teacher feedback because they could be sure that their mistakes in writing would be properly and fully corrected. EFL students may feel frustrated if they do not have feedback that helps them improve their papers. So, teachers have to spend the time and energy to offer students thorough and detailed feedback on the substance of their papers. However, if they correct every mistake of every student, they may not have time to teach their lessons. To reduce teachers' workload, teachers should model good writing behaviors for the students to follow. Give the students some helpful pointers so that they can catch and reduce their own errors and mistakes during the writing process.

### **Peer feedback can contribute to writing development**

The qualitative data supported the information elicited through the quantitative data that the students tended to have more positive attitudes toward teacher feedback. They relied on teacher feedback because of its accuracy. However, teachers need to be careful in employing teacher feedback in their classroom because some students may dislike its rigid format and feel embarrassed when receiving negative comments from their teachers. As evident in this study, the students welcomed peer

feedback. EFL students can get a lot of benefits from this method such as learning from other perspectives, seeing their own weaknesses, and having more motivation to improve their writing ability. Therefore, teachers in EFL context may find that peer review is a great way to relax students in a revision process.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

This research was sponsored by Bangkok University.

### **REFERENCES**

- Hu G (2005). Using peer review with Chinese ESL student writers. *Lang. Teach. Res.* 9(3):321-342.
- Leki I (1990). Coaching from the margins: Issues in written response. In B. Kroll (Ed.). *Second Language Writing: Research Insights for the Classroom* Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. pp. 57-68.
- Nelson G, Murphy J (1993). Peer response groups: Do L2 writers use peer comments in revising their drafts? *TESOL Q.* 27(1):135-142.
- Paulus TM (1999). The effect of peer and teacher feedback on student writing. *J. Second Lang. Writ.* 8(3):265-289.
- Saito H, Fujita T (2004). Characteristics and user acceptance of peer rating in EFL writing classrooms. *Lang. Teach. Res.* 8(1):31-54.
- Tsui M, Ng M (2000). Do secondary L2 writers benefit from peer comments? *J. Second Lang. Writ.* 9(2):147-170.
- Yang M, Badger R, Yu Z (2006). A comparative study of peer and teacher feedback in a Chinese EFL writing class. *J. Second Lang. Writ.* 15(3):179-200.
- Zhang S (1995). Re-examining the affective advantage of peer feedback in the ESL writing class. *J. Second Lang. Writ.* 4(3):209-222.