

# Peer Review versus Teacher Feedback in Process Writing: How Effective?

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**Abstract:** *The purpose of this research is to investigate the impact of peer review in comparison to that of teacher feedback on students' writing performance in an EFL academic writing context. The study also aims to suggest a possible way to alleviate the workload of writing instructors. The participants were 46 English majors at a state university in Ankara, Turkey. The data was collected from peer responses to first drafts, revisions, and comments from the instructor on the last drafts and student reflections in journals. The revisions in essays from two groups of freshmen ELT students were evaluated over nine weeks in five writing assignments. One group received training on effective peer feedback. They worked through peer revision when composing and received the teacher's comments only on their final drafts. The other group received teacher feedback over drafts. Frequency counts showed that both groups improved writing quality over the weeks. The peer reviewing group made many surface level changes and gradually increased deep-level changes. Comments in the reflection journals revealed a positive attitude. The performances of both groups were surprisingly similar. In terms of teacher workload, however, the peer-reviewing group relieved the teacher a great deal whereas she was overburdened with the other group.*

## **Introduction**

Writing is both a process and product. It is not only a physical act but also "... the mental work of inventing ideas, thinking about how to express

them, and organizing them into statements and paragraphs that will be clearer to the reader" (Sokolik, 2003:88). It is a process in which one generates, organizes, and communicates one's thoughts to the reader. Successful writing requires a series of interactive steps involving prewriting, organising, drafting, revising editing, and publishing. In other words, in the process approach to writing, writing instruction includes "the entire process of writing- invention, drafting, feedback, and revision- and not just the product" (Sokolik, 2003:89). When teaching learners how to write in L2, the language teacher acts as a facilitator, guide, feedback provider, and evaluator when students move along these steps. The learners' task is not an easy one because they have to deal with the text at surface level (e.g. grammar, spelling, punctuation and word choice) and at the deep level (e.g. planning and organisation, adequate support). The teacher's response to a piece of writing is an orthodox method practiced in most L2 writing classes to improve text quality, which, in turn, can leave teachers with too much paper work to evaluate. Since the 1980s, many studies have been conducted to find effective writing strategies to complement and support teacher feedback.

Seow (2002) points out that the teacher's response to students' writing is a significant technique in developing the writing process. However, it is often the case that the teacher responds, evaluates and edits the students' paper at the last stage. This might lead to failure in writing programs because students may have the

impression that nothing more needs to be done with their texts. In addition, the feedback from the teacher might deprive the student writer of the initiative of adopting or declining revisions because the teacher is seen as the “expert” and student concerns about “grading” strengthen the authority of the teacher.

Peer review, on the other hand, can help because it gives student writers more options to consider when they revise their papers. Kroll (2001:228) defines peer revision as “simply putting students together in groups and then having each student read and react to the strengths and weaknesses of each other’s papers”. The purpose of peer review is to generate and receive different points of view and thus raise awareness of rhetorical modes and the composing process. Peer review is meant to complement teacher feedback rather than preclude it. With training, guidance and practice, students can learn to be more specific and helpful in their responses to a peer’s essay. It is a powerful way for ESL/ EFL students to improve their writing (Min, 2006).

Peer revision has received increasing attention as a complementary and effective source of feedback in the L2 writing classroom (Villamil and Guerrero, 1998; Tsui and Ng, 2000). Several studies have focused on student roles, perceptions and affective benefits regarding peer review and successful strategies for peer revision (Stanley, 1992; Mangelsdorf and Schlumberger, 1992; Mendonça and Johnson, 1994; Hu, 2005; Min, 2006; Nelson and Schunn, 2009). Many studies have concentrated on final drafts to see the extent and types of revisions and on student-talk to get insight into the social dynamics of student interactions during reviews (Nelson and Murphy, 1993; Villamil and Guerrero, 1996). Research also indicates that peer review training helps student writers to shift from a prescriptive stance to a more collaborative one after training (Min, 2008). In their

study comparing benefits of peer review to the reviewer and the receiver, Lundstrom and Baker (2009) reported that the reviewing partners improved their writing more than their receiving counterparts.

Supporters of Communicative Language Learning and collaborative learning advocate using peer review in L2 writing classrooms because it provides immediate feedback from a real audience and encourages learner autonomy. While student writers are co-constructing the meaning, the atmosphere is more student-directed. Moreover, peer feedback develops critical reflection in writing. Supporting the view that learning is socially constructed, peer review lends a Vygotskian perspective to the learning of writing- it helps develop reader awareness in student writers (Carson and Nelson, 1994; Mendonça and Johnson, 1994; Berg, 1999; Hyland, 2003; Tsui and Ng, 2000).

The process-oriented approach to writing sees writing as a nonlinear and recursive process and involves giving feedback on multiple drafts. The feedback may come from different sources: the self, the peer or the teacher. Many studies have focused on the effectiveness of different sources of feedback. There was no consensus among researchers on the most efficient source of feedback. Leki (1990) reported that ESL students expected and valued their teachers’ feedback. Patridge (1983) saw greater improvements with the group that received teachers’ feedback. Zhang (1995) compared different sources of feedback and found that teachers’ feedback had an affective advantage over peer feedback, self-feedback, and other sources of feedback. Hedgcock and Leftwits (1992), on the other hand, found that students who received oral feedback from peers achieved significantly higher than those who received teacher’s feedback at the end of the term. Berger (1990) in his study with two freshman

college writing classes, valued peer feedback over self-feedback.

The debate between Truscott and Ferris displays the controversy as to the effectiveness of corrective feedback. Truscott (1996, 2007) argues that error correction in writing classes is not only ineffective but also harmful and should be abandoned. He points out that there is scant evidence for the effectiveness of corrective feedback in research and that language acquisition is a gradual process and transfer of grammatical knowledge from the teacher does not offer much for the process. Instead, Truscott suggests the time be spent more productively on other activities. Ferris (1999, 2003), as a proponent of error correction, rebutted Truscott's criticism by drawing attention to the research findings that do support corrective feedback on writing performance (Fathman and Whalley, 1990; Ferris, 2003; Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener and Knoch, 2008). Ferris also points out the methodological flaws in the design and analysis of the published studies and argues that it is too early to have a conclusive answer to the question. Ferris (1999) also emphasizes the importance of correction for both students and teachers by pointing out that students believe it helps them improve their writing. It appears that learners expect their teachers to provide them with feedback on their written work (Hedgecock and Lefhowitz, 1994; Lee, 1997; Schulz, 1996).

Given the conflicting research findings, it appears that there is a call for more research into the efficacy of corrective feedback and longitudinal studies investigating the effects of feedback on learners' writing performance. One point of consideration worth mentioning here is that the studies mentioned above investigated feedback in an ESL context. There is a need for research in the EFL context. Apparently, peer review work remains a controversy

in L2 writing instruction and it might not be widely endorsed by L2 teachers. Despite the workload, many writing instructors may tend to provide support, guidance and constructive criticism over drafts to improve the learners' writing performance. The question of whether peer review would be a worthwhile alternative to teacher feedback during the composing process led us to undertake this exploratory study. Furthermore, the criticism, mainly by Truscott, concentrates on the effect of corrective feedback on accuracy. However, this study further investigates the effect of peer review both on accuracy and content of the texts.

### **Problem**

This study took place in academic writing classes in which a process-oriented approach is favoured. The writing instructors believed that it was their duty to first model, then support and guide the learners from the first to the final draft to help improve their writing performances. However, in faculty meetings, the instructors often complained about having to deal with two or more writing classes and the many papers they had to respond to every week. In turn, they tended to reduce the amount of writing the students were required to do. As to peer review, some writing instructors were skeptical about the efficacy of peer review and said that the students might not be able to go beyond surface level problems.

Learner autonomy is a popular and favourable concept and some studies such as those by Lundstrom and Baker (2009), Min, (2006) that support the benefits of peer review provide the rationale for this study. Though the teacher, as a more knowledgeable other, can effectively tutor and provide support and guidance during the composing process, being the sole and constant feedback provider might be too time-consuming for the teacher.

Therefore, peer review appears to be an alternative that is worthwhile to investigate. In that respect, this study is reflective teacher-directed research to investigate the effectiveness of peer review in comparison to the instructor's responses. It also aims to find out if peer review would relieve the burden on the writing instructor.

The following questions guided this research:

- Will students be able to make helpful comments when they respond to a peer's paper?
- Will the peer reviewing group improve more in comparison to the group that received teacher feedback during composing?
- Will the students be able to make suggestions as to the content of the written work rather than solely focusing on surface level problems?
- Will peer review ease the workload of the teacher?
- What are the students' perceptions about the usefulness of peer review?

### **Participants**

The participants in the study were 46 upper intermediate English majors enrolled in freshmen Academic Writing classes. Their ages ranged from 18 to 20. There were 10 male and 36 female students. This female-to-male ratio is consistent with the department's student body. The participants formed two groups of 23. One group worked through peer revision and the other with teacher feedback when composing their work.

### **Assumptions and Limitations**

This study is conducted with two freshmen writing classes in an EFL context. In a larger group and a longer study, the findings might be different. More research involving different subjects and duration might be conducted for

comparing and contrasting the findings of the study.

The study lacks a group that received feedback neither from the peers nor the instructor because as an educational institution, we hold a process approach to writing. Therefore, each and every group receives teacher guidance and indirect feedback via individual or group conferencing and/or written comments during their composing process.

### **Data Collection**

The data was obtained from frequency counts from 230 texts written by two groups of students, namely, the group studying with peer review and that with teacher feedback during the composing processes. Peer responses to first drafts, revisions and comments from the instructor on the last drafts were counted. The reflection journals kept by the students were also analyzed and transcribed to obtain student reflections on the peer review process

### **Procedure**

#### ***Treatment***

The two groups involved in the study received writing instruction in rhetorical modes and performed five writing assignments (narrative, argumentative, cause-effect, process and comparison) over 9 weeks. The experimental group (23 upper intermediate EFL writers) were coached for 2 weeks to provide feedback suggesting revisions both for the form and for the content of their peer's writing. The instructor used samples of students' writing from the previous year to show how to provide effective feedback from the first draft to the final draft. Four-hour training was conducted on actual student papers from the previous year. A whole-class session was conducted on how to suggest improvements based on the rough drafts and improved versions. The student writers were also given a checklist to help them with their review (see Appendix 1).

Throughout the five writing assignments, the peer reviewing group provided one another with feedback on first drafts and received teacher response only on the final draft. The reviewers made final comments on the texts as well. Additionally, they were encouraged to keep reflection journals as to the effectiveness of the study. Finally, data from student reflections on peer review from journals were also analyzed. Meanwhile, the other group received teacher feedback to improve their first drafts into the final versions. To be more precise, the teacher reviewed the first drafts and provided indirect feedback, suggestions for improvement and general and positive comments on the overall paper during individual conferences.

### ***Faigley and Witte's Taxonomy for Revisions***

Each week the revisions suggested and incorporated into the final drafts were analyzed according to Faigley and Witte's (1981) taxonomy (see Appendix 2). The revisions were counted under two main categories: surface-level and deep-level changes. Surface revisions are modifications concerning the text surface, such as spelling, tense modifications and rewriting a word or a part for better readability. Deep or text-based changes involve completeness or irrelevance and reorganisation and transformation of words, phrases, sentences or longer text segments. These modify the text meaning and comprise additions, deletions, shifting or rearrangements. The researcher also looked for and counted any incorrect changes, that is, false repairs made based on the peer's feedback. The peers were also encouraged to make final comments on the texts, although that was not part of the taxonomy.

### **Analysis of Revisions**

Two categories of revisions were

marked as described above. So as to give deeper insight into the types of revisions suggested, some examples taken from written work of participants in the study are given below:

#### **Surface Level Revisions**

These included all revisions regarding spelling, punctuation, format and problems of verb tense, agreement, run-on sentences, sentence fragments, wrong use of collocations, parts that need rewording for better expression, omission of unnecessary parts and so on. The following are examples of surface level revisions and comments in brackets were made by the reviewing peers:

I enjoyed very much (*you need an object here*).

I had a little make-up before I went out. (*put on make-up*)

My first kindergarten experience was so painful that I couldn't forget it. (*awful???*)

Opposites scored a goal. (*the rival team??*)

Eventually I succeeded. (*you succeeded in it*)

They were waiting a baby. (*expecting???*)

I shared the room with three people except me. (*except for*)

I was scared that maybe I'm going to fail the exam. (*...that I might fail...*)

I had a stress about the school and exams. (*"..had some concerns about.." is better, I think*)

We can use fewer plastic bags as they cannot be recycled they are harmful for the environment. (*run-on sentence*)

It is widely known that the more we use electricity fruitlessly, the more we pollute the environment. (*misplaced word - the more fruitlessly we use....*)

When we were studying for the exam, you know, we had hundreds of tests. (*"you know" sounds too informal*)

**Deep Level Revisions**

These were minor revisions in meaning and macrostructural changes such as deletion of irrelevant sentences, joining sentences for better expression, pointing out incomplete ideas needing more support, reordering sentences or longer text segments. The following comments made by reviewers are examples of deep level revisions:

When I was little, I used to stay with my grandma when my mother was at work. *(this thesis statement is just a statement of a fact. It should express your opinion or feeling etc; consider revising).*

Everybody believes that .... *(a different sentence head would be better- It's a widely held opinion that....).*

*(the body paragraphs are not complete. Please give more information about your personal idea about the city and its people).*

*(I think you can change the places of some sentences. It's a bit confusing this way).*

*(The sentences are very simple. I think you could combine them with some linking words).*

*(It started well but then in the body part there are needless sentences and it is disturbing. I got distracted. They should be deleted).*

*(The concluding paragraph is not*

*appropriate because there is another topic that you haven't mentioned in the text before).*

*(If I were you, I'd explain in detail what exactly caused the difference).*

*(You end sentences abruptly. Then you start with a new idea. Appropriate linking words aren't used).*

**False repairs:** These were the wrong suggestions made by the reviewers. For example:

Whenever I think about that day, I have a smile on my face. *(I think you should say "I feel a smile on my face")*

It's not too late to save the environment like many people. *(... as many people)*

I was taken to the hospital. Fortunately, there wasn't any deficit about me. *(there wasn't any wrong about me)*

**Holistic comments:** These included final comments and/or encouraging remarks about the content or organisation of overall text. For example: *(Clear presentation of ideas; the argument can be followed easily).*

*(The introductory paragraph is so dull. It doesn't catch my attention to read more. But there isn't any irrelevant ideas. On the whole, the text is consistent and complete).*

*(I liked the introduction; it was touching. You provided adequate examples. But what I liked most is the idioms you used: ..was completely green; didn't have the foggiest idea; in a breezy manner etc. ☺).*

**Results**

**Table 1.**

*Number of Total Corrections Made in Both Groups throughout Five Assignments*

Of 1,235 corrections		Total		
<b>Group 1</b>	<b>Peer</b>	359	<b>S*</b>	286
			<b>D*</b>	73
	<b>Instructor</b>	268	<b>S</b>	140
			<b>D</b>	128
<b>Group 2</b>	<b>Instructor</b>	608	<b>S</b>	418
			<b>D</b>	190

\*S Refers to Surface Level Changes and \*D Refers to Deep Level Changes according to Faigley and Witte's (1981) Taxonomy

There were a total of 1,235 corrections on 230 texts over the five assignments. Of these, 627 corrections were made in the peer reviewing group (Group 1), 359 of which were made by the peers and the remaining 268 by the instructor. As to the other group, who received the instructors comments on their earlier drafts and final drafts (Group 2), all of the 608 corrections were made by

the instructor. The groups displayed similar performances throughout the study. As to false repairs, the researcher was happy to find out that the number of false repairs was very low. Of the 627 corrections made by the peers, only 24 (3.8%) were misleading. It encouraging that only half of these false repairs were carried over to the final draft.

**Table 2.**

*Distribution of Types of Revisions with Reference to Faigley and Witte’s Taxonomy in the Experimental Group*

Group 1	Surface level revisions (n)		Deep level revisions (n)	
	Formal changes (conventional editing revisions)	Preserving meaning changes (paraphrasing)	Microstructural changes (minor revisions)	Macrostructural revisions (major revisions)
Peer	94	192	60	13
Instructor	13	127	73	55

Whether or not the students would be able to suggest deep level revisions was a matter of concern for some of the writing instructors. As Table 2 shows above, the students in the peer-reviewing group were

able to make comments about deep level revisions as well. The researcher hopes that this finding will relieve doubtful instructors.

**Table 3.**

*The Distribution of Corrections in terms of Deep and Surface-Level over Five Assignments*

Group 1	Peer	S*	1st assignment	2nd assignment	3rd assignment	4th assignment	5th assignment	Total
			D*					
Group 1	Instructor	S	31	40	22	26	22	140
		D	34	32	21	23	17	128
Group 2	Instructor	S	126	105	71	67	49	418
		D	48	46	31	40	25	190

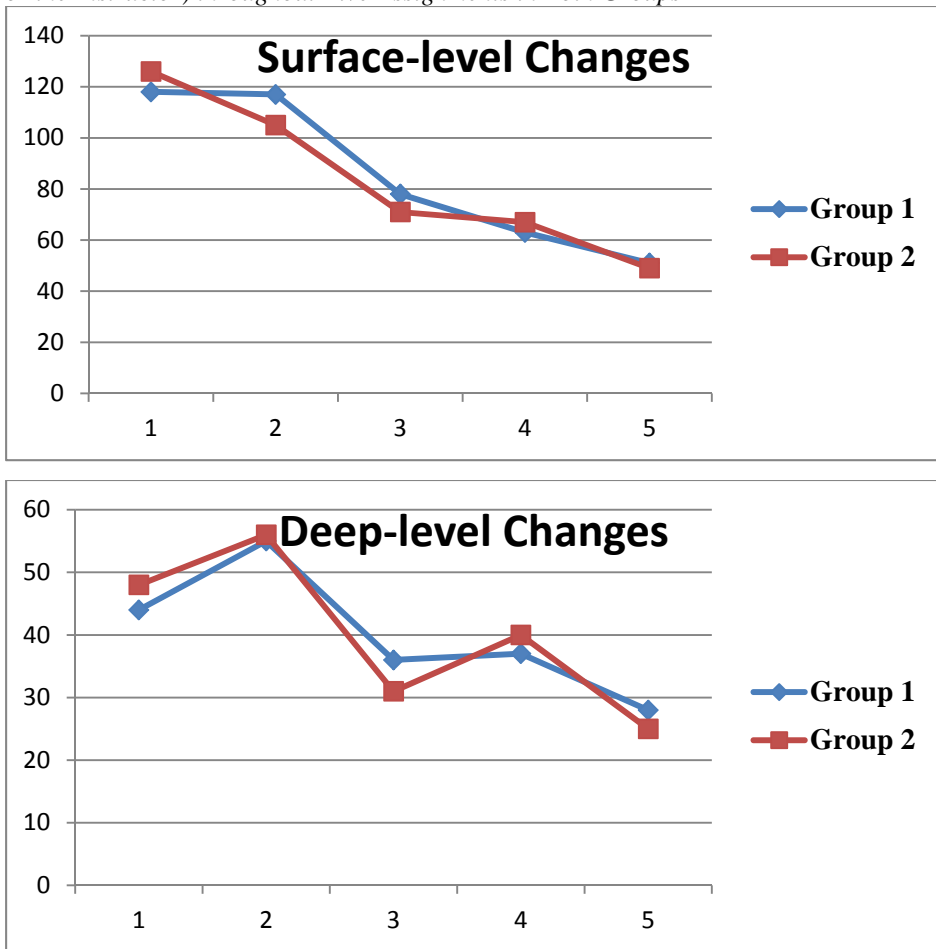
Table 3 shows surface-level and deep-level changes and suggestions made throughout five assignments in both groups. Of all corrections, 68.34% were surface-level changes and 31.66% were deep-level changes. The experimental group made 627 changes (50.77%) whereas the control group made 608 changes (49.23%). The difference between the groups was only 1.54%. In other words, both groups showed a very

similar performance throughout the study. The table below clearly illustrates the similar performances of both groups in terms of surface-level and deep-level changes throughout the study.

Table 4. Surface-level and Deep-level changes from different sources of feedback (the peer or the instructor) throughout five assignments in both groups.

**Table 4.**

*Surface-Level and Deep-Level Changes from Different Sources of Feedback (The Peer or the Instructor) throughout Five Assignments in Both Groups*



As seen above, *source of feedback* as a variable appears to have had almost no

effect on the student writers performance. In both groups, the number of surface



level changes decreased over the five assignments. The student writers made progressively fewer mistakes in the following weeks of the study in both groups. As to deep level changes, no matter who the source of feedback was,

both groups displayed a similar performance throughout the study. In fact, the researcher was really surprised to see the striking likeness in both groups.

**Table 5.**

*Surface-Level Changes by Peers and the Instructor in the Experimental Group (Group 1)*

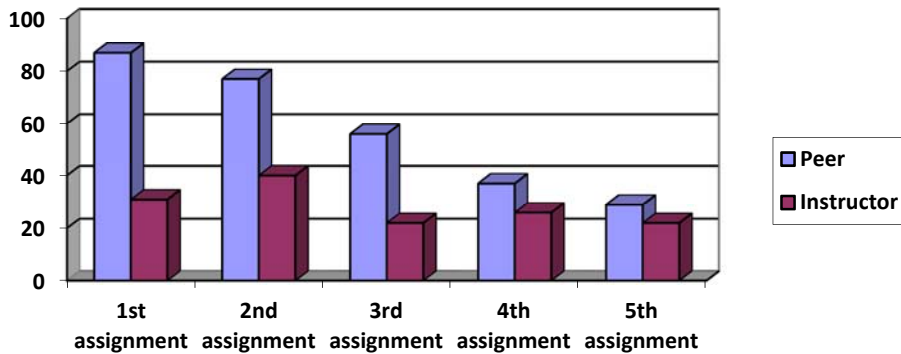


Table 5 depicts surface-level changes initiated by peers and the instructor. It appears that many of the surface-level changes were made by peers in the earlier drafts and much fewer were made by the

instructor. The students also seem to have improved their writing in terms of surface-level concerns because they needed much fewer corrections towards the last week.

**Table 6.**

*Deep-Level Changes by Peers and the Instructor in the Experimental Group (Group 1)*

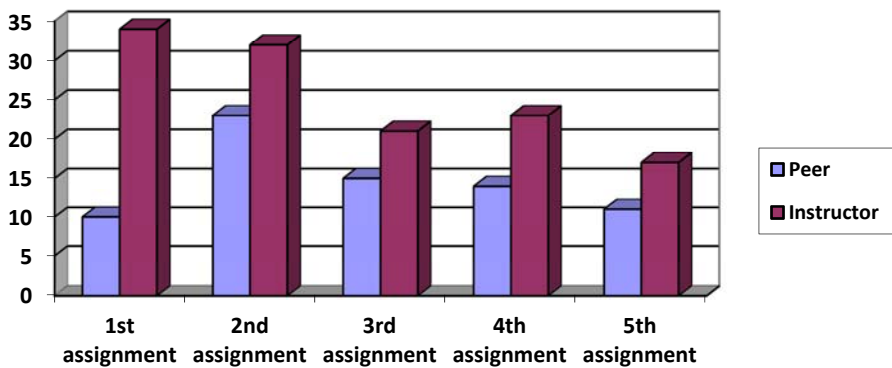


Table 6 illustrates a different profile than Table 5 does. Many of the deep-level

changes were made by the instructor. However, though with fewer revisions,

the peers also contributed to each other’s texts. In general, the student writers improved their texts in terms of content as

well because they needed fewer suggestions or corrections towards the end of the study than earlier in the study.

**Table 7.**

*Ratio of Total Corrections by Peers and the Instructor in the Experimental Group*

Group 1			Total
<b>Peer</b>	S*	45.61%	57.25%
	D*	11.64%	
	S	22.32%	
<b>Instructor</b>			42.74%

More surface level changes than deep level changes were made by the peers. The instructor seems to have been the main source of feedback in terms of deep-level changes. The ratio of total corrections by the peers and by the instructor reveals that the workload of the instructor was substantially alleviated by the peers.

reflections were transcribed. Their reflections were grouped under three categories: those that were related to (1) the effectiveness of peer review on their understanding of the writing proces; (2) comments about feedback from the peers and the instructor; (3) any problems they had experienced or any suggestions for improvement. The table below shows an overview of students’ reflections.

Finally, the reflection journals were analyzed and students’ comments and

**Table 8.**

*Student Reflections from Journals*

<b>A. The effectiveness of peer review on the understanding of the writing process</b>			
1. The writing lessons were:	<i>easy</i>	<i>neither easy nor difficult</i>	<i>difficult</i>
	<b>2</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>1</b>
2. The reviewing process was:	<i>easy</i>	<i>neither easy nor difficult</i>	<i>difficult</i>
	<b>5</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>3</b>
3. The reviewing process helped me improve my writing.	<i>a lot</i>	<i>adequately</i>	<i>more or less</i>
	<b>9</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>B. Comments about feedback from the peers and the instructor</b>			
4. My peers’ comments were:	<i>very useful</i>	<i>adequately useful</i>	<i>useless</i>
	<b>4</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>3</b>
5. My instructor’s comments were:	<i>very useful</i>	<i>adequately useful</i>	<i>useless</i>
	<b>12</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>C. Any problems experienced or any suggestions for improvement</b>			
Problems	<i>writer’s block, lack of coherence, failing to support adequately, insufficient vocabulary</i>		
Suggestions	<i>writing more often, reading more</i>		

## Discussion

The data obtained will be discussed with reference to the research questions:

**Research Question 1:** Will students be able to make helpful comments when they respond to a peer's paper?

As Tables 5 and 6 show, the peer reviewing group were able to offer corrections and suggestions both on surface and deep level. To be precise, 57.25% of all changes were initiated by reviewing peers (Table 7). Given the fact that only 24 (3.8) of all suggestions were false repairs and that only half of those were carried over to the final draft, it is possible to say that the peers were able to make helpful comments when they responded to a peer's paper.

**Research Question 2:** Will peer reviewing group improve more in comparison to the group that received teacher scaffolding during composing?

Although the majority of the students felt that the reviewing process helped them gain insight into the writing process in their reflection journals, the performances of both groups were almost the same throughout the five assignments. As Table 4 shows, the peer reviewing group did not improve more; yet, they did not achieve worse than the group who received teacher feedback in earlier drafts. Both groups displayed very similar results during the study no matter who provided the feedback.

As to related literature, Patridge (1983) and Zhang (1995) found teacher feedback to be more advantageous whereas Hedgcock and Leftwits (1992) found results that favour peer feedback. This study also supports peer-review as an effective technique in the composing process. Truscott advocates that teacher-initiated corrections assist redrafting but cannot lead to improvement in accuracy and overall quality of students' writing in the long run. The researcher believes that the findings of this study do not contradict

Truscott because the reviewing peers had training and followed a guide to give effective feedback. This is clearly beyond receiving corrective feedback from the teacher. Hopefully, the guidance and reviewing would raise their awareness and enhance their autonomy. The findings of the study showed that they were able to suggest even deep level revisions.

**Research Question 3:** Will the students be able to make suggestions as to the content of the written work rather than solely focusing on surface level problems?

One reason why the writing instructors were reluctant to use peer review in their classes was because they thought the students would fail to go beyond surface level suggestions. Tables 5 and 6 illustrate that the students contributed to the process at both levels. Most surface level changes were initiated by the peers and far fewer were made by the instructor. With regard to deep level changes, the students were able to make sound comments and suggestions involving coherence, completeness, organisation, support and so forth regarding the text. In Group 1, the instructor made 128 deep level suggestions (64.17% of all deep level suggestions), which means the remaining one third of changes were suggested by the peers. Table 2 shows the types of reviews contributed by the peers and it is clear that students made comments about deep level revisions – even macrostructural changes. Apparently, student writers were able to go beyond surface level corrections.

**Research question 4:** Will peer review ease the workload of the teacher?

Table 7 reveals that the students studying with peer review were able to correct most of the surface level problems during the composing process. Of all the corrections, the instructor's surface level changes accounted for only 22.32%. In terms of deep level changes, the instructor

suggested twice as many corrections as the peers (20.41% and 11.64% respectively). In total, however, 57.25% of all correction work was done by the peers whereas the instructor did 42.74%. It is apparent that the peers were able to provide effective feedback at both levels when they were composing the earlier drafts and the instructor dealt with the final drafts only. Eventually, the instructor was relieved from half of the workload with the peer reviewing group whereas she had to provide all suggestions and corrections with the other group.

**Research Question 5:** What are the students' perceptions about the usefulness of peer review?

In their reflection journals, the student writers viewed the process as helpful. Either when giving or receiving feedback, nine of them felt that the reviewing process helped them improve their writing "a lot", and 11 of them thought that it helped them "adequately". Only two students were not very satisfied with the effectiveness of peer review. The majority of the students had no problems with the reviewing process whereas only three students found it difficult. A closer look at these reflection journals revealed that dissatisfaction was mainly caused by failing to provide more deep level corrections.

Most students thought that the comments they received from their peers were useful (adequately useful-16, very useful- 4). Only three students were dissatisfied with the peer reviews and expressed that they did not benefit from the process. The instructor's comments, on the other hand, received more appreciation (very useful-12, adequately useful-11). This finding is in line with previous research showing students value the teacher's feedback over their peers' feedback (Zhang, 1995; Nelson and Carson, 1998). The students appear to benefit from the experience and they were also happy to receive the instructor's

comments on their final draft as a confirmation from an expert.

The comments below are from reflection journals regarding the students' perceptions about peer reviewing process:

"Reviewing our partners written work contributed to me a lot. I think receiving feedback at the last stage is not enough."

"I think we can improve our writing skill by reviewing each other's work."

"I think reviewing our partner's work was an effective strategy. It helped me get an understanding of what makes a coherent piece of text. I also commented on other's work about how ideas should join together, where more support is needed."

"Reviewing my partner's work was effective for both parties, in my opinion. It helped us understand the process well and we had a chance to improve the skill."

It appears that the students liked and appreciated the effectiveness of the study. Peer review appears to contribute to learner autonomy in that the student writers were able to write their final drafts relying on one another and without seeking for the instructors help at each stage. What is more promising is that while doing so, the peer reviewing group did not achieve less than the group that received teacher feedback.

### **Conclusion**

This study briefly presents a nine-week exploratory study involving the effectiveness of peer review in contrast to that of teacher feedback in an academic writing context. With the popular view that appreciates the intellect and capacity of learners, learner autonomy has gained momentum. Thus more responsibility has shifted from teachers to learners. In this study, it appears that without comments from the instructor, the learners were able to use the initiative of revising and improving their own work by relying on themselves and their friends.

Prior to the study, fellow writing instructors expressed their suspicion as to the effectiveness of peer review saying that the students would be unable to go beyond surface level changes. However, the student writers were able to provide sound deep level comments as well as surface level suggestions. To be precise, one third of all deep level changes were initiated by peer responses in the experimental group.

The most noteworthy finding of the study is probably the striking similarity in performances of the two groups. The written work of the peer reviewing group and the group that studied with teacher feedback improved throughout the five assignments in terms of both surface level and deep level concerns. The achievements of both groups during the study were almost identical. It appears that the source of feedback played a trivial role in this study. The study appears to lead to useful, though tentative, implications for practice. More research involving longer time and more participants is needed to validate this finding.

As to the work load of instructors, peer review appears to be an effective technique that alleviates the burden of commenting on papers. At the same faculty meeting, some writing instructors confessed that they sometimes tended to assign less work for fear that they would be unable to comment on papers on a regular basis. Peer review allows the instructor to comment on improved final drafts and at the same time it does not deprive the learners of the chance of taking more responsibility and initiative. Finally, reflection journals reveal that the learners enjoyed the experience and felt that reviewing each other's drafts contributed to their understanding of the writing process. They thought it helped them gain insight into the writing process.

To conclude, peer review appears to be a worthwhile alternative to feedback

by the instructor during the composing of essays. This paper suggests that writing instructors should make use of peer review more in their classes and share the findings with other colleagues so that the results can be compared.

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## Appendix 1 Peer Review Guide

**Read through your partner's text first without highlighting any errors. Check off the box next to each question. Write a brief comment and provide suggestions for improvement if possible. You can underline errors or write comments on the draft.**

**Peer Editor:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Author:**

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### Introduction

Is the introduction relevant and effective?

Does the thesis statement identify the main idea/opinion/argument clearly?

### Body Paragraphs

Is the content interesting and effective?

Are the body paragraphs fully developed with adequate and effective examples related to the thesis?

Is the body part complete without any ideas or points missing?

Do the body paragraphs start and end adequately?

Are transitions between ideas and paragraphs smooth and effective?

### Conclusion

Does the conclusion restate the thesis statement or summarize the main points mentioned in the essay?

Is the conclusion relevant and effective?

### Coherence & Unity

Is the essay coherent (well-organized, the ideas presented clearly, logically and creatively)?

Are transition signals and/or linking words used properly and adequately?

Are there any unnecessary/irrelevant or inappropriate/informal sentences or parts?

### Grammar

Are there any grammar mistakes in the essay (verb tense, pronoun case, agreement

etc)?

Are sentence length and structure varied? Are complex and compound sentences used?

Are there any unclear sentences or parts in the essay?

**Lexis**

Are the vocabulary items used appropriately and accurately in the essay?

Is there a rich variety of word usage in the essay (more sophisticated vocabulary, collocations, idioms etc)?

**Mechanics**

Is the essay free of spelling or punctuation mistakes? Is the layout appropriate?

**Holistic**

Is the essay effective and attractive in terms of content?

**Appendix 2**

**Taxonomy of revisions with respect to Faigley and Witte (1981:403)**

Surface revisions		Semantic revisions	
<i>Formal changes (conventional editing revisions)</i>	<i>Preserving meaning changes (paraphrases)</i>	<i>Microstructural changes (minor revisions)</i>	<i>Macrostructural changes (major revisions)</i>
Spelling	Addition	Addition	Addition
Tense	Deletion	Deletion	Deletion
Number and modality	Substitution	Substitution	Substitution
Abbreviation	Permutation	Permutation	Permutation
Punctuation	Distribution	Distribution	Distribution
Format	Consolidation	Consolidation	Consolidation