

A Study of the Impact of Peer Review on Academic English Writing among English Majors

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Abstract: Peer review is a hot topic in the research of writing teaching for English majors. At present, there is still great controversy in the academic community about its feasibility and effect. To fully sort out the impact of peer feedback on different contents in English writing, grasp its advantages and disadvantages in teaching, and put forward some implementable suggestions to improve teaching and make peer feedback better serve the teaching, this study used semi-structured interviews as the main method and questionnaires as the supplemented survey to survey eight students majoring in English in a university of foreign languages in Northeast China. The study finds that peer review mainly includes mutual evaluation of nine parts, such as vocabulary, grammar, punctuation, sentence coherence, and article structure, and mainly focuses on the surface content of language, such as vocabulary, grammar, punctuation, etc. In addition, the study found that despite some shortcomings, peer feedback is still a promising way to 2nd language writing feedback, which can enhance students' critical thinking skills and many other abilities. Research shows that we should actively incorporate peer feedback in college English writing classes to fully exploit its teaching potential in English writing.

1 Introduction

For many years, feedback has been a frequently discussed part of the research on second language learning at home and abroad[1], especially in the learning of second language writing[2]. Teacher feedback as a traditional feedback method is widely used in the teaching of second language writing, but Stergiani[3], a scholar at the University of Ireland, found that the use of formative teacher feedback on student writing alone is not enough, so peer review such as peer review is needed as a supplement.

2 Literature review

Peer review was first proposed by Graves[4], who pointed out that peer review advocates that students participate in the feedback process to evaluate each other as they complete the first draft, which is one of the important ways for students to master writing skills. Since the 80s of the 20th century, researchers in different countries have conducted a series of studies on the role of peer review in second-language writing, which is roughly divided into three parts: the content of peer review, the factors affecting its usefulness, and some controversies (including advantages and disadvantages) of peer review in second-

language writing. The content is roughly starting from the evaluation of the quantity, level, and quality of peer learning outcomes[5], which can be classified into two aspects: language level (such as vocabulary, grammar, coherence, punctuation, written neatness, etc.) and semantic level (structural arrangement, logical fluency, arguments, arguments, etc.)[6,7]. Factors affecting its usefulness include students' knowledge of the top essay topic, students' English level, attitude towards peer review, feedback time constraints, interpersonal relationships, etc.[8]; Of course, there are some controversies, some scholars believe that peer review can promote learning, but at the same time others believe that peer review is nothing more than formalism, and it is difficult to cause students to truly reflect and progress[9].

Although there has been a large number of studies on peer review, research in the field of academic English writing, especially in the group study of English majors, which is closer to academic English writing and more widely used peer review feedback, is slightly insufficient, so this study asks three questions:

1.) Peer review influences what aspects of academic English writing for English majors?
2.) Is there a difference in the impact of peer review on different aspects of academic English writing for English majors?
3.) What are the advantages and disadvantages of peer review in teaching? What suggestions and

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enlightenment can it bring to teaching activities?

3 Method

This study used a qualitative research method based on semi-structured interviews, supplemented by questionnaires, and the candidates' responses were encoded after the interviews to obtain students' ideas.

3.1 Participates

By distributing questionnaires on a large scale, 8 research subjects who meet the research conditions were selected from the English majors of the School of English Studies

in a university of foreign languages in Northeast China. The information on the research subjects is shown in Table 1. To avoid bias in the research results of gender influence, the selected subjects are 4 boys and 4 girls, all of whom have taken English writing courses and have experience with peer review. Due to the impact of the epidemic situation on the postponement of the fourth-year exam, the college entrance examination foreign language scores of the research subjects were collected and used as a reference for English proficiency. The scores were all above 115. In addition, the scores of the writing course ranged from 80 to 92 points, covering almost all the scores. different educational backgrounds, which to some extent improves the generalizability of the findings[10].

Table 1. Information on research subjects

Anonymity	Gender	Grade	College entrance examination foreign language scores	Writing class grades	Major	Registered permanent residence
A	female	Sophomore	143	80	English major	urban
B	male	Sophomore	129	86	English major	rural
C	female	Junior	139	92	English major	urban
D	male	Junior	115	85	English major	urban
E	male	Sophomore	141	87	English major	urban
F	male	Junior	120	80	English major	rural
G	female	Sophomore	134	86	English major	urban
H	female	Junior	125	90	English major	rural

3.2 Data collection

3.2.1 Questionnaire

In the early stage of this study, the questionnaire was used to collect data, and 8 questionnaire respondents were selected for follow-up interviews by limiting the prerequisites of the study subjects (English major, English writing course, peer review experience, etc), and considering the generality of the research results.

3.2.2 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used to maximize the revelation of candidates' views, understanding, and experiences[11], and the semi-structured interview questions were relatively standardized, minimizing the differences between the eight interviews, to achieve the possibility of diverse perspectives on the same issue[12].

This study uses a thematic analysis approach[13]. Based on the research questions, in addition to the interview quotation, confidential statement, and concluding remarks, this study divides the main questions of the interview into three parts: the first part is for "the impact of peer review on academic English writing", the second part is for "the influence of peer review on different aspects of writing", and the third part is for "the advantages and disadvantages of peer review in teaching". Based on the interview technique of Kvale &

Brinkmann[14], each part of the interview begins with an introductory question that elicits a more open response, followed by illustrative and confirmatory questions, and finally an excessive question. For example:

Introductory questions

Example 1: Did you and your peers pay attention to any aspects of the essay when using peer review to mark each other's essays in academic English writing class?

Example 2: Are different levels of attention paid to different aspects during peer review?

Example 3: Have you encountered any difficulties/gains in peer review?

Explanatory questions (elicit more ideas based on the candidate's answers)

Example1: You said that there are some concerns when you evaluate articles with your peers, right? So what exactly are the aspects?

Example2: You said that you will encounter some difficulties or gain some gains when evaluating the article, can you please tell us what the specific difficulties or gains are?

Confirmation questions (digging more into the answer to the previous question to inspire respondents to say more)

Example1: I see, you said that you will pay more attention to the grammar of the article, sentence coherence, etc., can you give some examples? Are there other areas that you haven't focused too much on? Why is this happening?

Example2: What are the specific manifestations of the troubles and gains you mentioned, can you talk about it specifically? Do you have any advice for teachers, students or teaching activities for such a phenomenon?

Transitional Issues (Transition to the Next Section)

Example: Ok thank you, your idea was very helpful to us, let's continue.

3.3 Process

The interviews are conducted online in Chinese and are recorded for post-analysis purposes with the candidate's consent. The duration of the interviews ranged from 60 to 90 minutes.

3.4 Analysis

This study uses the "content analysis approach" to analyze the data[15]. For each part of the interview, the researchers copied out the specific original transcript based on the audio excerpts of the candidates' answers and added a code to each record, that is, "generic"[16]. As shown in Table 2, in Part 1 (The Impact of Peer Review on Academic English Writing), the author marked several original transcripts with multiple different codes, such as "vocabulary" and "writing logic", and counted them.

Table 2. Recording and Coding

Original transcript	The result of the encoding
I think the first thing to focus on is the completeness of some vocabulary, grammar and paragraph structure	vocabulary, grammar and paragraph structure
Peers will pay priority attention to whether the handwriting of my articles is neat and beautiful	neatness of the handwriting
I often pay attention to whether the vocabulary and grammar used in the text are used appropriately, and I also observe whether there is a central sentence and supporting argument	vocabulary, grammar key points and arguments

4 Results and discussion

4.1 The impact of peer review on academic English writing essays for English students

During the interview, the interview records of classmates A to H were encoded and summarized (Table 3 and Table 4 below), and the impact of peer review on the academic English writing of English college students was as follows: check (1) the use of word spelling vocabulary in the article; (2) grammar of the article (subordinate clauses, special sentence patterns, etc.); (3) sentence coherence (cause and effect, inflection, etc.); (4) whether the punctuation marks are used correctly; (5) whether the structure of the article is reasonable; (6) whether the expression of the key point is clear; (7) whether the types of arguments are rich and sufficiently powerful; (8) whether the conclusion is complete; (9) whether the logic of the writing is smooth; a total of nine parts.

Table 3. Detailed recording and encoding

Original transcript	The result of the encoding
I think the first thing to focus on is the completeness of some vocabulary, grammar and paragraph structure	vocabulary, grammar and paragraph structure

Peers will pay priority attention to whether the handwriting of my articles is neat and beautiful	handwriting
I often pay attention to whether the vocabulary and grammar used in the text are used appropriately, and I also observe whether there is a central sentence and supporting argument	vocabulary, grammar, key points and arguments
I tend to focus on the use of punctuation and the logical consistency of sentences.	sentence coherence, punctuation marks
My classmates also said that the conclusion part of my article is not concise and clear.	conclusion part

Table 4. The result of the encoding

Classification	Specific contents
the surface of the language	vocabulary
	grammar
	sentence coherence
	punctuation marks
semanteme	the structure of the article
	key point
	arguments
	conclusion
	the logic of the writing

4.2 The extent to which peer review affects different aspects of writing

After coding the interview content, collecting and sorting out the frequency of different influencing factors, and communicating with the interviewee, the following results can be obtained: under the feedback method of peer review, the feedback parties pay more attention to the feedback on the surface of the language, such as word spelling, vocabulary use, grammar, and special sentence patterns; On the contrary, the evaluation is slightly poor in terms of semantic depth, such as whether the ideas of the article are fresh, whether the clear arguments are novel and diverse, and whether the logic is smooth.

Given the above phenomenon, firstly, teachers can formulate evaluation standards and scoring tables for different articles in teaching[17], and guide students to conduct mutual evaluation from both language and semantics, to enhance the importance of evaluation and the evaluated person to macro elements such as chapter structure, and achieve the effect of peer review teaching. Secondly, considering that some students have less knowledge about the designated topic, teachers can discuss with students on the designated topic before class, and show some very good articles in terms of language and semantics after class, so as to enhance everyone's understanding of the deep level of the article - semantic before and after mutual evaluation, and enhance the importance of semantics in mutual evaluation; Finally, in the process of peer review, students also need to strengthen their understanding and attention to semantic depth, improve their thinking ability, and accumulate more relevant materials in order to put forward constructive opinions in peer review.

4.3 Advantages and disadvantages of peer review in teaching

4.3.1 Advantages

Peer review has obvious advantages in teaching. Student A believes that peer review can improve students' enthusiasm for English writing, especially for English majors' English writing. Students B, D, and F believe that peer review can learn the advantages of other people's writing[9], discover the shortcomings of their articles, and then make up for the shortcomings of their writing, such as excessive colloquialism and confusion of thinking logic. G and H believe that peer review can improve their critical thinking, including self-assessment and evaluation ability and self-reflection ability, which is especially important for English majors.

4.3.2 Disadvantages

Of course, peer review also has some shortcomings in teaching. Students B, D, and E believe that due to the uneven level of English among students, peer review is likely to evolve into a one-way output of excellent students to poor students, sometimes causing poor students to avoid academic English writing; or the experience of students with similar levels. It is difficult to make a particularly large leap in writing ability when evaluating each other. Students C and H believe that sometimes due to interpersonal relationships, students are reluctant to critically evaluate other people's articles, or students think that teachers' feedback is more "authoritative"[18], so the attitude toward mutual evaluation is not good. correct. Students A, F, and G believed that the time for peer review was sometimes too long and sometimes too short, which was unreasonable[8].

4.3.3 Summary

The purpose of peer review is to continue to develop strengths and improve weaknesses in teaching. First of all, for the students themselves, it is recommended that students accumulate and improve their English writing level and knowledge reserve as much as possible before peer review activities so that they can write excellent articles and give constructive feedback to others.

Secondly, for teachers, it is recommended that teachers can assist in peer review activities[18], such as timely help for students with poor writing skills, and regularly replace novel peer review strategies, such as peer review, anonymous peer review, and group peer review among students in different classes so that students can evaluate, feel, and learn articles of different styles and levels. At the same time, teachers can act as a third party with higher writing and identification ability, provide students with different perspectives, share views from different angles, screen and display excellent articles, and improve the content richness of students' articles.

In terms of curriculum, it is recommended that students be trained before peer review is adopted; Awareness of the student's level; Classes with a poor

foundation should not blindly follow the trend for mutual evaluation; In addition, the time for peer review should be allocated to the classroom order, and the order should be properly managed.

5 Conclusion

The three research topics of factors, degree of influence, the difference in the degree of influence, and advantages and disadvantages of peer review on academic writing of English major students were examined in this study using the thematic analysis approach. This study reveals that students place varying amounts of weight on each of the nine factors that peer review has on academic English writing for English majors. It also makes some recommendations for instructional activities that can be done before, during, and after class. Peer review can be helpful in the process of teaching English writing, and its usage should be highly encouraged in classroom instruction, according to this study, which gathered respondents' opinions on the benefits and drawbacks of peer review[19]. However, several logical recommendations are also made regarding the benefits and drawbacks of peer review in the classroom in the hopes of illuminating future teaching methods.

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