On the Role of Peer Review in the Teaching of Second Language Writing

Linlin Feng1,*

1The Education University of Hong Kong, No. 10 Lo Ping Rd, Ting Kok, Hong Kong, China

Abstract. After process writing entered the field of second language writing instruction, peer review, which is one of the central elements of the review and revision stages, has received increasing attention and research. Peer review is a very important factor in process writing, enriching the teaching activities of second language writing instruction and playing an indispensable role in second language writing. Peer review can help teachers provide better diagnostic feedback, which not only reflects teachers' teaching results and students' own understanding of the target language, but also has a significant impact on learners' learning efficiency and motivation, and can positively influence learners' writing habits. However, peer review also has its shortcomings and limitations that need to be noted, such as: (1) students tend to ignore the meaningful aspects of their peers' writing; (2) discussions in peer assessment become "idle chatter"; (3) students are reluctant to make suggestions for their peers under the principle of "saving face". (3) students are not willing to make suggestions for their peers. This paper discuss the benefits of peer review in second language writing teaching from the perspective of two different subjects, students and teachers, and conclude that peer review can encourage students to revise their work, enhance their sense of readership, strengthen their communicative competence, and reduce their learning anxiety; it can also help teachers to reduce their burden and solve their teaching problems.

1. Introduction

Peer review is a writing teaching activity in which learners exchange their own compositions and give each other suggestions for revision, also known as peer feedback, peer evaluation, and peer editing, and so on. Peer review has an overwhelming majority of merits, it can help second language learners revise their compositions, enhance their readership, strengthen their communicative skills, and reduce learning anxiety; it can also reduce teachers' teaching load and improve their teaching skills.

In traditional second language writing education, teachers tend to adopt a one-draft writing style and a single grading system, focusing more on the final grade of students' writing and neglecting the subjectivity of students in the writing activity. The introduction of peer review has drawn attention to the subjectivity of students' writing, which has changed the one-way teacher assessment approach and allowed students to participate in the assessment of their work and become the subject of the writing classroom. In this paper, we will discuss the role of peer review in second language writing teaching, reflect on the limitations of peer review, and propose effective solutions from the perspective of both teachers and students. Through the discussion of peer assessment, this paper hopes to draw the attention of second language teachers to the process of writing and peer review, and to provide new inspiration for teachers to improve their teaching skills.

2. The role of Peer Review in Second Language Writing Instruction

A substantial number of empirical studies have examined the role of peer review in second language writing instruction, and various works of literature have confirmed that peer review is beneficial to second language writing instruction in various ways. In the following section, we will discuss the benefits of peer review for teachers and students in order to provide a basis for improving teachers' teaching standards and quality and to provide new ideas for teachers' writing class assignments.

2.1. How peer review can help students

Peer review can encourage students to revise their assignments and change the traditional one-draft writing system, which can greatly improve students' writing autonomy. As the saying goes, good writing is the result of the revision, and the process of writing is the process of continuous revision and improvement. Some domestic scholars' research shows that students show great enthusiasm for the new collaborative model of peer review, in which revisers can discover common
problems that they have never noticed in the process of helping their peers to revise, triggering self-reflection, enhancing students' self-reflective ability, cultivating critical thinking, and becoming lifelong learners [1]; revisers can also notice that revisers can also notice the flashpoints of their peers' work and thus internalize them for their own use. After revising, students are often curious about the feedback they receive from others and are eager to revise their own work. Peer review can easily bring a spark of inspiration to writers, which in turn leads to a shift from passive to active learning, stimulates students' interest in writing, and enhances their participation in class.

Peer review can develop students' sense of readership. Peer review changes the traditional model of the teacher being the only reader of students' work, and students have an additional group of "classmates" as readers. If the teacher is the only reader of the student's work, it is easy for the student to assume that the teacher is an experienced reader and ignore the detailed narrative of the work, and the student lacks a sense of thinking from the reader's perspective. When they think that the readers of their essays are their classmates, the writers assume the requirements, consciousness or aesthetic expectations of the new readers and implicitly internalize them in the writer's mind [2]. This consciousness is a kind of psychological perception that can regard the reader as a "dialogue communicator" rather than a "passive recipient". For Mr. Xu Changliang, it is rational thinking that can "choose the readers wisely and adjust the writing according to their reactions" [3]. Writing should be a communicative and interactive process, not a monologue of the student. Peer review can help students shift their thinking about writing, consider the purpose and content of writing from the reader's perspective, breakthrough writing barriers and barriers, and open the door to a new world for students. Doing so helps students understand that writing is not a mechanical task for the teacher to review but a rich and free vehicle to express their innermost thoughts and share them with others, helping students develop a new understanding of writing and its true value. The increased awareness of readership will make students' writing more vivid, and they will no longer be bound to a specific topic but will be able to write from the perceptions and perspectives of different readers.

Peer review is a strategy for teaching writing that can strengthen students' communicative skills. For many second language learners, peer review is almost a new writing practice activity that can bring curiosity and novelty to learners, and students are more willing to try to participate in this new activity, which enhances students' learning initiative and makes the classroom atmosphere livelier. Students perform better when they research and explore and learn together with their peers or teachers than when they complete learning tasks independently [5]. First, peer review promotes mutual cooperation and communication among students. Peer review requires students to cooperate and communicate with others, and students help, share, and explore with each other, providing opportunities for students to communicate with each other and learn cooperatively, creating more space for students to interact, negotiate, and cooperate. Second, peer-to-peer assessment is conducive to improving students' communication skills. Students need to express their opinions and ideas and give constructive feedback when they participate in peer assessment activities. In this process, students' communication skills can be improved, including dialectically listening to others' effective opinions, asking questions, expressing ideas, and debating. In conclusion, peer review can provide a positive communication platform for students to practice social skills such as building relationships with others, communicating with others and analyzing information in a suitable environment, all of which help students improve their communication skills and social skills while enhancing their spoken second language.

Peer review can reduce students' anxiety. Some learners tend to overestimate the gap between themselves and their classmates, believing that their classmates are better than they are, which can lead to stress. In the traditional one-draft writing model, students are required to complete a piece of writing alone and submit it directly to the teacher for review, which often causes students to feel anxious and intimidated about writing in a second language, as they have no way of knowing the level and content of their classmates' writing, and thus tend to fall into fear. Peer review, on the other hand, changes the passive state of students in the traditional writing model, allowing them to help each other and negotiate with each other to complete their writing. While evaluating and correcting their peers' writing, students can learn about their peers' second language level, observe other learners' language use habits, form a yardstick in their own minds to measure how their level differs from their peers', and make adjustments to their own writing. In addition, while reading, revising, and evaluating their peers' work, students are able to develop their own writing ideas, discover the strengths of their peers' writing, and reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of their own work; in addition, they are able to remind themselves not to make similar mistakes when their peers make mistakes. In this way, second language learners can know themselves and their peers, know that there is not a huge difference in level between themselves and their peers, improve their self-confidence, and alleviate peer anxiety in learning together.

Captions should be typed in 9-point Times. They should be centred above the tables and flush left beneath the figures.

2.2 How peer review helps teachers

Peer review helps to reduce teachers' burden. In the traditional writing evaluation system, the teacher is the only reader and corrector of the essays, and the teacher needs to correct the essays of the whole class by himself/herself, which is undoubtedly a heavy workload. Some teachers inevitably enter a state of exhaustion after correcting a large number of essays, and in this state it is difficult to conduct a comprehensive examination of
each student's essay and give differentiated assessment results for different students, which makes it difficult to ensure the quality of essay correction [6]. Peer review allows students to revise each other's assignments and give feedback, which reduces teachers' workload and allows them to have more time to devote to lesson preparation and other aspects, and at the same time, to a certain extent, ensures the quality of composition correction, so that students' compositions can receive more angles and more comprehensive suggestions for correction.

Peer review is conducive to solving teaching challenges and improving teachers' teaching standards. By having peer reviewers from the same country or at the same second language level, they can better understand what their peers are trying to say and why they are making mistakes and can suggest better ways to correct the problems. For example, when students make mistakes in their writing due to negative transfer of their native language, their peers may know better than the teacher the reasons for the mistakes. In this process, the teacher's teaching experience is enriched, the level of prediction of students' errors is improved, and the teacher is more likely to identify common problems in the writing of second language students and to focus on them.

3. Limitations and Solutions

3.1 Limitations of peer review

Although peer review has its unique advantages, it also faces some problems and limitations in its practical implementation.

A common problem in peer review is that students tend to focus on superficial errors and ignore meaningful issues [7]. This means that students tend to focus on identifying and commenting on superficial errors such as spelling mistakes, grammatical errors, and errors in vocabulary use, while less often identifying problems such as meaning, off-topic, and semantic errors in the essay. For example, the sentence "Even if I had no money, I would buy my girlfriend an expensive gift" in one HSK4 student's Chinese composition was grammatically correct, but semantically it did not work.

In addition, many second language teachers also found that although the majority of students cooperated with the teacher by carefully peer-assessing each other, there were a small number of students who did not fully follow the teacher's request to read their classmates' compositions and suggest corrections carefully but used the time to talk to their nearby classmates about things unrelated to the class. This places a high demand on the teacher's classroom organization and classroom monitoring skills. Teachers need to explain in detail the requirements and rules of peer review activities to students before organizing them and monitor them carefully during the activities to prevent "discussions (in peer review) from turning into idle chatter"[8].

What is more, Carson & Nelson found that the primary goal of some students in peer review is to maintain a sense of harmony because of the "face-saving theory," and they are reluctant to criticize their peers' essays or disagree with their peers' opinions, and they are unwilling to play the role of authority, which is found in a large number of East Asian students' classrooms [9]. Moreover, in some test-oriented learning environments that emphasize language accuracy, students are influenced by the dominant teacher-centered culture, and they tend to prefer authoritative evaluations given by teachers, while maintaining a cold, indifferent attitude toward critical suggestions given by peers, believing that advice given by peers has no value. These thoughts and behaviors undoubtedly weaken the effectiveness of peer review.

3.2 Solutions

As Dipardo & Freedman point out, although peer review has been strongly promoted by many second language teachers and supported by pedagogical theories, it is not an easy task to organize this activity effectively [10]. For peer review to be successful and truly useful for writing instruction, it can be done from both teacher and student perspectives.

3.2.1 Teacher's aspect

Teachers should consciously raise students' awareness of readership in their regular writing instruction, so that students can try to discover the strengths and weaknesses of their own writing and be able to try to revise it themselves. Before the task starts, teachers should plan this task reasonably and make a detailed task arrangement. The teacher should group students at the pre-task stage, taking into account multiple factors (nationality, personality, writing level, etc.). Teachers should give clear instructions to students about what role they will play in the peer review task, what tasks they will complete, and how they will complete the task. To address the situation that some students may be reluctant to give evaluations due to their face, teachers can set up a good assignment sheet and ask students to check and revise according to the requirements on the task sheet, which can serve as both a prompt and a guide. In the process of the task, the teacher should go around the classroom to supervise and make sure that she can follow up the students' completion of the task, and give timely help and guidance to students who encounter difficulties, and stop the students from "chatting about extracurricular topics" and direct their thoughts to the peer assessment activities. After the task is completed, teachers should first give students adequate and comprehensive positive feedback to acknowledge their efforts and work. Afterwards, the teacher should lead the students to review and summarize the activity together, praise the students for their excellent work, and then show the students their excellent work, using it as an example to demonstrate to them and help them understand the rules of peer review activities, so that
they can learn not only to write essays, but also how to make them better and more excellent by carefully revising them.

3.2.2 Student's aspect

Students should enhance their reading skills and improve their reading level by reading enough in the target language in their daily learning. Before the task begins, students should listen carefully to the teacher's task requirements, understand each item on the task list, and ask questions to the teacher if they do not understand it. During the task, students should read their peers' essays carefully and give suggestions, and check and revise them according to the points on the task list. During this process, students should always monitor themselves, stay focused on the class and the task, and make sure they are fully engaged in the task. At the end of the task, students should be open to the critical suggestions given to them by their peers and revise their mistakes. They should reflect on the mistakes made in their writing in time to avoid making the same mistakes again in their future writing. Finally, summarize the gains of this peer-review activity, draw experiences, and be fully prepared mentally for the next similar activity.

4. Conclusion

The purpose of this paper's exploration of peer review is to raise the importance that second language instructors place on students' writing skills and to provide instructors with new ideas for essay evaluation that can provide students with multiple means and perspectives. Peer review plays an important role in the second language writing classroom and is a proven, multi-faceted writing activity. This article discusses the benefits of peer review for students and teachers from both student and teacher perspectives. For students, it can encourage them to revise their work, enhance their sense of readership, strengthen their communicative skills, reduce their anxiety, and help them get "pleasure" and "empathy" from the group activity; for teachers, it can reduce their burden, solve their teaching problems, and help them give more fair, impartial, and objective feedback. For teachers, it can reduce the burden, answer teaching problems, and help teachers give fairer, more impartial, and objective evaluations.

However, just as everything has its two sides, peer review also has its flaws and shortcomings. For example, students are unable to give useful criticism suggestions to their peers due to their lack of second language proficiency, and they often focus on the superficial errors of inverted essays but ignore the meaningful issues due to their level of proficiency; some students turn the activity into "small talk"; some students are reluctant to criticize their peers because they want to "save face"; Some students were reluctant to criticize their peers' work or oppose their peers' opinions because they wanted to save face, which made this assessment tool impossible. These shortcomings should not be ignored by teachers, who should continue to accumulate teaching experience, summarize and reflect in time, and adopt appropriate strategies to deal with unexpected situations based on the actual situation, which is also a test of teachers' teaching level. In the face of a teaching activity deficiency, teachers should give full play to their subjective initiative, use their strengths to make up for their weaknesses, and use various teaching strategies flexibly in order to create a more efficient and more lively second language classroom.

In this paper, we have considered and studied the benefits of peer review for students and teachers and have come up with relevant insights and suggestions. However, there are still some shortcomings in this study, including the following aspects: (1) the amount of literature read is small. Most of the literature read during the study was domestic literature, and not enough international literature was read, and the results obtained were not comprehensive enough. Therefore, in future research, the number of literatures read should be increased, and relevant literature at home and abroad should be studied in depth to improve the reliability and validity of the study and the applicability of the research findings. (2) The scope of the study is small, and the practicability is insufficient. This thesis has referred to a series of excellent papers to gather ideas but has not applied the theory to practice to test the feasibility of the thesis conclusions. In future research, the theory can be put into practice to examine the authenticity of the conclusions obtained from the article, and the practice results can be written into the thesis to increase the credibility of the thesis.

References

2. S.G. Rong, Journal of Shanxi Normal University (Social Science), (04), 61-67+77 (1993)
3. C.L. Xu, Jiangsu Education, (03), 7-10 (2018)
4. Y.L. Yan, Jiangxi Education, (09), 32-33 (2022)
6. Y.T. Xu, R.X. Zhang, Modern Foreign Languages, (02), 244-253+293 (2017)