

Exploring EFL Teacher Interventions on Peer Feedback: a Case Study in an Indonesian Writing Classroom

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Abstract

This research article aimed to investigate the effect of interventions deployed by teachers on peer feedback in the context of Indonesian EFL writing classroom. This case study involved 16 participants of tertiary-level EFL learners. It explored types of teacher's interventions on peer feedback, analyzed whether the learners use peer feedback to improve their writing, and explored how the learners appreciate peer feedback. The case study research employed three instruments; they were students' writing assignment results with peer and teacher feedback, questionnaire, and interviews. The findings revealed three main points; (1) the teacher's interventions were mostly on grammatical errors, inappropriate vocabularies, and content structures, (2) facilitated by the teacher's interventions, more than 50% of the peer feedbacks were integrated by the students in their revision, (3) the students generally confirmed the usefulness of interventions deployed by the teacher on peer feedback. It is implied in the study that peer feedback, supported by teacher interventions, can be developed to benefit learning, some suggestions on how to carry out peer feedback to improve learners' skill of writings are provided.

Keywords

Teacher interventions, peer feedback, EFL teacher, writing classroom

Introduction

Over the last three decades, peer feedback has been a popular topic for researchers because of its benefits in writing development (Hu, 2005; Hu & Lam, 2010; Hyland & Hyland, 2006). Peer feedback is seen as the process of formative development which provides authors with the opportunity to negotiate their writings (Hyland, 2000). Moreover, Mangelsdorf (1992) revealed that peer feedback motivated learners to critically read their peers' writing which consequently developed learners' higher order thinking. In addition, Zhao (2010) argued that peer feedback is able to improve the quality of student writing by incorporating peer feedback while revising their drafts.

Despite this, Mangelsdorf (1992) and Zhang (1999) reported that learners relatively preferred teacher feedback rather than peer feedback. Furthermore, Paulus (1999) found that learners frequently used of teacher feedback more than peer feedback in revisions. Teacher feedback is argued to be preferred by learners because of learners' perceived low level English language proficiency (Zhao, 2010). In line with this, Nelson and Murphy (1993) claimed that English learners



mistrust peer feedback because of two main reasons; (1) English is not their peers' first language, and (2) the teacher is claimed as 'the one who knows'. In the context of teaching English in Asia, Cheng (2000) stated that teacher-centered education system had made the Asian learners passive, and had produced reticent learners. She further reported that the lack of English proficiency is another source of problem for learners to engage in collaborative work.

Teacher feedback is an important element in the context of ESL writing (Paulus, 1999). Several studies have revealed that learners generally appreciate teacher feedback (Ferris, 1995, 1997; Tsui & Ng, 2000). More recent studies have focused on investigating the effects of teacher feedback on student writing. For example, the study by Ferris (2006) had found the benefits of teacher feedback on the area of linguistics errors. In addition, Lee (2008b) reported that learners preferred teacher feedback on language. She further found the difference of preferences between high proficiency learners and low proficiency learners. The former preferred to receive error correction along with categorizing and underlying or circling. On the contrary, the latter preferred to receive all kinds of feedback, but reject categorizing. Although both types of learners preferred teacher feedback, not all low proficiency learners appreciated error correction. In this case, Lee (2008b) argued that excessive error correction tended to overwhelm the learners which consequently decreased their writing interest.

Peer feedback is believed to provide pedagogical benefits particularly in writing development (Min, 2006; Rollinson, 2005; Yang, Badger, and Yu, 2006). Moreover, Lundstrom and Baker (2009) reported that peer feedback not only increased learners' competence through scaffolding, but also facilitated social interaction and negotiation. Similarly, Min (2005) argued that peer feedback encouraged learners to learn their peers' weaknesses and strengths while involving in giving and receiving feedback. In line with this, Diab (2010) said that peer feedback benefited learners for two reasons; (1) it leads learners' attention to linguistics errors through negotiation, (2) it leads learners to make more revisions in the areas of organization. Furthermore, Harmer (2004) argued that peer feedback can lead to "self-reliance" when editing. As such, peer feedback provided learners with more opportunities to evaluate their own writing problems by examining the comments received.

To sum up, three research questions which form the focus of this study are outlined below:

1. What types of corrections did the teacher provide on peer feedback?
2. Did the learners use peer feedback to improve their writing?
3. How did the learners appreciate the teachers' interventions on peer feedback?

Method

Participants

This case study was conducted in an EFL writing classroom at an Indonesian university. The participants were 16 third-year English major students (6 males and 10 females). These students were categorized as pre-intermediate EFL learners based on two reasons, (1) the students' class records gained from their writing teacher, and (2) the students' average score of 500 – 550 on TOEFL-ITP

Instruments



To collect the data, three instruments were employed. The first one was 85 of students' writing assignment collected over the four-month period. The assignments covered 5 different genres (persuasive, report, argumentative, descriptive, and discussion). The second instrument was questionnaire, carried out at the end of study. The third instrument was follow-up interviews. Semi-structured interviews were chosen to allow the students express their idea and perceptions. Each interview lasted for about 15 – 20 minutes. In this case, native language (Bahasa Indonesia) was used to interview the participants so as to facilitate natural communication.

Table 1. Data construction of writing assignments

| Assignment | Quantity* | Breakdown by genre |
|------------|-----------|---|
| 1 | 8 | 3 persuasive, 5 report |
| 2 | 9 | 2 argumentative, 1 report, 6 descriptive |
| 3 | 6 | 4 descriptive, 2 discussion |
| 4 | 9 | 3 discussion, 4 persuasive, 2 reports |
| 5 | 10 | 3 argumentative, 4 report, 3 descriptive |
| 6 | 8 | 4 persuasive, 3 descriptive, 1 argumentative |
| 7 | 8 | 1 argumentative, 4 report, 3 descriptive |
| 8 | 9 | 4 discussion, 2 persuasive, 3 report |
| 9 | 10 | 5 discussion, 5 report |
| 10 | 8 | 4 argumentative, 3 report, 1 persuasive |
| Total | 85 | 14 persuasive, 11 argumentative, 27 report, 14 discussion, 19 descriptive |

Note: *= the number of assignments for each task depended on the quantity of submissions received.

Peer feedback was introduced to the students at the beginning of each class. The teacher trained the students in how to provide constructive feedback. After that, each student was assigned with a number between 1 and 8. The students who have the same number are then paired. The paired students are given 15 – 20 minutes to read and review their partner's draft. At the end of the class, the teacher collected the students' drafts and provided feedback or corrections outside the class. Based on the feedback provided, students then revised their draft.

Data Analysis

Three main data were analyzed, including the types of teacher corrections, the use of peer feedback, and the learners' perceptions on teacher interventions.

First, teacher comments on peer feedback were analyzed by categorizing the teacher's corrections into three types; (1) grammatical error, (2) inappropriate vocabulary, and (3) content structure. For example:

1. Prices rise more than ten percent two years ago.

past tense?

use (peer feedback)

2. The government should not waste such amount of money.



spend (teacher feedback)

This sentence is pointless. Delete it. (peer feedback)

3. He has three reasons for raising the tax. First, ... second, ... third,
Keep this one. It is a thesis statement. (teacher feedback)

In the first example, the peer reviewer underlined the word “rise” because she/he did not agree with the time signal, then put “past tense?”. The teacher agreed and circled the peer feedback instance. In the second example, the peer reviewer underlined the word “waste” because the word choice was not appropriate with the context, then she/he put the word “use”. The teacher disagreed and provided a solution by putting the word “spend”. In the third example, the peer reviewer suggested to delete the sentence. However, the teacher disagreed and suggested to keep the sentence.

Second, the use of peer feedback by students was analyzed by comparing the original version and the revised version. In this case, the use of peer feedback was categorized into three types; (1) fully used, (2) partially used, and (3) unused. For example:

1. Original sentence : I hoped we could pass the final exam.
wished
 Revised version : I wished we could pass the final exam.
2. Original sentence : The criminal was caught by the police last night.
detained
 Revised version : The criminal was arrested by the police last night.
3. Original sentence : This one is an obligation course for you to take.
compulsory
 Revised version : This one is an obligation course for you to take.

In the first example, the word “wished” was presented in the peer feedback. The student fully used the alternative by changing the word “hoped” with “wished”. In the second example, the word “detained” was presented in the peer feedback. The student partially used the suggestion by using the synonym “arrested”. In third example, the word “compulsory” was presented in the peer feedback. The student did not use the suggestion and kept the word “obligation” in his revised version.

Third, the learners’ perceptions were analyzed by examining the post task questionnaire and follow up interviews. All the 15 students responded to the questionnaire. Ten of them participated in the interviews which elicited further information regarding the effect of teacher interventions on peer feedback. All of the interviews were firstly transcribed. They were then coded and analyzed on four separate occasions to ensure the consistency of the identified codes. After that they were compared with another data (students answers on questionnaire) to check the similarities. This data triangulation was applied as a technique to obtain the validity of evaluation and findings (Matison, 1988).



Findings and Discussions

What types of corrections did the teacher provide on peer feedback?

From the total of 85 assignments, it was found that there were 658 peer feedbacks. Some of the feedbacks (343) were agreed by the teacher, but some (315) were disagreed and corrected. From the total of 315 disagreed feedbacks, the teacher focused on correcting three aspects (grammar, vocabulary, and content) in each genre.

Table 2. The percentage of teacher's corrections

| No | Genre | Types of Teacher's Corrections | | |
|----|---------------|--------------------------------|------------|---------|
| | | Grammar | Vocabulary | Content |
| 1 | Argumentative | 43.5% | 15% | 41.5% |
| 2 | Discussion | 54% | 7.1% | 38.9% |
| 3 | Persuasive | 40.7% | 4.7% | 54.6% |
| 4 | Report | 41% | 16% | 43% |
| 5 | Descriptive | 44.5% | 17.1% | 38.4% |

The above table shows that more than 40% of the teacher's corrections on peer feedback focused on grammar in each genre. Similarly, the majority of the teacher's corrections (over 38%) focused on content. In contrast, vocabulary is the least aspect (under 20%) corrected by the teacher in each genre.

Did the learners use peer feedback to improve their writing?

From the total of 658 peer-feedback, the students integrated 418 (63.5%) of the peer-feedback into their revisions, and 240 (36.5%) were not used.

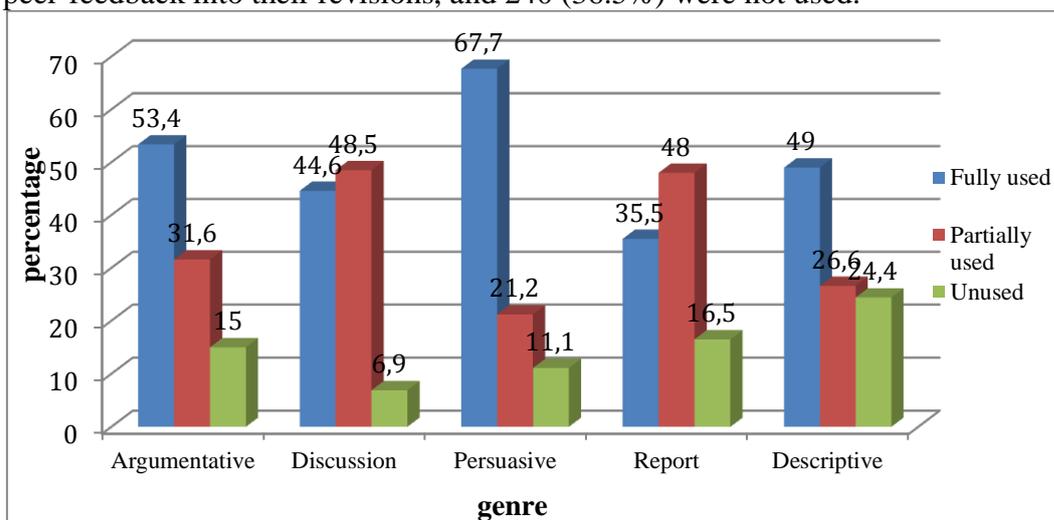


Figure 1. The percentage of peer-feedback used by students in each genre

Based on the bar chart above, it is clear that most of the peer feedback were used by students to improve their writings. In argumentative essays, 53.4% of the peer feedbacks were fully used, 31.6% were partially used and 15% were unused.



In discussion essay, 44.6% were fully used, 48.5 were partially used, and 6.9% were unused. In persuasive essay, students fully used 67.7% of the peer feedback, 21.2% were partially used, and 11.1% were unused. In report genre, 35.5% were fully used, 48 were partially used, and 16.5% were unused. Last, in descriptive essay, students fully used 49% of the peer feedback, 26.6% were partially used, and 24.4% were unused.

How did the learners appreciate the teachers' interventions on peer feedback?

Based on the data gained from post-task questionnaire, all of the students generally confirmed the usefulness of interventions deployed by the teacher on peer-feedback. It was supported by the students' answers in the interviews. In this case, the student learnt something new by reading the teacher's comments on their peers' writings. In other words, the teachers' interventions benefited the students. S2 and S4 commented:

S2: I learn something when I read the teacher's comments or notes. The more I read, the more I get information. I can learn new vocabularies, grammatical patterns, or content structures. It is a new resource for learning.

S4: When I read the teacher's comments on my peer writings, especially the argumentative essays, I always get something. Reading the teacher's comments on my peer argumentative writings helps me see an issue from different perspectives.

In addition, students also argued that the teacher's training prior to the period of study improved the efficiency of peer feedback. S5 and S8 stated:

S5: The teacher provided us with some guidelines on how to give feedback. By focusing on the aspects he suggested, I became more organized when participating in peer feedback.

S8: The teacher made several demonstration on how to comments on organization. It was very helpful. All of us were required to pay special attention to the organization of the essay.

These findings evidenced that the teacher interventions on peer feedback was generally supported by the students. Such interventions help the students provide a large amount of better quality peer feedback (Hu, 2005; Min, 2005). Facilitated by the teacher's interventions, the students used the peer feedback to revise their writing across a wide range of genres. It aligned with the study by Zhao (2014), where the participants used the peer feedback to revise the problematic areas across five genres despite the students' limited experience of peer feedback.

Conclusion

The current study investigated teacher interventions on peer feedback in an Indonesian EFL writing classroom. The findings revealed that the teacher's corrections focused on grammatical patterns (over 40%), vocabulary (under 20%),



and content structure (over 38%). The second finding was from the total of 658 peer-feedback, the students integrated 418 (63.5%) of the peer-feedback into their revisions, and 240 (36.5%) were not used. Last, this study found that the students appreciated the teacher's interventions for two main reasons. First, the student learnt something new by reading the teacher's comments on their peer feedback. Second, students argued that the teacher's training prior to the period of study improved the efficiency of peer feedback.

Even though several limitations occurred in this study (small sample of data and small number of participants), the written feedback were obtained from 10 assignments across 5 different genres, and multiple datasets were triangulated to interpret the results. Future research may apply the same methods on a larger scale, or in different educational contexts. Despite these limitations, several implications can be clearly seen. For example, this study provides practical insight to EFL teachers into how peer feedback, supported by teacher intervention, can be develop to benefit learning, and to inform EFL teachers with some suggestions to carry out peer feedback to improve learners' skill of writings. In addition, this study encourage teachers to implement peer feedback in the context of Indonesian EFL writing classrooms due to the high quality of peer feedback, learners' use of feedback, and the advantages of peer feedback perceived by the students.

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Appendix

Learners' perceptions regarding teacher's interventions on peer feedback.

Instructions: choose the most appropriate option, and answer briefly the open-ended questions in the space provided.

1. Have you participated in peer feedback before?
 - a. Yes. In what class?
 - b. No.
2. Do you trust the feedback provided by peers?
 - a. Yes.
 - b. No. Why?
3. Choose one statement that represents your preference for the mode of writing feedback.
 - a. I prefer to receive teacher's intervention on peer feedback
 - b. I prefer not to receive teacher's intervention on peer feedback
4. Do you find teacher's training regarding peer feedback prior to study useful?
 - a. Yes.
 - b. No.
5. Do teacher's comments on peer feedback influence your decision of using peer feedback?
 - a. Yes. Why?
 - b. No.
6. Do teacher's comments (grammatical patterns) on peer feedback help you revise your final draft?
 - a. Yes. In what way?
 - b. No.
7. Do teacher's comments (appropriate vocabularies) on peer feedback help you revise your final draft?
 - a. Yes. In what way?
 - b. No.
8. Do teacher's comments (content structure) on peer feedback help you revise your final draft?
 - a. Yes. In what way?
 - b. No.
9. Do you want to continue using peer feedback for your writing?
 - a. Yes. Why?
 - b. No.

