

Peer Feedback Training in Language Teaching: A Case Study of Business English Writing

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Abstract

This paper explores the application of peer feedback training to business English writing in China. From the theoretical perspective, compared with teacher feedback, peer feedback is beneficial to motivate students to take the initiative in learning, practice the student-centered concept, and promote cooperative learning. Peer feedback training, namely peer feedback under teacher intervention in the present study, combines the advantages of teacher feedback and peer feedback, which can not only be accepted by learners but also achieve significant pragmatic effects. Peer feedback training can be applied to teach large groups of students, thus reducing the pressure and burden on teachers and improving the quality of peer feedback. The results also show that peer feedback training mainly works during the training stage rather than the modification stage. It is crucial to investigate the mechanism of peer feedback training and apply it to practice to promote the quality of English writing teaching.

Keywords: English writing teaching, peer feedback, peer feedback training, business English writing

1. Introduction

Feedback is an essential part of the teaching process that helps learners to correct mistakes. First, it provides motivation and instruction for the writer to revise the writing until it is finished. Second, it strengthens the concept of audience and helps the author change from a “writer-based” perspective to a “reader-based” one to express meaning through writing. Writing feedback can improve learners’ language skills and reflect the effectiveness of teachers’ guidance (e.g., Schunn *et al.*, 2016).

Teacher feedback is dominant in *English as a Foreign Language* (EFL) writing teaching. For teachers, however, providing feedback is “a tedious and unrewarding job” (Hyland, 1990: 279). Large classes in China impose a heavy workload for teachers to correct students’ writing, and no matter how carefully essays are corrected, the same mistakes continue to occur repeatedly. Consequently, the traditional method of teacher feedback has been questioned due to its poor effect, whereas the feasibility of peer feedback has been revealed in more recent research. Dheram (1995) believes peer feedback can be used to improve students’ initiative in writing. It should also be noted that every teaching method has its advantages and limitations, which means taking no account of reality may only lead to passive teaching with little practical effect.

Peer feedback has risen to be another effective method apart from teacher feedback in *English as a Second Language* (ESL) writing classes. Theoretically deriving from the teaching theory of process writing and cooperative learning, especially Vygotsky’s “Zone of Proximal Development” and “interaction theory of second language acquisition” (Liu & Hansen, 2002), peer feedback has become an increasingly influential form of feedback in ESL writing teaching. Peer feedback is a writing teaching activity in which learners exchange their writing and propose suggestions for revision (Mangelsdorf, 1992); it is also referred to as peer review, peer response, peer critiquing, peer evaluation, and peer editing. Studies have shown that peer feedback can encourage learners to take an active part in writing (Mendonca & Johnson, 1994), enhance their willingness for revision, and create greater opportunities for them to interact, negotiate and cooperate (Zhu, 1995), which are critical factors to improve their initiative in language teaching (Lee, 1998).

Academic research has paid increasing attention to peer feedback in writing teaching, and effective ways to improve its quality have been emphasized. Recent studies on English writing teaching have focused on peer

feedback training, aiming to improve the quality of peer feedback dynamically and flexibly (e.g., Loretto *et al.*, 2016; Min, 2016). This paper investigates the effect of peer feedback training in business English writing after analyzing and discussing its effectiveness. Since little research has touched on peer feedback training, i.e., feedback under teacher intervention, the present study seeks to shed light on the effect of peer feedback under teacher intervention on students' writing.

2. Literature Review

2.1 From Teacher Feedback to Peer Feedback

2.1.1 Background of Peer Feedback

As a writing teaching method, peer feedback refers to the teaching activity where students provide feedback for each other in a written or oral form through cooperation in the teaching process so as to improve the quality of writing (Liu & Hansen, 2002: 1). Peer feedback is used in writing teaching, which aims to improve and develop students' writing ability through their interaction and influence. This method is widely used in both ESL and EFL writing teaching. Research shows that peer feedback in writing teaching has gradually emerged and developed after the 1980s (cf. Brannon & Knoblauch, 1982; Sommers, 1982; Zamel, 1985). Two critical points account for the occurrence of peer feedback.

First, peer feedback is accompanied by the change from the teacher-centered to the student-centered concept of language learning. In traditional English writing teaching, teachers generally adopt the behavior-based teaching method, that is, rote learning with teachers in the dominant position, but students need to gain more training in their communicative ability. The development of teaching theories triggers a shift of focus from results to the process in contemporary writing teaching. In the early 1970s, process-oriented writing teaching came into being (Chaudron, 1987: 673), which emphasizes the importance of students' participation and gives full play to the role of students in all aspects of writing, such as the collection of information, the formulation of writing plans, and the completion of writing (Graves, 1978: 15). The writing process is therefore seen as the focus of teaching, allowing students to learn to write dynamically (Keh, 1990: 294). In this process, peer feedback is regarded as a vital part (Zamel, 1985: 80), as through peer feedback, students can obtain comments and suggestions from different channels to modify the writing and, at the same time, enhance their reader awareness so that students can be involved in writing activities more effectively and efficiently.

Second, within the student-centered concept, peer feedback is the solution to the dichotomy between quality feedback and heavy workload, thus making up for the limitation of teacher feedback. In the traditional teacher-centered classroom, teacher feedback occupies absolute authority in the writing process, and students can only passively accept it and modify the writing accordingly (Mendonca & Johnson, 1994: 762). Admittedly, in teaching ESL or EFL writing, especially in many Asian countries, school education is mainly oriented toward achievement. In other words, as the most widely used feedback method, teacher feedback is universally recognized by students, and its authority is conducive to improving students' writing (cf. Ferris, 1995: 50; Ferris, 1997: 318; Yang *et al.*, 2006: 199). However, from the perspective of student-centered teaching, teacher feedback has apparent limitations. One is the cause of workload and lack of teaching resources. Due to a large number of students and a heavy burden on teachers, teachers often fail to evaluate each student carefully and detailedly. Some teachers even give rigid and unclear feedback, accounting for passive learning outcomes. As a result, a lot of time and energy were spent, but little was achieved (cf. Zamel, 1985: 79; Raimes, 1987: 440; Hyland, 1998: 280; Zhao, 2010:15). Second, the intervention of teachers makes students think little of the writing process, especially the drafting and revising process as they may rely too much on teachers. Also, the absolute authority of teachers may diminish students' confidence in using the language (Hyland, 2000: 34).

2.1.2 Students' Attitude to Feedback

There are conflicting views in the research on teacher feedback. Zamel (1985) believes teachers' comments are often confusing and arbitrary and do not convey the importance of revision to students. Truscott (1996) even suggests that feedback on grammatical errors is generally ineffective. However, Ferris (1997) found that detailed and specific teacher feedback can effectively help students revise their articles, which is more evident in Kepner's (1991) results that teacher feedback promotes the accuracy of expression and improves students' writing skills.

Studies on peer feedback have also presented a range of mixed results. Connor & Asenavage (1994) found that only 5% of students' modifications to their writing were caused by peer feedback. However, the figure rose to 14% in Paulus's (1999) experiment and as high as 53% in the study of Mendonca & Johnson (1994). The role of peer feedback in improving students' writing ability has been confirmed in many studies. For instance, peer

feedback can enhance students' awareness and sense of responsibility in active learning (Jacobs, 1989) and tap into students' potential to modify their writing spontaneously and effectively (Villamil & Guerrero, 1998). Hedgcock & Lefkowitz (1992) found that peer feedback can enable students to pay attention to the rhetorical structure of their articles and cultivate the ability to modify basic language errors.

Existing studies mostly use questionnaires to grasp students' attitudes toward different feedback methods. Many studies (e.g., Radecki & Swales, 1988; Enginarlar, 1993; Ferris, 1995) show that students generally favor teacher feedback. However, students' attitudes toward peer feedback vary from study to study. Mangelsdorf (1992) found that 55% of respondents are in favor of using peer feedback; meanwhile, in Mendonca & Johnson's (1994) research, students even consider peer feedback to be as important as teacher feedback. However, Nelson & Murphy (1993) found that Chinese and Spanish students preferred teacher feedback, and ESL respondents of Zhang (1995) preferred teacher feedback. The conclusion of Tsui & Ng's (2000) research is that students regard teacher feedback as being more authoritative and acknowledge the value of peer feedback. While there are varied results, new approaches have been proposed combining various forms of feedback, especially teacher feedback and peer feedback (e.g., Zhang, 1999; Jacobs *et al.*, 1998; Mendonca & Johnson, 1994).

Nelson & Murphy (1993) believes that students' attitude toward peer feedback and its effectiveness depends on environmental factors, that is, the social/academic atmosphere in the classroom. The influence of Chinese teaching environmental factors on peer feedback is particularly noteworthy, for teachers have special authority in Chinese cultural values (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996), which shows that students may prefer teacher feedback to peer feedback. To understand whether peer feedback can be applied to the writing process in an effective way, researchers need to explore how students implement peer feedback, how different their writing ability can be affected, and how they react. Therefore, Zamel (1987) points out that the "classroom-based" and "ethnographic" research methods should be simultaneously adopted in order to study further the effect of peer feedback in college English writing teaching.

2.2 Features of Peer Feedback

2.2.1 Effectiveness of Peer Feedback: A Practical Perspective

Empirical studies have tested the effectiveness of peer feedback in ESL writing teaching. Previous research found that peer feedback plays a positive and effective role in ESL writing (e.g., Kroll & Vann, 1981: 464; Topping, 1998; Berg, 1999; Tsui & Ng, 2000; Cho & Schunn, 2003; Saito & Fujita, 2004; Schunn *et al.*, 2016), mainly reflected in the following two aspects.

For one thing, peer feedback positively influences the writing ability of second-language learners. Keh (1990) found that learners can gain more knowledge about revising their writing and better understand high-quality writing by critically reading their peers' writing. In Berg's (1999) study of 46 English learners, he found that peer feedback makes a positive difference to the diversity of students' feedback types and writing quality. Meanwhile, peer feedback could cultivate students' critical thinking abilities, as illustrated by De Guerrero & Villamil's (2000) observation that both the provider and receiver of feedback can both get benefits.

For another, peer feedback exerts a positive impact on students' cognitive ability. Mendonca & Johnson (1994) believes that when students participate in peer feedback activities, they tend to play a more active role in learning to write; at the same time, they can reconstruct the writing content according to peer suggestions. In addition, when giving feedback, students can grasp writing skills and use the corresponding techniques to provide feedback for their peers. For instance, Tsui & Ng's (2000) interview of 27 students in a middle school in Hong Kong shows that peer feedback can help students enhance their audience awareness, recognize their strengths and weaknesses in writing more clearly, and promote students' initiative in effective writing.

2.2.2 Feasibility of Peer Feedback: A Cognitive Perspective

Existing studies have confirmed the existence of cognitive issues among learners and some obstacles from learners in applying peer feedback in English writing teaching.

Studies have found that some learners consider teacher feedback to be authoritative and irreplaceable and are subjectively unwilling to accept and use peer feedback (e.g., Mendonca & Johnson, 1994: 761; Zhang, 1995: 218; Carson & Nelson, 1996: 13; Tsui & Ng, 2000: 161; Yang *et al.*, 2006: 191), especially in some Asian countries, where learners have long relied on teacher feedback in ESL or EFL writing teaching. Nelson & Carson (1996) discovered that Chinese learners are reluctant to comment publicly on their peers' writing because they are afraid of making mistakes and losing faces. Zhang (1995) surveyed 81 ESL learners in the United States and found that 76% regard teacher feedback as better than peer feedback. The same goes for the interviews of Yang *et al.* (2006), who found that teachers are more experienced, authoritative, and trustworthy from students' perspective. Some

studies even found that most learners tend to use teacher feedback for revising their writing (e.g., Connor & Asenavage, 1994; Zhang, 1995; Tsui & Ng, 2000).

Nevertheless, some studies found that learners need more experience and knowledge in peer feedback because it is difficult to find mistakes and provide effective feedback. Even if mistakes are found, they do not know how to give high-quality feedback; therefore, the recipient of feedback may be suspicious of the ability of the partner and the accuracy of the feedback (cf. Mendonca & Johnson, 1994: 747; Connor & Asenavage, 1994: 270; Paulus, 1999: 267; Tsui & Ng, 2000: 161; Hyland, 2000: 49).

These findings, on the one hand, reflect the cognitive view that learners are more inclined to accept teacher feedback than peer feedback. On the other hand, they indicate their cognitive attitude toward the effectiveness of peer feedback.

2.3 Peer Feedback Training

In order to overcome the possible cognitive obstacles caused by the application of peer feedback in writing teaching, researchers have carried out targeted studies and found an effective method to make up for its shortcomings, i.e., peer feedback training. Studies have shown that peer feedback training can help learners make effective feedback, improve the quality of feedback, and help peers make effective modifications to their writing (e.g., Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1992; Stanley, 1992; De Guerrero & Villamil, 1994; Berg, 1999; Min, 2006; Loretto *et al.*, 2016). In addition, learners' attitude toward peer feedback is influenced by their experiences and feelings in the process of peer feedback. When the influence of peer feedback on language development is perceived to be effective, learners show a positive attitude toward peer feedback (Mendonca & Johnson, 1994; Yang *et al.*, 2006). Although there are some obstacles in applying peer feedback, it has certain advantages over teacher feedback, which can reduce teachers' workload and better reflect student-centered cooperative learning. Therefore, peer feedback training has attracted attention and has begun to be used in ESL or EFL writing. In-depth research has been carried out on how to conduct peer feedback training, and a series of methods of peer feedback have been proposed so far (cf. Stanley, 1992; Berg, 1999; Min, 2006), which means research on peer feedback training and its application is of great significance.

In recent years, the methods of peer feedback training have been further developed. Lam (2010) divides the training into three stages: modeling, exploring, and consciousness-raising. In the modeling stage, teachers emphasize the modeling process of language and the expression of meaning in writing. In the exploring stage, learners apply what they have learned to revise the writing of others. In the consciousness-raising stage, learners are instructed to analyze the peer feedback they are given. Min (2006) conducted a more detailed study on the training method of peer feedback and found that the method of combining mastery classroom demonstration, i.e., showing learners the correct evaluation process and method, with teacher feedback to provide explanations has the most obvious effect on improving learners' peer feedback skills. More importantly, it has also been revealed that peer feedback significantly affects ESL or EFL learners after training or mentoring during the writing process (cf. Paulus, 1999; Berg, 1999; Rahimi, 2013). In addition to improving the quality of feedback, training can promote the development of learners' writing skills, establishing their confidence in writing and providing feedback, and using meta-cognitive strategies (Min, 2005). Meanwhile, the writing purpose and reflection after peer feedback also contribute to the quality of feedback (Zhang *et al.*, 2017). Learners can provide feedback for their peers cooperatively, read their writing from the writers' angle, and make relevant evaluations. Besides, learners are more willing to spend time and energy understanding writers' intentions and helping writers solve problems through cooperation (Min, 2008). The present study focuses on peer feedback training, with specific attention to peer feedback under teacher intervention, to explore and investigate its role in writing teaching.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

Participants of this experiment are 90 freshmen majoring in business English from a university in Southern China. They are randomly divided into three groups according to three different feedback methods, with 30 students in each group. Before this experiment, 90 students had received four introductory writing training sessions. The average scores of the English university entrance examination of the three groups are 115.016, 115.029, and 114.985, respectively, which shows no significant difference in their English proficiency. Initially, 90 students took an IELTS mock test (reading and writing), with an average score of 6.14, 6.22, and 6.12, respectively. As the test results show no apparent difference, it can be preliminarily confirmed that participants' English level and writing ability can be regarded as the same.

3.2 Research Design

The basic operating procedures of different groups of students are shown in Figure 1. In order to improve the operability of the experiment, the ordinary peer feedback group and the group under teacher intervention are further divided into three sub-groups, respectively, to enable them to provide and receive peer feedback.

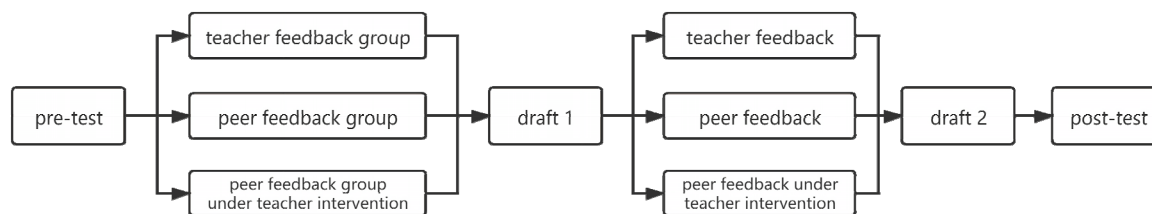


Figure 1. Research procedures of three feedback groups

Students in three groups are assigned the same writing task and complete the first draft of the writing task independently within a limited time in class. In the correcting stage, the teacher feedback group receives traditional teacher feedback: the teacher corrects the article conventionally and provides remarks for students. Then, students complete the second draft according to the teacher's comments and suggestions. The peer feedback group is divided into small groups to share each article with different members, apply the evaluation standards (text content, text structure, language accuracy, and language proficiency), and give written or oral feedback. Through face-to-face communication, students make adjustments to their writing according to the opinion of other members, followed by the second draft. In the same way as the peer feedback group, students in the group under teacher intervention apply what they have learned in their notes. Under the guidance of systematic training and group discussion in advance from the teacher, students review and revise their peers' writing. In the feedback process, the teacher makes appropriate interventions, enabling the group members to complete the second draft. Finally, the three groups submit the second and first drafts to the teachers for review within a limited time.

Based on Lam's (2010) three stages of peer feedback training (modeling, exploring, and consciousness-awareness), this experiment observes and compares students' different performances regarding the training process. During the experiment, in addition to feedback quality, the researcher conducts further interviews to evaluate the effects of peer feedback training on students. In the evaluation process, teachers guide students to put forward feedback opinions for their peers as feedback providers and receivers from the cooperative perspective.

The experiment lasts two months, and each student completes two articles modified by one of the three feedback methods. As students need to be familiar with the feedback process, in the first round of writing activities, the teacher demonstrates how to provide feedback for the students with the peer feedback group and the intervention group, and provide appropriate guidance for revision and communication so that students can be familiar with the experimental process of feedback. Therefore, after the first round when students are learning to apply different feedback methods, this experiment selects the second round as the experimental case.

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

In the experiment, SPSS is used for a comparative analysis of relevant data, and the feedback process is strictly recorded and further analyzed through classroom observation and audio recording.

3.3.1 Observation and Recording

The second feedback experiment is specially arranged with the assistance of recording equipment to obtain information on the whole feedback process in different feedback groups. Then, the audio file containing the feedback information is converted into text for analysis. Finally, errors in the text are categorized in a list, including text content, text structure, language accuracy, language proficiency, and others. Due to the poor quality of some recordings, researchers further pick 53 recordings from the six feedback groups that are successfully converted from audio into valid texts, with 25 receiving peer feedback and 28 receiving peer feedback under teacher intervention. For a better comparison, 25 texts of peer feedback and peer feedback under teacher intervention, respectively, are finally selected.

3.3.2 Questionnaires and Interviews

Questionnaires and interviews provide references for further data analysis. It is critical to determine the theoretical basis or source of some opinions in the revised draft and understand why writers hold different attitudes towards different feedback opinions. The questionnaire mainly involves two aspects. One is how helpful students consider teacher feedback, peer feedback, and peer feedback under teacher intervention, and the other is which type of feedback method they prefer. In order to obtain more reliable opinions and attitudes on three feedback methods, this study conducts a face-to-face interview with each student by using the questionnaire after the experiment. A total of 90 valid questionnaires and 90 valid texts extracted by recording conversion are collected, and 68 substantive feedback opinions are screened out for further evaluation.

3.3.3 Further Interviews on Pre-Test and Post-Test

Before and after the experiment, two short writing tests are set respectively, and students are then randomly selected for further interviews. The evaluation methods of the two tests follow the scoring requirements of the writing part of IELTS, including an overall evaluation and four specific evaluations. The overall evaluation is the teacher's overall impression of the article. Specific evaluations include text content, text structure, language accuracy, and language proficiency. The four teachers who grade the composition all have relevant experiences in grading college English papers, and the score is the average of the four teachers. After the evaluation, further targeted interviews are conducted with students according to the pre-test and post-test results.

4. Findings and Discussions

4.1 Results of Composition Modifications

Based on the comparison of text materials converted from audio files with the results of the pre-test and post-test, the present study classifies and analyzes the feedback content of each student's writing task in the peer feedback group and the intervention group. Specific results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Results of feedback: Types, frequency, and percentage

Feedback contents	Peer feedback group		Peer feedback group under teacher intervention	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Text content	62	16.31%	54	15.26%
Text structure	36	9.47%	62	17.51%
Language accuracy	89	24.72%	75	21.19%
Language proficiency	174	48.33%	155	43.79%
Others	19	5.00%	8	2.25%
Total	380		354	

In Table 1, the number of feedback opinions in the peer feedback group is more than that in the intervention group, and the distribution of specific feedback categories in the two groups is quite different. The peer feedback group focuses more on language accuracy, that is, grammar, spelling, and punctuation, while the frequencies of the text structure and the text content are relatively low. The distribution of the intervention group is relatively directional, especially in terms of text structure and text content, obviously more than that of the peer feedback group. As for some details, first of all, regarding the text structure, both groups put forward suggestions on the transition and cohesion of their peers' articles. The intervention group also advises on the overall layout and the coherence of the article. Besides, with regard to the text content, the intervention group provides more suggestions concerning the topics of their articles that deviate from what is anticipated. However, feedback about the width and depth of the text content tends to be the same, whereas ideas of their articles from the peer feedback group present greater diversification. In addition, in terms of language accuracy (grammar, spelling, and punctuation), a total of 21 grammatical errors are highlighted in the feedback, with tense and spelling errors being the top two. Last but not least, there is no conspicuous difference in the language proficiency between these two groups, with special attention paid to the wrong collocation and choice of words.

Repeatedly listening to the recorded audio of feedback as well as analyzing text information leads to the finding that the ideas of the peer feedback group are mainly affected by factors such as students' language ability and personal experience. Those in the intervention group are more or less limited due to the teacher's intervention, which triggers the convergence of opinions and reduces their creativity. The implementation process of peer feedback is face-to-face communication in which students tend to use their professional knowledge and language

skills to brainstorm and develop timely feedback after discussion. It is also found that their feedback is limited by time, place, and understanding, so it is impossible for them to propose many modifications and extensions to the text structure and content as they are not confident of their understanding. Therefore, the peer feedback group usually carries out detailed and in-depth discussions on the vocabulary and grammar of the article, while feedback on the structure and content is not adequate. When students provide peer feedback, their suggestions on the text structure and content are far less than those on grammar and vocabulary.

In the intervention group, due to regular communication with teachers for guidance, group members do not always focus merely on grammar and spelling mistakes but dare to offer feedback on the text structure as well as the topic and the coherence with further discussion and modification. In addition to language accuracy, particular attention is paid to text structure and language proficiency. However, due to the teacher's intervention, students rarely speak out freely regarding the text content; instead, they tend to follow what the teacher has guided them to do. Therefore, the intervention group provides fewer suggestions on the text content, and students are less innovative than those in the peer feedback group. In the interview, several students said that in the group discussion, their members generally further their feedback around the suggestions given by teachers, which is similar to what usually occurs in the teacher feedback group where students tend to rely on the teacher, thus reducing their initiative in learning and revising as well. The main reason is that students generally believe that teacher feedback is more authoritative and comprehensive, so there is no need to waste time and energy modifying their articles. To a large extent, this over-reliance on teacher feedback reduces students' enthusiasm for independent learning. Compared with teacher feedback, peer feedback can skillfully reduce the occurrence of this situation, which proves that the combination of teacher feedback and peer feedback is effective (cf. Zhang, 1999; Jacobs *et al.*, 1998). Peer feedback under teacher intervention can cultivate students' habits of spontaneous revision and autonomous learning, which can make up for the deficiency of teacher feedback in this aspect.

4.2 Questionnaire and Interview Results

4.2.1 The Role of Feedback

The questionnaire in this study contains five parts with different questions. The first part is to answer 10 'yes' or 'no' questions in order to understand the students' overall evaluation of the three methods. The other four parts mainly relate to specific evaluations of the feedback, including their acceptability of the methods, writing anxiety, interest in writing, and writing levels, in the form of the 5 Likert scales ('5' for 'totally agree'; '1' for 'totally disagree'), in order to understand the way students view these three kinds of feedback methods. Results of the questionnaire are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Students' evaluation of three feedback methods to improve their English writing ability

Feedback	Teacher feedback	Peer feedback	Peer feedback under teacher intervention
Acceptability	3.82	3.16	3.52
Anxiety	1.96	3.41	2.88
Interest	2.76	3.54	3.58
Ability	3.16	3.18	3.31

From Table 2, students in the experiment hold a positive attitude towards the three methods. Students in the teacher feedback group have the highest overall acceptance, as high as 3.82. It can be interpreted through the interview that students are used to teacher feedback, which, as far as they are concerned, is more professional and credible than peer feedback, reflecting that the teacher's guidance on student writing always occupies a significant role in the learning process. However, in terms of easing writing anxiety, the effect of teacher feedback (only 1.96) is significantly weaker than that of the other two methods, indicating that students have certain worries about teacher feedback. During the interview, some students express their concern that the teacher's evaluations of their articles are too low, and that they are even somewhat criticized. Moreover, they may be 'unable to write' when revising their articles due to their inadequate understanding of the teacher's comments. On the contrary, peer feedback (3.41) can alleviate writing anxiety with peer feedback under teacher intervention (2.88) in the middle, showing that these two methods are more helpful in reducing students' psychological pressure in writing than teacher feedback and help them better express their opinions and understand others' feedback.

In the interview process, the results of enhancing writing interest and alleviating anxiety are similar; that is, the score of teacher feedback is lower than that of the other two methods. In addition, in the teacher feedback group, the teacher only makes written evaluations and oral summaries for the whole group, so it is impossible to

communicate with each student individually. This further indicates that peer feedback under teacher intervention, with its flexible and equal communication mode, can better exert students' independent initiative and learning enthusiasm and enable students to participate actively in the discussion (cf. Jacobs, 1989; De Guerrero & Villamil, 1998).

As for improving writing ability, there is little difference between the three methods, and their scores are all higher than 3.1, which reveals students' acknowledgment of different feedback methods, as well as the necessity and importance of feedback methods for improving writing ability. In the interview, 90 students all recognize the role of feedback in writing. Only by knowing others' opinions and suggestions can they know how effectively it is to modify their articles and improve their writing skills. The interview records also fully indicate that students' interest in writing is enhanced through peer feedback and peer feedback under teacher intervention. Overall, peer feedback methods can develop students' interest in and enthusiasm for mastering English writing skills.

4.2.2 Students' Evaluation of Feedback

The first ten questions of the questionnaire are mainly used to understand students' overall recognition of three feedback methods and their opinions on which feedback methods they prefer to adopt in their future writing. Some of the results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Students' overall recognition of three feedback methods and their suggestions for improvement

Statements		Teacher feedback		Peer feedback		Peer feedback under teacher intervention	
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
I think this kind of feedback works for me.	Frequency	24	6	25	5	28	2
	Percentage	80.00%	20.00%	83.33%	16.67%	93.33%	6.67%
I would like to continue using this feedback.	Frequency	16	14	21	9	24	6
	Percentage	53.33%	46.67%	70.00%	30.00%	80.00%	20.00%
I would like to see this feedback improved.	Frequency	26	4	28	2	27	3
	Percentage	86.67%	13.33%	93.33%	6.67%	90.00%	10.00%
I would like to try other ways of getting feedback.	Frequency	10	20	18	12	4	26
	Percentage	33.33%	66.67%	60.00%	40.00%	13.33%	86.67%

According to the data, most students hold a positive attitude that these three methods help improve their writing ability. There are, nevertheless, some negative comments from the interview that several students do not understand peer feedback and how to improve their articles in the second draft. One student who participated in the peer feedback said that he could not reach the same opinion as other group members in the group discussion and was skeptical of peer feedback. Regarding whether to continue using the feedback method, the number of students in the intervention group who hold positive and negative attitudes is about the same, which indicates that the students have an indubitable trust and indisputable dependence on teacher feedback, but they also have both skeptical and curious attitude towards the new feedback method. This ambivalence is a typical feature of Chinese students and a typical reflection of the influence of the traditional education model (Cortazzi & Jim, 1996). Students tend to believe in teachers' ability and experience in giving feedback and have long been convinced of the accuracy and authority of teacher feedback (Ysui & Ng, 2000).

On the contrary, students lack confidence in their own and their peers' language proficiency, and their passive learning attitude also makes them fear difficulties in new feedback methods. This situation thoroughly explains the importance of peer feedback training as well as the necessity of teachers' guidance and instruction before implementing a new feedback method. After students are familiar with the feedback process and relevant skills, their fear can be greatly reduced. Similar to what is shown in the peer feedback group, more than half of the students in the intervention group agree to continue using the feedback method, and most of them hope to improve the method, revealing their willingness to see the feedback method developed as there still exist some limitations.

Besides, students tend to use different feedback methods. Most students hope to use other methods on the basis of using the original method, which the peer feedback group confirms. This data set fully reflects students' demands for different methods. During the interview, students in both the teacher and peer feedback groups express their willingness to use different methods flexibly. On the one hand, they hope to get detailed evaluations

from the teacher; on the other hand, equal communication among peers can not only enable them to enjoy a more relaxing and free space for creation but also enrich the writing content and improve the quality of language. Furthermore, the intervention group has the above two advantages, and students have the highest overall evaluation and satisfaction with this method. It can be seen that the flexible and comprehensive application of peer feedback under teacher intervention can highlight the advantages of each method, and enable students to maintain a more enthusiastic learning attitude toward improving their writing skills, so as to enhance the effectiveness of feedback.

4.2.3 Further Discussions on Interview Results

In order to ensure the validity of test results, questions are designed in strict accordance with the requirements of IELTS writing. The format of the essay is argumentative with the same difficulty of the topic within 50 minutes. The pre-test and post-test scores are shown in Table 4 according to different items, respectively. The present study conducts interviews with students based on their previous and subsequent achievements.

Table 4. Comparison of pre-test and post-test results (25 points for the total mark of each item)

Items	Teacher feedback			Peer feedback			Peer feedback under teacher intervention		
	Pre-test	Post-test	Gap	Pre-test	Post-test	Gap	Pre-test	Post-test	Gap
Text content	20.112	21.222	1.110	20.113	21.503	1.390	20.109	21.518	1.409
Text structure	20.205	22.211	2.006	20.207	21.434	1.227	20.211	21.887	1.676
Language accuracy	18.522	18.989	0.467	18.525	19.872	1.347	18.519	19.968	1.449
Language proficiency	19.425	20.503	1.078	19.416	20.503	1.087	19.423	20.514	1.091
Total	78.264	82.925	4.661	78.261	83.312	5.051	78.262	83.887	5.625

Based on the overall results of students on different methods, the writing level of the three groups has improved to a certain extent after combining writing feedback and writing training, which suggests that all three methods can effectively improve students' writing skills and language abilities. Nevertheless, from the perspective of different items, each method has different effects on the level of students' writing. In the teacher feedback group, students' improvement in the text structure is conspicuous; by contrast, in the peer feedback group, students make significant progress in terms of the text content and language accuracy, which reveals that students do not pay enough attention to basic language errors concerning teacher feedback (cf. Truscott, 1996), and that they focus more on spelling, grammar, and collocation. In the intervention group, the text structure, text content, language accuracy, and language proficiency have improved. Such a relatively balanced improvement proves the importance of combining different methods, as different methods have certain effects on different aspects of students' writing.

In order to compare the influence of the three methods on different parts of students' writing, the researcher conducts a one-way variance test on the post-test score. There is no significant difference between these three methods as to total scores, indicating that the three methods have similar effects on improving students' writing skills, and the intervention group performs slightly better than the other two groups. However, by classification, the influence of the three methods on different aspects of students' writing is noticeably different. A cursory observation of data leads to the finding that in terms of the text content, the gap of the peer feedback group (1.409) is similar to that of the intervention group (1.390), while the gap of the teacher feedback group (1.110) is observably different from that of the other two methods, suggesting that peer feedback has a significant advantage in expanding and enriching the text content. It is proved from the interview that communication between peers can change the tension of providing feedback and play a critical role in the diversification of the text content. As for the text structure, the gap of the intervention group (1.676) is between that of the peer feedback group (1.227) and that of the teacher feedback group (2.006). It can be seen by comparing the data that teachers play an irreplaceable role in improving students' ability of the text structure. Regarding language accuracy, the teacher feedback group shows no noticeable improvement (0.467), while the peer feedback group and the intervention group present significant changes with similar trends. This is because small language units are easier for students to master than the text structure, proving that peer feedback can lead students to emphasize their primary language ability. As regards language proficiency, there is also no conspicuous difference in these three methods, at 1.078, 1.087, and 1.091, respectively. A final comparison of the average scores reveals that the effect of teacher feedback on improving students' language proficiency is slightly less pronounced than that of the other two methods.

Results of the interview further support and interpret the statistics. First, objective and accurate macro-analysis provided by the teacher has a better guiding effect on the text structure of students' writing. Teachers' comments are more convincing to students than peer feedback. Additionally, peer feedback, based on its flexible and relaxing way of discussion, functions better than teacher feedback in the text content and language accuracy and can also reduce writing anxiety and enhance writing interest. Last, with teachers' intervention, peer feedback allows students to not only gain authoritative guidance from teachers but also communicate with peers with fewer barriers.

While students in the interview mention they do acquire more skills and techniques in the intervention group, many of them figure out that in practice, they have invested more time and energy in the training stage so that in the process of providing feedback, they have to master relevant writing knowledge and use the corresponding skills to provide feedback for their peers. Most of them think they mainly acquire the writing skills and techniques in the training stage, which is beyond the assumption that students should have made significant progress when providing and receiving feedback.

5. Implications and Conclusions

Improving the quality of English writing teaching is not only the focus of second language acquisition research but also one of the significant tasks for English teachers. However, not only does it take teachers a lot of time and energy to correct students' writing, but what students learn is also very limited because teacher feedback places students in a relatively passive state of acceptance. Given the authority of teacher feedback and the interactivity of peer feedback, this research adopts peer feedback training, that is, peer feedback under teacher intervention. This method is just as helpful to students as relying entirely on teacher feedback, and peer feedback can also be carried out to replace part of teacher feedback. Therefore, peer feedback under teacher intervention can both reduce teachers' burden and improve students' writing initiative.

In the experiment, it is found that teacher feedback has a significant effect on enhancing students' writing awareness of the layout, while peer feedback has a positive influence on expanding the content and improving basic language skills as well as alleviating writing anxiety and improving writing interest. Peer feedback under teacher intervention combines some characteristics of teacher feedback and peer feedback, which is more balanced on the whole and more effective in improving students' writing ability. While the steps, requirements, and methods of feedback are different, and students' familiarity with and acceptance of these methods vary greatly, all of them can improve students' writing ability and language skills to a certain degree based on the present study. Only teacher feedback cannot guarantee that students can effectively improve all aspects of the writing because of their difficulties in understanding and accepting teachers' opinions. Therefore, in writing teaching, full consideration should be given to the differences in students' cognitive ability and language skills and the flexible application of various feedback methods targeted at different students.

The present study shows that peer feedback training, i.e., the combination of peer feedback and teacher feedback, is feasible and effective. Teachers should act not only as formidable authority graders and supervisors but also as instructors, participants, organizers, coordinators, and readers who can communicate with students. During the implementation of teacher feedback, teachers should establish a friendly and equal cooperative relationship with students and express abstruse and general evaluation suggestions in a more straightforward and specific way to ensure that students can understand and accept the feedback. As for peer feedback, through reasonable grouping and system training such as flexible, real-time monitoring, the teacher can guide students to participate actively in group discussions, attach importance to developing students' consciousness of readers, cooperation spirit, and creative ability, and solve various contradictions and conflicts in the process of feedback in time, so as to ensure that feedback can be orderly and efficiently implemented. Only by combining them flexibly and appropriately in writing teaching can their functions be fully realized, and the objectivity and rationality of writing evaluation. In the questionnaire and interview, most students express their willingness to use different feedback methods for writing evaluation, proving the necessity of organically combining teacher and peer feedback. Future research is suggested to further explore the combination of teacher feedback and peer feedback in different ways, such as peer feedback prior to teachers' feedback, to compare the roles of different methods and different orders in the combination of feedback.

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