

Students' Engagement with Peer Feedback: A Case Study of Omani University Students

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Abstract

This study examines the characteristics that influence students' affective, cognitive, and behavioral responses to peer corrective feedback. For eight weeks, a group of 25 university students participated in the study, completing two writing assignments and providing and receiving peer feedback. The data was collected through analysis of drafts, post-study questionnaires and self-reflections. The results demonstrated that while students' cognitive and behavioral engagement varied, their affective engagement was strong. Students actively revised their work but found it difficult to apply feedback, particularly when it came to content and organization (global feedback), compared to language and mechanics (local feedback). Clarity, the perceived value of the feedback, and teacher guidance were among the key factors that affected their engagement. Student engagement was also significantly influenced by their motivation and the perceived relevance of the feedback was. The results suggest that peer review is effective; however, students need additional guidance in engaging with global feedback to improve their writing.

Keywords: peer feedback, student engagement, affective, cognitive, behavioral, writing, Omani students

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduce the Problem

One important aspect of language instruction that has drawn interest from researchers and teachers alike is corrective feedback (Ellis, 2017). Corrective feedback is essential because "the learner needs feedback on how well he or she is doing," according to skill-learning theory (Ur, 1996, p. 243). The effects of corrective feedback on students' writing have been the subject of conflicting findings in recent years (Masrul et al., 2024, Yang, 2024, Yousefi & Nassaji, 2024). Peer feedback refers to students' evaluation of their classmates' work (Nicol et al., 2013). Students are encouraged to assess their own work and compare it to that of their peers when they are given the opportunity to revise their peers' work (Reksiana et al., 2023). This process enhances learners' motivation (Hotea & Turda, 2024; Cui et al., 2021) and improves the accuracy of students writing, particularly in language use, mechanics, and grammar (Pham et al., 2021, Shang, 2019). While lower-proficiency students gain more from the type of feedback they receive than from the act of giving it, higher-proficiency students gain from both giving and receiving helpful feedback (Gao et al., 2023). Feedback's efficacy depends less on the feedback itself and more on how students respond to it. To achieve broader learning goals, feedback works best when it motivates students to move on with their upcoming assignments and performance in general. According to research, taking use of feedback's potential to improve student learning requires active engagement (Zhang & Hyland, 2018).

As Mao and Lee (2023) note, most research on student engagement has focused on how students interact with written feedback and the factors that affect their engagement with it. Yu et al. (2018) highlight that students' interactions with peer feedback are complex and dynamic. To get the most out of peer interaction activities, it is essential to give clear training on peer feedback procedures (Sippel, 2021). Such training ensures students actively contribute to each other's language development through meaningful feedback.

1.2 The Theoretical Framework of Student Engagement with Peer Feedback:

The process of engagement is dynamic and ongoing, taking place over a range of timeframes (Sulis, 2022). Wong and Liem (2021) argue that "students' psychological state of activity affords them to feel activated, exert effort, and be absorbed during learning activities." According to Fredericks et al. (2004), it is a multidimensional construct that incorporates behavioral, emotional (affective), and cognitive engagement. Ellis (2010) applies this framework to corrective feedback, defining engagement as students' affective, behavioral, and cognitive responses to feedback. Han and Hyland (2015) further specify that it involves perceiving and understanding feedback, employing metacognitive strategies to regulate mental effort, and applying cognitive processes to evaluate and respond to input.

Behavioral engagement in the context of peer feedback describes how students use the feedback that they get (Fan and Xu, 2020). According to Han and Hyland (2015), it includes a range of revision tasks, including fixing mistakes, making inaccurate modifications, updating content, removing, replacing, or leaving text unchanged. Revision strategies also include the techniques students employ to enhance their writing, such as requesting external help, consulting tutors, or checking feedback notes (Fan and Xu, 2020; Han and Hyland, 2015).

Students' emotional responses to peer feedback and their evaluation of that input are indicators of affective engagement (Fan and Xu, 2020). Terms such as curiosity, perceived significance, and emotional reactions reflect students' affective attitudes toward the feedback process (Fan and Xu, 2020).

1.3 Studies about Students' Engagement with Peer Feedback:

Affective engagement is demonstrated by students' emotional reactions to peer feedback and their assessment of that input (Fan and Xu, 2020). This component of engagement can be observed using terms like interest, perceived significance, and emotional response, which reflect students' affective attitudes toward the feedback process (Fan and Xu, 2020).

Liu and Storch (2021) examine the ways in which three students respond to feedback on several aspects of their writing. While students adopted nearly all feedback suggestions, their responses varied based on individual traits and learning environments, underscoring the complexity of feedback engagement.

Along the same lines, Shi (2021) compared engagement across teacher, peer, and automated feedback sources. Students revised differently. Regarding behavioral involvement, there were variations in their revision techniques and how frequently they incorporated feedback from different genres and sources. There were differences in how students processed feedback both cognitively and metacognitively. Additionally, the type and source of feedback had an impact on the students' emotional reactions. According to the students, peer and teacher feedback was more beneficial and enhanced the quality of their drafts than automated input (Shi, 2001).

Jin et al. (2022) found that postgraduate students improved their writing performance significantly due to cognitive, affective, and behavioral engagement with peer feedback. Key drivers included perceived feedback value, developmental suggestions, and positive affective responses.

In a study by Qian and Li (2023), the focus was on students' long-term interactions with peer feedback. The researchers discovered that these interactions varied between four writing tutorials. Peer feedback given in person was especially successful at maintaining students' continuous involvement in the feedback process. Task requirements, feedback problems, and interaction patterns are additional context-related aspects. These characteristics jointly influence how students interact with peer feedback.

Cheng et al. (2023) recently noted that peer feedback responses were more variable than teacher feedback responses. In contrast to their typically consistent affective, behavioral, and cognitive responses to teacher feedback, students' responses to peer feedback showed both consistency and variability in these three areas (Cheng et al., 2023).

1.4 Factors that Influence Students' Engagement with Corrective Feedback:

Han and Hyland (2015) identified student-related factors (e.g., writing skills, goals, L2 beliefs) and contextual factors (e.g., task design, interpersonal dynamics) as key influences. A thorough investigation into the variables influencing students' involvement with feedback was carried out by Winstone et al. (2016). Their study considered several important factors, such as the setting, feedback messages, feedback givers, and feedback recipients. Individual characteristics among students, such as their commitment to change, self-efficacy, self-regulation skills, prior experience, and agreement with grades, influence how the feedback recipients utilize the feedback. The effectiveness of feedback implementation was also influenced by the students' degrees of experience, expertise, focus, and peer power dynamics. The feedback's actual content and clarity had a

significant impact on students' answers. Engagement was also impacted by the situational elements and larger context of the feedback process (Winstone et al., 2016). Zheng & Yu (2018) found that although lower-proficiency students maintained a positive emotional engagement, they struggled with feedback comprehension due to limited metacognitive skills.

According to Han's (2019) research, learner-related factors and contextual factors are the two primary components that affect how students engage. Beliefs, language skills, metalinguistic awareness, prior knowledge, and motivation are all components of the learners. These factors have an impact on how students identify and correct their mistakes as well as how they prioritize their revision assignments. Han distinguished several levels of context that influence learning. The first is the textual context, which consists of the features and organization of the educational resources. The interpersonal context, which includes social interactions between students and others, is the second context. Third, the teaching strategies and tactics are covered by the instructional context. Fourth, broader cultural and socioeconomic influences on learning are part of the sociocultural context (Han, 2019).

Tian and Zhou (2020) investigated the interaction of five Chinese students in an online writing course with three feedback sources in longitudinal research. The results showed that both environmental and individual factors affected learners' involvement, which altered dynamically and reciprocally across tasks.

In secondary education, Yan and Tang (2023) investigate how students interact with feedback and what influences this interaction. The findings demonstrate that complex cognitive, behavioral, and affective interactions are involved in students' involvement with peer criticism. Both providing and receiving comments are dynamically impacted by these factors. Students' roles influence their level of engagement; whereas those who provide feedback frequently demonstrate deep engagement, those who receive it may show more surface-level commitment. Students' proficiency, views, personalities, and teacher leadership were among the many aspects that influenced their involvement with peer feedback (Yan and Tang, 2023).

Chinese high school students' participation in providing and receiving peer feedback is examined by Chen (2023). Chen draws the conclusion that although students demonstrated reduced affective involvement, they were cognitively and behaviorally engaged. Six elements were identified: effective task organization and prioritization; online performance of participants; interactive communication; feedback response tactics; self-reliance; and acknowledging the contributions of peers.

The paper aims at investigating university students' engagement with peer corrective feedback and the factors that influence their engagement. The research questions are:

- 1- To what extent do university students engage with peer corrective feedback affectively, behaviourally, and cognitively?
- 2- What factors influence students' engagement with peer feedback in comparison/contrast essays and incident reports?

The phrase "corrective feedback" has historically been used to refer to students' participation in negotiated encounters that might help them identify their mistakes and make connections between form and meaning, thus promoting the acquisition process (VanPatten, 2003).

2. Method

2.1 The Context

The study was conducted at a public university in Oman as part of an English Level 3 course designed to improve students' English skills. The students are taught reading, speaking, listening, and vocabulary through textbooks. Writing and grammar are taught through supplementary materials. The course covered four writing types, including comparison/contrast essays (200 words) focusing on logical structure using block method and incident reports (150 words) emphasizing factual clarity and chronological organization.

2.2 Participants

Twenty-five pre-intermediate students participated in the study - 13 males and 12 females, all aged 17-18 years old. These students had studied English for twelve years in school and were placed at this level based on their performance on the university placement test.

2.3 Research Design

Over the course of eight weeks, the study collected data using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Participants were informed of the study's purpose and provided ethical clearance.

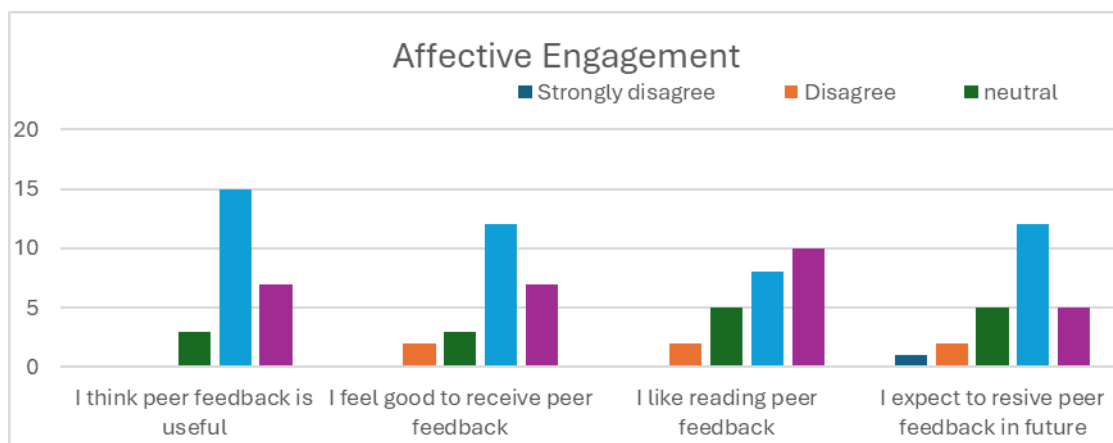
2.3.1 Peer Feedback Protocol:

The research design incorporated a peer feedback protocol with two main categories: global feedback (covering content relevance, depth, and accuracy as well as organizational structure, coherence, and flow) and local feedback (addressing language elements like grammar, vocabulary, and syntax along with mechanics such as spelling and punctuation).

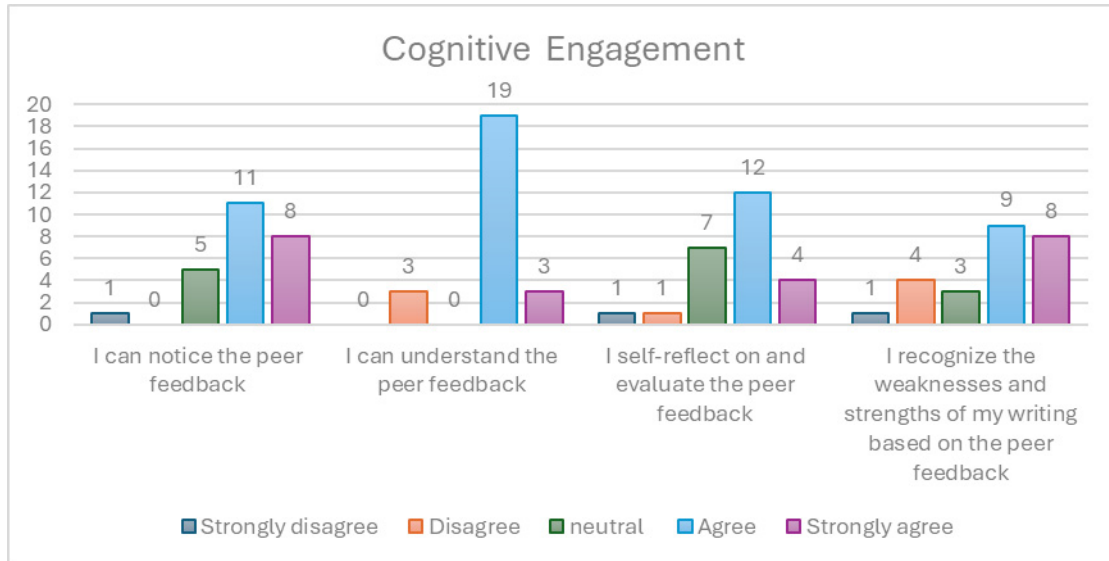
During the Training Phase in Week, students practiced using a 5-criteria rubric (task achievement, organization, grammar, vocabulary, mechanics) to evaluate sample drafts through an Error Identification Workshop. This included: correcting grammar errors (e.g., subject-verb agreement) in essays and playing a “Feedback Quiz” to identify missing transitions in incident reports. For feedback guidelines, students used color-coded written feedback (red = critical, blue = optional) and participated in 15-minute structured oral discussions with prompts like “Explain why you suggested this change.” In the Implementation Phase (Weeks 2–8), students exchanged feedback on two drafts per writing type, using structured templates with genre-specific prompts (e.g., “Does the conclusion summarize key points?” for global feedback; “Circle spelling errors” for local feedback). To ensure validity, triangulation was employed: First, draft revisions (e.g., grammar fixes) were tracked, second, a 17-item Likert-scale survey (Fredricks et al., 2004) measured engagement, third reflections were thematically coded (e.g., confusion about the organization), and an inter-rater check (50% of drafts) achieved 92% agreement on feedback categorization. Feedback emphasis, which divides feedback into global and local feedback, was used to analyze students' drafts and peer feedback by earlier studies (Mao & Crosthwaite, 2019; Cheng et al., 2021; Cheng & Zhang, 2024).

3. Results

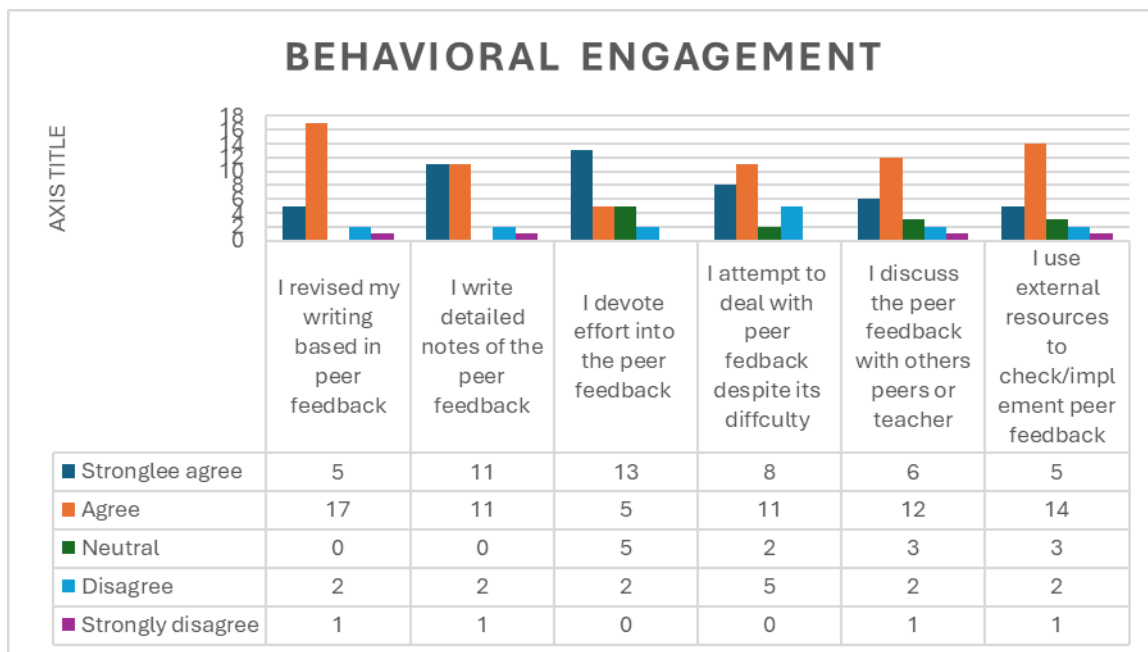
The column chart analysis of students' affective engagement revealed that 15 students agreed peer feedback was beneficial, while 7 strongly agreed. Nineteen students reported positive feelings about receiving peer feedback, though 2 disagreed and 3 remained neutral. Regarding enjoyment of the process, 72% of students found reading peer comments enjoyable, compared to 20% who were neutral and 12% who disagreed. When asked about future expectations, 68% of students anticipated receiving peer feedback again, with 20% neutral and 12% expressing disagreement.



Analysis of cognitive engagement measures showed that 18 out of 25 participants (72%) could effectively identify peer feedback. Twenty-two students (88%) understood the feedback they received. When evaluating feedback, 16 participants engaged in self-reflection, while 7 were neutral and 2 disagreed. When recognizing writing strengths and weaknesses through feedback, 68% of students agreed this was possible, compared to 12% neutral and 20% disagreed.



Behavioral engagement results indicated that 22 students (88%) revised their writing based on peer feedback, including 5 who strongly agreed and 17 who agreed with this statement. Only 3 students chose not to revise their work. Regarding notetaking, all 22 revising students maintained detailed feedback records (11 strongly agreed, 11 agreed), while 3 did not take notes. Most students (13 strongly agreed, 5 agreed) reported investing effort in providing feedback, though 5 were neutral and 2 disagreed. When facing feedback challenges, 8 strongly agreed and 11 agreed they made attempts, while 5 disagreed. Discussion of feedback occurred among 18 students (6 strongly agreed, 12 agreed), with 3 neutral and 2 not participating. Nineteen students (5 strongly agreed, 14 agreed) used external resources to verify feedback, compared to 3 neutral and 2 who did not.



Findings from Analyzing the drafts

The examination of the comparison and contrast essay drafts showed that students concentrated predominantly on local components (language), comprising 78.22% of all feedback. Global feedback (organizations and content) the remaining 21.78% of comments, with organization receiving moderately more attention (23 comments) than content (16 comments).

Table 1. Analysis of Feedback Focus: Comparison and Contrast Essay.

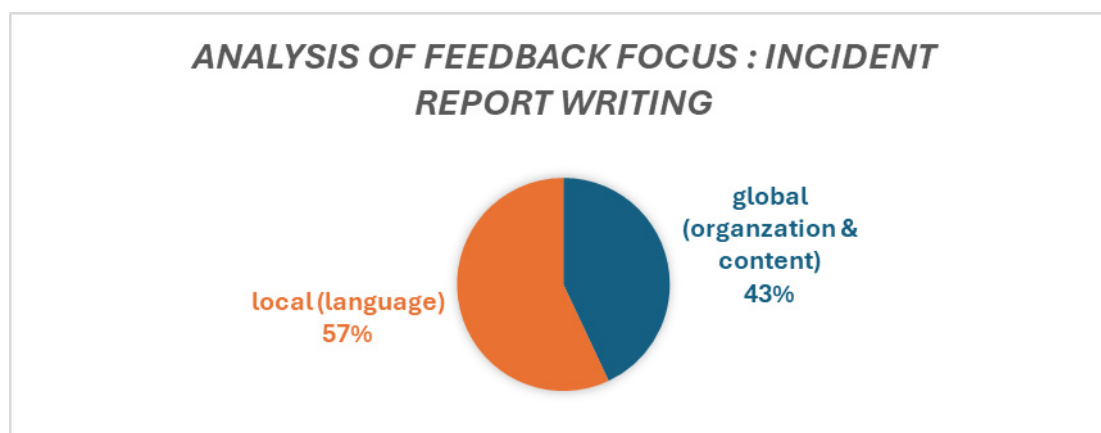
Type of Feedback	Global (Organization & Content)	Local (Language)
Number of feedback comments	39	140
Percentage	21.78%	78.22%

Regarding revision procedures, the analysis revealed that 28 out of 39 global revisions were fully addressed (71.8% success rate) with 5 partially addressed and 6 revisions were not addressed. For local feedback, students incorporated 102 out of 140 suggested changes (72.9% implementation rate), while 22 were partially addressed and 16 remained unaddressed.

Table 2. Analysis of Revision Operations: Comparison and Contrast Essay

Revision Outcome	Global Feedback	Local Feedback
Fully Addressed	28 (71.8%)	102 (72.9%)
Partially Addressed	5	22
Not Addressed	6	16

Analysis of incident report drafts revealed a comparable distribution between feedback types with 57 local feedback comments (language and mechanics) versus 43 global comments. The global feedback comprised 28 content-related remarks (65.1%) and 12 organizational comments (27.9%), demonstrating how the reports' structured sub-question format facilitated more focused content feedback compared to comparison essays.



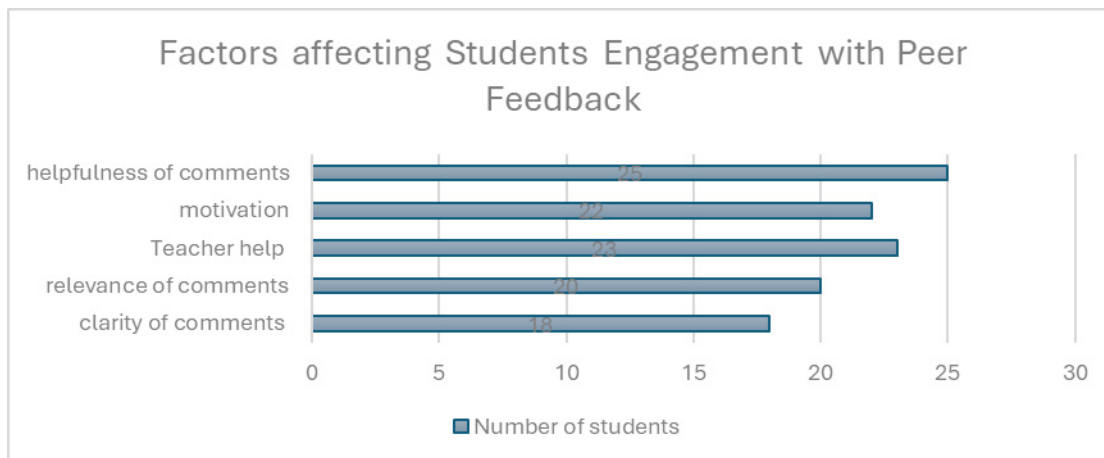
Analysis of feedback implementation revealed notable differences between global and local revisions. For global feedback (content and organization), 34 revisions (68%) were fully addressed, demonstrating complete incorporation of the suggested improvements. An additional 5 revisions (10%) showed partial implementation, where students made some but not all recommended changes. However, 11 instances (22%) of global feedback were not addressed at all. Local feedback (language-focused) showed stronger implementation rates, with 39 cases (73.6%) fully addressed and 12 (22.6%) partially addressed. Notably, only 2 local feedback items (3.8%) were left unaddressed. These findings indicate that students were significantly more likely to fully implement language-related corrections compared to content and organizational suggestions, although the structured format

of incident reports appeared to facilitate better implementation of global feedback than was observed in the comparison essays. The results highlight both the effectiveness of peer feedback for surface-level corrections and the ongoing challenges students face with more substantive writing improvements.

Student reflections emphasized that peer feedback has been a valuable tool in improving students' writing. It helped them "focus on important details such as using capital letters correctly", "check spelling" and "minimize grammar and style errors". The feedback enabled them to "focus on punctuation marks" and "their location in the sentence". "My peer also suggested ways to arrange my ideas in an organized manner", which "made my writing clearer", more structured and effective. Additionally, a student wrote "I worked on writing a strong hook" to engage the reader and adding more reasons and explanations, particularly in comparison and contrast essay, "to strengthen my arguments". "Sharing ideas with others was a helpful" part of the process, as it introduced them to "new ways of improving my work and making fewer mistakes".

While peer feedback has been helpful, it also came with several challenges. One difficulty was "forgetting some important comments", which made it harder to apply all the suggestions effectively. "Conflicting advice from peers" was another challenge, as it was sometimes unclear which suggestions to prioritize. Additionally, some feedback "lacked clarity" or provided "different opinions" that were hard to resolve. These challenges made it difficult at times to confidently improve their writing, but they also taught them the importance of careful evaluation and decision-making when incorporating feedback.

Key engagement factors varied in importance according to student perspectives as shown in the chart below. The greatest factor is *the helpfulness of comments*, which scored 25 out of 25. Another significant factor is *Teacher help* scoring 23 out of 25. Similarly, *motivation* plays a crucial role in students' engagement, scoring 22 out of 25 which emphasizes its importance in keeping students committed to their learning. In addition, *the relevance of comments* scored 20 out of 25, showing that feedback closely aligned with the students' needs and tasks fosters greater interest and involvement. Lastly, the clarity of comments scored 18 out of 25, which reflects the need for feedback to be easy to understand and improve students' writing effectively.



4. Discussion

The results demonstrate that the students' affective engagement is strong, and most students value peer feedback, enjoy reading peers' feedback and expect to receive feedback in the future. Notably, while cognitive engagement was generally high, gaps existed in self-reflection and applying feedback to recognize their strengths and weaknesses. The behavioral engagement is high in revising writing, though not all the students took details, discussed feedback and used external resources effectively. Behavioral and cognitive engagement varies based on the feedback focus as students engaged behaviorally and cognitively more with local feedback (language-related feedback) but had lower engagement with global feedback (content and organization). In both types of writing, more feedback comments addressed the local aspect besides feedback operations. A possible explanation for this finding might be that students prioritized addressing surface-level language issues because they are clearer, easier to identify and correct compared to organization and content. While students engaged cognitively with both types of feedback, they appeared to struggle more with effectively addressing global feedback in tasks like the comparison and contrast essay, where guidance was less explicit. In contrast, the incident report's structure facilitated better cognitive engagement with global feedback. It seems possible that

these results are due to the nature of the writing since the comparison and contrast essay was taught through a writing frame, so it was easier for students to concentrate on the structure of the essay and give comments on it. On the other hand, the incident report included more comments on content because the task has a set of questions that students should include in their report, so this facilitates giving feedback as students put ticks through questions that their peers answered. This finding is consistent with that of Fan and Xu (2020), who found that students showed affective engagement but the behavioral and cognitive differ based on the feedback focus.

Analysis of engagement factors revealed that comment helpfulness emerged as the most influential. Therefore, providing learners with meaningful, actionable feedback is very crucial. Closely following in significance was teacher guidance which boosts students' engagement since it enhances students' ability to understand and apply peer feedback effectively. These results are consistent with data obtained in Yan and Tang's study (2023). The data further indicated that motivation, relevance, and clarity also contribute to students' engagement significantly which is consistent with the findings of a study conducted by Winstone et al., (2016).

The study highlights key implications for improving peer feedback and writing instruction. Educators should train students to address local (language) and global (content and organization) issues and provide structured support, such as rubrics or scaffolding, to enhance engagement. Tasks with clear structures, like incident reports, foster better cognitive processing and engagement. Teachers play a vital role in boosting motivation and guiding reflective practices, ensuring feedback is relevant, clear, and actionable. Ultimately, balancing surface-level corrections with deeper content-focused feedback is essential to promote comprehensive student development.

5. Conclusion

The current paper aimed to evaluate university students' affective, cognitive and behavioral engagement with peer corrective feedback, and to explore the factors that influence this engagement. The most prominent finding from this study is that students demonstrated strong affective engagement, they valued and enjoyed peer feedback. However, their cognitive and behavioral engagement varied. Although students actively revised their writing, they struggled with deeper self-reflection and with applying feedback effectively, particularly with global feedback (content and organization) as opposed to local feedback (language and mechanics). The second major finding was that the key factors influencing engagement included the perceived helpfulness of comments, teacher guidance, motivation, relevance of comments, and clarity of feedback provided.

6. Limitations

There are certain limitations of the current study. First, the findings are context-specific therefore may not be generalizable to other educational contexts. Second, the study evaluated the engagement using limited range of writing tasks, focusing on only two types. Third, the study was conducted over a relatively short period of eight weeks, which restricts insights into long-term engagement. Despite the limited sample size, the study provides valuable insights into students' engagement with peer feedback.

7. Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, three key recommendations are proposed. First, instructors should develop targeted scaffolding strategies to help students better engage with and implement global feedback on content and organization. Second, institutions should establish structured peer feedback training programs to enhance the clarity and usefulness of comments exchanged between students. Third, future research should extend beyond the eight-week timeframe and include a broader range of writing genres to better understand long-term engagement patterns across diverse task types. These evidence-based recommendations directly address the current study's limitations and build on its significant findings about affective, cognitive, and behavioral engagement with peer feedback.

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