

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES ABOUT GIVING AND RECEIVING PEER REVIEW IN L2 WRITING CLASSES

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ABSTRACT: *This study aimed at investigating the attitudes of a Tunisian cohort of students toward peer review. A mixed methods research was adopted to elicit students' views. Data collection instruments included two questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The pre-study questionnaire results showed that students were very doubtful of the effectiveness of this pedagogical practice. They were mostly concerned about their peers' ability to provide valid feedback. A few students were equally adamant regarding the distribution of roles in the class and perceived their teacher as the most adequate person to assume that responsibility. The post questionnaire results, however, showed a swing in attitudes in favor of peer review. Interestingly, 85% of the participants reported more positive attitudes. It has been found that the systemic training helped to raise students' awareness about the potential benefits of peer review. Similarly, the repeated practice has had a positive effect in enhancing students' trust in their peers' review. In accordance with the growingly positive attitudes, the study reported several benefits of peer review. The flexibility and convenience of the practice helped learners work actively and collaboratively to achieve shared aims. It also helped them to overcome the feelings of fear and apprehension about writing. The students equally confirmed gaining a better awareness about process writing and audience expectations. The received peer review was found to be very detailed and catered to specific learners' needs.*

KEY WORDS: L2 writing, peer review, attitudes, giver, receiver

INTRODUCTION

Peer review has become a staple instructional strategy in most L1 composition classes (Brammer & Rees, 2007). Various referred to as peer feedback, peer editing, peer evaluation, or peer response, peer review denotes a collaborative educational arrangement wherein students read, review, and critique each other's work with the intention of appraising its value and adherence to quality standards (Nguyen, 2016).

Empirical research has proven that as a pedagogical practice peer review has an array of benefits on students' motivation, interpersonal skills, and cognitive development (Rollinson, 2005). The use of peer review in ESL /EFL composition classes has been linked to heightened motivation. Rollinson (2005) finds that peer review reduces learners' apprehension and is "less threatening, less authoritarian, friendlier and more supportive" than teacher feedback (p. 24). Being two-directional in nature, the process of peer review further stimulates collaborative interaction (Storch, 2007). Working jointly, learners, acting simultaneously as providers and receivers of peer review, actively scaffold each other. With reference to writing, peer review was found to help learners attend to meaning (Hansen & Liu, 2005), content (Berg, 1999), structure, and the

overall quality of the text (Storch, 2007). In addition to securing immediate textual improvement in the short run, peer review has equally been found to have a more sustainable objective of developing better writing competence through support and mutual scaffolding (Tsui & Ng, 2000). Peer review further enhances understanding of the requirements of writing being a product, a process, and reader-sensitive (Saeed & Ghazali, 2017). Berg (1999) found that peer review encourages critical reasoning, since, in the process, a student doesn't merely take whatever feedback provided but "questions its validity, weighs it against his or her own knowledge and ideas, and then makes a decision about what, if any, changes to make" (p. 232). This collaborative venture is equally found to foster autonomy as learners engage in "reciprocal responsibility between reviewer(s) and reviewee(s), that is, students act both as givers and receivers of response" (Lundstrom & Baker, 2009).

Research has furthermore disclosed that the above-stated benefits have been linked to a favorable attitude among the learners about the practice of peer review. Learners' attitudes, it turns out, have a profound influence not only on the learning behavior but also on the learning outcomes (Savignon and Wang, 2003). Favorable attitudes are found to foster motivation and in turn support learning (Abidin & Alzwari, 2012). Conversely, "classroom realities that contradict learner expectations about learning may disappoint them and thus interfere with the attainment of desired learning outcomes" (Savignon and Wang, 2003, p.225).

Statement of the Problem

Western teaching contexts have witnessed a shift towards the democratization of classes (Chang, 2016). Peer review found its way among classroom pedagogies within these settings and has become "nearly ubiquitous" in composition classes (Paulson et al., 2007, p. 306). Yet, despite the introduction and proliferation of alternative feedback techniques elsewhere in the world, teachers remain the primary source of feedback to students in English as a foreign language (EFL) context (Hirose, 2008; Nguyen, 2019). Tunisia, like many other EFL countries, has only lately witnessed the introduction of peer review techniques in writing classes (Belaid, 2004). Yet, the attempts to implement this educational practice in Tunisian classes remain in an embryonic state with only a few research endeavors attempting to test the efficacy of peer review (Ayachi, 2017). Perhaps scarcer is research on learners' attitudes, be it in L1 or L2 settings. Baierschmidt (2012) aptly notes that the potential effectiveness of peer feedback may vary based on the attitudes and the cultural background of the students involved. Yet, "despite the plethora of research on attitudes about peer review in general, there seems to be a gap in research on the attitudes of actual beneficiaries about this method (Harutyunyan & Poveda, 2018).

Given their overarching importance in the process of learning, this study seeks to investigate the attitudes of a group of Tunisian EFL learners before and after they engaged in a peer review practice. This study addresses three key research questions, namely:

RQ1: What are students' attitudes towards trained anonymous written peer review before taking part in the study?

RQ2: What changes in attitude, if any, does the practice of trained peer review bring about?

RQ3: What benefits do students perceive of giving and receiving peer review?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Investigating learners' views toward peer feedback represents a major line of inquiry that ushered in a substantial number of studies (O'Donnell, 2014). Studies implemented a variety of research designs and data sources including surveys, questionnaires, direct observation, field notes, interviews, etc. Research on learners' attitudes has shown a discernible swing in opinion about the value of peer review. While some researchers found that learners overall show positive attitudes towards peer review as a linguistically, cognitively, socially beneficial, and affectively enjoyable (Mangelsdorf, 1992; Mendonca & Johnson, 1994), the literature equally documents quite a few studies which provided adverse findings about the practice (Carson & Nelson, 1996; Saito & Fujita, 1994).

Research on peer review attitudes equally explored the cultural appropriateness and pedagogical efficacy of peer review in ESL writing contexts (Saito and Fujita, 2004; Hu and Lam, 2010). Learners' cultural background was found to affect classroom dynamics to a great extent and even dictate culture-specific behavior which is not always in harmony with peer review philosophy (Allaei and Connor, 1990; Ferris and Hedgcock, 1998). Asian cultures, for instance, advocate some kind of power distance¹ in academic contexts. Such cultures promote a rigid hierarchy and academic dependence between teachers who "typically take on the role of the expert who has the answers and are seldom challenged or questioned" on the one hand and students on the other (Ilkos, 2018, p. 90). These cultures are equally found to espouse a rather collectivist ideology, which makes learners' resistance to peer review "especially magnified" (Chang, 2016, p.88). Collectivism in Asian countries is characterized by an indirect communicative style that promotes harmony and discourages "orders, objections, and disagreement" (Saito & Ebsworth, 2004). These rhetorical patterns are inherently antithetical to the underlying principles of peer review as a problem identification practice which can turn into a harmony-threatening activity (Wang, 2016). The skepticism regarding the effectiveness of peer review in the L2 contexts was subject to scientific scrutiny and brought about a wealth of research (Zhang, 1995). The findings, however, are far from being conclusive (Chang, 2016).

A third axis of research of peer review perceptions' explored learners' preference for different configurations including teacher-, peer- or self-directed or computer feedback (Harutyunyan, 2018; Zhang, 1995). Like research on students' perceptions in general, this line of inquiry yielded mixed results. Examining learners' preference between teacher-, peer-, and self-directed feedback, Zhang's (1995) found for example that "the affective advantage of peer feedback" recorded in L1 writing context doesn't have the same appeal in ESL settings (p.217). Students in this study overwhelmingly (94%) favored teacher feedback over peer and self-review provisions. In his research examining the attitudes of a group of ESL learners towards peer review in comparison to teacher feedback, Baierschmidt (2012) similarly reported that the participants showed a strong preference towards teacher feedback despite the overt positive affective regard for peer feedback.

1 Power distance refers to the unequal distribution of power among individuals within the same society and the degree to which the less powerful accepts this power inequity (Hofstede, 1986, p.370).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research implemented a mixed-method case study research (Dornyei, 2007). The study is set in an EFL academic context, namely the Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences Kairouan, Tunisia. The sample consisted of twenty-eight undergraduate students enrolled at the Department of English Language and Literature. Mirroring the typical English as foreign Language student demographics, the great majority of the participants are native speakers of Arabic who had studied English for a minimum of 1 to 2 years at elementary school and another 7 years at high school and before joining the university. In the pre-study questionnaire, participants confirmed that they had very little exposure to process writing, multiple-drafting, or peer review. They further stated that most of the feedback they received emanated from the teacher and was primarily summative in nature, aiming at justifying scores rather than improving their writing skills. The participants in this study were distributed according to three different writing classes that the researcher taught part of her schedule as an instructor within the English department. Out of the 36 students recruited, 14 students belonged to group 1, 10 students to group 2, and 12 students to group 3.

Data Collection Instruments

To elicit the data needed for this study, multiple data collection instruments were deployed. These include two questionnaires, and interviews. Previous research findings stipulate that learners' feedback uptake depends heavily on the kind of relationship among peers and the degree of trust for the latter's language proficiency (Dixon & Hawe, 2017; Nassaji, 2016). This study sought to investigate learners' attitudes about peer review prior to taking part in the study. The objective is to establish background information about the participants' experiences working jointly with peers and their attitudes about peer review. In its design, the questionnaire adapted several items from questionnaires from previous research, namely Alnasser (2013), Dörnyei (2010), Grami (2010), and Tsui & Ng (2000). The decision to implement the same items was made because of the overlapping research purposes. Furthermore, the validity of these tools has been established since "they had already been tested in the field and, presumably, been thoroughly checked before publication, which suggests that they are proven to be relatively well constructed" (Zhang, 2018). The pre-questionnaire also included some additional sections that met the specific objectives of this study. For example, when inquiring about peer review attitudes and experiences, the previously mentioned questionnaires contended their scope to either the role of the review giver or receiver, but not both. In this study, the prequestionnaire was designed to solicit information from both the perspectives of the receivers and givers. The questionnaire contains 17 questions in total and is divided into three parts. The first section investigated students' general experiences and attitudes about L2 writing. The second section was designed to gather data about students' experiences of various feedback strategies. Finally, the last section sought to find out about students' attitudes towards peer review. The questionnaire made use of varying types of questions. It included open-ended questions that solicited information and details about experiences and attitudes. It also made use of different Likert scales that sought to measure opinions, quantity and quality (Cohen et al., 2007).

Upon completion of the peer reviewing phase, students were invited to reflect on their experiences of peer review. DeVised after a fairly extensive review of related literature (Coté,

2014; Jacobs et al., 1998; Lei, 2017; Tsui & Ng, 2000; Zhang, 1995), the peer review satisfaction questionnaire attempted to investigate students' attitudes towards peer review from the perspectives of both the givers and receivers (Lei, 2017). The questionnaire is structured into two main parts and mostly used closed questions that offered a limited range of possible responses. The responses are arranged following a Likert continuum scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. This kind of closed question is recognized for yielding accurate information within a relatively short time. Questions relating to informants' general evaluation of the peer review experience are asked in the first section. Section two was designed to investigate the effect of the practice of peer review in the development of the respondents' academic writing skills. In the third section, informants were asked to give their opinions towards peer review capacity to facilitate/ inhibit collaborative learning and their critical thinking skills. Section four explores possible challenges students faced during the peer reviewing stage and possible suggestions for improving the practice.

The decision to use interviews in this study was made to allow the participants the opportunity to share their perspective regarding the implementation of peer review in their composition class. Although they had the chance to express their attitudes in the peer review satisfaction questionnaire, participants were interviewed to gain direct explanations and further clarifications about emerging themes (Dörnyei, 2007). The interview was also used as follow-up to probe responses and investigate motives and feelings (Bell, 2010, p.161).

Among the three interviewing configurations, namely structured, semi-structured, or unstructured (Cohen et al., 2007), the decision was made to implement a semi-structured interview. Indeed, semi-structured interviews were found to be much less rigid than their structured counterparts although they are guided by predefined questions (Mackey and Gass, 2005). This kind of interview offers some kind of flexibility since it allows the exploration of a specific topic in an open-ended format (Dörnyei 2007, p. 136). Hatch (2002) explains, "although researchers come to the interview with guiding questions, they are open to following the leads of informants and probing into areas that arise during interview interactions" (p. 94). The interview includes fourteen questions in total. The questions sought details about students' experiences of the peer review with regard to their writing performance and the areas they improved the least/ most. There were some attitudinal questions asking about perceptions and attitudes about peer review configurations and the roles taken in the process as givers and receivers.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Research question 1 sought to explore students' attitudes about peer review. The prequestionnaire gave valuable insights into students' prior experience with the practice of peer review in their composition classes. Not surprisingly, most respondents (N=20) claimed receiving feedback exclusively from their teachers. Interestingly though, when commenting on the frequency of receiving feedback, 18 students say that they "sometimes" receive feedback. 4 students noted they "rarely" get any feedback, and 2 claimed they had never received any feedback. Surprisingly, none of the respondents used the options "often", "usually", or "always" on the Likert scale. Commenting on their composition teachers' feedback, 18 Students judged the latter's helpful in many ways. Participants feel that their teachers give them accurate and

valid comments. Furthermore, 15 students appreciate that their teachers provide them with adequate guidance and correct answers.

Among the sample, only 6 respondents reported that they had some prior experience of peer review in their writing classes. 3 students confirmed that peer review was mainly implemented at the brainstorming stage before embarking in the actual writing step. It basically involved working in pairs, or groups, on gathering ideas related to a certain theme. 2 students said they helped review their friends' writing and 1 student said that peer review involved correcting only spelling and grammar. Among the participants with prior experience of peer review, 4 students positively perceived peer review and suggested that it enhanced their motivation and collaborative learning. One participant noted "I like working with classmates. I enjoy sharing ideas and learning from each other" (S0017). 2 Students said that the practice was rather useless and a waste of time since they would lapse into "discussing irrelevant matters when the teacher is not looking" (S0024). According to them, the practice was enjoyable but they didn't really learn much from it. "Don't get me wrong", one student explained, "I like talking to friends from class but unfortunately I don't think there is much to learn from them. Their level in English very often is worse than mine, so I'm not very hopeful" (S0016).

Participants with no prior experience of peer review seem to have a rather wavering attitude about the practice. 6 students (21.42%) felt that peer review might help them improve their writing skills, 11 students are rather skeptical about its usefulness and 5 students were indecisive. Among the participants who negatively perceived peer review, 8 students doubted their friends' English proficiency. 5 participants thought that this is a teacher's role and questioned their peers' ability to give adequate feedback and 3 informants did not answer the follow-up question of why they didn't think peer review can improve writing. Here are some example comments that show these mixed opinions:

- "I don't feel it can help. I'm not optimistic." (S0015).
- "Why not. I'm open to new ideas. I'm sure there is a lot to learn from each other" (S008).
- "I did never tried (SIC) peer review. I want to do it I feel it can help" (S0010).
- "I personally believe that writing is personal and review, in general, helps students to see mistakes they don't see. That's good but I don't expect miracles to happen" (S0024).

The finding from the pre questionnaire showed that there was a clear discrepancy among all the participants regarding their preferred form of review. 64.28% (N=18) of the informants strongly agreed that feedback in writing classes should only come from the teacher, while 21.42% (N=6) said that feedback can originate from their peers as well as the teacher. The majority of students 64.28% proclaimed their overt preference for teacher feedback. They indeed consider teachers better entitled to give effective feedback. For them "the teacher is more professional and trained to do this. It is his responsibility, not the students'" (S0023). Some students sounded quite assertive in this respect claiming that "there should be only one teacher in a class. This can't be of any help. Students are not entitled to teach. It's the job of the teacher" (S0012).

In order to ascertain learners' attitudes about peer review after taking part in this research, a post-treatment satisfaction questionnaire and interviews were carried out. The findings at this later stage of the study suggest that there was an important shift in attitude in favor of peer

review. For the sake of condensing data, questionnaire items related to attitudes towards peer review (part 1: Q1, Q2, Q4 /part 2:Q1, Q24, and Q25) were combined as a single variable and then measured accordingly. Indeed, “combining the results for all the questions categorized as ‘attitude’ questions” is thought to “provide a ‘global’ picture of the students’ attitudes towards writing” (Alnasser, 2013, p.138). Here is the list of statements:

I liked giving PR on my peers’ paragraphs

I liked receiving PR on my paragraphs

Giving PR changed my attitude about the value of peer review.

Receiving PR changed my attitude about the value of peer review.

I would participate in peer review again.

I would like to receive peer review in my future writing classes

Compared to the pre questionnaire, the findings of the peer review satisfaction questionnaire show a statistically significant shift in attitude about the activity. Among both givers and receivers. The following pie chart shows this trend:

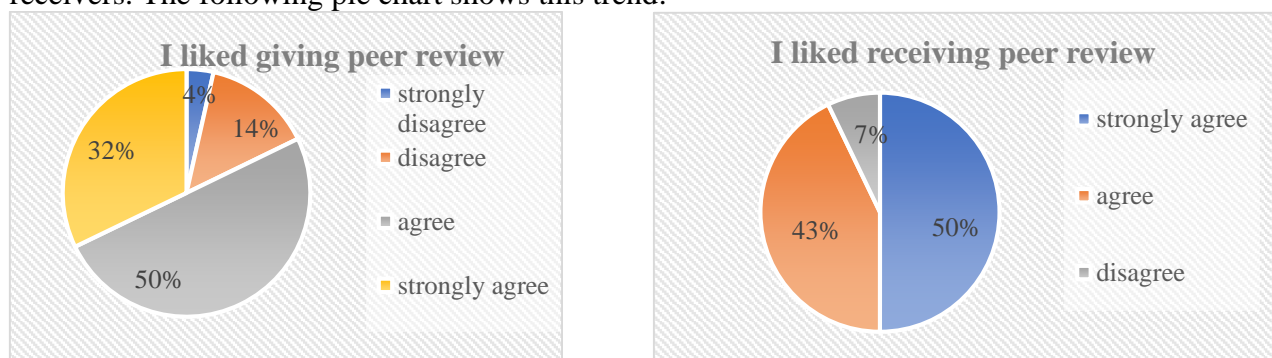


Figure 1: Students' Attitudes about Giving and Receiving Peer Review

Overall, the participants regarded receiving and giving peer review as a good experience (n = 22) and acknowledged many benefits. 85% of the participants revealed a more favorable attitude towards peer review and want the practice to be used in coming writing. The chart shows that students liked receiving peer review more than giving it and claimed that taking the responsibility of commenting on their peers’ work gave them a sense of authentic practice and autonomy. Students found that the practice “was really challenging, and gave me confidence and new ideas to improve writing” (S0013). Furthermore, participants acknowledged the importance of practice to improve. For many giving and receiving peer review was a totally new experience, but students exhibited a great deal of enthusiasm about it and performed their tasks the best they could. This comment from student (S0019) “This was my first experience about doing peer feedback. I enjoyed it and I hope all writing classes give us the chance to practice like this. I’m not a very good writer but I learned how to evaluate writing and do it for my own paragraph”. Despite the long peer review process, students were not discouraged. Student (S0014) explained “after a while, I felt responsible for my partner. I had to give the best possible review to help him become a better writer. I became a teacher in a way. I liked it

and I sure learned from it myself'. Students' responses about the usefulness of peer review acclaimed an array of further benefits to both the givers and receivers. Results in this regard will be dealt with extensively in the coming sections.

The Perceived Benefits of Peer Review

Students' change in attitude was accompanied by a renewed perception of the potential advantages of peer review. Worth noting that in relating the findings in this regard, no distinction with respect to the roles taken by participants as givers or receivers will be made, as some benefits overlap when taking both roles. Only when students took one specific role that accrued into distinctive benefits, the findings will be presented as such.

Convenience and Flexibility

Another objective of the present study is to look at the affordances of peer review using a combination of in class and online modalities. Relying on data from the questionnaires and the interviews, a variety of benefits of both in-class and online peer review were discerned. Among the first advantages of peer review that the participants noted in this research is its convenience and flexibility. Convenience relates to the accessibility and practicality of peer review. Students claim that the practice of peer review gave them much needed practice of writing which otherwise was inaccessible due to time constraints and the large number of students. Peer review not only relieved the teacher from the cumbersome task of reviewing the whole class papers' but further promoted more and equal participation among group members. A student remarks: «I understand that with 30 students or more in a group it is impossible for the teacher to help everyone. Peer review is a good option for us to help each other and receive feedback on our works” (S006). In confirmation of the same thought, a different participant claimed: “When I answered the first questionnaire, I said that the class is all theory, now this changed we write a lot and doing peer review is an efficient solution for us to evaluate writing” (S0021).

Additionally, the flexibility of the online format was highlighted by the majority of respondents. This modality, though completely new to many, was found to be an interesting and innovative experience. Being able to conduct peer review in-class and online gave students the chance to further the reach of peer review outside the confines of classroom walls. The following observation by one participant exemplifies their perceptions regarding online peer review: “exchanging peer review on messenger is an innovative way of using social media. So far, I just used the internet for searching for information for my homework. However, I learned other ways of benefiting from the internet for different purposes” (S0024).

Although the design of the study did not involve pinning the two modalities in a competing fashion, data gleaned from interviews revealed that students preferred digital peer review in comparison to its in-class counterpart. 23 students readily acknowledged the easy access to online material from the comfort of their homes at their time of choice. Students equally highlighted the immediacy of response. Despite being conducted asynchronously, online peer review still presented undeniable advantages over traditional in class instruction. Receiving feedback in a timely manner gave learners access to what Lids (1991) defines as contingent responsivity, or “the ability to read the [tutee]’s cues and signals related to learning, affective and motivational needs, and then respond in a timely and appropriate way” (p. 109). A student commented: it’s the fast answer that I want to stress here. For the first time in all my education

I get feedback every time and within short time” (S0011). It seems that learners are highly sensitive about the time of receiving review. While immediacy is found to foster engagement, delayed response could give a counter effect and result in waned motivation. This idea is clear though some sample explanations by the learners.” In regular writing classes we hardly get feedback right after we finish writing. We have to wait until the following class for the teacher to help. Sometimes teacher is busy and we don’t get any review. That is frustrating and makes me lose motivation. This class differs. We know the problems right away and we can fix them” (S0020). Within the same line of thought, another learner confirmed ‘In other classes the teacher occasionally gives us feedback and it takes long to get it. I know my teacher has a lot to do and many students so I understand. But time is very important to improve” (S0015).

Detailed Feedback

In addition to its convenience and flexibility, peer review was found to offer detailed and personalized feedback tailored to the needs of the students. Data from the peer review satisfaction questionnaire and the interview shows that an average of 64.28% (N=18) of the students underscored the extensive details their partners gave them and deemed that the thorough review was helpful. One student noted” I like knowing what the problem in my writing in detail. I hate general comments. My partner did a good job of pointing to issues in detail. Although I didn’t agree with all ideas, I really appreciate this hard work” (S0022). Compared to teacher feedback, participants claim that peer review is more detailed and feels more personal. One student explains: “The comments I received were very detailed and show that indeed someone read my paragraph, unlike teacher feedback which sometimes seems ‘Passepartout ‘like “what do you mean???” Or ‘repetition’ or simply ‘no”” (S002). Students, furthermore, attempted to sustain their corrections and recommendations with relevant rules to give legitimacy to them. “Although this is a writing class, I learned a lot about grammar and punctuation. My partner gave me so many grammar and punctuation rules. This helped me a lot” student S0015 noted.

With regard to the quality of the feedback received, students highlighted its constructive nature. Learners pointed that part of the task required them to mention challenges to be addressed but also stress positive things in their partners’ work. This encouragement I received put a lot of “positive” pressure on me. It gave me energy to go on student (S0028) claimed. Similarly, student S005 concurred that “the friendly comments I received made me want to improve.

Audience Awareness

Peer review was equally found to give learners an authentic audience and endowed them with a better understanding of audience considerations. Student 0019 compares his attitude about writing before and after taking part of this research. He claimed: very often the teachers assign a writing activity. I don’t usually do it because I know that nobody is going to read it”. The learner considered the practice of peer review an incentive to improve the quality of his writing. Learners cared about the opinions of their reviewers and tried to adhere to their expectations. Within the same line of thought, student S0015 confirmed: “every time I write my paragraph, I look forward to comments. I know that what I write will be read by my friends and that makes me do my best”. A similar comment about audience awareness came from student 0020 explains “The peer reviewing activity gave me a reason to do the activity. I was so excited to written my paragraph in a better way. I wanted my friend to see that I can write good (SIC”.

Similarly, learners have also grown more conscious about teachers' grading criteria. Student 0019:" In the past when I get a bad mark in writing I don t know the problem. I doubt the correction. I compare with my friends. they have the same. now doing peer review helped to see what teachers look for in paragraphs.

Active and collaborative learning

Data showed that it was a common perception among participants (n = 26) that they acquired a more active role in their own learning process and eventually gained more autonomy. Students acknowledge that taking on different roles helped them be more involved in their writing class. One student noted that: "in this class we did a lot of writing. I'm repeating the year and this class is so different from last years. In the other class we don't (sic) write, here I wrote so many paragraphs. I'm tired but happy and proud of the progress I made" (S0015). In another testimony, a student commented "as a writer: I learned to rely on myself to improve. Writing is not theory! The more I practice the better I become" (S003). Another student concurred: "In this class I realized that being a good writer is not a strike of chance. It's something you really sweat for. You practice until you nail it (S0016)." Peer review also helped learners take a new role of feedback providers. One participant commenting on the new role bestowed upon him as a giver said: "It is a big responsibility. My partner trusts me and I need to be up to the challenge. I did my best to help. I sometimes had to research online for better words or ideas and check the grammar rules to give a detailed answer" (S0012). Another student admitted:" at times I felt overwhelmed not only by writing a lot but also doing review, but knowing that my friend is waiting, just like me when I wait his comments, gave me a boost to continue and give the best review I could offer" (S0028).

In addition to allowing them the opportunity to take a more active role in their writing class, learners considered peer review a great way to foster collaborative learning. A student explained:" most subjects require us to work individually. Except from some subjects where we are asked to do a project in pairs, this class is the only class where we are allowed to work in pairs and share knowledge and ideas" (S0019). The relaxed atmosphere and horizontal relationships between learners stimulated collaboration. Student 0010 noted: "my partner and I worked together. He helped me with my mistakes and I helped. Reading his work, I learned a lot. I got some fresh ideas. It's good to have someone read your work. It's good to see it from a different perspective". Even the most skeptical students had their concerns dashed away after experiencing peer review. One comment read "to be honest I had strong doubts about this whole idea of peer review. It wasn't easy for me to understand how my friends can become teachers. Now I feel I learned a lot from them. I still need teacher feedback, but this is very different it feels that there are no barriers between us" (S0017).

Better Reviewing Skills

As a corollary to the repeated practice of peer review, students noted that they gained better peer reviewing skills. Clustering the items 13,14,15,16,17,18,19 and 20 in the peer review satisfaction questionnaire, findings suggest that most respondents (N26) acknowledged improving their motivation towards and ability to do peer review. Students seem to have more positive attitudes towards the practice indeed an overwhelming majority of 93% of students liked receiving peer review while 83% enjoyed giving peer review to their peers. This favorable

attitude was adjunct to a new understanding of peer review as constructive process. Indeed, students now see peer review as a balanced feedback, pointing to shortcomings but equally underscoring strengths. The ultimate objective is to help and not to criticize. Several comments from students came to enhance this heightened awareness like in the following examples: “I learned how to criticize without causing embarrassment. The idea is to help so we focus on the positive. We correct mistakes but we encourage too” (S001).

An equally important aspect of the peer review procedure which ushered in extensive gains to students is the ability to notice mistakes. Regardless of their roles as either givers or receivers of peer review, students claim that they nurtured an eye for catching discrepancies. Noticing mistakes became much easier according to 64% of the respondents. They claim that when reading other students’ that when more conscious attention to mistakes and monitored their own review by double checking their suggestions for confirmation. “Whenever I give peer review, the first thing is finding spelling, grammar, punctuation mistakes. I make sure my decision is accurate. I use my phone internet to check. It helped to improve my grammar and language too” student S0017 noted. Another participant related his own experience of peer review:” when I started the project the word peer review was totally strange. I felt this is a waste of time. The first day was very complicated and long. But as we practice, I started to see that I can focus my attention on the important elements of writing. Little by little I become better in peer review. I think I write better and I have experience in peer review”(S0028). Similarly, students confirmed that noticing mistakes in other students’ work helped them become better selfreviewers. Student S0019 explained how findings mistakes in his peer’s drafts helped him edit his own writing: «I sometimes skip my own mistakes but when I give a comment on my partner’s paragraph, I notice that the tense is wrong for example. That reminds me of what I wrote and I go back and correct my fault». Another student confirmed “seeing so many mistakes in the paragraphs I reviewed taught me to be more careful about my own. Before I submit it, I review punctuation and grammar! This is what I correct the most” (S0027). A more unflattering statement comes from student 0017 “To be honest I didn’t feel I benefited from my partner’s comments. His writing was average, but the peer review practice helped me gain a better idea of how to write. And correcting my friend make me want to use more difficult words and complex phrases”.

Whether taking the role of the giver or the receiver students had to make critical decisions regarding the quality of writing or the peer review respectively. This helped them to develop more critical thinking. Indeed, assessing the quality of the drafts reviewed was a challenging task for many students. It involved reflecting upon the quality of the draft to be reviewed and providing contingent assistance. Giving peer review equally triggered heightened audience awareness student recalled: «At the beginning it was hard for me to say if something was wrong. I had to be careful to convince my partner of the change I want him to make so sometimes I used the internet to make sure that my ideas are good” (S0023). As receivers, students had to critically examine their peers’ feedback. Part of the peer review procedure in this study design involved making critical decisions either to accept ignore or reject peer review, while sustaining these choices with adequate support. As peer review receivers, students had to weigh in their partners’ review and explain why they opted for taking it aboard or disregarding it in the back-feedback sheet. The benefits to critical thinking skills are attested to in these example statements: “I wasn’t convinced all the time of my friend’s comments. In any times I have

doubts so I try to find the answer. In some cases, I was right and completing the back-feedback sheet helped understand why and learn more” (S0014). This evaluative process of peer review helped learners nurture stronger logical reasoning abilities through systematic comparisons between their drafts and their partners’ suggestions. Commenting on this gain, a student noted” I learned to evaluate writing. Everything I read now, whether in class or outside, I try to find the parts of the paragraphs we use in the peer review sheet” (S005).

Writing as a Process

In addition to gaining a more favorable attitude about writing in general, learners proclaim that taking part of this research imbued them with a deeper understanding of the writing process. Students stated that they got used to writing one draft, if any, in their traditional composition classes. One student noted” I barely do any planning at all I just write whatever comes in my mind. Now I understand that it’s a very structured process. I find ideas, organize write the first draft second and even third”. Another testimony suggests, “Writing feels like a chain work. We think, we plan, we write the first writing then peer review and draft 2 and draft 3. this practice sure helped me improve but also like this procedure and it made writing easy for me.” (S003). Part of the writing process students recognized the importance of reviewing and editing their work. “Every time my teacher asks me to revise my writing, I read but I don’t see much mistakes. The peer review is important and my partner helped me a lot. But I also use the peer review sheet to review my own paragraphs” (S008). Students equally suggest that the peer review practice assisted them in improving their writing skills. Results will be grouped according to the students’ roles as a receiver or as a giver since there are some distinctive benefits to each role.

In taking the role of receivers, students confirmed that peer review helped them improve their composition skills in many ways. The following table presents the results from the peer review satisfaction questionnaire as well as the perceived benefits to the different writing areas.

Table1: Perceived Benefits of Receiving Peer Review

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree Strongly		Agree	
	NB	%	NB	%	NB	%	NB	%
I feel that the peer review I received helped me improve my paragraph writing skills.	1	3.57%	3	10.71%	10	35.71%	14	50%
peer review helped me develop the content (ideas) of my paragraphs (i.e. identify a clear topic and give specific details or examples to support it)	4	14.28%	7	25%	5	17.85%	12	42.84%
peer review helped me develop unified and coherent content in my paragraphs.	3	10.71%	7	25%	7	25%	11	39.28%
Reading my peers' comments helped me understand paragraph organization better (sequencing the ideas in a logical order and using adequate cohesive devices, linkers)	4	14.28%	3	10.71%	12	42.84%	9	32.14%
peer review helped me use better vocabulary (word choice, register)	3	10.71%	6	21.42%	4	14.28%	15	53.57%
peer review helped me vary the sentence types I wrote.	4	14.28%	6	21.42%	7	25%	11	39.28%
peer review helped me correct my language use (grammar) mistakes	2	7.14%	3	10.71%	16	57.14%	7	25%
peer review helped me correct my spelling and punctuation mistakes	0	0%	1	3.57%	18	64.28%	9	32.14%

As indicated by the findings, most students (85,71%) concur that receiving peer review helped them improve their own writing. Students perceive of the practice of peer review as an eye opener about key requirements in writing. Student 0010 explains how the practice gave her a better idea of paragraph writing: «I know that it's not about how many lines you write. There are three important parts: the topic sentence, the supporting and concluding sentence. My paragraphs have all the elements now. I also know that I should add details and explain my ideas. I need to use easy and correct language and punctuation». Another student confirms: “I think I know better now. My language is good. I used difficult vocabulary and a good style; Still I didn't get good marks. Now I understand why. I know that language alone is not enough. It has to be organized in a logical way. I now pay attention to unity and coherence in my writing. I use short sentences and I plan my ideas” (0017).

Equally, it seems that receivers perceive the most improvement in the areas of mechanics (96,42%), language use (82,14%) and organization (74,98), vocabulary (67,85%) and content (60,69%). Comments from the interviews can explain this tendency. One student emphasized: «I learned a lot about the importance of punctuation. Now I make sure that my sentences end with a punctuation, no comma that was my mistake” (S0015). Another student confirmed “Space before start, Capitals, full stops etc. my friend is very detailed so I learned to pay attention to this thing and avoid making the same mistakes in following writings”(S0026). Another comment about the gains in language use read: “ the most thing that I learned is looking at the verbs and use the same tense in all the paragraph. I learned how to correct fragments and write correct sentences.” (S0011). Students furthermore highlight the role of reading their partners work in inspiring them with new ideas and helped them improve the content of their own paragraphs. Some interviewees said that aside from relying on the feedback they received, reading the reviewers texts gave them a perspective into a different view about the same topic. By ways of comparison, students analyzed their own drafts against their

peasantries to enhance the ideas and language of their own drafts. Indeed 82% of the respondents claimed that they learned by looking at the organization of their peers 'writing, while 74% stated that they improved the content of their paragraphs by reading content in their partners 'drafts. Comments from the face to face interviews suggested similar results indeed, a student attributed the improvement he made to the input he was exposed to/ at times I was stuck. While I feel that my English is way better than my partner. I still learn from reading his ideas. That inspires me. I sometimes find so ideas that I like so I use them" (S009).

Results equally indicate that giving peer review gave learners a more favorable attitude towards writing in general with an overwhelming majority of 92,82%. The following table gives an idea about learners' attitudes.

Table 2: Perceived Benefits of Giving Peer Review

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	NB	%	NB	%	NB	%	NB	%
Giving PR to my peers' paragraphs was useful for improving my own paragraph writing skills.	0	0%	1	3.57%	16	57.14%	11	39.28%
Giving PR to my peers' paragraphs helped me improve the content of my own paragraph (I. e identify a clear topic and give specific details or examples to support it)	2	7.14%	2	7.14%	14	50%	10	35.71%
Giving PR to my peers' paragraphs helped me develop unified and coherent content in my paragraphs.	4	14.28%	3	10.71%	12	42.85%	9	32.14%
Giving PR helped me improve the organization of the paragraphs I wrote (sequencing the ideas in a logical order and using adequate cohesive devices, linkers)	2	7.14%	3	10.71%	16	57.14%	7	25%
Giving PR to my peers' paragraphs helped me use better vocabulary (word choice, register)	5	17.85%	4	14.28%	16	57.14%	3	10.71%
Giving PR to my peers' paragraphs helped me vary the sentence types I wrote.	2	7.14%	5	17.85%	12	42.85%	9	32.14%
Giving PR to my peers' paragraphs helped me identify and correct my grammar mistakes	3	10.71%	4	14.28%	14	50%	7	25%
Giving PR to my peers' paragraphs helped me correct my spelling and punctuation mistakes	1	3.57%	5	17.85%	14	50%	8	28.57%
Giving PR to my peers' paragraphs gave me a more positive attitude about writing	0	0%	3	10.71%	7	25%	18	64.28%

96,36% of the students claimed that giving peer review was indeed more helpful than receiving in improving their own paragraph writing skills. The development according to the respondents mostly affected content, organization, vocabulary, language use and mechanics. A total of 86% proclaim that they made significant gains in the area of content and development of ideas. A student explained "I learned to give details to my partner. This helped me to do the same in my work. When I think about my partner and his ideas, I get new ideas myself" (S0013). Giving peer review seems to positively affect the area of organization according to 82% of the questionnaire takers. Recurring comments brought up the issue of coherence and unity: "When

I give comments to my friend, I learned to evaluate my own writing. I have a problem with ideas. I just write anything in my mind. I learned to establish a link using connectors and transition signals "(S0021). The gains also affected vocabulary and word choice. 68% of the students stated that they pay more attention to the vocabulary they use. One student stated "I now choose my words carefully if I feel the word is not clear or ambiguous, I try to use a better word" (S007). Another major category that was perceived to witness noticeable improvement according to the participants is language use with 75% of the total responses. Most progress was made in grammar in particular tense and prepositions according to the interviewees. There was also some progress at the sentence variety level too. Student 003 explained being a peer review giver gave me a big responsibility to help my partner. But I also became tougher on myself and what I write. I always check grammar first". With regard to mechanics, 78% of the participants suggested that the exposure and the frequency of doing peer review helped them pay a special attention to mechanics and punctuation.

Concerns about Peer Review

Despite the recorded benefits of peer review, data from the questionnaires and interview show that participants had some concern, however minor, about the practice. Students pointed that their partners were not intrinsically motivated at times, which is in turn affected the dynamics within the pair. This concern was indeed echoed in 25% of the interviews. A student explained: "it felt sometimes that my partner just wrote anything just to get done with the task. The review seems too general" (S0025). Furthermore, the interview findings suggest that there were some reservations about students' pairing. On the one hand participants complained about having same partner all along the course of this research, on the other hand there were some concerns regarding the differing proficiency levels. Single-matches were found to be somehow demotivating to many participants. Indeed a total of 12 students (42%) said that wished they had different partners every time or worked with more than one person. For example, one student said, "...working with the same person becomes boring after a while. It's better to change partners"(S005). A similar comment was voiced by another student: "I love working with my friend but I want my writing to be reviewed from a different person with a different perspective. After some time I got used to my friends' comments and his feedback doesn't challenge me anymore"(S0012). Likewise, some interviewees (29%) expressed their discontent with their partners' English proficiency. While low achievers found that their peers' comments were way beyond their level, high achievers lamented their partners' inadequacy and poor writing quality. These sample comments can shed some light on this issue: "I'm not very good in English. My friend's excellent. I honestly don't find any mistakes. So, I give general comments like explain more or give details. I use them every time" student S0022 admitted. Another student regretted "I find it hard to correct my partner. He is better than me. I feel there isn't really much I can do to help. I want to say that my friend helped me most of the time, but sometimes it felt like he spoke Chinese. His remarks were not easy to understand. I like the English he uses and I learned a lot but his words are difficult for me" (S0011). Similarly, a high achiever said: "It's hard for me to understand my partner's writing. He sometimes writes awkward ideas. I spend a long time trying to figure out what they mean to be able to help in an adequate way. I guess all this is because of his/ her poor English" (S0016). Finally, more intimidating than the language proficiency is the harsh criticism and authoritative tone of some reviewers, according to some interviewees. Many participants (N7) felt quite daunted by the number of mistakes flagged up in their drafts. According to 3 students seeing negative

comments discouraged them and gave an opposite effect. A student said: «my friend picked every mistake: the ones I make and I don't. It's too much for me so I just ignore most of it” (S0018). Student 0013 claimed: “I hate the authoritative tone of my partner. He makes me feel stupid”.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study explored attitudes to peer review before and after the research undertaking. Results indicate that initially students were quite skeptical about the intervention and voiced several concerns pertaining mostly to the traditional distribution of roles in the classroom. Later, after being exposed to peer review, there was a noticeable shift in attitude (Tsui and Ng, 2000). In general, the participants showed a more positive attitude about peer review. This finding concurs with results reached by similar studies which recorded a significantly important improvement in attitudes about peer review in comparison to conventional teacher feedback (e.g., Grami, 2010; Rollinson, 2005; Tsui& Ng, 2000). Learners perceived a variety of benefits of this form of feedback. They found that peer review offers individualized support tailored to their specific needs. Unlike teacher feedback, which is “heavily evaluative in nature and may have little or even negative effects on performance particularly if the assessee has low self-efficacy (Double, McGrane & Hopfenbeck, 2019), peer review is found to be more congenial and individualized, catering to the specific needs of individual learners. Likewise, peer review promotes active learning and since it requires students to assume varied roles, giving and receiving peer review (Double, et al., 2019). The task of giving peer review involves critically reviewing peers' writing while receiving feedback requires making guided decisions whether to accept or reject it (Mendonça and Johnson, 1994). These skills eventually helped learners nurture more favorable outlook towards writing (Gaynor, 2019).

Similar advantages were reported in previous research. The study by Tsui and Ng (2000), for instance, found that ‘peer comments enhance a sense of audience, raise learners' awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses, encourage collaborative learning, and foster the ownership of text’(p.124). Topping (2000) concurs that the process of peer review may, ‘promote a sense of ownership, personal responsibility, and motivation... it might also increase variety and interest, activity and interactivity, identification and bonding, self-confidence, and empathy for others’ (p.256). The finding that practicing peer review raises awareness about audience expectations is congruent with Rodriguez and Sharp (2018) who recommended considering writing a social act and advocated giving learners a sense of readership to optimize peer review activities. The new awareness about writing conventions and readers' expectations eventually helped peer review givers and receivers become ‘more critical readers of peers' writing’ and ‘more alert in their own writing, thus cultivating them into conscious writers’ (Berg, 1999).

As a corollary to the new perception of peer review, there was a change in attitude about writing. The findings also reveal that the practice of peer review helped learners nurture a more favorable attitude about the process of writing and its conventions (Zhao, 2014). Bearing double roles as peer review givers and receivers, students started to notice the complex nature of writing as a nonlinear, recursive process (Maarof et al., 2011). This change in attitude can be attributed to systemic training which was found to “offset students' negative attitudes, tremendously reduced worries, and increased confidence toward producing peer feedback and

back-feedback” (Zhang, 2018, p 39). in addition, exposure and repeated practice were found to affect learners’ attitudes (Hu, 2005; Min, 2006; Rollinson, 2005). Albeshar (2012) notes that this shift in students’ attitudes could be the result of their enthusiasm to be involved in, and acceptance of, this new technique (p,186). Peer review, Albeshar (2012) concludes, seems to have filled a feedback gap (p.186).

Despite these positive perceptions registered, however, not all students showed the same zeal about peer review. Among the commonly perceived limitations of peer review is its reliability. Many participants found that their peers lack the adequate skills and linguistic knowledge to offer good quality peer review. Other researchers who investigated attitudes about peer review voiced similar concerns (Hu, 2005; Hu & Lam, 2010). Explaining the problem, Pham, et.al., (2020) note “students with high proficiency feel poorly motivated due to little confidence in the comments made by low proficiency peers, whereas those with limited English abilities are insufficiently knowledgeable to rectify language problems and encounter difficulties in providing such constructive comments as higher English proficiency students expect”(p.1). Equally, some students showed strong resistance to new methodologies and called for maintaining the traditional distribution of roles within the classroom. Indeed, they felt that it is the teacher’s role to give feedback to the students. Overall, participants unequivocally deemed teacher feedback as their preferred form of feedback. Interestingly the same participants called for a combination of both teacher feedback and peer review to reach optimum results.

Research Implications

Based on the findings of this research, several implications can be advanced. First, the heavy workload and the relatively large number of students make it hard for composition teachers to offer detailed feedback. Finding ways to integrate peer review could complement teacher feedback in L2 writing classes. Both forms of feedback can allow students opportunities for collaborative work (Jacobs et al., 1998; Tsui & Ng, 2000).

It seems that any endeavor to explore the effectiveness of peer review in EFL classes should be futile unless an investigation of learners’ attitudes is conducted. This study, among many others, has shown that adequate training and awareness raising are key to reach more favorable attitudes and hence boost the quality of peer review in practice. In addition to adequate training, giving a well-structured procedure to follow can focus the attention of the learners and guide them throughout the practice. Implementing peer review guidance sheets can offer such help. In the design in these forms, it is important to require adequate information and justification about the suggested review for the students to respond and act on it (Hyland & Hyland, 2006).

Another pedagogical implication ensuing from this research findings is breaking down the practice of peer review into different tasks. To avoid turning the peer reviewing procedure into an error correction activity, it is key to target content and meaning making issues. Within the same line of thought implementing back feedback sheets in written peer review design helps receivers to voice their ideas and track their behavior with regard to the peer review they get.

Equally, continuous appraisal of the peer review procedure could usher in better results. The design of this study explored students’ satisfaction with peer review at the end of the semester. It was found that students’ proficiency pairing and attitudes as well as overemphasis on surface

level issues could have been remediated had the study design involved think aloud protocols, stimulated recall or mid study questionnaires (Gass & Mackey, 2000) for example to help students reflect on their experiences while unfolding. These tools could contribute to a richer insight into participants' mental processes, attitudes and experiences during the peer reviewing procedure.

CONCLUSION

Driven by the often-cited advantages of peer review in educational contexts (Lundstrom & Baker, 2009; Topping, 2000; Zhao, 2014), this research explored its affordances in an EFL writing class. The findings revealed that the practice of peer review favorably and significantly influenced students' attitudes. Participants perceived a variety of benefits from taking both the roles of the receivers and givers of peer review in this study. Students highlighted the flexibility and convenience of the practice. They also underscored collaboration and gained awareness of process writing. Both givers and receivers confirmed gains in understanding the requirements of the paragraph writing tasks they engaged in. This study however pointed to some possible causes of concern about peer review, which could be the focus of future research.

Future Research

The findings of this study suggest that peer review is a valuable pedagogical practice in L2 writing classrooms. A number of research areas are worth exploring, including expanding the scope of research on peer review to other instructional environments. Furthermore, larger scale longitudinal research could yield better-grounded findings and usher in more insights into the attitudes, dynamics, and effects of peer review in the long run. From a methodological stance, other variables likely to affect the findings such as gender, age, proficiency, students' matching is capable of capturing the immediate effects these have on the type, amount, focus and effects of peer review on writing.

This research further confirmed the cited benefits of written peer review. Similarly, a wealth of research has been conducted to investigate oral peer review (e.g., Suzuki, 2008; Tsui & Ng, 2000). Research including both forms of peer review is quite scarce, however. As such enhancing the design with a combination of both forms, written and oral, seems a quite promising line of research.

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