

Investigating the Challenges of Implementing Peer Feedback to Enhance EFL Students' Writing Accuracy

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Abstract	Article info
<p><i>Improving students' written performance has long been a challenging task for students and teachers alike. The current study aims at investigating the challenges facing the implementation of peer feedback as an instructional pedagogy to enhance students' writing accuracy. To carry out this study, a mixed-methods approach to data collection and analysis was applied wherein an online questionnaire was administered to EFL students in addition to an interview conducted with teachers in charge of the written expression module at the Department of English at M'sila University. The results obtained revealed that peer feedback is not implemented in writing instruction. Hence, training students on how to give and receive peer feedback is recommended.</i></p>	<p><i>Received</i> 02/20209/17</p> <p><i>Accepted</i> 28/03/2023</p>
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1. Introduction

In the course of learning English as a foreign language (EFL) and English as a second language (ESL), writing is an essential skill to master as a means of expressing one's thoughts

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and ideas and as a means of communication as well. Teachers, genuinely, tend to apply various ways and techniques to improve students' writing levels. This end could be realized when students produce a written work that is grammatically accurate. One of the ways which improve students' ability to write accurately is through responding to students' grammatical errors (Truscott, 1996). Significantly, improving students' writing accuracy is requisite as the effectiveness of any piece of writing is quintessentially determined by its grammatical accuracy.

The effectiveness of grammar instruction has long been investigated in literature since learning any language entails the mastery of its grammar at the outset. Ultimately, language learning goals would have never been attained without a rich command of grammatical knowledge (Richards and Renandya, 2002, as cited in Mart, 2013). Swain (1995) and Lyster (1993) argue that grammar instruction, in addition to a communicative-oriented environment, is a necessary condition to significantly improve students' performance (cited in Rauber and Gil, 2004).

In an attempt to develop students' writing accuracy, it is critical to pursue students with corrective feedback (Ellis, 1994 as cited in Rauber and Gil, 2004). In this regard, feedback should guide learners in the course of their learning so that they can take the next step and improve on their own. Feedback is one of the techniques employed to enhance second language (L2) learning in general and L2 writing in particular (Hyland, 2013) as it assists learners overcome grammatical imperfections in writing.

In the current teaching/learning practices of the 21st century, the ultimate aim behind the process of teaching and learning a foreign language is developing learners' communicative competence (Štajduhar, 2013). Correspondingly, with the shift in the teaching paradigms from traditional teacher-centered to learner-centered classrooms, it would be reasonable to expect a corresponding shift regarding various language assessment techniques including feedback. Peer feedback is thus an ingenuity which represents a move away from teacher-centered culture and promotes learner-centeredness.

The current study is intended to investigate the challenges facing the implementation of peer feedback in writing instruction.

2. Literature Review

In order to increase students' involvement in the teaching/ learning process, students become largely encouraged to step out of their usual roles of being just feedback receivers. In this regard, students become more and more involved in the feedback processes through providing peer feedback on their production (Štajduhar, 2013).

Conceptually, different labels have been used interchangeably to refer to peer feedback (Farrah, 2012). These labels include: peer response, peer editing, peer critique, or peer evaluation (Zhou and Mo, 2007; Mangelsdorf, 1992, as cited in Burket and Wally, 2021). All these concepts share the same idea. They are used to refer to the activity where students tend to read their fellow students' works for the sake of giving a constructive criticism (Farrah, 2012). In this regard, learners are encouraged to hold both the role of feedback providers and receivers.

Accordingly, Liu and Hansen (2002) define peer feedback as "the use of learners as sources of information and interactants for each other in such a way that learners assume roles and responsibilities ... in commenting on and critiquing each other's drafts in both written and oral formats in the process of writing (quoted in Lee, 2017). Additionally, Liu and Carless (2006, p. 280) consider peer feedback as "a communication process through which learners enter into dialogues related to performance and standards". In this definition, peer feedback tends to focus on interaction through which learners tend to give comments where the standard is emphasized in order to reach better understanding and enhanced learning.

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Peer feedback can be classified into two types. It is either an input-providing or an output promoting (Iwashita and Dao 2021). Input-providing peer feedback purveys learners with information about what is correct and acceptable in the target language. This positive evidence is represented by recasting; reformulating learners' errors, and explicit correction, explicitly indicating the error and providing the correct form. Alternatively, output-promoting peer feedback lacks any positive evidence or target-like form. It rather creates opportunities for learners to self-correct their output by pointing that there are language and/or comprehension issues. Output-promoting peer feedback includes repetition, clarification, elicitation, and metalinguistic comments (Lyster, Saito, & Sato, 2013).

In terms of settings, peer feedback can be carried out between two students "peer dyads", or between three or more students "peer-reviewing response groups. In literature, while peer-dyads allows for more social interactions, studies revealed that peer-reviewing groups enable students to receive a more varied feedback (Mendonca and Johnson, 1994, as cited in Burket and Wally, 2013).

Peer feedback has been largely investigated within the socio-cultural theory (SCT) developed by Vygotsky (1978) where the social elements is an essential part of cognition and learning. In that, higher thinking skills are shaped by social interaction. According to Vygotsky (1978), learners are ready to process information about a specific form and respond to intervention by others. For him, this is a sign of the existence of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (cited in Moser, 2020).

In L2 writing literature, the usefulness of peer feedback is well documented. According to Lee (2017), the use of peer feedback is typically approached in the current process approach to teaching writing. Educators shifted from the traditional approach in which students merely hand in the final product to the teacher to get written feedback (Burket and Wally, 2013). Consequently, peer review encourages revision in writing. It provides a true impetus for the students to revise their written work. Besides, exposing student writers to critics or readers who are their fellow students broadens the audience and contributes in developing their critical thinking skills both as writers and readers. As readers students tend to read their classmates drafts neatly in order to make judgments. As writers, as they receive their peers' feedback, they tend to judge the usefulness and relevance of their comments in order to respond accordingly. Furthermore, peer feedback enables students to reflect on their own writing, clear up their thoughts and better understand the needs and expectations of their readers.

Through peer feedback, students learn gradually how to become autonomous writers as they are trained to write without the help of the teacher (Jacobs, 1989, as cited in Lee, 1997).

Through peer interaction which leads to collaborative writing, students are getting a better understanding of the difficulties their peers are likely to encounter in writing. This may boost their self-confidence, turn writing into a more positive learning activity, and help students to become more independent writers. That is, learners are likely to hold positive attitudes towards feedback and writing.

Typically, besides helping students promote their writing skills, this feedback is likely to create a sense of relevance. That is, students realize that their written productions matter to their peers. This fact makes students more cognizant for revision. That is to say, peer feedback is a way to increase students' motivation to writing (Burket and Wally, 2013).

Numerous research studies highlighted the importance of responding to students' writing in a variety of ways including peer feedback. In this regard, Williams (2005) stated that "all writers can benefit from having a real audience to write for, especially if the readers can provide helpful

feedback. A readily available audience in the classroom is the writer's classmates, or peers" (p. 93, quoted in Altstaedter and Doolittle, 2014).

Previous studies indicated that grammar is a crucial aspect for any good piece of writing and that students can advance their proficiency level by producing written work that is grammatically accurate (Baleghizadeh&Gordani, 2012). In this regard, numerous studies highlighted the important role of peer feedback as part of the writing process (Omaggio Hadley, 2000; Shrum and Glisan, 2005 as cited in Altstaedter and Doolittle, 2014).

The role of feedback in overcoming grammatical problems of academic writing in EFL classrooms was also investigated by Suseno (2014). The results he obtained clearly revealed that individual feedback and classroom discussion are significantly an effective strategy to improve students' writing particularly in the aspect of grammar. Within the same line of thought, Altstaedter (2016) explored the impact of trained and untrained peer feedback on students' writing quality. The results demonstrated that students' participation in peer feedback process yielded significant impact on writing quality. These results indicate that the incorporation of peer feedback into foreign language writing classroom helps students improve the quality of writing. These results could show the benefits of incorporating peer feedback in foreign language writing instruction, as it allows students' to focus on writing as a process and improve the quality of their writing.

Kuyyogsuy (2019), on his part, conducted a mixed-methods research which aimed at investigating the effects of peer feedback on students' English writing ability in L2 writing class. The results of the study showed that students made a significant progress in their writing ability. That is, students' engagement in the process of peer feedback results in an effective written product. Kuyyogsuy (2019) concludes that for peer feedback to be effective, training is a crucial factor to enable students to improve their written performance with better grammar use.

Peer feedback, nonetheless, is still a controversial issue in EFL/ ESL contexts. In this regard, peer feedback is resisted as some problematic concerns have always been raised from among is the lack of training. Training students to give and receive feedback from their fellows is very crucial (Kuyyogsuy, 2019). Besides, what is noteworthy to be mentioned is the lack of intra-rater reliability (Štajduhar, 2013). Furthermore, Liu and Carless (2006) state that students may consider their peers lack the enough qualifications to provide insightful feedback. Additionally, students may lack confidence in whether they can provide qualified feedback compared to that provided by the teacher (Kangni, 2015). What is more, Topping (2009) points out that the process of peer feedback can, to some extents, be affected by power relations such as friendship, antagonism, the popularity of individuals, or perception of criticism as socially uncomfortable (cited in Štajduhar, 2013).

Within the same vein, Ferris (2003) discusses a number of issues and concerns that are likely to relatively impact the effectiveness of peer feedback. These issues include the need for training, the need for peer review sessions to be carefully structured and monitored by the instructor, in addition to potential problems with social roles and cross-cultural dynamics within pairs or groups of peer reviewers. Hyland, on the other hand, considers peers are not trained sufficiently and their comments may be vague, unhelpful, or even overly critical.

Therefore, in an attempt to investigate the difficulties and constraints that lie behind the implementation of peer feedback in writing instruction, the current study seeks to answer the following questions:

- ✓ Is peer feedback implemented to enhance students' writing accuracy?
- ✓ What are the difficulties and constraints that hinder the implementation of peer feedback to enhance writing accuracy?

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

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The nature of the current study necessitates the use of a mixed-methods approach to data collection and analysis as the best method in order to get an in-depth understanding of the situation in question. Mixed- methods approach tends to combine various elements of both qualitative and quantitative approaches (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011, as cited in Cohen, et al., 2018). While qualitative data tends to be open-ended without predetermined responses, quantitative data, on the other hand, tends to include closed-ended responses such as found on questionnaires or psychological instruments. In this regard, Cohen, et al., (2018) argue that mixed-methods research “enables a more comprehensive and complete understanding of phenomena to be obtained than single methods” (p. 33). What is more, Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) as cited in Cohen, et al., (2018) contend that mixed-methods research is likely to yield explanations of, and insights into, the phenomenon under investigation in order to reach more useful and credible results.

3.2 Data Gathering Tools

The data gathering tools employed in this study were an online questionnaire, administered to students, and an interview conducted with teachers.. In this regard, Brown (2001), as cited in Dornyei (2003) states that “questionnaires are any written instruments that present respondents with a series of questions or statements to which they are to react either by writing out their answers or selecting from among existing answers” (p.06). Alternatively, Kothari (2004, p. 97) considers interviews as a method of collecting data involving the presentation of oral-verbal stimuli and reply in the form of oral-verbal responses. Hence, the implementation of the interview and questionnaire techniques together in a single study would result in more valid conclusions.

3.3 Participants

The participants who were selected to take part in this study were five (05) teachers in charge of the written expression module, in addition to forty-five (45) first-year EFL students at the Department of English at M'sila University.

4. Results

4.1 Results of Students' Questionnaire

The online questionnaire was set to probe the implementation of peer feedback in writing classes in order to improve students' grammatical accuracy. The following tables and figures display the results yielded

Table 01. Students' Level in Writing

Axes	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Good	10	22.22
Average	31	68.88
Poor	04	08.90

Fig.1. Students' Level in Writing

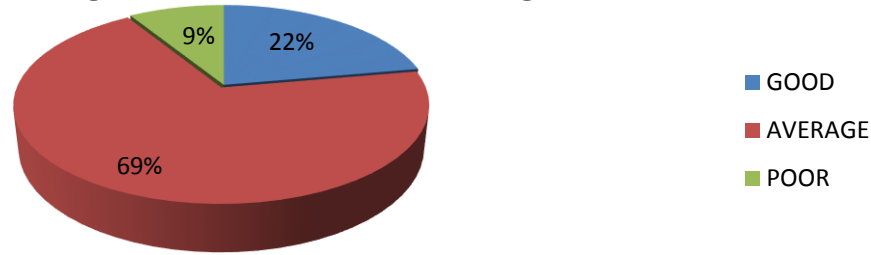


Table 01 and figure 01 expose students' views as far their level in writing is considered. The results obtained indicate that two thirds of respondents (68.88%) consider their level in writing average, (22.22%) consider their level good, and (8.88%) perceived that their level is poor. The results obtained identify students' awareness of the quality of their written productions. This may suggest that students receive feedback from their teachers to estimate their level in writing.

Table 02. Areas of Difficulty Elaborated in Students' Written Performance

Axes	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Grammar	06	13.33
Spelling	09	20.00
vocabulary	20	44.44
Organization	10	22.22

Fig. 02. Areas of Difficulty Elaborated in Students' Written Performance

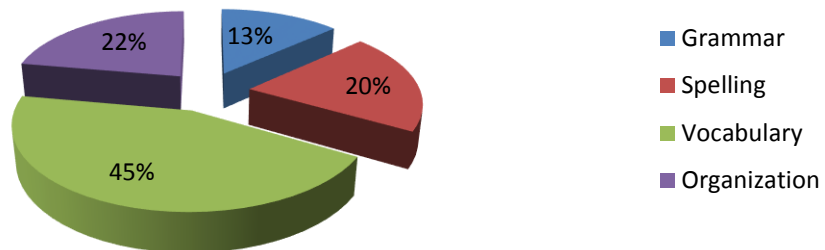


Table 02 and figure 02 display different areas of difficulty frequently students in their writings. The results obtained demonstrated that (44.44%) of respondents' writing difficulties is attributed to poor vocabulary, (22.22%) to organization of ideas, (20.00%) to poor spelling, and (13.33%) to poor grammar. Notably, it can be seen that grammatical accuracy is paid less consideration when compared to other areas such as spelling and vocabulary.

Table 03. Reasons of Students' Poor Written Performance

Axes	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Inefficient Instruction	08	17.17
Lack of Practice	22	48.88
Lack of Feedback	15	33.33

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Fig.03. Reasons of Students' Poor Written Performance

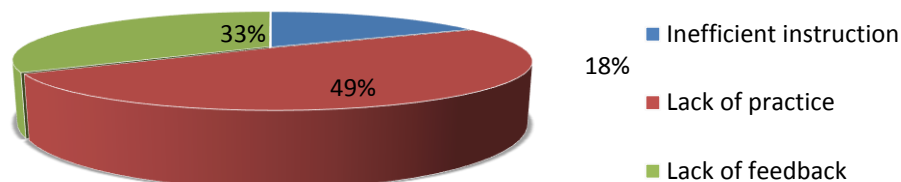
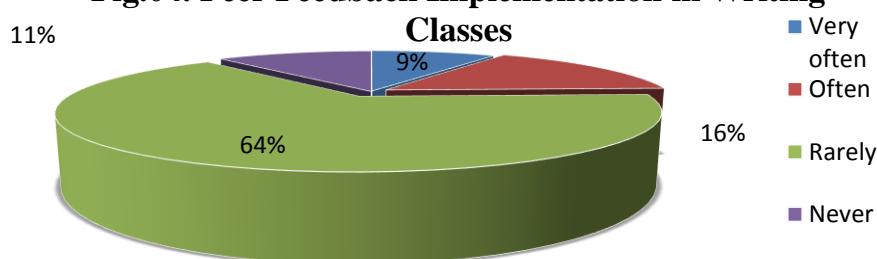


Table 03 and Figure 03 above show the various reasons students listed for their poor writings. (48.88%) of respondents reported that the reason behind their unsatisfactory level of writing is lack of practice, be it inside or outside classroom. (33.33%) consider that their weak level of writing is due to lack of feedback while (17.17%) consider that inefficient instruction is the reason behind their poor writings. Seemingly, the results obtained indicate students' awareness of the significant role of feedback in addition to practice in enhancing their written competence.

Table 04. Peer Feedback Implementation in Writing Classes

Axes	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very Often	04	08.88
Often	07	15.55
Rarely	29	64.44
Never	05	11.11

Fig.04. Peer Feedback Implementation in Writing Classes

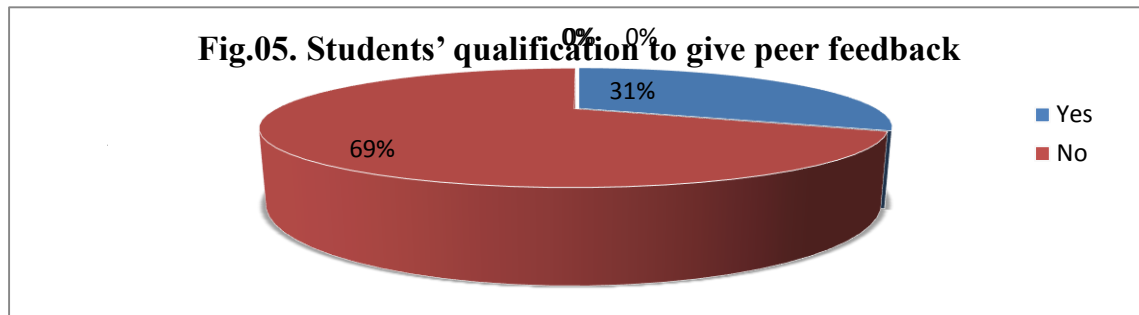


Data exhibited on table 04 and figure 04 concern peer feedback implementation in writing instruction. Accordingly, (64.44%) of students reported that they are rarely engaged in peer feedback practice, (15.55%) reported often, (11.11%) never, and (08.88%) very often. Considering the data displayed in the previous tables, this clearly shows that teacher's feedback is highly practiced in comparison to peer feedback.

Table 05. Students' qualification to give peer feedback

Axes	Frequency	Percentage
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Yes	14	31.11
No	31	68.88



In response to the question which was designed to estimate whether students consider themselves and their peers qualified enough to give feedback, students responded by No (68.88), and Yes (31.11). With regard these results, it is evident that teachers neither rely on students to provide feed feedback to their peers, nor they train them on how to provide effective feedback.

4. 2 Results of Teachers' Interview

In order to enrich and support the data obtained from the questionnaire, an interview was conducted with teachers in charge of the written expression module wherein teachers reported their views regarding peer feedback in addition to the difficulties and constraints hindering its implementation in writing classes.

As far as teachers responses are concerned, all teachers held that students' level in writing is not satisfactory. Teachers agreed that students, in their writings, face difficulties frequently attributed to poor spelling, lack of vocabulary, grammatical (mainly tenses) and syntactical problems, lack of ideas which might be attributed to lack of reading and practicing writing, in addition to mother tongue interference as one of the problems that appear in students' writings.

When teachers were asked about students' focus in their writings, they all confirmed that students tend to focus on the content and ideas neglecting the accuracy of their writings. Nonetheless, when teachers come to assess students' written productions, all teachers accorded on the aspects of sentence structure, grammatical accuracy, and organization of ideas.

Teachers also consider the importance of grammar instruction in teaching writing and that any grammatical imperfections affect, negatively, the quality of students' writings. In the same respect, teachers asserted that students need to receive feedback on their grammatical errors.

Consistent to this view, (03) teachers considered the importance of teachers' feedback, as it is much more trusted, and that they seldom rely on students to give feedback to their peers. They claimed that students are not yet trained and are not qualified enough to give feedback to their peers. Further, they argued that peer feedback is time-consuming and does not work with overcrowded classes. Consequently, it will not be effective. Yet, (02) teacher asserted that it is necessary to engage students in peer feedback from time to time in order to train them as peer feedback reflects the new teaching realms where students actively take part in their learning as well as in the classroom instruction including the feedback process.

5. Discussion

Based upon the results obtained, it is evident that grammar holds an important status in EFL curricula. Yet, students at the Department of English at M'sila University bare little consideration to grammatical accuracy in foreign language writing. They tend to focus more on content and ideas. On the contrary, when assessing students' written productions, teachers give much importance to the grammatical accuracy of the written production. This fact does not mean that teachers' feedback is restricted solely to grammar. Genuinely, teachers tend to make students write accurately by shedding the light on the grammatical errors students commit without neglecting the content. In this regard, Shintani and Ellis (2015) state that feedback can focus on organization, content or linguistic form. Typically, improvements in grammatical accuracy will eventually result in improved accuracy in new pieces of writing (Shintani and Ellis, 2015). For this reason, teachers tend to estimate students' level in writings as an average to under average.

Students consider grammar as one of the areas of difficulty they encounter when they come to produce a piece of writing in addition to poor spelling and lack of vocabulary, which is mainly caused by the lack of reading, therefore students become unable to develop an appropriate content. In this regard, Adas and Baki (2013) contend that English language students have limited vocabulary, and therefore, they end up repeating the same words resulting in poor content which lacks the criteria of creativity. Moreover, language transfer be it French or Arabic is another factor which affects students' writing quality.

As far as the reasons behind unsatisfactory written performance are considered, the findings obtained showed that the majority of students attribute this to the lack of practice. Yet, teachers

indicated that besides the lack of practice, students lack reading which is essential to develop vocabulary. This is consistent with the view of Peter and Singaravelu (2020) who state that lack of content in writing is due to the fact that students lacked reading.

The findings obtained from both teachers and students revealed that the feedback that students receive is teacher-centred. Teachers claimed that students are not trained enough to give feedback and eventually feedback will not be effective. In the same vein, students held that they lack the necessary qualifications to give peer feedback. This may be attributed to their low proficiency level and poor communication skills as well. However, students' awareness of this fact is a good sign of their readiness to be trained to give effective and efficient peer feedback. In this respect, Kuyyogsuy (2019) asserts that for peer feedback to be effective, training is a crucial factor to enable students to improve their written performance with better grammar use. Additionally, students consider themselves and their peers not fully qualified for this activity as Liu and Carless (2006) point out that students may consider their peers lack the enough qualifications to provide insightful feedback.

However, some teachers do acknowledge the importance of peer interaction within the current teaching/ learning paradigms and they assert that corrective feedback is thought to be more effective when it occurs in an interactional atmosphere (Okyar and Ekşi, 2019). Correspondingly, peer feedback can be more effective when students hold a positive and a supportive attitude to their peers. That is, one of the factors which contribute to the success or failure of peer feedback is students' attitudes towards their peers.

6. CONCLUSION

Improving students' writing accuracy is one of the targets in L2 instruction. In order to improve students' writing accuracy, teachers constantly try various techniques so that students can take the next step and improve on their own. Peer feedback is one of the most commonly and recently applied techniques to enhance students' written performance. The current study was intended to probe the difficulties and constraints that lie behind the implementation of peer feedback as an instructional pedagogy to enhance students' writing accuracy. This study was carried out through a mixed-methods approach to data collection and analysis, wherein an online questionnaire was administered to forty-five (45) first year students at the Department of English at M'sila University, in addition to an interview conducted with five (05) teachers in charge of Written Expression module. The results obtained revealed that peer feedback is not implemented among first year EFL students although it is

highly established in literature that peer feedback is an effective way to improve students' writing accuracy. Alternatively, students receive teachers' feedback which is essentially form-focused. Furthermore, results also indicated that teachers consider time shortage and crowded classes in addition to lack of training from the part of students as mainly constraining the process of peer feedback. Hence, it would be useful to better train students on how to give effective peer feedback at the outset of the writing course.

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