

# The Pilot Study of Students' English Writing Improvement through Online Peer Feedback during the Covid-19 Pandemic in the Southern Border Province of Thailand, Yala Rajabhat University

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## Abstract

The pilot study aimed to investigate students' English writing ability via online peer feedback during covid-19 pandemic. In this pilot study, eight open-ended questions, which were conducted to 12 undergraduate students majoring in English with mixed grades coming from 43 students in English writing class in one university in the three Southern border provinces of Thailand. The data analysis stage made use of qualitative data to conduct thematic analysis of the content. The results indicated that students took a positive view of using online peer feedback to support the development of their writing, since this feedback also upgraded their affective strategies and critical thinking skills as well as their ability to interact socially in an effective manner. The results indicate student perceptions concerning writing strategies and found that they believed that online peer feedback could be carried out effectively, leading to improvements in their writing through enhanced grammatical usage. Furthermore, peer feedback and discussions supported better critical thinking skills as well as improving social skills through the need to work cooperatively. Importantly, the pilot study is very beneficial to both instructor and students, especially the instructor can bring to adapt the main study more effectively. Therefore, the findings of online peer feedback ought to be taken into consideration in the main study group to adapt in learning and teaching process.

**Keywords:** online peer feedback, attitudes, L2 writing, collaborative learning

## 1. Introduction

As a consequence of the Covid-19 outbreak, learning English as a second language (ESL) and learning English as a foreign language (EFL) instruction has switched to an online setting in many parts of the world, forcing learners and teachers to adapt to the new learning environment. In particular, the changes in learning will be seen in the practice and method of delivering feedback (Yang, Mark & Yuan, 2021). The Covid-19 pandemic broke out in December 2019 and continued in Thailand throughout 2020, having a significant effect upon education in the country as many schools closed to prevent the spread of the virus. This created a difficult situation for teachers as online learning was the only permissible way to continue the education that Thai students needed (Prapaporn, Wichuta, Werachai & Siraprapa, 2021).

Writing is a critical productive skill which is understood to be relatively complex for ESL/EFL learners to master in order to write at a high level. While the skill is recognized to be very important, however, the pedagogical processes which have long been employed in the language classroom seem rarely to succeed in producing excellent writers in the EFL context. One problem is that traditional methods have been unable to improve the writing quality through comments, suggestions, and other high quality feedback which can lead students to effectively increase their own writing competence. Current writing strategies are changing so that teacher feedback is increasingly augmented by peer feedback, so peer feedback has become a key component in a writing process which involves multiple drafts (Khalil, 2018).

For the purpose of this study, feedback can be described as the information from various sources which informs the learners about the qualities of their work and advises how improvements can be made. In this case, learners play a key role in taking responsibility to use this feedback to benefit their own learning, and therefore they may engage with the provider of the feedback to negotiate the information used to support learning. Feedback must be used to

revise the learner's work or to restructure the learner's understanding. It can also provide confirmation of what the learner already believes they know. Furthermore, providing feedback for their peers can also help learners to reflect better upon their own work. Yu and Lee (2014) concur, having created their own dialogic approach in which feedback is considered to take the form of formal or informal dialogue that promotes learning. During these dialogues, the learners cooperate to construct meaning jointly with those who provide the feedback for the learning process (Butler & Winne, 1995; Carless & Boud, 2018; Yu, 2019, as cited in Yang, Mark & Yuan, 2021).

In L2 writing classes, peer feedback has become an important means of delivering feedback when the teaching is process-based. It is considered to be an effective means of assisting teachers in helping students to improve their writing (Rollinson, 2005). Numerous studies have shown that peer feedback has a positive influence upon the learning outcomes in EFL/ESL writing performance and language development (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). It is also the case that many L2 writing researchers have taken a particular interest in the pedagogical use of peer feedback, since it is an interactive approach which allows the students to participate in discussions concerning the quality of their work and how it might be (Liu & Carless, 2006). It is also clear that peer feedback allows learners' potential to flourish; for instance, it has been shown that students experience reduced writing anxiety when receiving peer feedback, the process helps writers to build awareness of their audience as well as boosting fluency (Stanley, 1992). Furthermore, writing improvements can be facilitated via corrective peer feedback (Hyland, 2000), while working in groups leads to greater motivation and self-confidence. Giving and receiving online feedback also helps students to think critically, while the need to deliver constructive feedback in writing helps to build self-awareness in effective writing strategies and skills. Students are obliged to work harder to clarify their comments and deliver better explanations. Consequently, the need to offer written comments and to revise written work gives learners a better understanding of the evaluation criteria while simultaneously boosting critical reading skills (Rollinson, 2005). The activation of learners' metacognitive awareness also takes place, which in turn supports autonomous learning according to Mendoca and Johnson (1994). Peer collaboration further supports the development of social skills among students. However, numerous studies have commented upon the problems of peer feedback, noting the time taken, the need for training at the outset, and the potential for lower quality when compared to teacher feedback (Legi, 1991; Ferris, 2003; Gielen et al., 2010 as cited in Bosboom et al., 2014), yet other researchers have chosen to emphasize the benefits of the peer approach, suggesting that it represents an appropriate and effective technique to develop learners' second language writing skills in the classroom (Corbin, 2012). Thailand, however, has traditionally focused upon a teacher-centered approach with spoon-fed content strictly controlled by authoritarian teachers. It is suggested that students would be better motivated by peer feedback as an alternative, and better motivation can lead directly to superior performance in L2 writing. The current study therefore seeks to examine student attitudes to the use of peer feedback in Thai university classes in the context of L2 writing, with the aim of learning more about learner perceptions toward peer feedback. The research question therefore focused on the attitudes of learners toward the use of peer feedback as a means of supporting the development of L2 writing skills.

## 2. Review of the Literature

### 2.1 Peer Feedback

Teachers of EFL or ESL writing have been using peer feedback as part of their courses since at least the end of the 1980s (Berg, 1999) since it plays a key role in the process-oriented approach to writing instruction. A number of different terms have been used to describe peer feedback, including peer review, peer editing, peer response, peer evaluation, and peer critiquing. The technique can be described as a collaborative approach based on the reading and analysis of other written work through which collective scaffolding serves to enhance the learners' writing skills (Tsui & Ng, 2000; Zhu, 2001; Hu, 2005; Konwose, 2013; Nguyen, 2016). Further support is provided by the work of Liu and Hansen (2002) who stated that the collaborative activity demanded by peer feedback processes can assist students in making progress in their writing as they revise their drafts over several steps. Accordingly, peer feedback can be described as a strong constructivist technique to strengthen and deepen learning when it is carried out by either learners or teachers, through its provision of useful information and guidance which can be applied to revise and modify the work produced throughout the writing process (Black & William, 1998a; Marzano, 2007 as cited in Rahmat, 2013). Studies have confirmed that one reason for the effectiveness of peer feedback is that the learners must take a more active approach, taking on the roles of both author and reviewer through the process of giving and receiving feedback on their and their peers' work (Hansen & Liu, 2005; Lam, 2010). One further advantage of peer feedback is its informative and timely nature, since this can provide the immediate scaffolding support that is needed to allow learners to construct their writing knowledge and share their ideas (Reynolds, 2009; Lu & Law, 2012). A number of researchers who have specialized in the study of L2 writing have noted that peer feedback plays a vital role in developing learners' writing potential (Hu, 2005; Lam, 2010; Min, 2016). The approach offers learners

constructive support from multiple sources and viewpoints, while the fact that the peer feedback process is recursive helps the learners involved to develop greater self-awareness and confidence as well as stronger critical thinking and social skills (Hirose, 2008; Farrah, 2012; Orsmond et al., 2013). Furthermore, students are also more likely to become better autonomous learners as a consequence of peer feedback, while exhibiting superior critical thinking abilities (Brusa & Harutyunyan, 2019).

Although clear advantages exist, some studies have shown that peer feedback is sometimes negatively perceived. For instance, it was reported by Rollinson (2005) that activities involving peer feedback often proceed rather slowly when learners have not used the technique before, as they are unfamiliar with the processes of the activity such as note-taking, reading, and working with others to provide oral or written feedback. Where students fail to deliver effective feedback, this can lead to frustration for the writer upon receiving inadequate information. These problems tend to arise as a consequence of poor training of the learners (Min, 2005), restrictions on the available time (Legi, 1991) and the lack of credibility of the peer reviewer (Torwong, 2003). Consequently, prior to delivering peer feedback, it is essential that students are trained to do so appropriately. In the context of L2 language learning, and especially in developing writing, the communicative approach has shifted the emphasis away from a teacher-centered model and towards a more student-centered approach. This places the responsibility for learning upon the students themselves. When the advantages and drawbacks of peer feedback are considered, however, many authors have suggested that the advantages significantly outweigh any negative effects (Hu, 2005; Lam, 2010; Van Zundert et al., 2010). Consequently, it is clear that there are many benefits resulting from the use of peer feedback in the ESLEFL context when studying writing, even though some shortcomings do exist. If peer feedback is to work successfully, however, it is necessary for peer training to be carried out, and therefore teachers must in turn learn how to train students so that they can deliver effective peer feedback in L2 writing classes.

### *2.2 Language Level and Peer Interactions*

Earlier research has examined the effect of language proficiency level on the basis of its association with the characteristics of interaction whereby meaning can be negotiated through the form of the interaction along with the interaction patterns and pedagogy. Studies have shown that the negotiation of meaning in any interaction is based on proficiency, with peer interactions taking place with both mixed and matched levels of language proficiency. Results showed that no effect from proficiency levels upon the negotiation of meaning, though it was apparent that the amount of negation required was correlated to the level of proficiency. In the case of students who exhibited mixed levels of proficiency, this might be due to increased miscommunication, while the negotiation involves extended effort to resolve those misunderstandings (Varonis, 1985, as cited in Zarei & Toluei, 2017). Some studies have recently shown that mixed ability level groups can be advantageous, because the process of peer feedback relies on interactions between learners to construct knowledge, and this takes place more effectively where there is a difference in the existing knowledge levels between the learners (Lee, 2008). Learners of higher ability can provide scaffolding support for those of lower ability, thus allowing those learners to generate more complex linguistic structures (Ohta, 2000b). Few studies, however, have examined in any great depth the qualities of peer interactions which involve students at differing proficiency levels (Storch, 2002; Leaser, 2004). To examine this subject in greater depth, this research study sought to investigate the interaction patterns among learners of various language levels when peer feedback is applied in the EFL/ESL writing classroom.

### *2.3 Social Constructivism and Collaborative Study*

Collaborative learning involves students working together to achieve a particular learning objective. It has its basis in the idea of constructivist learning which holds that learning takes place via communicative interactions, negotiations, and collaboration through which meaning, or new knowledge, can be constructed by building upon the foundation of the learner's existing knowledge. Language is critical in such a process, while the learning itself takes place in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which is the zone of knowledge which lies just beyond what is actually known, and which represents the next stage of development for the learner who has the potential and capacity to make that next step with the support of teachers or capable peers. Collaborative learning activity can be described in terms of the ZPD, as can the interactions of the students. Learning performance is much greater when studying collaboratively within the ZPD when compared to individual study. Collaborative learning differs from cooperative learning and can be more demanding because it requires that all learners are mutually engaged in the development and exchange of knowledge as a group. Students who choose to engage collaboratively through social interactions both inside and outside the classrooms, they will probably achieve superior academic performance in contrast to those who do not. EFL/ESL educators and academics are very interested in the interactions among learners as knowledge is co-constructed to achieve effectiveness in communication in L2. Greater achievement often results

from the process of collaborative learning when compared to individual study, as shared tasks can be completed more effectively through true collaboration. The development of digital technologies has also served to support a shift in pedagogical focus towards collaborative learning as many tools exist which can facilitate transformative learning via superior communication. The new platforms provide an excellent opportunity for learners to engage in highly motivating collaborative learning to construct knowledge together.

2.4 The Process of Writing

The writing process is a method which has been widely used for the last fifty years (Key, 1990). As writing skills develop, the aspiring student writer is motivated to work through the process until the final product is the eventual result. It is vital that teachers have a good understanding of the mechanism underpinning the writing process in order to be able to guide students to practice their skills as they move through each phase. In this study the selected writing process was adapted from the work of Flower and Hayes (1981), White and Arndt (1991), and Kim (2005)’s framework, and comprised six phases: 1) Preparation: the learners create a paragraph through mind-mapping to generate ideas, devising an outline, and then applying a grammatical structure; 2) Drafting: the learners complete the paragraph containing all of their ideas; 3) Evaluation: a discussion is held in which learners discuss their own and their peers’ work; 4) Interactive feedback: the learners may seek further detail from their peer reviewers; 5) Re-viewing: self-evaluation is performed by the students to assess their own work, and 6) Revising: the paragraph was then rewritten and students were asked to check their grammatical structures as well as their handwriting. It may be the case that learners also review earlier stages where more information might be found which will allow the task to be completed more accurately. Introducing students to the writing process and then providing stimulation and motivation allows them to improve their writing by performing a prewriting stage along with thoughtful revision, as shown in Fig. 1.

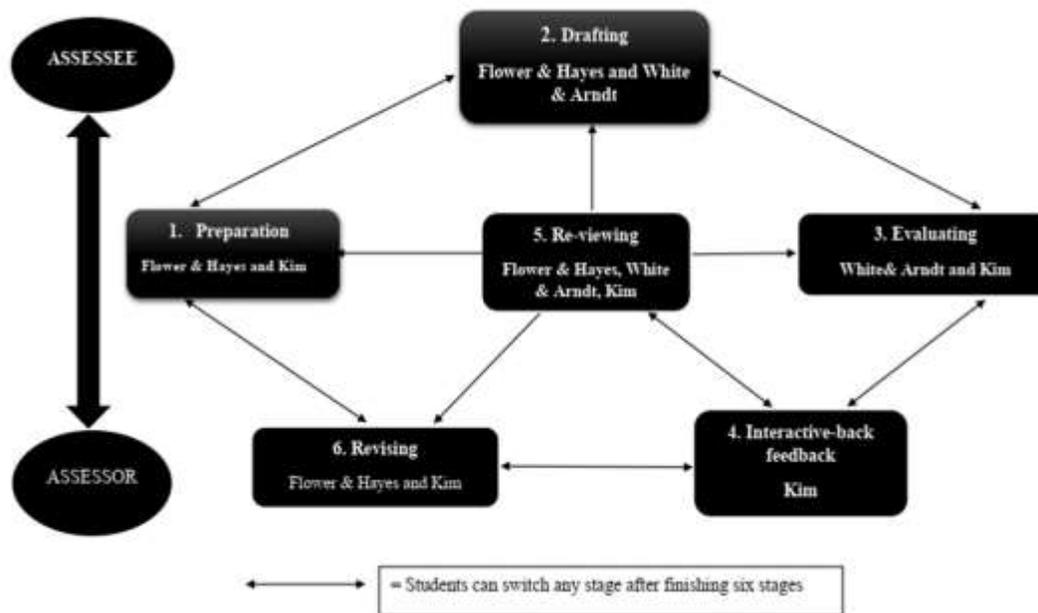


Figure 1. Peer Feedback Model

3.1 Research Design

The pilot study is one part of conducting the research, the researcher only adopted the 8 open-ended questions after the students had completed the online peer feedback session for six weeks to explore their attitudes toward the benefits and drawbacks of incorporating peer feedback in second language writing and to adapt into the main study of the project.

3.2 Subjects

The subjects were 43 undergraduate students majoring in English in a tertiary writing class in a university in the three southernmost border provinces of Thailand, Yala Rajabhat University. They had a prior English background because they had studied Basic English writing courses. This implied that all students had sufficient English writing competence to give online feedback to their peers.

### 3.3 Research Tools

#### 3.3.1 The Eight Opened-Question of Online Peer Feedback

This consisted of eight open-ended questions to elicit students' viewpoints toward the advantages and disadvantages of online peer feedback. Absolutely, the researchers had to prepare the question very well to explore students' attitudes towards online peer feedback in developing their English written tasks.

#### 3.4 Training to Deliver Peer Feedback

To improve the quality of the feedback learners will provide, students received training in how to conduct and also receive peer feedback, based on the four-step process of Min (2005) and the training ideas of Lam (2010).

Furthermore, the lesson plans were designed to fit the study aims and to be suitable for the context. The training process incorporated three phases, which took three weeks to implement at the outset of the writing course.

*Modeling Phase:* Training commenced by introducing the basic strategies for writing and providing learners with an understanding of the class objectives and rationale behind the use of peer feedback in writing development. The advantages of peer feedback were explained along with guidance concerning its application, so that learners would develop the revision skills necessary to use peer feedback effectively. A four-step process was presented by the researcher, comprising clarification and explanation, giving suggestions, the use of peer feedback checklists, and the use of a coding system marking the five most common error types made by students.

*Exploration Phase:* In this phase, the students complete practice exercises based on the four-step process and the five error types through the use of the checklists for peer feedback. In this way, students could practice the evaluation process and check their own understanding of the application of the peer feedback checklist. The students then swapped roles with their peers, marking each other's work and interacting to focus on errors.

Seven of the students were then asked about the pros and cons of the peer feedback approach in order to determine the way they perceived the method.

*Consciousness-raising Phase:* The students were in this phase required to write a paragraph of around 150 words in a narrative style, and subsequently to participate in a group discussion of their work. Each participant served both as an evaluator providing feedback to others about their work, and as a learner receiving feedback and comments about their own work. The peer feedback took a natural format, and participants were free to ask for further clarification or information if they wished. For the purposes of the study, the students were invited to form groups of three in which the ability levels were mixed, since this approach has been shown increase the levels of understanding and participation. Peer feedback can be conducted effectively after peer training has been carried out to ensure that learners understand the process-based approach to writing as well as the feedback procedure.

#### ***Trials of Research Instruments***

**1<sup>st</sup> period 1 December 2021** • Explaining about the study of online peer feedback to Inter-rater, and the researcher demonstrated 6 stages of peer feedback as the core of writing process including lesson plan in teaching a narrative and descriptive paragraph writing

**2<sup>nd</sup> period 8 December 2021** • 4 students with the good ability of Thai language were chosen to read the peer feedback questionnaire in order to improve language use.

**3<sup>rd</sup> period 13 December 2017** • 4 students with the good of Thai language were selected to read 8 opened questions of online peer feedback.

**4<sup>th</sup> period 15 December 2017**

• To measure the reliability of research instruments, 30 students were asked to answer the peer feedback questions.

#### 3.5 Data Collection

When the pilot study started, the researcher used peer feedback training to administer to the students for 6 weeks, to achieve this, the students had to learn how to give and receive feedback to peers in the issues of the writing strategies, the checklists of peer feedback, the types of error codes and learning about students' roles. The following six weeks, student will be asked to perform their written assignment through the discussion of online peer feedback in an English writing class and had to answer to the eight opened-questions of questionnaire to reflect on what they had studied after completing the online peer feedback.

### 3.6 Data Analysis

In the pilot study, the researcher begins with analyzing the qualitative databases independently to bring the results into the main study with 8 opened-questions which were thematically analyzed. The online peer feedback questions are followings: 1. What do you think about online peer feedback; for example, online peer feedback helps students motivate in learning or not 2. While you receive peer feedback from peers, how do you feel of it? 3. After you got feedback from peers, does it make you responsible for a group work? 4. What are the benefits of online peer feedback such as reading in advance to correct the written tasks. 5. What are the drawbacks of online peer feedback such as the problems of using technology 6. Does online peer feedback helps develop student's the social skills? For instance, this activity raises the exchange the ideas to one another or not 7. Does online peer feedback make students enjoy learning, How? 8. What do you think of teaching and learning process through online peer feedback?

#### **Results of the Qualitative Data**

The results of the qualitative data of the 8 open-ended questions on the same phenomena, this would increase the belief in the research findings (Creswell, 2011). In the pilot study, the results revealed that the students had high positive viewpoints toward online peer feedback in the writing class as following:

*"In my point of view, online peer feedback can develop my English writing more effectively, I can expand the longer sentences in creating a writing paragraph. Moreover, my English grammar is improved also in the issues of the use of conjunction and transition signals. It makes me motivate in learning effectively."*

*"Receiving feedback from group peers makes me stimulate a lot in learning. Giving and getting feedback makes me discuss and debate the using of grammar on my written tasks. Getting the comments from peer is beneficial for me and if I do not agree with them, I can respond and object to it immediately. Importantly, I tried to explain why I answered to peers reasonably. Besides, I can control my emotion during discussion very well."*

#### *Student 1*

*"At first, I knew that my written tasks are not absolute, and it is necessary to be solved from peers. Besides, when I receive peer feedback, I learn about how it is correct, and I asked peers why it is wrong on my grammar. Discussion makes me know how the word is correct, and I corrected it from peers' comments."*

*"After getting feedback from peers, it makes me unconfident in English writing. However, we can reasonably discuss our works to one another. When we write with the wrong grammar and peers will comment, I will correct it immediately. Online peer feedback makes us responsible for our group works, motivate in studying, and it makes us elaborate in doing online peer feedback in more details."*

#### *Student 2*

*"I got a plenty of the benefits of online peer feedback, the first thing is to make me stimulate in learning English. We had to prepare ourselves and reading in advance in order to correct peers' written tasks via online google meet. This makes me know about how to produce the writing paragraph correctly. This makes me write it with the correct grammar such as topic sentence, supporting details and conclusion. Work collaboratively helps me have the responsibilities a lot to group peers."*

*"In my opinion, online peer feedback encourages me in produce my works. The mistakes can happen in writing. However, when there is online peer feedback in checking my works, it makes me understand more with correct guidelines of checklists as system on my works. I can expand my writing longer. I have learnt about accepting peers' ideas, and more importantly, I can express my opinions to peers and dare to exchange more ideas to one another."*

#### *Student 3*

*"I think that online studying is so beneficial for us in the Covid-19 situations, it is very suitable for the students. More importantly, I have learnt about peers' work and do the activity via a group working, and we could exchange knowledge to one another; not just only see my work. We can check the mistakes of peers' work also."*

*"In my point of view, I was very excited and enjoyed the peer group activity. I could know what I made some mistakes in my writing paragraph and learnt about peers' mistakes also. This will make me very careful in producing my subsequent writing performance. Besides, this makes me know how many mistakes I did also. Absolutely, I love online peer feedback, although sometimes it is complicate in conducting online peer feedback."*

#### *Student 4*

*"In my opinion, I think online learning and teaching process is so useful for me in developing my writing. I have got*

*the experience about how to correct peers' task. This makes me improve in the issues of content, language and mechanics. I could analytically think in writing English. I can review my work before submission. There are a plenty of the online peer feedback in developing my written tasks."*

*"For online peer feedback, it makes me learn about collaborative learning. In checking peers' tasks, we could discuss what we made the mistakes on our work. It raises the social skills when we perform the peer group activity. This makes us responsible for work as the group member in the role of peer feedback giver, and receiver. We have learnt about the learners' English individual difference via doing online peer feedback.*

*Student 5*

#### **4. Discussion**

The study asked eight open-ended questions to obtain the qualitative data, whereupon the data analysis indicated that the students had a generally positive perception of the use of online peer feedback. The approach attracted high scores assessing the impact of the writing process, critical thinking skills, affective strategies, and social interaction skills following the peer feedback session conducted online.

##### *4.1 The Writing Process*

The students viewed the writing process and the experiences it generated in a positive light. The findings showed that perceptions of the peer feedback process and the process-based approach to writing were broadly positive. Furthermore, the students believed that their writing improved in terms of its organization and content, and the learners were better equipped to utilize the materials for peer feedback in assessing the work of their peers. The requirement to provide peer feedback also ensured that students remained engaged in their activities, generating a greater sense of responsibility for learning and being a productive group member. All reported that providing feedback helped them to improve their abilities to provide corrections and to participate in discussions with their peer group in the class. These findings matched those of Min (2005) and Shehadeh (2011) who reported positive perceptions from students about using peer feedback to improve their writing through an emphasis on organization and content rather than simply grammar. The amount of reading students were required to perform in order to give feedback helped them to develop a deeper understanding of the writing process to create higher quality compositions of their own. This view was supported by eight open-ended questions in responses. Learners were better able to produce paragraphs in different genres, could expand their ideas as their paragraphs were developed within a specified time frame, and their skills in negotiation and social interaction were also enhanced while they improved their understanding of writing strategies.

However, the most important factor leading to writing improvement was the training concerning peer feedback. This training allowed them to better appreciate the details of the writing process as the peer feedback guided them through the drafting stages until the finished product was created. Earlier studies have also confirmed the importance of training in the delivery and use of peer feedback to improve writing (Hu, 2005; Liou & Peng, 2009; Goldberg, 2012; Kunwongse, 2013; Nguyen, 2016; Khalil, 2018), with findings revealing that one significant impact of training lies in the way it encourages learners to make use of the peer corrections they receive as they revise their writing and improve its quality. The learners' ability to deliver improved written comments was noted, along with enhanced levels of self-confidence. The work of Min (2005) also showed that those learners who have received feedback training are able to produce superior written work themselves. In particular, they were able to offer suitable comments and observations in the area of grammar, so it may be possible to conclude that when peer feedback is well managed, it can serve as a strong indicator of the learners' success in the use of peer feedback for the development of writing skills.

##### *4.2 Affective Strategies*

Affective strategies can be built via discussion in peer groups, while the feedback interactions can be enjoyable, stimulating, and responsible for the development of self-confidence among group members working on peer feedback tasks. This was supported by the work of Khalil (2018), who reported that there are positive effects stemming from peer feedback which include enhanced self-motivation and confidence following the criticism of work completed by peers. Furthermore, the results were in agreement with those of Tui and Ngo (2000) who reported that students are encouraged to participate in writing tasks when peer feedback is employed, as the process gives them greater confidence to become capable independent learners who are not overly reliant upon their teachers. The opportunity to compare their work with that of their peers resulted in a decrease in negative emotions as they were challenged to make improvements through practice with the support of their peers.

The findings also confirmed that students were able to effectively develop their affective strategies through the use of

peer feedback, while their stress levels were reduced and their self-confidence increased. Most of the students reported that positivity was vital when giving feedback to their peers. The chance to practice and revise their work based on the feedback was also helpful, and learners were found to enjoy the feedback discussions. Where disagreements arose, learners were able to control their emotions and developed their ability to respond positively to constructive criticism or to alternative viewpoints. Meanwhile, the need to deliver peer feedback

resulted in greater student engagement. The friendly and caring atmosphere generated by the peer feedback discussions inspired the learners to participate, leading to overall improvements in their self-motivation, self-awareness, and self-confidence.

#### *4.3 Critical Thinking Skills*

It is understood that peer discussions can support the development of critical thinking skills through the exchange of ideas and opinions, while the need to offer critical and constructive feedback forces students to build a deeper understanding of their own work and their criteria for improvement. The process also compels

learners to develop their self-reflection practices, as well as making it easier to create new ideas, since the learners are required to read the ideas of others in various formats, and to argue and share ideas on the same topics themselves. Brusa and Harutyunyan (2019) reported similar findings that students become autonomous learners with superior critical thinking skills when peer feedback is used. They can learn from the strengths and weaknesses of their peers when they deliver feedback, and apply this awareness in their own writing ( Tsui & Ng, 2000; Nguyen, 2016). The practice in reading fluency and critical thinking also plays an important role in supporting peer discussion and creating more effective evaluations (Rollinson, 2005). Both offering and receiving critical analysis of written work helps the learners to develop their critical thinking skills and to take greater responsibility for their learning and the learning of the peer group as a whole.

#### *4.4 Social Interaction Ability*

Peer interaction can be defined as one component of cooperative or collaborative learning. It plays an important role in developing the social skills of learners as they interact with their peers. Following the provision of training, participation in group discussions to provide peer feedback helped learners to gain a better awareness of the varying levels of English writing ability of their peers. Language usage and tone of voice was also crucial in creating the right atmosphere within the discussion groups to deliver the messages effectively, with emotions controlled and negotiation and comprise becoming key components of the discussions. The questionnaire findings supported this observation, with the data indicating that peer feedback improved the social skills of students. This would be expected as social interaction is a critical aspect of working within the ZPD, as learning takes place through the use of scaffolding interactions within the ZPD. Peer feedback and peer interaction therefore supported learning, and encouraged students to take responsibility for that learning due to the different roles they had to play as part of the peer feedback process. Moreover, the acceptance of the peer feedback offered helped to create a harmonious and cohesive working group atmosphere, while the provision of feedback helped learners to improve their own work as well as learning more about the writing skills of others. This view is supported by the original work of Vygotsky (1978) on this topic. Moreover, the use of peer feedback places emphasis on social interactions, builds a deeper understanding of the strategies used for learning in the context of problem solving, and improves the language skills of the students, especially in grammar and writing because these elements are vital to support the role of the provider of peer feedback (Kunwogse, 2013; Min, 2016; Nguyen, 2016; Allharbi, 2018). It cannot be disputed that the peer feedback approach provides an important social element as learners take responsibility for their own duty to collaborate with others to achieve results.

### **5. Conclusions and Implications**

Peer feedback represents a particularly dynamic pedagogical approach, so this research sought to present the benefits of taking this approach within the online setting to bring these advantages to students. The findings suggested that learners had a generally positive perception of the use of peer feedback with the data indicating high level support in the context of improving the writing process, critical thinking, affective strategies, and social interactions. However, it is essential that students first receive peer feedback training for the practice to work effectively. A strong process can lead to better results, so the online process of peer feedback is very useful in developing better English writing skills, while learner autonomy is also supported by this method. From a theoretical perspective, students who are self-reliant can make use of online peer feedback to develop their skills in a collaborative setting which provides social and intellectual support. The study confirmed the theoretical expectations, revealing that learners had a broadly positive view towards peer feedback and its capacity to improve the quality of their written work. The main

study of this project should therefore make use of peer feedback in order to foster positive attitudes towards the writing process. The results from six weeks are therefore potentially very useful as schools and colleges make increasing use of online and computer technologies to mitigate the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

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