

The Effects of Integrating Peer Feedback into University-Level ESL Writing Curriculum: A Comparative Study in a Saudi Context

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This project aims to investigate the effects of introducing peer feedback to a group of university-level students in a context where teacher-fronted classes are considered predominant. I performed a three-phased, three-month long project using various data collection methods. The study first investigated students' initial perceptions of peer feedback and compared them to their perceptions after the experiment using semi-structured questionnaires and individual interviews. The results of the first stage suggested that students approved of teacher-written feedback, but were apprehensive about peer feedback. The main objection to peer feedback was the fact that it was originated from fellow students whose linguistic level was lower than that of the teachers. The second phase of the project included members of an ESL class divided into two groups; the experimental group, which jointly used teacher-written and peer feedback; and the control group, which received only teacher-written feedback. Despite linguistic concerns, the overall perception of peer feedback became more positive and students subsequently accepted this technique as part of their ESL writing curriculum.

The results suggest that peer feedback helped students gain new skills and improved existing ones. The last phase was a comparative study consisting of pre- and post-tests to measure the progress of students' writing. Texts were evaluated and given an overall grade based on various local and global issues, using a holistic assessment approach. Students in both groups did considerably better in the exit test. However, members of the peer feedback group outperformed the other group in every aspect of writing investigated. The study concludes that the effect of peer feedback on students' perception was profound. Students were hugely impressed by the potential of peer session on their ESL writing routines which has been reflected on their eagerness to have more similar sessions in the future. If students are properly trained to use peer feedback, the benefits could be very significant, and therefore it recommends that education policy makers and ESL writing teachers in Saudi Arabia should do more effort to introduce peer session to all ESL writing classes.