Peer-Editing Versus Self-Editing in the ESL Classroom

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ABSTRACT

Few studies have compared peer-editing to self-editing with respect to writing development. This study addresses this gap in literature. It uses a pre-test/post-test comparison group quasi-experimental design and employs quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection to compare the effect of trained peer-editing to that of trained self-editing in developing students' writing in revised drafts. The student sample comprised students taking a freshman level course at an American university in Lebanon. The comparison group engaged in self-editing their essays, while the experimental group practiced peer-editing. The researcher, who was also the instructor, evaluated students' writing performance using a rubric following the multiple trait approach and another rater evaluated a sample of students' essays to achieve inter-rater reliability. A comparison of ANCOVA tests from both groups revealed that unlike the comparison group, the experimental group significantly improved their revised drafts. Sample essays and editing forms by the experimental and control groups were also analyzed to determine the changes made to students' second drafts in response to peer- and self-feedback. The study concludes by recommending the use of peer-editing in the writing classroom since it focuses students' attention on good writing skills and helps them construct new knowledge through peer mediation.

Keywords: Peer-editing, self-editing; interaction; attention; noticing; essay revision.

1. INTRODUCTION

Studies that examined the effects of peer-editing in the L2 writing classroom may be classified into several strands: studies comparing the effects of trained to untrained peer-editing in terms of the quantity and quality of student comments [1, 2], studies tracing the number of revisions student writers made on their essays [3, 4, 5], and those monitoring the effects of peer-editing on the writing quality of revised drafts [1, 5, 6]. The few peer-editing studies that report writing development in students' revised drafts after receiving training in peer-editing (see Literature Review) do not really trace the effects of self-editing on the quality of students' revised drafts. It is therefore possible that self-editing, brought about by teacher training in good writing skills, may have contributed to the reported writing development. Indeed, Ferris [7] reviewed the work of many researchers on peer-editing and stated that 'the mere act of rereading and rewriting, even without feedback from peers or teacher, may lead not only to substantive changes but improved writing quality' (p. 82). Unfortunately, however, researchers have not given self-editing much attention.

This paper will first review some research studies examining the effects of peer-editing on revised drafts, point out the considerable amount of self-editing students did in some of these studies, and report on a quasi–experimental study that compares the effect of peer-editing to those of self-editing on students' revised drafts.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Berg [1], Min [5], and Paulus [6] have reported writing development in students' revised drafts after receiving training in peer-editing. Berg [1] compared experimental and control groups to determine the effect of trained peer-editing on the quality of L2 essay revisions. Her study concluded that the quality of revisions made by the trained group was better than that by the untrained group. However, Berg did not reveal whether oral peer feedback or self-feedback brought about by teacher instruction in editing was responsible for the improved revisions. On the other hand, Paulus [6] examined the effect of trained peer feedback as well as teacher feedback on students' essay revisions. The study involved 11 students who wrote an essay in three drafts: the second draft in response to peer feedback, while the third was in response to teacher feedback. Paulus [6] found that students made changes in their content and language as a result of both peer and teacher feedback and that these changes significantly improved students' final draft. However, the study did not trace the effects of each type of feedback separately [6]. Only Min's L2 study [5], in which students received peer and teacher feedback, compared the effects of trained and untrained peer feedback on students' essay revisions and traced the source and number of essay revisions. The study concluded that trained peer-editing resulted in better essay quality than untrained peer-editing. However, the study did not report the effects of self-editing on students' writing development.

A few L2 studies tracing the source of essay revisions have shown that students tend to make considerable revisions as a result of self-editing. Connor and Asenavage [3] examined the fourth essay of two ESL student groups who were trained in peer-editing. The essay was written in three drafts: the second draft was written in response to peer feedback, while the third was in response to teacher feedback. Revisions on the second draft resulting from peer feedback were 4% in Group 1 and 12% in Group 2. Moreover, revisions on the third draft resulting from teacher feedback were 37% in Group 1 and 35% in Group 2, those resulting from self/others were 57% in Group 1 and 64% in Group 2, while revisions resulting from direct group comments were 6% in Group 1 and 1% in Group 2. Hence, essay revisions resulting from self/other feedback were considerably more than those resulting from peer or teacher feedback for the two groups. However, the study included a small number of students (four students per group), so its results may not be generalized. Moreover, it did not indicate whether the revised drafts improved in quality.

In contrast, another study tracing the source of essay revisions arrived at different results [4]. The study examined the first essay written by 12 ESL students who were paired off to edit each other's first draft with the help of four guided questions; however, the students did not receive training in peer-editing. Analysis of the first and second drafts and the peer feedback indicated that 53% of essay revisions were peer generated, while 37% resulted from self revisions. The relatively small number of revisions resulting from self-editing (compared to that number in Connor and Assenavage's 1994 study) may be attributed to the fact that the students had not received training in peer-editing and thus were not confident of their ability to edit their essays. However, similar to Connor and Assenavage [16], Mendonça & Johnson [9] did not indicate whether the revised drafts in this study improved in quality.

Moreover, the previously-mentioned study by Paulus [6] reported that while peer feedback was the source of 32.3% of revisions in the second draft, 65.4% of the revisions were generated by self/other feedback. Moreover, in the third draft, 56.7% of revisions resulted from teacher feedback, while 42.3% resulted from self/other feedback. Hence, a significant number of revisions resulted from self-editing, which is similar to the findings of Connor and Asenavage [3].

The above review of studies indicates that self-editing plays a considerable role in essay revision. However, to the knowledge of this researcher, only Berger [8] and Graner [9] compared the effects of trained peer-editing with those of self-editing. Berger [8] examined essay revisions of two groups, each including 23 students. Both groups practiced the feedback technique they were asked to engage in. After one session of training, the first group peer-edited each other's essays, while the second group self-edited their essays. A comparison of the essay revisions made by the two groups revealed that 'The peer feedback groups did make more revisions than the self-feedback groups in every category except content' (p. 28), but it did not investigate the effect of type of feedback on essay quality. A similar study by Graner [9] found that both groups (those who received peer-editing and those who engaged in self-editing) improved in writing, but there was no significant difference in writing ability between the peer-editing group and the self-editing one. This may be due to the fact that the two groups only had one training session in editing, which did not allow the students who engaged in peer-editing to develop a sense of audience awareness that may help them revise their essays from different perspectives.

To sum up, the rather high percentage of self-based revisions mentioned in the above studies [3, 4, 6] suggests that self-editing, promoted by teacher instruction in good writing skills, merits further investigation. Accordingly, the present study seeks to fill this gap in the literature through investigating whether the effects of trained peer-editing are similar or superior to the effects of self-editing in improving students' revised drafts. If superior, peer-editing would be worth the time and effort invested in it.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

Research Questions
The study employed a pre-test/post-test control group quasi-experimental design to answer two research questions: Q1) Do students revise their essays better in response to trained peer-editing or to trained self-editing? Q2) How do essays revised in response to trained peer feedback differ from those revised in response to trained self-feedback?

Research Sample
The student sample comprised a comparison group (18 students) and an experimental group (22 students) attending English 3, a freshman level course at an American university in Lebanon. English 3 is the third course in a sequence of five English courses; three taken at the freshman level and two at the sophomore level. Students placed in English 3 should have scored at least 500 on the SAT, 263 on TOEFL (computer-based), 600 on the university's English Entrance Exam (EEE), or passed another pre-requisite course. Since the two groups were not formed randomly, two instruments were used to check whether the two student groups were equivalent, namely a diagnostic essay and a questionnaire (see Data Collection).

Method
The students in the comparison and experimental groups attended different classes of English 3. In both classes, the instructor was also the researcher. The students met three times a week for 15 weeks. In the first week of the semester and before introducing editing, all students wrote a diagnostic essay in two drafts over two 50-minute

class periods. The essays were graded using the multiple trait scoring rubric adapted from Hamp-Lyons [10]. Moreover, the students filled in a structured questionnaire about their educational background.

Between the second and fifth week of the semester, both student groups were taught the components of the argumentative essay. Students practiced editing for content and organisation in four 50-minute class periods. During the training sessions, the instructor modelled to the students how to edit argumentative essays. Sample essays that included weak content and organisation and that were written by anonymous students from a previous semester were put on transparencies. With the instructor's help, the students collectively identified vague or irrelevant content and faulty organisation of ideas using a variety of cognitive, metacognitive, and affective strategies. While revising each of these essays, the students practiced filling in an editing form to focus their attention on the components of the argumentative essay that they needed to examine. The editing form included two sections: a checklist section and an open-ended section. The students were asked to read each essay twice, once to know its general content and another time to edit it. In the second reading, each editor wrote on the editing form what needed to be added, deleted, kept, or changed in each essay, stated the line number, and offered suggestions for improving the essay, where possible.

At the end of the training period, the students in both groups were asked to write in class three graded essays in weeks six, eight, and ten respectively, and for each essay they were given two topics to choose from. Before the first draft of each essay was written in class, both groups were given an additional practice editing session. Both groups wrote each of their graded essays in three class periods (first draft, editing, and second draft).

In week six, the experimental group wrote the first draft of Essay One in one class period. In the next period, they swapped papers and edited each other's essay content and organisation for 50 minutes. When editors spotted weaknesses in their colleagues' papers, such as weak content or irrelevant ideas, they discussed them with the writers, negotiated possible alternatives, and filled the editing form like they were taught in the practice sessions. In the third class period, the students took back their first draft with the respective peer-editing form and proceeded to revise their essays in response to their peers' feedback and according to the knowledge they had gained from teacher instruction in editing argumentative essays. At the end of the third class period, the students in the experimental group submitted their second drafts along with their first drafts and the peer-editing forms.

Likewise, the students in the comparison group followed the same procedure as that of the experimental group except that they engaged in self-editing their essays in light of teacher instruction in editing argumentative essays. The students submitted both drafts and the self-editing form at the end of the third class period.

In weeks eight and ten, the same procedure was repeated by each group for Essay Two and Essay Three respectively. However, this paper will only report students' writing performance on Essay Two, the position argument.

4. DATA COLLECTION

As stated earlier, two quantitative instruments were used, namely an essay grading rubric and a questionnaire as well as one qualitative instrument, the peer-editing form. The students' first and second drafts of each essay (diagnostic, Essays One, Two, and Three) were graded for both groups using the Hamp-Lyons [7] multiple trait rubric. The grades of first drafts were not disclosed to the students as they were corrected and graded at the end of the semester for research purposes only. To check for reliability, instructor's evaluation of seven sample student essays from each group was compared against that done by an experienced teacher. Inter-rater reliability of essay grading was ($r=0.82$, $p=0.007$).

Moreover, to account for variables that may be responsible for changes in the students' writing ability, the structured questionnaire was administered to all the students in the first week of the semester to identify differences in their age, gender, personality, language ability, and the methods they were exposed to when learning English. The above instruments were piloted and evaluated with students who were not part of this study. The results of the questionnaire were used along with the results of the diagnostic essay to determine whether or not the two groups were equivalent. If they were equivalent, any change in writing performance between them after the peer-editing intervention could be considered the result of the intervention.

Moreover, the students' feedback on the editing forms and the revisions they made on their second drafts were analyzed and compared to their first drafts.

5. RESULTS

Diagnostic Essay Results

The comparison carried out between the two groups' performance on the diagnostic essay revealed some difference in the students' writing ability in favor of the experimental group. This may have been due to the different writing exposure they had at school. Accordingly, to ensure that the students in the two groups have rather similar essay writing background, the first draft of Essay One (causal argument) was considered as pre-test (T_1), instead of the diagnostic essay which initially was to be used. The first draft of the causal argument was written before getting peer feedback (in the case of the experimental group) but after receiving training in editing content and organisation. A

comparison carried out on the two groups' scores on the first draft of the causal argument showed that they had similar writing ability.

Results of the Questionnaire
The results of the questionnaire revealed that the two student groups were rather equivalent [11].

Results of the Quasi-Experiment
In order to address Q 1) Do students revise their essays better in response to trained peer-editing or to trained self-editing?, a multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) test was conducted. The treatment conditions (comparison versus experimental) were used as an independent variable, the students results on the first and second drafts of the position argument essay as dependent variables. The causal argument (T_1) was used as covariate. The experimental group revised their essays in response to peer feedback while the comparison group self-edited their essays. However, both groups had received teacher instruction in editing. The results showed that there was no significant difference between the two groups on the first draft, $F (1, 37) = 1.66$, $p = 0.204$; the mean score and the standard deviation (SD) of the comparison group and the experimental group were 57.88, SD = 8.51 and 59.59, SD = 10.96 respectively, (d = 0.1). However, there was a statistically significant difference between the comparison and experimental group in favor of the experimental group on the second draft (written after the treatment) at $p < 0.1$ alpha level: $F (1, 37) = 3.12$, $p = 0.08$. The mean score and the standard deviation (SD) of the comparison group and the experimental group were 64.16, SD = 11.71 and 67.22, SD = 10.80 respectively, effect size (d = 0.2). Thus, the above results reveal that students who engaged in peer-editing were able to improve the content and the organization of ideas in their revised drafts significantly more than the comparison group.

Results of Analyses of Sample Essays and Editing Forms

Results of Peer-Editing: To answer Q2) How do essays revised in response to trained peer feedback differ from those revised in response to trained self feedback?, a qualitative analysis of seven randomly chosen position arguments (first drafts, peer-editing forms, and second drafts) written by the experimental group was carried out. Grades of the seven second drafts varied (40%-82%) as did the editing ability, which ranged from good to average to poor. Analysis of the sample seven first drafts and their respective peer-editing forms revealed that most writers did not include a title in their first draft but wrote good introductory paragraphs with acceptable claims, and almost half of them had sound logic and organization. Although the first drafts had included 52 total errors (TE), the peer-editors commented in the peer-editing form on two 'false' errors (FE) i.e. actually not errors and 35 real errors (RE), most of which addressed missing titles, missing or insufficient

supporting details, counter arguments and refutations, and logical fallacies in their colleagues' first drafts. On the other hand, peer-editors mostly failed to notice errors in organization (redundant ideas) and to comment on the lack of in-text citations in their colleagues' first drafts. In one case, a peer-editor gave wrong feedback to the writer regarding the quality of her counter argument and her refutation, thus pointing her writer's attention to the above-mentioned two false errors.

With respect to the seven second drafts, analysis revealed that the writers, in general, responded to 27 out of 35 correct peer comments that involved adding ideas, deleting others, or incorporating changes requested by their peers. Almost all the revisions (23 out of 27) on the first drafts' titles, claims, supporting details, counter arguments, refutations, logic, irrelevant ideas, conclusions, and citations, made in response to peer feedback, ended up improving the revised drafts. Still, a couple of revisions to one supporting detail and one concluding paragraph were unsuccessful as were the two revisions made in response to wrong feedback (counter argument and refutation) stated above. Moreover, nine peer comments, four of which addressed refutation of counter arguments, were ignored as well as one wrong comment regarding a counter argument (see Analysis and Discussion below).

Results of Self-Editing: With respect to self-editing, the same procedure adopted for analyzing the essays and editing forms of the experimental group was also used with those of the comparison group. Here too, the seven essay grades varied (40%-82%) and the self-editing forms ranged from good, to average, to poor. Analysis of the seven first drafts revealed that all student writers had provided a title for their first draft, and almost half of them had acceptable introductory paragraphs, logical arguments and sound organization of ideas in their first drafts. Still, these drafts included a total of 53 errors, of which the self-editors noticed 37, mostly with respect to weaknesses in the introductory paragraphs, weak or missing counter arguments and refutations, weak conclusions, and missing or incomplete citations. Self-editors also seemed to spot most of the missing or insufficient supporting details in their first drafts, though not consistently (three out of seven self-editors noticed problems in some supporting details, but not in others). Moreover, three out of seven self-editors encountered difficulty spotting problems with organization (redundant and irrelevant ideas). Only one student was able to spot the redundancy in his essay and delete it, while no student was able to spot irrelevant ideas.

When examining students' second drafts, it appeared that students revised 36 of the 37 errors they had spotted in their first drafts and ignored one comment pertaining to one concluding paragraph. Still, though self-editors were able to notice certain errors, they were not always able to correct them and improve their second drafts. Examples of such errors are ones in introductory

paragraphs, supporting details, and refutation of counter arguments, so these aspects were sometimes not improved in their second drafts. Of the 36 revisions that self-editors made to their first drafts, only 28 led to improving their second drafts.

6. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The results of peer- and self-editing (see Table 1) reveal that the experimental group (Peer-Editing column in Table 1), who received peer feedback, noticed fewer errors in their writers' essays ([35 noticed RE]/[52 TE] = 67%) than did self-editors in their own essays ([37 noticed RE]/[54 existing TE] = 69%). However, the revisions which writers made in response to peer feedback improved the writers' second drafts significantly more ([23 improved revisions of RE made in response to peer feedback]/[27 total revisions made in response to peer comments on RE] = 85%) than the revisions made by self-editors to their own writing ([28 improved self revisions]/[36 self revisions of RE] =78%). As a result, the experimental group scored significantly higher grades on their second drafts than the comparison group. The experimental group's improved revised drafts may be attributed to peer interaction. When the students interacted with each other, peer-editors spotted the conflict between the writers' intended meaning versus the actual meaning presented in the written text thus providing the writer with a sharper sense of audience awareness. Moreover, writers and editors negotiated areas of conflicts in the essay and the possible alternatives suggested by the peer, thus generating new knowledge that allowed the writers to improve their revised drafts.

This interpretation agrees with that of Ohta [12] who found that peer mediation and interaction allowed the learners in her study to notice and focus their attention on specific aspects of language and to develop their language ability. Likewise, Tocalli-Beller and Swain [13] highlight the significance of cognitive conflict in enhancing learning since 'through explaining, questioning, disagreeing, and sometimes defending their own view, students construct new knowledge' (p.23). Hence, the experimental group's ability to improve their second drafts with the help of peer feedback shows that student interaction leads to cognitive development. Moreover, peer interaction not only benefitted the writers but also the editors who gained better awareness of argumentative writing skills through noticing other students' errors and their effect on the meaning. Thus, their comments helped writers improve their writers' revised drafts by 85% compared to self-editors whose essay revision developed their essays by 78%.

Results also revealed that student writers in the experimental group did not always trust their peer feedback ([9 ignored peer comments on RE]/[35 peer comments on RE] = 26% ignored feedback) and only addressed it in their second draft if they were convinced of its validity as a result of peer interaction ([27 revised

RE]/[35 peer comments made on RE] = 77% revised RE). Such rejection of peer feedback reflects the authors' ownership of their essays and the importance of learners' agency. This concept of agency is stressed by socio-cultural theory which 'maintains that no amount of experimental or instructional manipulation (for example, structured input, controlled teacher talk, required information exchange tasks, etc.) can deflect the overpowering and transformative agency embodied in the learner' [14].

Table 1: Summary of Results

Errors	Peer-Editing	Self-Editing
Total	52RE (100%)	54 (100%)
Noticed and commented on	35 RE (67%), +2FE	37 RE (69%) +1FE
Revised	27RE (77%) + 2 FE	36RE (97%) +1FE
Improved	23 RE (85%)	28RE (78%)
Not Noticed	15RE (29%)	17 RE (31%)
Noticed but Not Revised	9 RE (26%) + 1 FE	1RE (3%)
Revised but Not Improved	2RE (7%) + 2FE	8RE = (22%)

7. CONCLUSION

The difference in writing development between the comparison and the experimental groups in favor of the latter shows that improved writing in revised essays is due not to teacher instruction in editing techniques but rather to peer interaction and peer feedback. In this study, peer-editing helped students explore learning opportunities and build new knowledge by directing their limited and selective attention to problems of content and organization in their essays. Through negotiation of meaning, peer-editing allowed students to exchange ideas, learn new concepts about writing, rationalise writing decisions, as well as gain confidence in their writing ability. According to Tynjälä [14] writing tasks that best enhance learning and the development of expertise in higher education are ones which promote active knowledge construction, allow students to make use of their previous knowledge, reflect on their experiences, allow them to apply theory to practice, and involve them in group discussion. Peer-editing fulfils all of the above requirements as this study has demonstrated.

In light of the above discussion, ESL teachers of writing are encouraged to incorporate peer-editing in their writing classes as it engages students in their learning thus facilitating the process of gaining new knowledge. However, since the student sample is not representative of the population, researchers are invited to replicate this study with a more representative sample to find out if they would achieve similar results that promote the generalisation of its findings.

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