

Is Peer Review Training Effective in Iranian EFL Students' Revision?

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the effect of peer review training on the Iranian EFL students' subsequent revision in an advanced writing class in Larestan Islamic Azad University. After 12 weeks class demonstration, teacher-reviewer conferences with 20 male and female students, the students' first drafts, revisions, and reviewers' comments were collected and compared the comments before and after peer review training. The findings revealed that the students incorporated significantly more comments into subsequent revisions after peer review training. Therefore, peer review training had a positive effect on the students' subsequent revisions.

Keywords: Peer review, peer response, peer review training, revision, EFL students

1. Introduction

Peer review in second language writing classrooms has received its support from different theories like social learning (Vygotsky, 1978) and rhetorical theories (Bruffee, 1993; Harris, 1990). According to many researchers (e.g. de Guerrero & Villamil, 1994; Mendonca & Johnson, 1994; Villamil & de Guerrero, 1996 de Guerrero & Villamil, 1994; Mendonca & Johnson, 1994; Villamil & de Guerrero, 1996) both university and high school students can take advantage of peer response or peer review for their writing and revision process (Min, 2006). Peer review generates positive attitudes toward writing (Min, 2005) and finally can facilitate the acquisition of second language (Lockhart & Ng, 1995).

Although there are large number of studies on many different benefits of peer review or peer response like affective, social, and linguistic benefits, few studies (e.g. Nelson & Murphy, 1993; Lockhart & Ng, 1993; Tsui & Ng, 2000) have been conducted on the role of incorporation of peer review into students' subsequent revisions. The findings of these studies show a less benefit of peer review. The benefits range from 5% (Connor & Asenavage, 1994) to 22% (Chou, 1999), and less than 50% (Paulus, 1999; Tsui & Ng, 2000). In this case, one concern about the peer review is the lack of utilizing of the peer comments by the students in subsequent revisions. Maybe the students are unable to give useful feedback on their classmates' errors (Mendonca & Johnson, 1994; Lockhart & Ng, 1993; Tsui & Ng, 2000 as cited in Min, 2006), or they don't have adequate knowledge for giving feedback. Thus, the teacher makes an intervention (George, 1984; Wiener, 1986), and this intervention has some positive effects (Min, 2005; 2006).

2. Literature review

In a study, Stanley (1992) trained the students to provide peer response on their classmates' composition. The findings of Stanley's study showed that the coached groups provided better and more useful responses than the uncoached groups. To train L1 peer responders in composition classes, Zhu (1995) used group conference approach for freshmen. In order to be familiar with main concepts of peer reviews, all experimental and control groups received a video demonstration. The students in experimental group were divided into groups of three and met the instructors. During the teacher-student conference a student read aloud his/her essay. Then, he/she received some suggestions for revisions. In this case, the teacher encourages the other students to give feedback on the shortcomings of his/her essay. The teacher demonstrates "writers could employ to illicit feedback and seek clarifications from their responders" (Min, 2006, p.

119). The results of Zhu (1995) study, revealed that peer review training had a positive effect on the quantity and quality of feedback.

In her study, Min (2005) trained 18 EFL students in a composition class. In order to facilitate students' revision, she considered four characteristics of comments as "clarifying writers' intentions, identifying problems, explaining the nature of problems, and making specific suggestions" (Min, 2005 as cited in Min, 2006, p.120). The teacher used these characteristics as guidelines for training in class. To meet each student twice and providing individual assistance, Min (2005) took advantage of conference method by Zhu (1995). Analyzing next drafts which were commented by the students revealed that the students produced more and relevant comments in subsequent drafts. Stanley(1992) states that "the drafts of the coached groups evidenced more responses to peer evaluation than did the uncoached groups' drafts (p. 229)." However, the question was whether the quality of peer comments by trained group had a better quality than the comments by uncoached one. It seems that there are very few studies on the effects of respondents' training on the quality of subsequent revisions (Berg,1999; Paulus, 1999). Regarding this issue, Berg (1999) investigated the effects of trained peer review on the ESL students' revisions. The students in the experimental group received peer response training, but the students in the control group did not receive any instruction to comment on their classmates' papers. The analysis of the first and revised drafts by both experimental and control groups showed that the students in the experimental group made significantly more meaning changes than the peer response by the students in the control group did not receive any training. Moreover, there was a better quality of revision made by trained response (Min, 2006).

Paulus's (1999) compared the impact of teacher and peer review training on the quality and revision types in the composition of 11 international university students. The findings of Paulus' study revealed that students were able to make more surface changes. About 32% of the second revision and only 1% of the third revisions of the compositions were peer influenced. While peer response affected on just 13.9% of revisions teacher feedback affected on 34.3% of revisions. Thus, peer response had less quality in comparison with teacher response.

Regarding the previous studies on the quality of peer response, the present study tries to examine whether students incorporate the trained peer response into subsequent drafts and whether there is a difference in the amount of this incorporation before and after training. To this end, the research question is as follows:

Is there any difference in the rates of the incorporation of peer response into subsequent revisions of the compositions before and after receiving the training for peer response?

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

The participants of the current study were 20 EFL Iranian university students (males and females) in Islamic Azad University, Larestan branch. The participants were MA students in teaching English enrolled in advanced writing course. During the course, the students had many opportunities to study model writing, and provide peer response on their classmate's writing. This course met once a week for 12 weeks each semester. To design his writing class, the researcher used a "writing cycle" (Tsui & Ng, 2000). The cycle was based on process writing model which sequenced as follows: "brainstorming, writing the first draft, written peer feedback, writing the second draft, oral presentation and peer oral response, teacher-writer conference (both oral and written comments) on the second draft,

writing the third draft, teacher's written feedback to the third draft, and writing the fourth draft (final) draft" (Min, 2006, p.122). To be sure of the homogeneity of the participants, they received an Oxford Placement Test at the beginning of the study. None of the students had taken part in any review training prior to the study.

4. Peer response training

The training was performed in two cycles (second and third), and it included two phases inside and outside the classroom. During the class time which lasted one hour and half, the students worked on writing cycles. Outside the classroom, there were one to one reviewer-teacher conferences.

5. Inside the class modeling

The students performed paired peer response on the first drafts of essays. Each student received a guidance sheet and a copy of composition by another student. Then, "he used the think aloud method to demonstrate how to make comments by using a four-step procedure: Clarifying writers' intentions, identifying the source of problems, explaining the nature of problems, and making specific suggestions" (Min, 2005 as cited in Min, 2006 p. 123).

Some techniques were used for implementing each step. In order to clarify what the writer means, the researcher used some questions such as "Do you mean that....." and "Are you saying....." (Min, 2006, p.123). When the researcher was not certain about the intention of the writer, he used the pointing technique (Stanley, 1992). According to this technique the sources of the errors were shown for the students by raising some questions like "What do you mean by.....". The researcher asked the student to revise his/her ideas. Then, the researcher taught the students how to find the problems. When the researcher knew the intention of the writers, he identified the problems and explained about the problems and. When the researcher was not sure of the intention of the writer, he referred to immediate sentence before and after the error that had been occurred. The researcher asked the students to have some strong reasons why some parts are problematic and they should be able to convince the writer to accept the comments. (Min,2006). The researcher informed the students not to adopt all suggestions, and the students learnt how to find solutions for their problems.

At the next stage, the researcher asked the students to do the peer-review by themselves and follow the guidelines in the guidance sheet. They also were asked to write their comments based on the orders of the errors that had been occurred in the draft.

Each student was supposed to review two drafts and provided comments to his/her classmate for revision. Then, the writers were asked to revise the first draft. If the writers did not agree with the suggestions or comments provided by the reviewers, they could disregard the comments and explained the reason why they failed the comments.

A week later, the researcher collected all drafts, revisions, and the comments. Like the model used by Min (2006), the researcher categorized the comments into three categories “check plus, check only, and check minus” (Min, 2006, p. 124). Then, he made a conference session with each reviewer and explained “why they received one of those three scores” and informed them “how refine their comments” (p.124).

6. Data Analysis

The quantitative phase of this study was based on the comparison of the number of responders’ comments in revisions and the number of peer revisions before and after training was done. In this case, a paired t-test was done to identify the mean difference in items before and after peer review training.

To answer the research question on the amount of the incorporation of peer response into subsequent revisions before and after receiving the training for peer review, the total number of reviewers’ comments before and after the review training was calculated. Then, the percentages of the reviewers’ comments before and after the training were calculated. Results revealed that before peer review training, reviewers generated 76 comments, and only 34% of the comments incorporated into subsequent revisions by writers. In contrast, after peer review training, reviewers generated 102 comments, and 66% of the comments incorporated into subsequent revisions. Regarding this issue, Table 1 represents mean differences in the number of comments incorporated into subsequent revisions before and after training. The table reveals that the total number of comments and those comments have been incorporated into subsequent revisions after training were significantly higher than those comments before training.

Table 1. Comparison of peer review comments before and after peer review training

	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig.
CBT/ CAT	-3.582	5.4367	-2.463	19	.018
CIRBT/ CIRAT	-5.467	2.3472	-10.648	19	.000

*CBT refers to all comments before training, while CAT refers to all comments after training

*CIRBT refers to the number of peer comments incorporated into revisions before training, whereas CIRAT refers to comments incorporated into revisions after training

* The negative means and t values reveal that the total number of comments before training and the number of peer comments incorporated into revisions before training are smaller than those comments after training and the number of peer comments incorporated into revisions after training

7. Discussion

The findings of the current study revealed that peer review/response training has a positive effect on reviewers’ comments and subsequent revisions. These findings were similar to the findings of some other studies (e.g. Berg, 1999; Min, 2006; Paulus, 1999; Stanley, 1992;Zhu, 1995). This study was one of the first studies to investigate the impacts of peer response training on student revision. The students provided their comments on a piece of paper. They gave numbers to each comment based on the order of occurrence of the errors in writers’ first drafts.

The findings indicated that 66% of comments incorporated into subsequent revisions after training. This high percentage was in contrast with peer comments before receiving training that was 34%. This high rate suggests that peer review training was helpful and the students were willing to incorporate them into their subsequent revisions.

One probable success of peer review training is related to teacher-reviewer conferences. According to previous studies classroom demonstration alone cannot be a guarantee for successful incorporation of peer review or peer response on students’ writing. Peer review training along with demonstration cannot make sure a high incorporation of comments into revision(Connor & Asenavage, 1994) or a positive impact of training on the quality of revision(Tang & Tithecott, 1999). To Min (2006), assistance from outside of the classroom is required. Connor and

Asenavage’s (1994) suggested that “more extensive and specific peer response training with follow-up [italics mine] should be implemented” (p. 267). The addition of teacher-reviewer conferences to peer review training can complete the success of peer comments. Some previous studies indicated that some students didn’t know how to do the peer response or peer review without any teacher-reviewer conferences to address the problematic areas for the writers. Thus, they suggest that these conferences increase the quality of peer review comments.

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