

Through the online platform with expert and peer review task to improve EFL student writing

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Abstract: Even though peer reviews and expert reviews are a commonly explored subject in the field of second/foreign language writing, few studies have investigated the function of follow-up discussion between feedback givers and receivers on the received feedback in the review process. In this study, both experts and English majors of EFL students in Taiwan served as reviewers to provide feedback and comments on the EFL students' writing. In view of this, this study aimed to examine to what degree discussion forum could improve the students' writing in terms of organization, logical development of ideas and style and quality of expression via an online platform designed by the researchers.

Keywords: second/foreign language writing, online platform, peer review writing tasks.

Introduction

Although studies over the past decade on ESL/EFL peer review writing tasks in the CALL context have been widely discussed, few of them have dealt with how a follow-up discussion between student writers and student reviewers over the received feedback would impact writing outcomes. Theoretically, receiving comprehensible feedback might further increase the amount of the feedback that the student writers adopt in revising their writing drafts. In view of this, the discussion forum in this study functioned to create a cyberspace for the student writers to clarify the unclear feedback generated by experts and cross-institutional peers until they fully comprehended the received feedback. Such technology enhanced language learning (TELL) has been widely used in collaborative learning, with students work together as members of a learning community, working on problem-solving tasks by questioning each other, discussing and sharing information.

Peer assessment, also called peer evaluation or peer review, is a process wherein peers evaluate each other's work, usually along with, or in place of, an expert (e.g. [12], [22]). Opportunities for students to revise their written work based on feedback have long been seen as critical to improving their writing skills ([10], [11], [16], [18], [21]). When students revise with feedback, they may not only improve the current piece but also develop general writing skills and learn to self-evaluate their writing [17].

Experts possess plentiful domain-specific knowledge that is highly organized, whereas novices have loosely organized knowledge [5]. Experts are faster in detecting problems because they need fewer cues [6], respond automatically rather than in a controlled way [13], access their own memories rather than focusing on the task at hand which is often external to their mental representations [3], use heuristics rather than exhaustive search [15], recognize data patterns [4], and use compiled rules and response plans [1]. The expert and peer review (EPR) task in this study demanded the students to

conduct two rounds of news reflective writing, with each round including the drafting and revising processes.

Both the purpose and the primary research question of this study was to examine to what extent students writing improved as a result of the feedback from experts and peer reviewers, in the writing areas of organization, logical development of ideas, and style and quality of expression.

Method

The participants in this study were forty-four English majors who enrolled in two intermediate-level writing courses at two distinct school sites in this study. A total of 22 experts, including the instructors of two writing courses, evaluated the students' writing in this study. Students were required to produce two rounds of writing reflections about the news. Each writing task used the drafting and revising process and each was assigned at least two experts and two cross-institutional peers for feedback randomly and anonymously via an online learning platform.

In order to examine the differences resulting from the expert and peer feedback, this study was designed with two reflective writing tasks for two different issue topics. The processes of the tasks were carried out by 1) providing prompts and topic suggestions for the responses during class time, 2) writing the reflection (first draft), 3) performance of the expert and peer reviews, 4) receiving the feedback, 5) revising the writing (revised draft) and finally 6) repeating the expert and peer reviews with the revised version draft. Steps two through six were completed in the online platform that was designed by one of the researchers.

Data analysis

These two writing tasks (including the reviewed feedback and the participants' drafts and writing products) were posted on the online platform. The data of this study consisted of the participants' two reflective writing assignments and the related feedback from the peers and expert reviewers. The analyses of the participants' writing improvement were according to the scoring rubric used in the peer and expert reviews. Each writing task had results consisting of comments and reviewed feedback for the first draft and the final draft from two experts and two peers. The researchers; comments were analyzed and the difference of the drafts were compared to examine the effectiveness of the comments and feedback from the peers and experts. Hence, the methodology used in this study was qualitative.

Results

In this study, there were two rounds of writing tasks and each task had a first draft and a revised draft. In addition, each draft had four reviewers (two peers and two experts) to provide the comments and revision suggestions via the online platform. The researchers want to know the improvement between the first draft and revised draft from different aspects according to the writing scoring rubric which included organization, logical development of idea (content), and style and quality of expression.

The present study compared and analyzed the first and revised draft difference according to the criteria in the scoring rubric. The results showed that the participants'

writing improved within the three categories in the scoring rubric. Most of the drafts had more improvement on the organization and quality of expression but less improvement on the logical development. However, in general, the authors of most of the drafts followed the comments and feedback from the experts and peers in writing the revised draft.

Discussion and Conclusions

The students' reactions provided not only useful insights into the course design and the learning project but also valuable suggestions for improving them. The students unanimously liked the course design and the class activity. The questionnaire findings showed that students clearly preferred the expert comments compared to their peers. The data helped the authors understand why. Despite the fact that students clearly preferred the experts' comments, there are some roles that can be identified from this study. From this study, the students' revisions were supposed to focus primarily on the organizations and style and quality of expression. Therefore, the experts and the peers were instructed to focused more from these two parts.

This study provided a discussion forum that functioned to create a cyberspace for the student writers to clarify the unclear feedback received from the experts and cross-institutional peers until they fully comprehended the received feedback. However, there were still several limitations. First, some students received less than two items of feedback from two experts and two peers. Second, though this study lasted for a whole semester, it was still insufficient. Third, the website was self-designed and the actual process of logging in to edit and provide peer review was time consuming, which may be why, in second draft, some students received less than four comments. The authors recommend that future researchers might make the time longer for the study, and adding functions to the website.

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