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PEER FEEDBACK AS A COLLABORATIVE LEARNING STRATEGY FOR IMPROVING WRITING SKILLS AMONG EFL STUDENTS

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Abstract: Correcting grammar does not automatically produce competent writers. Many EFL learners can complete language exercises successfully yet struggle to develop ideas, organize arguments, and communicate meaning through extended texts. This discrepancy suggests that writing instruction should focus not only on language accuracy but also on the thinking processes involved in writing. Peer feedback offers one way to address this challenge. When students evaluate each other's texts, they engage with writing from both writer and reader perspectives, making decisions that are often hidden during individual work. This article examines peer feedback as a collaborative learning strategy and discusses its influence on writing development, learner autonomy, critical thinking, and classroom engagement. Particular attention is given to EFL contexts where writing is frequently taught through teacher-centered approaches. The discussion argues that peer feedback is most effective when it is structured, purposeful, and integrated into the writing process rather than treated as an optional classroom activity.

Keywords: peer feedback, collaborative learning, EFL writing, writing instruction, learner autonomy, academic writing

Introduction

Writing exposes weaknesses that other language activities often conceal. During a conversation, learners can rely on gestures, repetition, or immediate clarification. Writing offers no such support. Ideas must be organized, relationships between arguments must be clear, and language choices must withstand careful examination.

This explains why writing remains one of the most difficult skills for EFL learners. Students frequently know more English than their written work suggests. The problem is not always vocabulary or grammar. More often, learners struggle to transform thoughts into coherent texts.

Traditional writing instruction rarely solves this problem. In many classrooms, students write independently, submit their work, receive corrections, and move on to another assignment. The teacher becomes the only reader and the only source of evaluation. Such a model places students in a passive position. They wait for corrections instead of learning how writers evaluate texts themselves.

Peer feedback changes this relationship. Students become active participants in the evaluation process. Instead of receiving judgment only from the teacher, they learn to analyze writing, identify

weaknesses, and suggest improvements. The value of peer feedback lies not in replacing teacher feedback but in expanding the number of opportunities students have to think critically about writing.

Writing Development Beyond Grammar

A common assumption in language classrooms is that stronger grammar leads automatically to stronger writing. This assumption is partly true but ultimately incomplete.

Consider two student essays. One may contain only minor grammatical errors while presenting weak arguments and poor organization. Another may contain several language mistakes but communicate ideas clearly and persuasively. Most readers would prefer the second text.

Effective writing depends on decisions rather than rules alone. Writers decide what information to include, how to organize paragraphs, how much evidence is necessary, and how ideas should connect. These decisions develop through practice and reflection, not through grammar exercises alone.

Peer feedback encourages exactly this type of reflection. Students begin asking questions that teachers usually ask:

- Is the main idea clear?
- Does this example support the argument?
- Is the conclusion convincing?
- Does the paragraph connect logically to the previous one?

The ability to answer such questions represents an important stage in writing development.

Collaborative Learning and Social Interaction

Collaborative learning is built on the idea that learning occurs through interaction. Knowledge develops through discussion, negotiation, and shared problem-solving rather than simple transmission from teacher to student.

This principle is particularly relevant to writing instruction. Writing is often described as an individual activity, yet professional writing rarely occurs in isolation. Researchers work with co-authors and reviewers. Journalists receive editorial feedback. Business reports are revised by multiple contributors. Even experienced authors rely on readers before publication.

Classroom writing should reflect this reality.

When students discuss drafts together, they encounter alternative perspectives that challenge their assumptions. A writer may believe a paragraph is clear until a peer points out confusion. Another student may notice missing evidence or inconsistent reasoning. These interactions expose weaknesses that writers often fail to recognize independently.

Collaborative learning therefore contributes not only to language development but also to intellectual development. Students learn to justify decisions, defend ideas, and reconsider assumptions.

Why Peer Feedback Works

The effectiveness of peer feedback is often misunderstood. Some teachers expect students to become miniature versions of professional editors. This expectation is unrealistic.

Students are not valuable because they provide perfect corrections. They are valuable because they represent authentic readers.

Writers frequently know what they intended to say and therefore overlook problems in their own texts. Readers do not possess this advantage. If readers misunderstand a passage, the problem belongs to the text rather than the reader.

Peer feedback reveals these communication gaps.

A comment such as "I do not understand this example" may be more useful than several grammar corrections. It identifies a genuine failure of communication and directs the writer toward meaningful revision.

Research consistently shows that students who participate in peer review become more aware of audience expectations. They begin writing with readers in mind rather than focusing exclusively on assignment completion.

The Development of Critical Thinking

One of the strongest arguments for peer feedback lies outside language learning itself.

Writing requires judgment.

Students must evaluate evidence, distinguish strong arguments from weak ones, and determine whether ideas support a central claim. These are critical thinking skills as much as language skills.

Peer review creates repeated opportunities to practice such judgments. Students compare arguments, identify logical gaps, and evaluate the effectiveness of supporting details.

Interestingly, learners often become better critics before they become better writers. They may recognize weaknesses in classmates' essays while continuing to make similar mistakes themselves. However, this ability gradually transfers to their own writing.

The process resembles learning to identify errors in someone else's speech before noticing the same errors in one's own language use.

Over time, students internalize evaluation criteria and apply them independently.

Peer Feedback and Learner Autonomy

Teachers frequently complain that students depend too heavily on correction. Every draft is submitted with the expectation that the teacher will identify problems and provide solutions.

This dependence creates a significant obstacle to writing development.

Strong writers do not rely entirely on external evaluation. They revise independently, anticipate reader reactions, and monitor their own work.

Peer feedback encourages this transition toward autonomy.

Students begin taking responsibility for improvement because they participate directly in evaluation. They learn that revision is not simply a response to teacher correction but an essential part of the writing process itself.

This shift has long-term benefits. Learners who develop self-evaluation skills continue improving beyond the classroom because they no longer depend exclusively on teacher guidance.

Classroom Challenges

Despite its advantages, peer feedback is not automatically successful.

One common problem is superficial feedback. Students often write comments such as "good job" or "very nice essay" without identifying specific strengths or weaknesses.

Another challenge involves confidence. Some learners doubt their ability to evaluate classmates' work. Others hesitate to provide criticism because they fear damaging social relationships.

Language proficiency can create additional difficulties. Lower-level students may struggle to explain their observations clearly, even when they recognize problems in a text.

These challenges explain why peer feedback requires careful preparation. Simply asking students to exchange papers rarely produces meaningful results.

Making Peer Feedback Effective

The quality of peer feedback depends largely on teacher guidance.

Students benefit from explicit criteria that direct attention toward important aspects of writing. Checklists, rubrics, and guiding questions help transform vague impressions into actionable comments.

For example, instead of asking students whether an essay is good, teachers might ask:

- Can you identify the thesis statement?
- Which paragraph contains the strongest evidence?
- Where does the argument become unclear?
- Which sentence requires further explanation?

Such questions encourage analytical reading and produce more useful feedback.

Training is equally important. Students improve significantly when teachers model effective feedback and demonstrate how constructive comments differ from simple criticism.

Peer Feedback in Uzbek EFL Contexts

The relevance of peer feedback is particularly noticeable in Uzbekistan, where writing instruction has traditionally emphasized teacher authority and examination performance. Research discussed in recent Uzbek studies has identified persistent difficulties in organization, coherence, and academic style among EFL learners. These challenges often remain despite years of grammar-focused instruction.

Another factor is writing anxiety. Learners frequently avoid complex language structures because they fear negative evaluation. Studies involving Uzbek EFL students suggest that supportive feedback environments can reduce this anxiety and increase willingness to revise written work.

Peer feedback addresses both issues simultaneously. It provides additional opportunities for revision while creating a less intimidating evaluation environment than teacher-centered correction alone.

The growing use of mobile technologies in Uzbekistan further strengthens the potential of collaborative feedback. Students increasingly exchange drafts and comments through digital platforms, extending writing interaction beyond classroom walls.

Implications for Teachers

The central question is not whether peer feedback should replace teacher feedback. It should not.

Teachers possess expertise that students cannot match. They identify patterns, diagnose problems, and provide professional guidance.

The more productive question is how feedback responsibilities should be distributed.

Teachers are most effective when addressing complex issues that require expert judgment. Students can contribute by identifying reader confusion, evaluating clarity, and responding to ideas.

This combination creates a richer feedback environment than either approach alone.

Writing improves when students encounter multiple perspectives rather than a single authoritative voice.

Conclusion

Peer feedback succeeds because it changes how students think about writing. Instead of viewing writing as a product submitted for correction, learners begin seeing it as a process of communication, revision, and decision-making.

Its greatest contribution is not grammatical accuracy. Grammar can be corrected in many ways. Peer feedback develops something more difficult to teach: the ability to read critically, evaluate arguments, and anticipate the needs of an audience.

Students who learn these skills become more than competent language learners. They become independent writers capable of improving their work long after formal instruction has ended.

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