

THE ROLE OF CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK IN VIETNAMESE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' WRITING

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ABSTRACT

Through the history of language teaching and among many controversies in teaching second language writing, there are various concepts of corrective feedback. In fact, roles of corrective feedback including teacher and peer feedback are highly appreciated in contributing students' writing improvement. Especially, in teaching writing to second language learners, the use of peer evaluation might be more motivated than the traditional type of teacher evaluation. This finding, as well as students' data explanations of their choices, 48 high school gifted students at Experimental High School in Ho Chi Minh City participated in the study. Results of the study indicated the overall effect of corrective feedback on Vietnamese high school students' attitude towards their learning in writing English, and how the combination of teacher feedback and peer feedback influence effectively on their work.

Keywords: Corrective feedback; Teacher Feedback; Peer Feedback; Teaching Writing Second Language.

Introduction

Students' writing problems can be decreased significantly by receiving corrective feedback from teachers and vice versa, one of the great interesting tasks of teachers in teaching writing is reading and giving feedback on student writing. Sometimes it can be time consuming and confusing, but it is also an enjoyable task for teachers. To get good results, students should be given enough effectively evaluation. Therefore, corrective feedback, which includes teacher feedback and peer feedback, plays an important role in solving student's writing problems. There are many ways to give feedback; it depends on the purpose and means of delivering the feedback. For instance, teachers could provide written feedback on writing papers or face-to-face comments. The steps can

help learners become aware of what they have written.

Corrective feedback are beneficial to L2 writing students, the vital advantage of the role of corrective feedback in L2 writers is noted that by receiving constructive provision of the readers, learners can reduce their writing problems (Han, 2002). In addition, acquiring useful information from readers can also help learners enhance their skills in effective writing by all means (Chaudron, 1984). Similarly, it is also proved that no matter what teachers did, some students would benefit by helpful instruction and corrective feedback while others would not (Guenette, 2007). The original motive for doing this research came from my experience and concern as an English teacher in Vietnamese secondary schools

where students are facing significant challenges in learning writing. This is a situation in which high school students apparently lack peer feedback in their writing process; they just receive teacher feedback instead. The purpose of the study described in this paper is how receiving corrective response including teacher response and peer response influence on Vietnamese high school students' writing. For this reason, I was wondering if two means of giving feedback (teacher and peer feedback) play any roles in student writing when being combined at the same time in students' writing process. Does it make any differences? These questions urged me to find out more about the role of corrective feedback in students' writing, especially in ESL classrooms of high schools in Vietnam.

Literature review

The study was motivated by a great interest in the influence of corrective feedback on students' writing that has been addressed by a large number of prominent writers who have conducted the study (e.g., Ferris, Pezone, Tade, & Tinti, 1997; Devenney, 1989; Berg, 1999; Chaudron, 1984; Guenette, 2007; Bitchener, Young, & Cameron, 2005; Montgomery & Baker, 2007; Chandler, 2003; Ashwell, 2000; Hu, 2005; Jabalpur & Yamani, 1995; Truscott, 1999; Sheppard, 1992). According to the previous studies, it was undeniable that teacher-written feedback to student writing played an important role in learning writing (Cohen & Cavalcanti, 1990; Ferris, 1995, 2002). For example, Silver & Lee (2007) have argued that students really appreciate the influence of positive elaborative feedback on their writing. In fact, when students receive feedback while they are writing, they are more likely to apply it to revise and edit their first drafts than to get the suggestions on their graded

papers (Peterson, 2010). Likewise, beside preferring teacher feedback, students also value peer feedback as one type of collaborative feedback on their work and they believe that this kind of collaborative learning has become a major movement in their education (Roskams, 1999). In addition, peer feedback can also help students gain perceptive knowledge of the nature of writing and contribute to the creativeness of a supportive environment for practicing writing (Villamil and the Guerrero, 1996; 1998).

However, although a significant amount of research has been done on how either teacher or peer feedback influence differently on students' writing, I could not find out the answer for evaluating the effects of the combination of two kinds of feedback in Vietnamese high school current learning context. In light of this concern, the primary aim of this study is to fill a gap in the research of this aspect by examining two research questions:

What is The Experimental High School students' attitude towards receiving teacher feedback during their writing process?

Are there any significant differences in the use of teacher feedback in combination with peer feedback on the student's written products?

Method

Setting and Samplings

The students were all high school gifted students at a pre-intermediate level. To attend this course, they had either scored between 6.5 or 7.5 on the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). They also had studied a year-long pre-intermediate English as a Second Language (ESL) course at the same class in the previous year.

The study was conducted in an English

writing course at The Experimental High School in Ho Chi Minh City. The purpose of the course was to improve the ability of these pre-intermediate students in writing skills. The classes met for 90 min three times a week over 12 weeks. During the class time, selections from chosen writings were discussed to improve writing skills. In addition, students spent some class time reading English stories written by some famous writers to learn how to write, sometimes did pre-writing activities, sometimes wrote narrative essays, watched videos or discussed common errors in student writing for 15 minutes. Also, students regularly chose one favorite topic for their free writing during the course so as to focus on enhancing their writing fluency as well as their self-expression in writing English. The aim of these activities and assignments was extensive practice to improve students' writing abilities.

Both positive comments on the content and specific error correction were given on the first draft of the students by the teacher, but no peer feedback was done in this class time. Grades on the final written product were given only at the end of the semester and they were based on these criteria: quantity, quality and accuracy.

Procedures

During the time of the writing course, participants wrote two drafts of compositions and first received peer feedback while they were pre-writing, revising the content as well as grammatical structures, and editing their writing. Next, the teacher-researcher also provided feedback orally or in written products. Moreover, the teacher supported students' peer feedback by giving more specific guidelines and constructive feedback. In spite of the fact that peer feedback was used in the participants' writing, grading was only determined by teacher-assessment.

At the end of the course, participants were required to complete a questionnaire (Appendix B) in which students did not write their names or other related information. Then, students were simply told to write an essay approximately 500 words about their own favorite topics, e.g., describing people, events, social relationships, were discussed in class during the course. After being trained how to give feedback to one another as well as receive peer feedback on the first drafts, the participants rewrote their work and then submitted the final versions to their teacher.

To identify indicators of the role of corrective feedback in Vietnamese high school students' writing, I collected the data from conducting a questionnaire (16 questions). After gathering the information, I used Google Drive Software to analyze it.

Results and Discussion

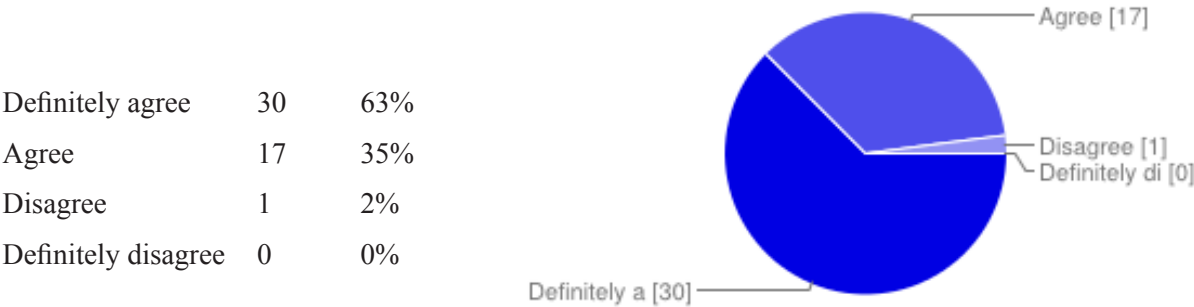
This present study indicates results and considerations of the two research questions:

Research question 1: What is The Experimental High School students' attitude towards receiving teacher feedback during their writing process?

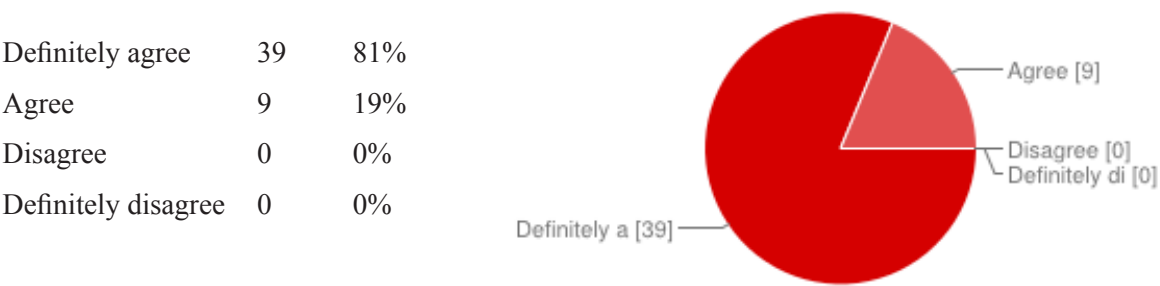
In pie number 1, the majority of the participants definitely agreed that improving writing skill is important to their writing process (63%) and just a little disagreement (2%) with this viewpoint. In addition, from having a serious attitude towards their learning in writing English, 39 of 48 participants (81%) in pie number 3 noticed that receiving constructive response from teachers remains a significant role in facilitating students' writing. Also, we could see that students have strong beliefs and preferences for getting feedback given by their teachers (Montgomery & Baker,

2007). Furthermore, I still believe that we are still affected by Asian culture in which teacher-centered view is significantly noted. So, it was unsurprising that students commonly rely on their teachers’ response.

Pie number 1: The writing skill is important in your English learning process



Pie number 3: Teacher-written feedback plays an important part in your writing

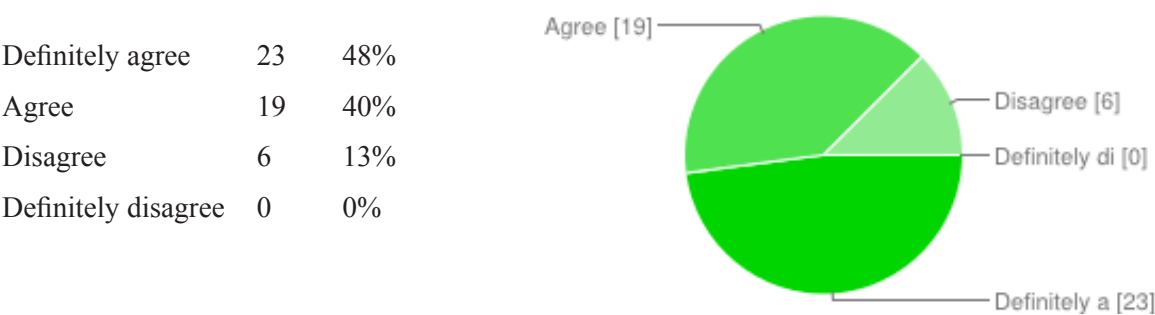


However, in the combination of teacher feedback, according to previous studies mentioned above, Vietnamese high school students in ESL classrooms still prefer to receive feedback from their classmates as one type of effective feedback on their writing. This factor will be analyzed to answer the research question number 2.

Research question 2: Are there any significant differences in the use of teacher feedback in combination with peer feedback on the student’s written products?

The questionnaire data in pie number 4 shows that most students were willing to share their writing to the others in the hope of getting more useful feedback, not only from their teachers.

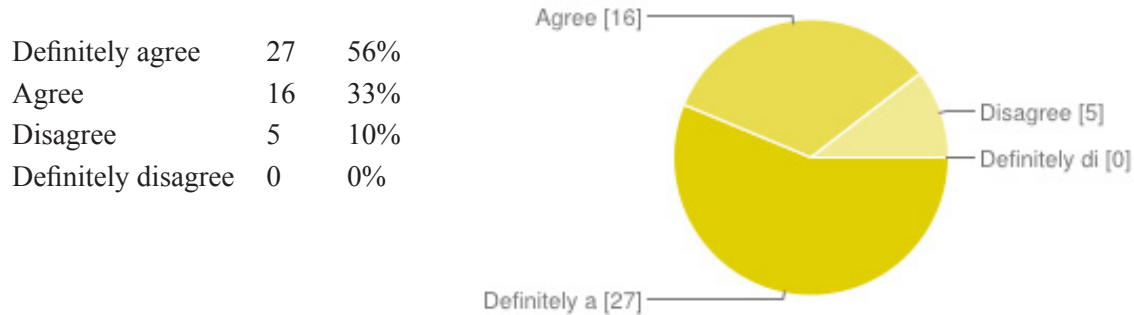
Pie number 4: You are willing to share your writing with your classmates to get their feedback.



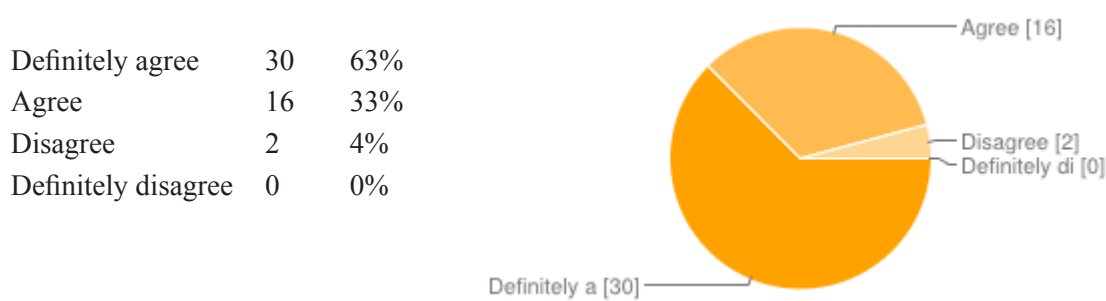
Personally, from my experience as a teacher, I easily notice that students were more motivated working together and try harder to interact with one another during the class time. It's not surprising that Zhu (2001) stated that many writing teachers and researchers have interested in examining peer response in which

students critique and contribute feedback on one another's writing in the classroom. Together with giving feedback, learning from the others' mistakes is also a good point to improve students' learning writing ability. We can notice these elements in pie number 5 &6.

Pie number 5: Getting feedback from your classmates is important to improve your writing.



Pie number 6: Getting peer feedback helps you learn a lot from your classmates' mistakes.

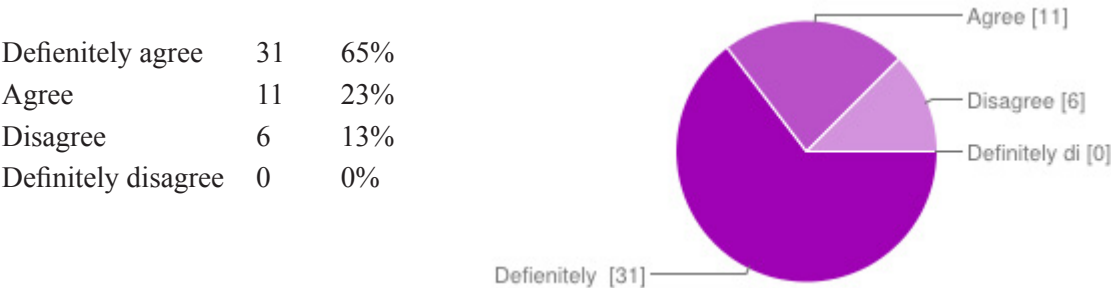


As pie number 6 shows, 30 of 48 students (63%) found that peer feedback was also informative and could promote motivation to write and revise because peers are at the same level, they could understand each other better, feel less anxious and more confident when interacting with peers during group activities.

In fact, language learners were willing to share as well as to revise their writings thanks to receiving peer feedback. Furthermore, such collaboration

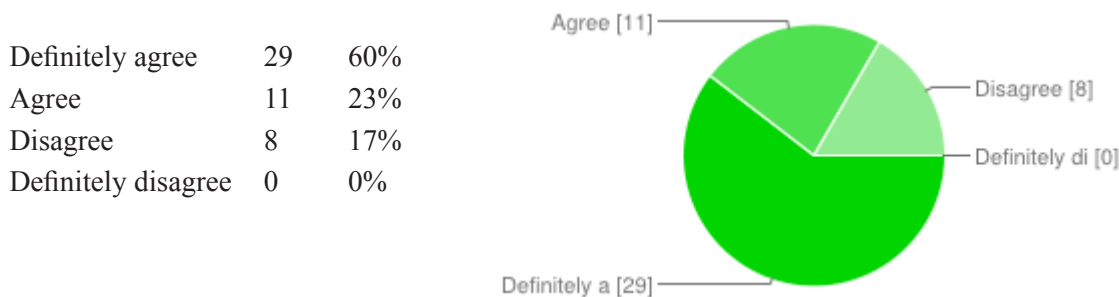
could help to build up knowledge about how to write the topics they were writing and establish critical thinking by being more responsible in giving comments to one another. As in pie number 7, 31 of 48 participants (65%) definitely agreed that thanks to critiquing the others' work, students could enhance their awareness of revision strategies or we can say that peer feedback can be considered as "an important complementary source of feedback" (Villamil and de Guerrero, 1998:491)

Pie number 7: Critiquing your friends’ work is useful for you, too.



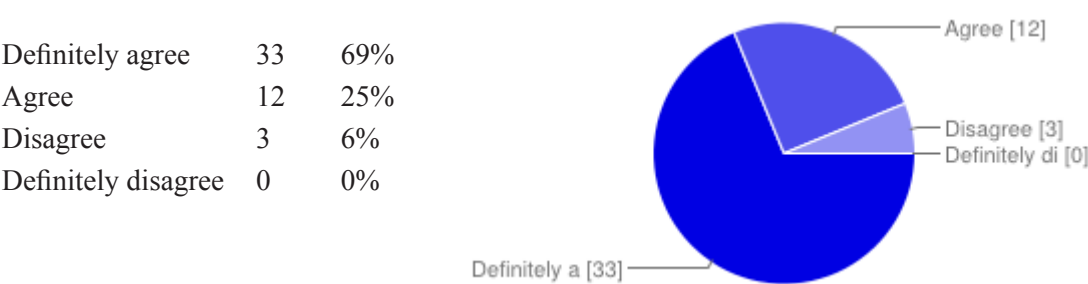
In pie number 9, we can notice that most participants definitely (60%) agreed that peer feedback could provide students’ mutual improvement and it had an important influence on the quality of students’ writing and the others (23%) had the same viewpoint.

Pie number 8: Peer feedback provides openings for mutual improvement on the quality of students’ writing.



Once the idea of getting helpful peer feedback was identified through the collected data, I was wondering if there were any significant differences in the use of teacher feedback in combination with peer feedback on the Experimental High school student’s writing. In this learning context, I found that high school students were almost unfamiliar with getting feedback from their peers. Therefore, in my opinion, it was necessary that students must be shown the way how to respond to writings in a peer context. In addition, addressing the significance of providing students with appropriate peer response skills was totally important (Huff & Kline, 1987). Look at pie number 10, of 48 responses, 33 (69%) completely agreed that students must be trained how to give and receive criticism, feedback skills or teachers should give the models of constructive feedback to the students.

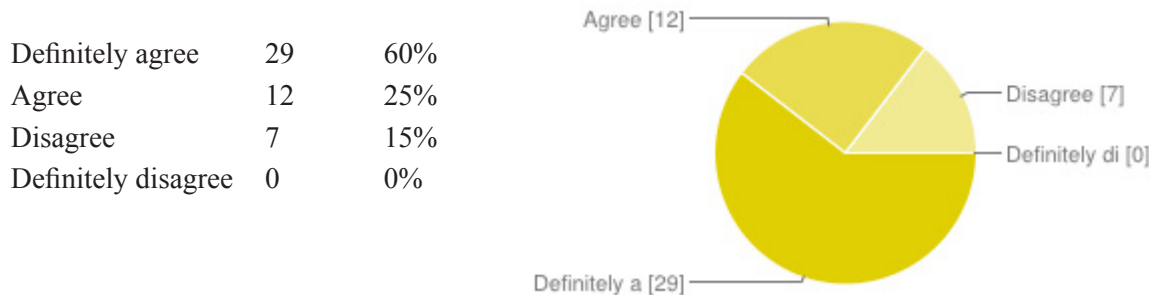
Pie number 10: Students must be trained peer response skills in giving feedback to their peers’ work



To collect data, I also raised a question if corrective feedback including teacher and peer feedback was necessary for students before writing their final versions. In pie number 11, 29 of 48 responses (60%)

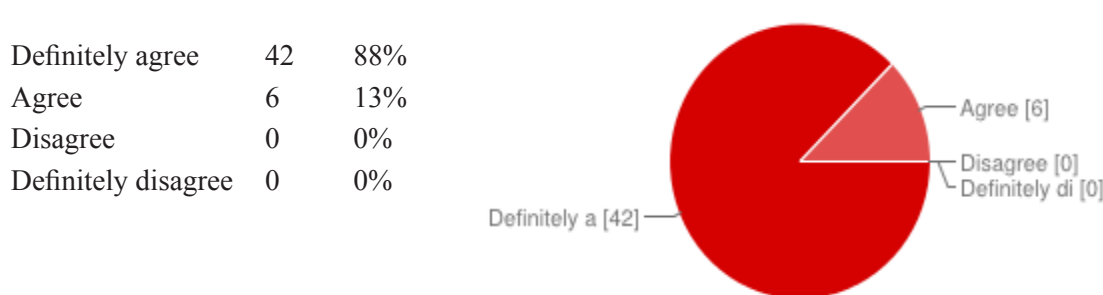
definitely agreed and 12 responses (25%) also agreed that the combination of teacher and peer feedback was encouraging in guiding them to learn writing.

Pie number 11: Before writing your final version, corrective feedback is necessary for you.



In pie 11, 42 of 48 participants (88%) stated that after getting feedback from their teachers and peers, rewriting their work, they could improve their English writing skills.

Pie number 12: After getting comments both from your teacher and your classmates you can improve your writing skill by rewriting your essay.



In summary, what the study shows is that the use of teacher feedback in combination with peer feedback resulted in the largest impact on The Experimental High School students’ attitude towards receiving teacher feedback during their writing process. Besides, through the study, we can easily recognize the significant differences in the use of teacher feedback in combination with peer feedback on the student’s written products. Furthermore, although we can get significant benefits from applying peer feedback in teaching writing, it is inevitable that teachers still have to cope with some disadvantages. Some of the problems of student peer response include many students’ lack of critique experience with the process,

personal judgments may interfere subjectively. In addition, when putting students in “judgment” of their classmates, we can also make them feel uncomfortable about giving honest comments. In this point, instructors should help the students realize that “responding” to a student paper does not mean “criticizing” it; it means raising questions, marking things they liked or things that need to be improved and highlighting places where the reader seems to be confused. Consequently, there will be a meaningful community spirit instead of just giving critical remarks as Ryan James Costello noted in his article: “There is also no sense of community when a student’s audience is the lone teacher with the red pen” (2009). In my opinion,

teachers can encourage students to give comments without giving their names on the products, just underline passages and write notes on the back of the paper, by this way providing respectful, but honest feedback is really effective. However, when doing this, teachers or instructors should be careful in choosing students so they are in quite the same levels. In my process, I continuously wonder what will happen if the students 'paper in higher level are judged by the lower ones. This will discourage them from practicing writing. Therefore, having different levels in the same class is an important issue that we need to consider when applying peer response. One more thing, teachers must decide whether or not to evaluate students based on their peer review participation. Personally, I would rather encourage them to participate and offer constructive feedback than try to find out their classmates' mistakes for criticism. To avoid this, teachers can evaluate the students during the actual peer review session by observing each group's activity to see who is participating and offering constructive feedback. To be honest, no matter what the disadvantages are, I still prefer to combine peer feedback with teacher feedback in teaching my high school students. I totally believe that they can benefit a lot from this method.

Conclusion

In conclusion, according to the results of the study, having teacher and peer feedback resulted in a significant improvement in students' attitude towards their learning in writing. I suggest that

students should learn more from either finding their own errors or making their own corrections through receiving both teacher and peer feedback during their writing process. Moreover, students can value the proper role of collaborative working to promote learner autonomy and to enhance their motivation in learning writing English, too.

Limitations

This study provided an empirical report regarding how Vietnamese high school students developed their language knowledge and writing competence in a foreign language context. However, the findings still have some limitations for the following reasons. First, this study only examined one class without reference to a comparison group. Therefore, although the study indicated the influences of corrective feedback on students' writing improvement, I cannot conclude the students' improvement of other classes. In the future, studies would need to use two different treatment groups and compare the achievement of the group that receive teacher and peer feedback with a control group to gain more evidence for potential teaching effects. Second, this study was limited to one final writing test at the end of the course, the high school students' writing competence should be observed gradually through more writings to explore how the combination of teacher and peer feedback influence on their work in the Vietnamese learning context. Actually, this method is still a very challenging task for teachers to achieve, and above all, persistence is necessary in this process.

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