

**The Impact of Peer Feedback on Improving the Writing skills among
Hebron University Students**

أثر تقنية التغذية الراجعة من الاقران في تحسين مهارات الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية لدى
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Abstract

This study investigated students' attitudes towards peer feedback in process writing classes in addition to assessing the effectiveness of this teaching technique. The sample of the study consisted of 105 male and female students from five sections of an undergraduate writing course offered by the English Department at Hebron University in the academic year 2010/2011. A pre-test, post-test as well as a pre-questionnaire and post-questionnaire consisting of twenty statements follow a five-point Likert scale. The results indicated that students viewed peer feedback as a worthwhile experience; it offered an opportunity for social interaction. It also improved students' writing skills. Furthermore, the technique enhanced students' critical thinking, confidence, creativity, and motivation. In addition, it helped in improving their assignments. The paper offers some recommendations.

Key words: motivation, critical thinking, improving writing skills.

ملخص

هدفت هذه الدراسة الى معرفة أثر تقنية التغذية الراجعة من الأقران في تحسين مهارات الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية، وزيادة الاتجاهات الايجابية لدى طلبة الجامعة، وقد تفصّلت هذه الدراسة أيضاً الفروق في أداء الطلبة وتوجهاتهم التي تُعزى إلى الجنس. وقد تكونت عينة الدراسة من (١٠٥) طالباً وطالبة من خمس شعب لمساق في الكتابة لطلبة البكالوريوس في جامعة الخليل للعام الجامعي (٢٠١٠-٢٠١١)، واستخدمت في الدراسة اختبارات لمهارة الكتابة واستبيانات قبلية وبعديّة، وقد تمّ توزيع استبانة مكونة من (٢٠) بنداً حول تقييم الأقران. وقد بيّنت نتائج الدراسة الآثار الايجابية لاستعمال هذه التقنية باعتبارها وسيلة جيدة للتواصل الاجتماعي وتحسين مهارات الكتابة، وقد بيّنت النتائج أيضاً أنّ الطالبات فضلن استعمال هذه التقنية أكثر من الطلاب على الرغم من عدم وجود فروق ذات دلالة احصائية بين الطرفين في اختبار الكتابة البعدي. وبايجاز فإنّ التقنية تجعل مساق الكتابة أكثر امتاعاً ودافعية وتجربة جديرة بتطبيقها في مختلف مساقات الكتابة.

Introduction

Using peer feedback as a model in process writing became popular in teaching English language skills. This is in agreement with the growing focus on peer and collaborative learning that cater for the real processes experienced by students while writing and lead to creativity (Paulus, 1999, Clenton, 2006). This model involves collaborative learning in which students review and evaluate each other's writing and offer each other's with feedback. The process has a number of benefits as it enhances understanding of the learning process and; therefore, improves the quality of the final assignment (Paulus, 1999). Moreover, peer feedback is a fundamental part of the learning process as it can motivate students as they have a sense of audience, and improve their learning (Mogahed, 2009; Liu and Carless, 2006; Tsui and Ng, 2000; Zhang, 1995; Tang and Tithecott, 1999).

A number of studies reported that the process of providing feedback on peers' work increases the opportunity of meaningful interaction with peers and maximizes the opportunity of sharing new ideas as well as understanding different perspectives on the writing process (Liu and Hansen, 2002; Tsui and Ng, 2000; Zhang, 1995). Other studies emphasized that peer feedback has the potential of improving students' perceptions of learning from their classmates and viewing them as

‘legitimate sources of knowledge’ (Gehring et al., 2005, p.321). This can in turn change the traditional idea that the teacher is the sole person who can disseminate knowledge and evaluate their work, thus paving the way for the introduction of a collaborative and participatory learning atmosphere (Paulus, 1999).

The following section briefly offers a theoretical framework on peer feedback, which is followed by a brief section about what is meant by peer feedback.

Theoretical Framework

Peer feedback is deeply rooted in several theoretical frameworks including collaborative interactionist learning theory, Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development. Vygotsky (1978) stresses the importance of negotiation of meaning among learners in developing their cognitive skills and promoting social interaction. Vygotsky (1978) deems that interactions with other peers will help learners achieve their full potential through what he called students’ “zone of proximal development” emphasizing the distance between the learners’ developmental level and the higher level that they can arrive at through peer interaction.

Peer response is also supported by interactionist theories of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), which hold that learners need to be encouraged to negotiate meaning to facilitate second language acquisition (Long and Porter 1985). Gas and Selinker (1994, p. 217) emphasized the importance of “negotiated interaction” and considered it to be very important in second language acquisition.

Thus, peer feedback emphasizes the importance of social context and social interactions in creating a better understanding for the learning process (Halliday, 1978; Berkenkotter and Huckin, 1995; and Swales, 1990). This understanding is achieved through engaging students in meaningful and problem-solving activities that promote their critical thinking skills and creativity rather than receiving and memorizing information. Learners construct their knowledge in a social context and through interactions with others when they are involved in social

activities and real life situations that enable them to obtain knowledge through discussions and applying what they obtained in new situations. These processes have a number of benefits such as increasing self-confidence and the ability to negotiate meaning and reach consensus with peer in a non-threatening environment, thus increasing the opportunity of active participation and maximizing interaction among learners (Johns, 1997).

To conclude, peer feedback provides learners with opportunities that help them to improve their learning in a conducive environment and to take part in a meaningful dialogue.

The following sections provide a brief definition of what is meant by peer feedback, its advantages, limitations and challenges and literature review of studies related to the topic.

What Is Peer Feedback?

There are a number of terms that are used interchangeably and refer to peer feedback such as peer review and peer response, but all of them share the same idea where students offer constructive criticism after reading and evaluating each other's work. To illustrate, peer feedback refers to the suggestions or comments, questions or inquiries that learners offer each other after reading any piece of writing with the aim of producing 'reader based prose' (Flower, 1979). Liu and Hansen (2002) defined it as "the use of learners as sources of information and interactants for each other in such a way that learners assume roles and responsibilities normally taken on by formally trained teacher, tutor, or editor in commenting on and critiquing each other's drafts in both written and oral formats in the process of writing" (p.75).

In other words, peer feedback refers to engaging learners in the process of sharing their ideas and receiving as well as offering constructive comments and suggestions for improving a piece of writing. In this model of learning, learners have great responsibility for their learning as we are moving from teacher-centered to learner-centered approaches to teaching and learning. As stated by Brown (1999:7),

“students need to be able to look with new eyes at the work they have undertaken, to understand the reasons by which assessment decisions have been made and to look for ways of remedying defects and supplying omissions.” Hansen and Liu (2005) referred to peer feedback as the “use of sources of information, and interaction between each other” (p.1). Peer feedback is an essential part of writing classes. Studies carried out by researchers have revealed the importance of the implementation of peer feedback in improving what learners produce, thus leading to meaningful revisions (Hansen and Liu, 2005).

Advantages of Peer Feedback

Peer feedback has been advocated in several studies for a number of benefits that have been summarized in Ferris (1995). According to her, students increase their confidence and critical thinking skills as a result of reading text written by peers on similar tasks. Students also obtain more feedback on their writing than they could from the teacher alone. Moreover, they bring multiple perspectives as they get feedback from a more diverse audience. Finally, peer review activities build a sense of classroom community. Therefore, offering and receiving feedback from peers enable learners to promote the level of their writing as it offers them opportunities to share ideas and give constructive comments. Moreover, it has the potential to build confidence, promote critical thinking and maximize motivation. Furthermore, White and Caminero (1995) believe that learners can benefit from the invaluable opportunities that can be presented by offering peer feedback and learning from each other. Students learn to communicate effectively, and accept different perspectives while listening carefully, thinking critically, and participating constructively.

Some Concerns and Challenges of Peer Feedback

Despite its perceived benefits, some researchers found that peer comments were viewed with skepticism and produced few benefits. A number of studies challenged the strong positive comments about peer review and cautioned that some peers are likely to comment on surface

errors and give advice that does not help revision. Moreover, some studies questioned the validity of peer's comments (Zhang, 1995, Leki, 1990, Nelson & Murphy, 1993). Zhang (1995) found that nearly 94% of the participants indicated preference for the teacher feedback over peer feedback. Ching (1991) questioned whether students are capable of providing a high-quality feedback similar to that offered by their teachers and he opined that unless we offer our students proper training on giving feedback, they are likely to keep on giving comments on syntactic errors and avoid semantic or textual ones that are concerned with the development of ideas and the content itself. Sufficient training was the concern of several studies. Berg (1999) examined the effects of peer response on ESL students' revision strategies and writing outcomes. The main question addressed in her study is whether trained peer response influences writing outcomes, revision strategies, and peer talk about ESL student texts. The study revealed that "trained peer response positively affected writing outcomes, revision strategies, and peer talk about ESL student texts" (p.240). Berg confirmed the success of peer response training by making a comparison for revision outcomes after peer feedback by trained and untrained students. As a result of peer feedback followed by revision, she found that trained students' responses generated more content changes and they scored higher on improving the overall quality of their own drafts. Tang and Tithecott (1999) indicated that "experience reveals that students should be given intensive training to enable them to participate fully in the process" (p. 36). Moreover, Rollinson (2004) examined the experiences of four Spanish students and their perceptions of the peer response process. He concluded that "if response groups are to work for every writer, then current notions of preliminary peer training must be extended and personalized to take into account the ongoing needs of the individual operating within the group" (p.79). Hong (2006) investigated the perceptions of 22 advanced English major students over peer response. Findings revealed that the respondents have "very negative reactions to peer response" (p.49). The author suggested training students to do peer response as a pre-requisite for the success of such activities.

In fact, these studies show the complexity in the nature of the peer feedback process and the need to be cautious when implementing it and it doesn't mean that we have confusion or contradiction about the outcome. So if it is introduced with caution and after training students, it could be a part of any English writing classroom instructions.

Literature Review

Using both quantitative and qualitative data, Tsui and Ng (2000), investigated the effects of teacher and peer comments on secondary L2 learners in Hong Kong. They found that "some learners incorporated high percentages of both teacher and peer comments, some incorporated higher percentages of teacher comments than peer comments, and others incorporated very low percentages of peer comments." Those who favored teacher comments found peer comments not useful. Those who favored peer comments reported that they "enhance a sense of audience, raise learners' awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses, encourage collaborative learning, and foster the ownership of text." According to them, learners were able to "develop a sense of autonomy over their own writings", and, the writing classroom is no longer one that gives absolute control to the teacher. The teacher role changed into "negotiating meaning and collaborating with learners to clarify and voice their thinking, emotions, and argumentation as well as in helping them to develop strategies for generating ideas, revising, and editing" (p.168).

Tang and Tithecott (1999) explored the value of peer feedback groups in English as second language writing classes on 12 international students from Asia. They aimed to investigate the perceptions of students and whether their perceptions changed over time. Findings revealed that the students gave positive comments about peer feedback "and that they became somewhat more positive as the semester progressed." Moreover, the students engaged in "a variety of social, cognitive, and linguistic activities as they worked to accomplish the assigned task" (p.19). Lee (1997) described the implementation of peer reviews in a Hong Kong tertiary classroom. The results revealed that the students made positive comments on peer reviews. The author opined that in order to incorporate

peer feedback effectively a number of areas need to be addressed like making the purpose explicit to students, assigning students into groups where they feel comfortable, providing teachers new roles either by modeling or conferencing, assigning students new roles where they “become more aware of the demands of writing and to take greater responsibility” (p. 64). Finally the author recommended “making peer reviews a regular activity and a part of language instruction” (p. 64).

Al-Jamal (2009) examined the impact of peer feedback on improving writing skills and building positive attitudes among English language learners. She found that the participants have benefited from the training on peer response. Moreover, she noticed some differences in the revision behavior between males and females in the quality and quantity of responses between the two groups. She concluded that this technique affected the participants’ attitudes positively in a way that enhanced the development of their writing skills. She recommended that English teachers utilize the guiding principles offered by her study in their own planning, and student training for more effective writing lessons.

Statement of the Problem

The importance of peer feedback has been emphasized in foreign/second language learning theories with the shift to the communicative language teaching approach and the process approach to writing. The aim is to move from a teacher-centered classroom into a student-centered classroom where the students confer and help each other. They read and comment on each other’s work, thus increasing their opportunities for interaction and improving their social relations and increasing their self-confidence. The researcher believes that peer feedback helps students to interact and increase their motivation. Accordingly, there is a need to address the issue of using peer feedback in English language writing classes and to investigate students’ attitudes towards this process.

Purpose of the Study

This study aims at investigating the students' attitudes towards peer feedback. It will also examine the effectiveness of the peer feedback process on improving the students' performance. Moreover, the study will explore the differences in students' performance and attitudes due to gender.

Research Questions

The study addressed the following questions:

1. Are there any statistically significant differences in performance between the experimental and control groups based on students' performance in the pre and post-writing tests?
2. Are there any statistically significant differences between the performance of the female students and male students within the experimental group towards peer feedback in the writing skill?
3. Are there any statistically significant differences in students' attitudes in the experimental and control groups between the pre and post questionnaires?
4. Are there any statistically significant differences between the attitude of the female students and male students within the experimental group towards peer feedback in the writing skills?
5. What is the general attitude of the respondents within the experimental group towards peer feedback?

Significance of the Study

As mentioned above, there is a need to address the issue of using peer feedback in the English language writing classes and to investigate the students' attitudes towards this process in English Department. The present study has benefits for both students and instructors. For the students, it has the potential of developing students' abilities to give and receive comments about their writing. The results will be much better written paragraphs and essays in content, form and quality. Instructors will get better insights about the peer feedback process and learn some

practical advice about using peer response and assessment. Therefore, the researcher believes that this study can report the current practice of peer feedback by Hebron university students in an undergraduate writing course. Their performance in the pre-and post writing exams as well as their experiences in peer feedback will give helpful insights to writing instructors. Moreover, the recommendations could contribute to enhancing the effectiveness of using peer feedback in writing classes.

Methodology

The present section discusses the population, research instruments, procedure, developing the questionnaire and its reliability.

Population

The sample for the study consisted of 105 male and female students in five sections. Participants were students in an undergraduate writing course taught by the same instructor throughout the academic year 2010/2011.

Research Instruments

Two instruments were used in this study: pre and post tests and pre and post questionnaires.

Pre and Post Writing Tests

At the beginning and at the end of every semester throughout the academic year 2010/2011, both groups of students took pre and post writing tests. The aim of the pre test was to make sure that the two groups had the same level in writing. The aim of the post test was to see if there are statistically significant differences after the peer feedback process.

The Questionnaire

Development and Distribution of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire (See Appendix 1) was developed based on the literature review conducted by the researcher. An appropriate

questionnaire that is related to peer feedback was developed and distributed by the researcher. The questionnaire consisted of 20 statements with a 5 point Likert scale, (strongly agree, tend to agree, neutral, tend to disagree and strongly disagree).

A 20-item questionnaire was distributed during the Fall, Spring, and Summer semesters of the academic year 2010/2011. The questionnaires were distributed at the beginning and at the end of every semester. This questionnaire was used to elicit students' views about the effect of peer feedback on improving students' learning, as well as increasing their motivation, creativity, and critical thinking skills (See Appendix 1 for the Questionnaire).

The aim of the pre-questionnaire was to make sure that the two groups had the same attitudes towards peer feedback. The aim of the post questionnaire was to see if there are statistically significant differences in the attitudes of the students after the peer feedback process.

Procedure

The students were encouraged to write paragraphs and essays weekly and then they were asked to comment and give feedback on each other's paragraphs and essays. The students were asked to evaluate each other's work based on a checklist that was given to them. The instructor trained the students on how to give constructive feedback and demonstrated that on some paragraphs and essays. The students were introduced to all patterns of paragraph and essay development and by the end of every semester they were given an assignment to write a comparative essay about one of the following topics (two teachers, two jobs, two restaurants, two friends, two places etc.). By the end of the process, the students exchanged their assignments and they were asked to comment on each other's writings. Based on the comments that they gave to each other, they revised, reorganized and edited their work. They repeated the process several times before the submission of the final version to the instructor. Upon completion of the task, the students completed the post-questionnaire that included the same statements in the pre- questionnaire.

Reliability of the Questionnaire

The reliability coefficient of the questionnaire was tabulated. The result showed that the overall Cronbach Alpha Coefficient of the questionnaire is high ($r = 0.85$) indicating a high degree of internal consistency, and therefore presenting a considerably reliable instrument.

A t-test was carried out to ensure that the students in the experimental and control groups have the same attitudes towards peer feedback. This was carried out using the pre-questionnaire. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table (1): t-test for Equality of Means.

	Group	N	M	SD	T	Df	Sig.
Attitude	Experimental	80	3.49	.50186	-0.38	103	0.70
	Control	25	3.54	.39184			

The t-test reveals that the students in the two groups (experimental and control) have the same attitudes towards peer feedback as shown in Table 1 and no significant difference at $\alpha = 0.05$ were found.

A similar t-test was carried out to ensure that the students in the experimental and control groups are within the same level of performance in writing. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table (2): t-test for Equality of Means.

	Group	N	M	SD	T	d.f	Sig.
Writing pre test	Experimental	80	11.73	1.44	-0.84	103	0.45
	Control	25	12.04	1.92			

The t-test reveals the students in the two groups (the experimental and control) are within the same level of performance in writing as seen in Table 2. This indicates that the two groups are equal in terms of language proficiency.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the results of the study. First, the results of the post-writing test are presented and discussed. Then, the results of the post-questionnaire are presented and discussed.

Question One

Are there any statistically significant differences in performance between the experimental and control groups based on students' performance in the pre and post-writing tests?

The researcher investigated whether there were statistically significant differences in the performance of the experimental and control groups after the treatment in teaching writing. This was carried out using the post-writing test. A t-test was carried out and the results are shown in Table 3.

Table (3): t-test for Equality of Means.

	Group	N	M	SD	T	d.f	Sig.
Writing post-test	Experimental	78	13.56	1.14	3.73	100	0.005
	Control	24	12.41	1.76	2.99		

By examining the statistically significant differences between the control group and the experimental group, the results clearly show that the statistical evidence favored the experimental group as revealed by the scores in the post-test as there is a significant difference at $\alpha = 0.005$. This is in agreement with Mogahed (2009) who reported statistically significant differences between the performance of the experimental group students and that of the control group students on the writing post-test favoring the experimental group.

Question Two

Are there any statistically significant differences between the performance of the female students and male students within the experimental group towards peer feedback in the writing skill?

The researcher investigated whether there were statistical significant differences in the performance of the female students and male students

within the experimental group towards peer feedback in the writing skill. A t-test was carried out and the results are shown in Table 4.

Table (4): t-test for Equality of Means.

	Group	N	M	SD	T	d.f	Sig.
Post-test (Experimental)	Female	65	13.67	1.10	1.67	76	0.167
	Male	13	13.00	1.29			

Table 4 shows that there is no statistically significant difference in students' performance in the post-writing test within the experimental group due to gender.

Results of the Post-Questionnaire

The following section aims at answering the research questions of the study as reflected in the post-questionnaire.

Question Three

Are there any statistically significant differences in students' attitudes in the experimental and control groups between the pre and post questionnaires?

In order to see if there was a significant difference between the experimental and control groups using the post-questionnaire, a t-test was carried out and the results are shown in Table 5.

Table (5): t-test for Equality of Means.

	Group	N	M	SD	T	d.f	Sig.
Attitude	Experimental	78	3.78	0.62	2.98	100	0.005
	Control	24	3.37	0.43			

As Table 5 shows, there are statistically significant differences at $\alpha = 0.005$ in students' attitudes between the control group and the experimental group. Similar results were obtained in a number of studies (Al-Jamal, 2009; Tsui and Ng, 2000; Mogahed, 2009; Yang, 2006, Lee, 1997). For example, The result in this study agrees with Al-Jamal (2009) who found out that the process of peer feedback had a positive impact on

the participants' attitudes in a way that contributed to improving their writing skill. They are in line with Tsui and Ng (2000) who found that peer feedback encouraged students to have real audience and encouraged collaborative writing. Moreover, the results are in agreement with Mogahed (2009) who reported statistically significant differences between the experimental group students and that of the control group students on the attitude post-scale favoring the experimental group. Yang (2006) concluded that peer feedback is beneficial in helping students to have standards of good writing and in qualifying them to be thinkers and writers. Lee (1997) concluded that as students have positive comments on peer feedback, there is a need to introduce peer feedback in L2 writing instruction.

Question Four

Are there any statistically significant differences between the attitude of the female students and male students within the experimental group towards peer feedback in the writing skill?

In order to answer this question, a t-test was carried out to investigate the differences and the results are shown in Table 6.

Table (6): t-test for Equality of Means.

	Group	N	M	SD	T	d.f	Sig.
Attitude (Experimental)	Female	65	3.86	0.54	2.76	76	0.035
	Male	13	3.36	0.84			

Table 6 shows that there is a statistically significant difference at $\alpha = 0.035$ between female and male students' attitudes towards peer feedback process within the experimental group in favor of females. However, the findings of this study disagree with those of Al-Jamal (2009) who reported that no noteworthy differences were found between the male and female in their peer responses.

Question Five

What is the general attitude of the respondents within the experimental group towards peer feedback?

Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were calculated for all the experimental questionnaire items to examine the attitudes of Hebron University students towards peer feedback in a writing class. Table 7 shows the calculated means of items and their standard deviation for each statement.

Table (7): Means and Standard for the Whole Items in the Experimental Questionnaire.

No	Statement	N	M	SD
9	I think the idea of peer feedback is a waste of time (<i>recoded</i>)	78	4.15	1.181
16	The peer feedback process enhanced my critical thinking skills	78	4.06	0.944
3	I learnt most from receiving feedback from my classmates	78	3.97	1.468
1	As a learning tool, peer review was very useful	78	3.96	0.86
14	The peer feedback process provided me with the opportunity of social interaction	78	3.96	0.813
18	The peer feedback activity improved my writing skills.	78	3.94	0.931
13	Through exchanging ideas and knowing my peer's writing proficiency, I feel much more comfortable in the writing class	78	3.92	1.003
20	I feel confident when asked to make suggestions about peer's work	78	3.92	0.908
6	The reviews helped me improve my assignments	78	3.91	0.942
2	I learnt most from writing feedback to other students' work	78	3.87	0.998
19	I like my writing to be revised by my classmates again because I can learn more	78	3.86	1.053
17	The peer feedback process enhanced my creativity	78	3.82	0.908
15	The peer feedback process increased my motivation to write	78	3.79	1.085

... continue table (7)

No	Statement	N	M	SD
5	I think that I improved my written work as a result of the reviews that I received or wrote	78	3.74	1.05
8	I think the peer feedback process should be introduced in every writing class	78	3.73	1.336
7	The peer review process was very helpful	78	3.72	0.979
4	I think that my peers did a good job in providing me with critical feedback on my work	78	3.58	1.087
12	I feel that peer feedback makes me learn more in a relaxed way	78	3.55	1.147
10	I feel more relaxed to read my classmate's feedback on my writings	78	3.41	1.086
11	I prefer peer feedback to teacher's feedback	78	2.85	1.396

As Table 7 reveals, most of the items got high ratings, with item number 9 getting the highest rating ($m=4.15$). The means of this item was calculated after recoding the reversed responses as they are negatively structured. This means that the highest response score was indicative of a positive rating for the statement. Consequently, this indicates that the respondents did not perceive the peer feedback process as a waste of time. On the contrary, they perceived it as a worthwhile experience and recommended its continuity as shown in the other items.

Similarly, the item that got the second highest agreement is item 16 (*The peer feedback process enhanced my critical thinking skills*) (mean=4.06). This means that students think that peer feedback could contribute to enhancing critical thinking skills. This is in agreement with a number of studies which indicated that peer feedback may enhance critical thinking skills (Yang, 2006; White and Caminero, 1995; Berg, 1999). For example, Yang (2006) concluded that peer feedback has distinct learning advantages and qualifies learners to be independent thinkers and creative writers.

The item that got the third place and got a very high rating (mean=3.97) is item number 3 (*I learnt most from receiving feedback*

from my classmates). This item is followed by item number (1) which addresses the *feedback usefulness* and number 14 which indicates that peer feedback offers an “*opportunity for social interaction.*”

Similarly, item number 18 got a very high rating (mean=3.94). This indicates that the students felt that “*the peer feedback activity improved their writing skills.*” Moreover, they felt comfortable while exchanging ideas in the peer feedback process as evident in item 13 (*I feel much more comfortable in the writing class*). This is in line with Tsui and Ng (2000) whose students reported that peer feedback helped them to improve their writing skills and gave them more ideas.

The result of item 20 indicates that the process of peer feedback enhances students’ confidence to make suggestions on their peers’ work. As a result, it is not strange to find that in item number 6 the students reported that the reviews were helpful in improving their assignments (mean=3.91). This is in line with a number of studies that showed a relationship between group work and raising students’ level of confidence and improving their writing (Tsui and Ng, 2000).

Items number 2 and number 19 got a high rating (mean=3.87, 3.86) respectively. This means that the students “learnt most from writing feedback to other students’ work” and likewise they “*like their writing to be revised by their classmates again because they can learn more.*” This means that they have a feeling that the process of peer feedback is beneficial to them as they benefit both by giving feedback as well as receiving it as shown earlier in item number 3. As a result, they like their writings to be revised by their classmates again as they feel that they learn more from each other.

Item number 17 and item number 15 address two important issues in language learning, creativity and motivation. Both items got a high rating indicating that the feedback *enhanced creativity* (mean=3.82) and *increased motivation* (mean=3.79).

Due to this increase in motivation and creativity, the students felt that “*they improved their written work as a result of the reviews they received or wrote*” as evident in item number 5 (mean=3.74). Therefore, a good

percentage of the respondents found themselves in agreement with item number 8 by recommending the “*introduction of the peer feedback process in every writing class*” (mean=3.73). This means that they perceived *the process as helpful* and worthwhile experience as revealed in item number 7 (mean=3.72). This is in line with the findings of Rollinson (2004) who reported similar experiences for his students as they benefited from the peer response activity and they agreed on its importance and usefulness, and they all felt that they had improved as writers as a result of participating in the peer feedback activities, both as readers and writers.

The students tended to give less agreement to the last four items. For example, item number 4 (*I think that my peers did a good job in providing me with critical feedback on my work*) got a moderate rating (mean=3.58). This indicates that though most of the respondents agree that the process is a helpful and worthwhile experience, some respondents are not satisfied with the quality of the peer feedback. This concern is expressed in a number of studies where they mentioned that the students may focus on surface feedback and ignore semantic one.

The second item to which the respondents gave a moderate rating is item number 10. Though most of the respondents “felt much more comfortable through exchanging ideas and knowing their peers’ writing proficiency” mean=3.92, some respondents gave less support to the idea that “*feedback makes them learn more in a relaxed way*” (mean=3.55). It seems that there is a contradiction here, but this contradiction in the opinion of the students can be solved by examining the peer feedback process in depth. This means that we have a complex issue here. The researcher believes that the respondents meant that the process of exchanging ideas and knowing the proficiency of each other is comfortable; however, the process is a demanding one. Thus, it did not make some respondents feel that the peer feedback makes them learn in a relaxed way. This is explained also in their rating to item number 10 which also got a moderate rating (mean=3.41) indicating that some respondents did not feel relaxed while reading their classmate’s feedback

on their own writing. It seems that some students are not accustomed to the idea of offering or accepting constructive criticism.

Finally, the item that got the least support in this study is item number 11 (mean=2.85). This item addresses the issue of whether the respondents preferred peer feedback or teacher feedback. This means that if the students are given the choice between the peer feedback and the teacher feedback, they feel that the teacher is the most knowledgeable person and any feedback should be taken from him. In the current study only 35% of the participants indicated that they agree or strongly prefer peer feedback. This is in line with some studies that questioned the validity of peer's comments (Zhang, 1995, Leki, 1990a, Nelson and Murphy, 1993; Tsui and Ng, 2000). The others were either undecided or disagreed. This is, to some extent, in line with Zhang's (1995) who found that nearly 94% of the participants indicated preference for the teacher feedback over peer feedback. It is also similar to the results in Tsui and Ng' study (2000), who found that that most respondents favored teacher comments than peer comments and induced more revisions. Rollinson (2004) reported that one of the four students in his study expressed a clear preference for peer rather than teacher feedback and the other students asked for substantive rather than surface level response. Again, there is no contradiction here; students feel that they welcome peer feedback but it should move from surface comments to more semantic ones.

The students' answer to the open ended questions in this study provided more insights into the reasons behind their preference to their instructor's feedback. According to some participants, the instructor's feedback is much more valuable, and they feel more confident when reading the feedback of their experienced and knowledgeable instructor (for more examples, see Appendix 2 for sample of comments about the advantages disadvantages of peer feedback)

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study showed that the participants in this study improved their performance in the post-test exams and had positive attitudes towards

peer feedback in their writing class. The results of this study indicated the positive effects of the use of peer feedback in writing classes to enhance students' motivation and improve their writing skills.

Moreover, the study indicated that female students favored peer feedback in writing classes more than male students. There were no statistically significant differences in students' performance in the post-writing exams due to gender. Nevertheless, we can see that using peer feedback in the writing classroom is beneficial to students as demonstrated by the results of this study. Additionally, the students improved their writing, developed their ideas, became more motivated to write, and had a much better perception. To sum up, peer feedback could help in improving students' writing skills as evidenced by the statistically significant differences among the participants in the experimental group and the control group. Moreover, peer feedback in English writing classes has the added advantages of increasing motivation and improving writing skills.

Based on the results of this study, the researcher offers the following recommendations:

1. Peer feedback in process writing classes should be an integrated component of every writing course offered by English Department at Hebron University.
2. Peer reviews should be made a regular activity and part of language instruction. Students should be aware of the benefits gained from peer feedback.
3. Instructors who teach writing courses should be aware of the benefits of peer feedback in enhancing students' social interaction, confidence, creativity, and motivation.
4. Students should be intensively trained on how to carry peer feedback in the process of writing including receiving and giving feedback. Then, future studies may examine the effect of different types of peer training on students' performance and attitude.

5. Similar studies should be carried out at other Palestinian universities in order to corroborate the results of the present study.
6. Future studies in this domain should deal with other factors which might affect peer feedback such as grades, being extrovert or introvert socio-economic class and place of residence should be investigated. In addition, gender factors should be examined more closely.

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Appendix 1

The purpose of this questionnaire is to measure students' attitudes towards learning writing through peer feedback. Please read the statements carefully and answer PART I, PART II and PART III.

Your answers will be kept strictly confidential and anonymous.

PART I: Please, tick (✓) the appropriate box.

Gender: <input type="checkbox"/> Female <input type="checkbox"/> Male
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PART II: Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding your views about learning writing through peer feedback by putting a tick (✓) in the appropriate box using the scale given below.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree
 1 2 3 4 5

No		1	2	3	4	5
1.	As a learning tool, peer review was very useful					
2.	I learnt most from writing feedback to other students'					
3.	I learnt most from receiving feedback from my					
4	I think that my peers did a good job in providing me					
5	I think that I improved my written work as a result of					
6	The reviews helped me improve my assignments					
7	The peer review process was very helpful					
8	I think the peer feedback process should be					
9	I think the idea of peer feedback is a waste of time					
10	I feel more relaxed to read my classmate's feedback					
11	I prefer peer feedback to teacher's feedback					
12	I feel that peer feedback makes me learn more in a					
13	Through exchanging ideas and knowing my peer's writing proficiency, I feel much more comfortable in					
14	The peer feedback process provided me with the					
15	The peer feedback process increased my motivation					
16	The peer feedback process enhanced my critical					
17	The peer feedback process enhanced my creativity					

18	The peer feedback activity improved my writing					
19	I like my writing to be revised by my classmates					
20	I feel confident when asked to make suggestions					

Part III:

1. Name two things that you liked about Peer Feedback.
2. Name two things that you did not like about Peer Feedback

Appendix II
advantages and disadvantages of peer feedback

No	What I like about peer Feedback	What I disliked about Peer Feedback
1	Reading notes about my written assignments	Some students did not respect me and refused my notes
2	Reading others' articles & talking to new people & sharing ideas	I did not like the idea that some students did not accept criticism
3	Learning new vocabulary and developing my ideas	The process needs more time than we put we work individually
4	Is better than writing individually as it helps me to organize my thoughts and to be more specific	Teachers' feedback is better than my peers & some of my peers did not accept my criticism
5	Working together and improving my writing	Time consuming and some girls did not help so much
6	Everyone gives her opinion	Maybe we sometimes didn't like others' opinions
7	Learning to be more careful in grammar & pronunciation	When I think that my topic is complete and my peer suggests some changes
8	Be more careful in the coming assignments	She misunderstood my writing and sometimes she gives point just to give = not important points
9	Cooperation and focusing on things that we didn't care about	Some of the notes were vague and we did not discuss the feedback together

10	Using new words, improving my language and writing in a right way	My partner's feedback is not as good as my teacher feedback. She gives just general advice
11	I improved my writing and became more confident	We did not take a lot of time while we were doing feedback
12	She helped me to be more careful about spelling and other things	I felt depressed to see her comments on each statement
13	Actually, I like to work alone but I learnt from her many things like spelling and pronunciation and knowing other people	
14	Giving new ideas and persuading each other	Sometimes some students did not give new ideas
15	The argument among peers was useful	My peer did nothing but complaining all the time
16	It makes the relationship between students stronger	Some students feel depressed when I give them my notes and did not incorporate them in their writing
17	Seeing my friends and discussing with them	
18	Exchanging ideas and increasing motivation to write	Nothing
19	She taught me how to use some words and I liked her writing and I try to write like her.	Sometimes she doesn't have a specific point
20	She gave me critical points & improved my language	She is very angry
21	I had the opportunity to read others' activities and to get more information on how to write in a better way	My peer gave me unreasonable comments
22	I had the opportunity and evaluate other students' work	My peer was angry of the course so she gave wrong comments on right statements
23	Having new ideas and talking about my ideas	Some students did not incorporate my ideas

24	We can discover sometimes some mistakes that we do not see and we can gain more information and ideas	The teacher feedback is better as some students are not committed
25	It makes me learn more in a comfortable way	Time consume and we were not able to write everything that comes to our mind because of the limited time
26	Discussing different ideas	No time
27	We talk freely and the class ends quickly	Sometimes it is a waste of time my peer did not care
28	Writing more carefully and correcting my mistakes	Sometimes I dislike the way my peer corrected my writing
29	I learnt how to put more ideas in my writing	I didn't like her criticism
30	Very useful – having different ideas and working hard	
31		Giving wrong comments
32	I learnt new things that make my writing better than before	Maybe some peers did not welcome my comments especially those who feel that they are better than me
33	Respecting each other and having the opportunity to express my opinion	When my partner doesn't want to work
34	We learnt useful things from each other and accepted comments from each other in a normal way	Sometimes he makes mistakes when correcting me
35	The excitement I felt and the examples he gave	His evaluation is not perfect and the statement not clear
36	To be more cooperative	Sometimes we had careless peers
37	It increased interaction – gave us the chance to learn more – it is nice to know the opinions of the others about your writing	Talking in a bad way on my writing assuming that she is the best

38	Encouraged me to write more	Sometimes it makes me feel that my writing is not good
39	She taught me to be careful about spelling & punctuation	I did not like small corrections
40	I like working with other people	The work is tiring
41	We are better prepared for the final exams	Sometimes the peers were not very careful and they just wrote things without reading the others' work. Some read but were not able to give feedback
42	I liked cooperation and respecting each other	I did not find anything I did not like
43	Increased my motivation to write	Embarrassing some students and discouraging them
44	Knowing others' opinion on my writing & correcting mistakes	Some students believe that they can make your writing full of mistakes
45	Having a variety of ideas and correcting mistakes	Sometimes we have different opinions & some are careless
46	She criticized me positively & helped me to used the right word	Sometimes her writing was not clear or she corrected right words
47	It gave me the opportunity to compare what I am writing and what other students are writing. It helped me to think in a critical way	Some expressions that were written especially they were written by a peer and not a teacher
48	---	----
49	Peer feedback supports my writing	
50	Cooperation and knowing your mistakes	----
51	Know how the others are thinking	Unclear handwriting and spelling mistakes
52	Discovering new ideas and exploring new styles in writing	It takes, sometimes, too much time more than expected, & it doesn't work properly like teacher's feedback does

53	Cooperation and making new friends	Sometimes some peers are careless
54		My peer thinks her writing is better than mine
55	Improved my writing	Nothing
56	I prefer my friend feedback	Sometimes waste of time
57	----	----
58	Cooperation -motivation	----
59	Enhanced my critical thinking skills	Careless peer
60	It offers the students opportunities to evaluate each other	I like it
61	Discussing my work with my friend but I can't do that with my lecturer	Spending more time with your peer
62	Her way of writing influenced me	We differed in some situations and did not agree with her comments
63	Improved my language and encouraged me to write	Nothing
64	Alert me to mistakes that I do not notice and an opportunity for exchange d ideas	When I am convinced about my ideas, I have nothing to do with her suggestions
65	I am very happy to discuss with my classmate and giving my advice on how to become a better writer	Challenging as I do not like to be criticized and it is a big responsibility to comment on someone as I have to use words that do not hurt her.
66	Exchanging ideas and increasing my motivation to write	I have a lazy student who took a lot of time from me to make her understand
67	I ask what I want without being embarrassed	Some students are careless and sometimes we argue with each other
68	Cooperation and consideration	Correcting true things I wrote
69	Increased my motivation to write and learnt a lot of things from my peer	Some students are lazy and late and sometimes it is a waste of time as some students don't want to work

70	Gaining more knowledge and being aware of my grammatical mistakes	It is OK
71	Teamwork and knowing others' ideas	Do not have time to sit together and sometimes people like to force their opinion
72	Nothing	Waste of time and decreases motivation
73	Eating together and making jokes	When nobody comes and when everybody thinks he is the best
74	Revising the work and asking questions	The time we gave to a student who is totally weak in writing and I do not benefit from his comments
75	New ideas & I love working in groups	To see red marks in my paper though what I have written is correct
76	Working together and knowing each other mistakes	Correcting her mistakes
77	Correcting my partner mistakes and Learning more about coherence and unit	I hate it when my partner gives me a wrong suggestion and delays submitting me her feedback
78	Correcting my spelling and grammatical mistakes	Sometimes her suggestions are wrong
79	Encouraging me to think in a critical way and giving me good ideas on unity, coherence , support	Sometimes they correct what I believe to be right and sometime I fear correcting my friend essay
80	Knowing how to think and give comments in a polite way	I do not think that her evaluation is really the correct one