



**Formative Peer Feedback during the Pre-writing Stage**

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### **Abstract**

This study was carried out in a public high school in Guayaquil city in Ecuador. The participants were eight grade students whose ages ranged from 11 to 13 years old. Students' mother tongue is Spanish. They were at the pre-A1 English level based on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). This study aimed at improving writing drafts using formative peer feedback facilitated by google docs. The present action research was conducted for six weeks (24 hours classes) and quantitative methods were used to data collection. The quantitative instruments were a checklist, a pre- and post-test, a rubric, and a survey. At the end of the innovation, there was an improvement in the mean in the post-test compared to the pre-test. This innovation accordingly with the results had a positive impact on students' first pre-writing stage. Participants were aware of the importance of formative peer feedback in a collaborative environment. This study is addressed to people who wants to improve the writing skill in their classes specially EFL teachers.

*Keywords:* Formative peer-feedback, google docs, rubric, prewriting, drafts

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### Resumen

Este estudio se realizó a estudiantes de octavo grado de una escuela secundaria pública de la ciudad de Guayaquil en Ecuador. La edad de los estudiantes está entre los 11 y los 13 años cuya lengua materna es el español. Tenían un nivel de inglés pre-A1 basado en el Marco Común Europeo de Referencia (MCER). El objetivo de los participantes era mejorar la redacción de borradores utilizando la retroalimentación formativa de pares usando Google docs. La presente investigación se llevó a cabo durante seis semanas (24 horas clase) y se utilizaron métodos cuantitativos para la recopilación de datos. Los instrumentos cuantitativos fueron una lista de verificación, una prueba previa y posterior, una rúbrica y una encuesta. Al final de la innovación, hubo una mejora en la media de la prueba final en comparación con la primera prueba. Esta innovación tuvo un impacto positivo en la primera etapa de escritura de los estudiantes. Los participantes fueron conscientes de la importancia de la retroalimentación formativa a los compañeros en un entorno colaborativo. Este estudio está dirigido a personas que quieran mejorar la habilidad de escritura en sus clases, especialmente a los profesores que enseñan inglés como lengua extranjera.

*Palabras clave:* retroalimentación formativa en pares, documentos de Google, rúbrica, escritos, borradores

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### **Formative Peer Feedback during the Pre-writing Stage**

The development of the writing skill draws a considerable attention for its learning and teaching from the very early phase of language education (Fareed et al, 2016). Problems appear in interlanguage students, when they are writing in the target language, some L1 characteristics and lack of vocabulary show up and this problem should be considered in teaching of ESL/EFL writing (Bennui, 2016).

Feedback is recognized as one of the driving forces in writing development and as an essential pedagogical tool in writing instruction (Saliu-Abdulahi et al.,2017). Providing formative peer feedback, the students gain experience in problem detection, become aware of types of writing problems and discover different revision strategies (Patchan & Schunn, 2015).

Rollinson (2005) stated that the use of peer feedback in English writing classrooms has been generally supported in the literature as a potentially valuable aid for its social, cognitive, affective, and methodological benefits. Noroozi et al. (2018) established that peer feedback provides learners with the opportunity to critically test, enlighten, and analyze learning partners' arguments and understand multiple perspectives of the issues, make them better writers.

There are studies that have applied peer feedback to improve writing (Luo & Liu, 2017; Suryani, 2019), they have been developed in other countries. In Ecuador, Parra (2019) and Ibarra (2018) conducted studies to improve writing but they did not use peer feedback, also the participants were not eighth graders. Students that provide online peer feedback, feel engage with the technology (Van Popta et al.,2017).

Local education authorities allow the use of technological resources like internet, software and computers among others to enhance language and content-area instruction (Ministerio de Educación, 2012). The technological tool chosen to improve writing in this

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study was google docs. Using Google Docs, students can begin their assignments in the classroom and continue at home, or anywhere if ubiquitous devices like mobile phones or netbooks are being used (Reyna, 2010).

Considering the poor writing in the participants, this study had the purpose to improve the writing skill from the beginning (pre-writing), so the students create better writing drafts of short paragraphs by applying formative peer-feedback facilitated by google doc as tool during the process. This study is different and innovative from other articles because it was addressed to a pre-A1 level.

The research questions that drove this study were: (a) to what extent does formative peer feedback improve the organization of the writing drafts? (b) to what extent does formative peer-feedback improve the content in the writing drafts; (c) what are students' perspectives about writing formative peer-feedback using google docs?

### **Literature Review**

The following section provides topics related to the present study research, making connections with different researchers, comparing and contrasting theories, and viewpoints of the topics. This section describes writing skills in L2, the writing process, pre-writing, brainstorming, outline, drafting, feedback, formative peer feedback, google docs, and perspective.

### **Writing Skills in L2**

Second language writing skill plays an increasingly important role today in the lives of professionals in almost every field and discipline, creating a challenge to those responsible for the teaching of second language writing (Kaplan, 2003). Hyland (2019) stated that learning to write in a foreign or second language mainly involves linguistics knowledge and vocabulary choices, syntactic patterns, and cohesive devices that comprise the essential building blocks of texts. To reinforce this theory and the importance of writing in L2. Kroll et al. (1990)

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established that learning to write in a second language is seen as an exercise in habit formation where the writer is a simple manipulator of previously learned language structures.

### **Writing Process**

Writing is a multi-dimensioned process and it begins before to start working with strategies for invention (Reither, 1985). Harmer (2004) stated that the writing process can be developed in three ways: content of the text, the type of writing and the resource, besides it has five main elements: prewriting, drafting, revising, editing and publishing.

#### **Pre-writing.**

Pre-writing is the start stage in the writing process, the writer chooses and determines from a prompt list what he is going to write. This step permits writers define topic sentences, set goals, draw outlines, and to organize ideas (Faraj, 2015). In addition, Herayati (2019) explained that prewriting is a significant part in the writing process, the writer can reach their topics like sports or social medias and come upon with main ideas in this stage. It will guide the writer into an organized outline of possible ideas, topics, and/or comments.

#### **Brainstorming.**

According to Tuyet (2017), brainstorming allows writers to quickly generate a large number of ideas to select and start writing. Nugraha and Indihadi (2019) stated that the instruction of brainstorming strategy has a positive effect on students writing improvement and makes them more active.

#### **Outline.**

Gamboa (2020) Outline is part of the pre-writing stage where the writers form a brief structure of a text before putting pen on paper, providing the opportunity to organize the ideas beforehand, in such a way the writers will be able to convey a message with more precision. It is also a viable way to make up ideas, before writing when the writer does not have any knowledge about the writing topic.

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### **Drafting.**

Nasser (2018) said that you start your writing by using your notes about your thoughts (forming your sentences). In the drafting stage, the writer puts together all the information collected to engage the audience through the paper. The writers have to focus on the principal points of their writing and correct errors (Faraj, 2015).

### **Feedback**

Feedback has a place in most theories of second language and is seen as contributing to language learning (Ellis, 2009), Bitchener and Storch (2016), in their study, showed that many teachers confirmed that their students benefit from some of the feedback they receive and that improvement is better than no improvement at all.

### **Formative Peer Feedback**

Formative peer feedback in writing improves student's knowledge through providing opportunities to think critically, and to improve their autonomy (Bijami et al., 2013). Huisman et al. (2019) defined formative peer feedback “(...) as all task-related information that a learner communicates to a peer of similar status which can be used to improve his or her academic writing performance (...)” (p. 4).

Receiving constructive feedback during an interactive class from peers enabled students to identify mistakes after that their work became a positive outcome (Snowball & Mostert, 2013)

### **Google Docs perspectives**

Google Documents are characterized because users can collaborate with people from all over the world to create writings using editing tools, adding images, links, and drawings. Changes in these documents will be kept automatically. Keeping a version history where changes are indicated by the authors because several people can edit the same document at the same time from anywhere (Martín, 2018).

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According to Alsubaie and Ashuraidah, (2017), the integration of collaborative learning with technology (google docs) in EFL classes and others contexts can be used to develop students with different learning styles. Faulkner (2019) showed in his study that Google Docs supports student learning by increasing opportunities for collaboration and helping each other, besides the students saw Google Docs as a learning tool and they were more engaged while working collaboratively with their peers.

### **Innovation**

This research lasted 24 hours, the main goal of this study was that students learn how to improve their writing skill especially the first step (pre-writing), through formative peer feedback facilitated by google docs. Students wrote short paragraphs according to their preference like sports or social media. Taking in account that the audiences for these paragraphs was the educational community.

As beginner writers with a pre-A1 level of proficiency, students were guided in how to provide formative peer-feedback in order to improve their writings. First, students gave a placement test to confirmed their level (appendix A), then they were exposed to some basic vocabulary and a simple grammar structure, after that students knew the first step of the writing process, brainstorming and outlining in order to write their drafts.

With the teacher's help students analyzed the purpose of giving formative peer-feedback, after that they began to improve their drafts, finally they used a topic of their interest to write a paragraph for the final assessment, the activities implemented in this innovation are detailed in the lesson plan (Appendix B).

### **Methodology**

According to Wang and Reio (2017), action research is where a researcher studies a problem by analyzing the information collected through different instruments to solve the problem. The methodology used in the present study is described in this section including the



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participants, instruments, data analysis, and ethical standards. Action research is about interpreting all the evidence provided in the social situations, and this fusion of research and action permit to obtain better results (Hartas, 2015). This action research contains quantitative and qualitative instruments.

### **Participants**

The participants of this study were eighth grade students from a public high school in Guayaquil city in Ecuador. The students' ages ranged from 11 to 13 years old, students' mother tongue is Spanish. In this study the participants took an online placement test (Kaplan international), in order to know their real English level. This placement test gave as a result that the participants were in a beginner level it means pre-A1 level according to the CEFR.

### **Instruments**

In this study the instruments considered were a checklist, rubric, pre-post-test, and a survey. First, in order to answer the question to what extent does formative peer feedback improve the organization of the writing drafts? the instrument used was the checklist (appendix C), in which students gave the information about the organization of their drafts, if the topic was connected with the principal idea and this with the second ideas and the correct use of words to give the proper order creating cohesion in their writings.

Second, to what extent formative peer-feedback improves the content in the writing drafts? a pre and post-test was applied. First students took a pre-test (appendix D) providing a background of how they write short paragraphs about topics like sports or social media, then at the end of the innovation, they took a post-test to see their improvement. The pre-test and post-test were graded using a rubric (appendix E). The rubric assesses basic writings, ideas, organization, expression, convention and legibility.

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Third, to answer what are student's perspectives about writing formative peer-feedback using google docs? a survey was applied (appendix F). Students determined the importance of formative peer feedback, they answered in Spanish due their English level.

### Data Analysis

The innovation was assessed by two professionals in order to get concise, reliable and accurate results. The main researcher and another professional graded the tests of the innovation to reduce bias. These results were exported from a spreadsheet to the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to get descriptive statistics (minimum, mean, maximum, standard derivation). All the information was used to obtain effect results in an online calculator.

### Ethical Considerations

The permission to apply this innovation was given by the authority of the high school.

Moreover, the students that participated as volunteers in this research counted with their parents' approval. The results of the information collected in this innovation was confidential, the participants' names were not disclosed.

### Results

This section describes the results considered in this study. The data obtained in this study were analyzed based on the three research questions determined in this study. The results are explained statically according to each question.

Question 1: To what extent does formative peer feedback improve the organization of the writing drafts?

Table 1.

*Results from de checklist*

Statement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
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I use a topic according to my background	15	1.00	0.00
The main idea was according the topic	15	1.00	0.00
The scheme used was consistent to the topic and idea	15	1.00	0.00
Secondary ideas were correctly derived from the main idea	15	1.00	0.00
I used connector words to organize my draft	15	1.00	0.00
The ideas had an established order	15	1.00	0.00

The organization of the drafts was analyzed by the checklist and based in the results the 1.0 mean indicates that the organization improved after they received the formative feedback.

Question 2: To what extent formative peer-feedback improve the content in the writing drafts?

Table 2.

*Pre-test and post-test results*

Instruments	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pre-test	15	6	9	7.60	1.00
Post-test	15	9	12	10.00	0.82

The innovation had a real impact and it is significant because the p-value of this results is 0.048, which enter in the range according to the SPSS software.

Table 3.

*Results based on the rubric through peer feedback*

Components	N	Pre-test Mean	Std. Deviation	post-test mean	Std. Deviation
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Vocabulary	15	1.87	0.516	3.13	0.352
Organization	15	1.60	0.507	3.07	0.258
Grammar	15	1.53	0.516	2.53	0.516
Cohesion	15	1.53	0.516	2.60	0.507

Table two shows participants' improvement in their draft after the post-test, the content increased, also the results from the rubric (table 3) confirmed the developing in participants' writing drafts. This study had a great impact in improving the content in their short paragraph's drafts according to the students' level.

Question 3: What are student's perspectives about writing formative peer-feedback using google docs?

Table 4.

*Students' perspectives about writing formative feedback using google docs*

Item	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Formative peer feedback helped me to improve my drafts	15	3.87	0.352
Can I make a sentence based on a rubric	15	3.53	0.516
Google docs tool is easy to use	15	3.6	0.507
Through google docs, improve my writings	15	3.93	0.258
The pre-writing helped to develop my paragraphs	15	3.6	0.507
I learnt some basic words connectors to organize my drafts	15	3.6	0.507

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Participants answered six statements in the survey where they were totally agreed that formative peer feedback helped them to improve their drafts using google docs. Participants were pleased to be part of this innovation because they noticed how their writing drafts improved. The results of this innovation were significant for the participants.

### Discussion

Based on the results obtained in this study, regarding *to what extent does formative peer feedback improve the organization of the writing drafts?* Students received formative feedback which improved their writing organization. Likewise, Snowball and Mostert (2013) stated that receiving constructive feedback from peers that enabled students to identify mistakes and improve their own work seems to have been a prominent positive outcome.

*Question 2: To what extent formative peer-feedback improve the content in the writing drafts?* the participants improved their writing drafts, they break through their lack of vocabulary and obtained better results after the post-test the checklist helped to prove it, in the pedagogic and theoretical results (Kuyyogsuy, 2019).

Chen (2010) confirmed that on the pedagogical dimension, peer feedback should become a routine feature in writing classrooms and it worked effectively in the current study, as students shared similar English writing proficiency, disciplinary knowledge, and the same dedication to improve their writing skills.

*Question 3: What are student's perspectives about writing formative peer-feedback using google docs?* the student's perspective about the writing formative feedback were similar to some studies, for example, Nicol et al. (2014) concluded that students maintained that feedback gave them more control over their own learning. In addition, it is relevant to mentioned that the technological tool was Google docs, Van Popta et al. (2017) mentioned that students use cognitive processes to provide online peer feedback, which will lead to several benefits.

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### **Conclusions**

According to the results, there are some conclusions: formative peer-feedback turned out profitable for students, they developed their writing skills in many aspects as clarifying ideas and the organization in their drafts.

An important factor was that participants saved a lot of time by using the checklist to assess their drafts. Furthermore, the goal of the checklist usage in the innovation to make sure how they increase their writing skill was accomplished according to the successful results.

Formative peer feedback had a positive impact on participants, based on the comments and suggestions they gave using the formative peer feedback rubric as a beneficial tool they had the opportunity to see clearly in what points they were failed and make the corrections improving their drafts. Another important aspect based on the formative peer feedback is that it allowed the participants to increase their critical thinking and, make them learn from their mistakes. Moreover, using google docs as a technological tool facilitated the participants to accomplished the standards of this innovation.

As a conclusion, the participants demonstrated that they enjoyed learning giving formative feedback to their peers using a technological resource like google docs, besides this innovation achieved the aims of the study as evidenced in the results provided by the instruments applied, despite all the limitations in the process.

### **Limitations**

Regarding the limitations during the execution of this innovation, the participants had issues in technology or internet access. Some participants did not have the necessary tools because they are situated in an area where they have low economic resources, to face these limitations, the researcher provided an organized internet connection schedule when parents were at home and at least borrow to the participants their smartphones.

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On the other hand, another limitation was the time determined for this innovation during the pandemic, this study was implemented in 24 hours in online classes (zoom) which were not enough to have more practice in their drafts. Likewise, participants do not have high English level, they started the innovation with a pre-A1 level. However, the participants improved their writing in general and started to write short paragraphs according to the vocabulary introduced in class.

### **Recommendations**

Researchers that like to replicate this study should expand the time of the execution of the implementation which will help students to increase their writing skill; reinforce in students the perspective of giving and receiving formative feedback, opportunities for improvement and constructive because it helps them with their critical thinking and increase the motivation.

Continue further research with bigger groups to expand the benefits of this action research. Motivate students to continue using google docs as tool for their writing activities giving them the experience to be more creative, collaborative and be independent writers in the future.

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**Appendix A**

Placement test: Kaplan online test

**Appendix B****Lesson Plan**

Available upon request.

**Appendix C****Checklist**

**Mark with a cross (X) to the following statements to test the organization of your peer's drafts.**

Available upon request.

**Appendix D****Pre-test**

Available upon request.

**Post-test**

Available upon request.

**Appendix E**

Rubric to assess the students' writing

Available upon request.

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**Appendix F****Survey**

Available upon request.