**Peer Feedback Using Evernote to Improve Writing Short Stories**

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English is the most spoken language around the world, and it plays an important role in education, in a multilingual society, and for future employment (Knaak et al., 2021). It helps people to better understand and appreciate not only other cultures but also their own culture due to the immersion of experiences that this language provides (Mahu, 2012).

Culture and other topics related to real life situations can be seen, demonstrated, and learnt in classrooms by applying English in any skill, such as: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Different tools and strategies when teaching these skills engage and motivate students, and as a result, students speak and write properly through real interaction (Nguyen, 2017).

Related to the writing skill, learners can express and communicate, however, some EFL learners find it as the most challenging skill because they have to be coherent and fluent at the moment of producing or trying to explain any topic. Learners believe that a great knowledge of vocabulary and grammar is needed to have a variety of words in their writings, and that their writings have to call the attention of other readers, so they can comprehend what has been written without asking for clarification to maintain the desire to continue reading (Sholah, 2019).

About that point, Suleiman (2000) added that "The writer must not only have an idea (to recreate meanings presented) about a given topic, but also must have a good sense on how to present it in an authentic and witty manner" (p. 4). The idea of the previous quote has been focused on being coherent when producing a writing. However, Zamel (1982) made a connection with grammar and vocabulary in order to present a work not only with creative ideas but as an accurate writing too. Therefore, one needs to

be coherent at the moment of communicating something through writing in order to understand what has been written and to improve in this language skill.

There are some goals found in the Common European Framework of Reference for languages that learners need to achieve on the B1 level that will be described later on this research. However, through a pre test, it was revealed that students lacked vocabulary words, organization in the structure of the writing, and coherence in some sentences and phrases. The main reason for applying this proposal is to help students reinforce what they know and increase their level through different activities with the use of peer feedback facilitated by Evernote.

Guanoluisa et al. (2017) stated one of the reasons from what was mentioned above: "in most of the educative institutions, there is not an appropriate teaching instruction since the beginning levels. It is believed that students must develop this skill in higher levels." (p. 906). This generates a bigger problem since high school teachers have to start from the basics when students could have learnt basic things in earlier academic years.

There are different strategies that seek to improve writing skills. Huisman et al. (2019) made a difference between peer feedback and self-assessment. They said that peer feedback had a greater impact than self-assessment on writing skills because it gives students a range of points of view and styles from different partners. Also, Kayacan and Razi (2017) and Wu and Schunn (2021) agreed that peer feedback gives students the opportunity to be autonomous and develop their own writing skills rather than just waiting for the teacher's point of view.

A similar study was done by Kuyyogsuy (2019) where students that applied peer feedback in classes improved their social skills because it promoted collaboration with

other students. It also developed intellectual skills  because it prepared students to apply their basic writing abilities through different techniques. Besides the progress that students had in social and intellectual interaction, the research from Fatimah and Suharto (2017) demonstrated that students improved their scores in the writing skill which changed their attitude when doing different writing activities.

However, one of the challenges that arise when trying to use peer feedback in the classroom is that learners believe they are not prepared to assess each other or even give a grade if necessary. Also, it is thought that the teacher is the only expert in giving feedback or giving fair grades to each student according to their papers (Bijami et al., 2013).

Another challenge about peer feedback is that it could be time consuming because learners want to find the correct words for their own writings, then check the work of another person in a critical but objective way, revise the feedback they have received from their partners, and finally, they have to rewrite their work according to the feedback they have received (Cook, 2019).

Moreover, there are not many studies where the use of peer feedback has been included with technological tools (Al-Naibi et al. 2018; Kitchakarn, 2013; Mabuan, 2018; Wichadee, 2013). They expressed the benefits of using blogs, facebook, EDMODO, and other web pages to facilitate students to give peer feedback and improve their writing skills.

Some of the benefits mentioned above are that students can have a meaningful interaction giving peer feedback through the use of Evernote, in this case. Using an online resource, students can develop their ideas, offer alternate points of view, and add suggestions to their writings in order to improve (Lin & Yang, 2011).

Also, the process of giving feedback can speed up at the moment of dividing and providing each student a work to check. According to Dippol (2009), students give more detailed suggestions and comments related to grammar or structure aspects because learners do some research about these topics. This action leads students to more autonomous working.

This research focuses on giving students the opportunity to improve their writings through different short stories and think critically at the moment of revising their work, so students establish a written online communication where they can develop more ideas. About the process of revising, Pena-Shaff and Nicholls (2004) stated that " can become even more powerful when communication among peers is done in written form, because writing, done without the immediate feedback of another person as in oral communication, requires a fuller elaboration in order to successfully convey meaning" (p. 245).

It is through peer feedback that students learn to identify the most important ideas and determine the originality of the work. In this case, students will get interested in the story, and as readers, they could determine what makes the story powerful or what could be changed in order to make it engaging or strengthened (Kelly et al., 2014).

No research has been found regarding peer feedback through the use of Evernote, or at least has not been tested in students from high school in Ecuador so far. That is why the problem needs to be addressed in this local context.

In this proposal, the objective is to give students the opportunity to apply peer feedback in order to improve their writing. This action will allow students to boost their weaknesses and reinforce their strengths in their writings.

**Literature Review**

This literature review includes the main topics regarding this proposal. It covers peer feedback facilitated by Evernote which is the independent variable, and the writing skill which is the dependent variable. In this section these concepts contained different scientific sources to support this study.

**Writing Skill**

To Huy (2015), writing is "a complex metacognitive activity that draws on an individual's knowledge, basic skill, strategies, and ability to coordinate multiple processes" (p. 54). To expand this concept, Yulianti et al. (2019) said that "writing involves several components which have to be considered including word choice, use of appropriate grammar, syntax, mechanics, and organization of ideas into coherent and cohesive form" (p. 714). For these reasons, learners could see writing as a difficult skill to master where their attitude could change if they do not succeed in the tasks done in class (Petric, 2002).

Related to the attitude, students could not feel motivated at the moment of doing different writing activities; however, Daniels (2010), mentioned that each person comes with an inner motivation. Teachers cannot force students to feel motivated, they can just be an influence by creating a good environment where students have the desire to learn.

One alternative that could be useful for students is that they can write or transmit their own ideas and thoughts through short but meaningful stories. This could be found in a research by Lenhart et al. (2008) where their teens said that "they are motivated to write when they can select topics that are relevant to their lives and interests, and report greater enjoyment of school writing when they have the opportunity to write creatively" (p. 3). However, it is important to recognize that for learners that are starting the process of writing effectively, it is necessary to spend not only class hours doing relevant

activities but outside classes where teachers can give students more opportunities to apply what they have learnt in order to see progress and improvement (Sadiku, 2015).

**Revising**

Revising is one of the components found in the writing process. It is considered as the central part of the whole process (Fitzgerald 1987; Law & Baer 2020; Truscott & Hsu 2008) because it can give learners the opportunity to improve the quality of their work by rearranging the ideas presented on it or improving the organization of it. Applying these changes can help learners to increase their knowledge or even discover new ways to transmit information to others. These arrangements allow students to correct their syntax or mechanics without even notice (Fitzgerald, 1987).

It is important that both the writer and the reader can work together, for instance, the reader can ask for clarification or provide more details if necessary, and the writer can ask for ways to improve the writing according to their feedback or suggestions (Al-Jamal, 2009). Related to the implementation of this strategy, Kieft et al. (2007) announced that the more students practice revising other writings on their own, the more prepared they will be to check their work and analyze the organization or grammatical aspects while writing.

**Peer Feedback**

Peer feedback is considered a pedagogical tool where students have the opportunity to interact and collaborate among each other about their own works (Iswandari & Jiang, 2020). Lin and Chien (2009) mentioned that peer feedback is a learner-centered process where they become acquainted with the importance of this process that leads them to be more responsible and develop higher levels of proficiency in writing.

About this technique, Yastıbaş and Yastıbaş (2015) and Kuyyogsuy (2019) stated that, teacher feedback must not be the only strategy to be applied in classrooms because it is through peer feedback where students get involved in real learning where they share ideas and give and receive comments to improve their own writings.

Moreover, Grami (2010) noticed that peer feedback helps students to be more active in classes through their own participation. The theory of Vygotsky explained in words of Shabani et al. (2010), which is the Zone of proximal Development, establishes that individuals can develop cognitively when interacting with each other (social interaction). Also, when learners try to guide or assist their partners to check their work in order to be better (scaffolding), they internalize the comments and try to apply them in other writing tasks (Iswandari & Jiang, 2020). For that reason, it is important to explain the objective of peer feedback, so students could develop revising skills to check their partners' writings and give suggestions or comments.

**Evernote**

Technology is an important tool for students nowadays because they communicate through different platforms, however, it can be used to practice writing in order to expand what they are learning in class.

Evernote is an app designed to take notes, organize work, and insert different media to make it more personal in order to store important information. This app allows students to keep everything they want, for instance, if they write short stories based on the in-class activities, students have the opportunity to go home and rewrite what they were doing, and then add some pictures or make it more personal and engaging.

According to Blikstad-Balas et al. (2018), there are two factors that influence students to write: how teachers activate writing in class and what opportunities students

have to do so. With the use of Evernote not only in classes but outside, learners would progress in an entertaining way.

## Innovation

This innovation will consist of improving writing skills in learners from tenth grade by using peer feedback facilitated by Evernote. It will take place as part of a regular unit of six hours a week for a month. The implementation will have thirty participants at a private high school in Guayaquil where they will receive vocabulary, grammar points, different writing activities to stimulate this skill, and peer feedback practice (Appendix 1).

For a better understanding, the teacher will explain the use of Evernote, show some examples of the components when writing short stories (introduction, body, and conclusion), and give extra phrases that call the attention of the reader. Then, students will use new vocabulary about traveling, fears, and school life to write different stories for each topic in Evernote. Meanwhile, the teacher will model how to give relevant peer feedback with a task as an example. After that, the teacher will encourage students to revise other students' work and give suggestions for improvement. Finally, each student will edit their own writing with the given suggestions.

Some of the benefits when applying peer feedback are that both, the reviewer and the writer, can scaffold each other which allows them to improve their own writings due to the practice and interaction learners have at the moment of working together (Lundstrom & Baker, 2009).

It is for that reason that learners will deeply analyze the process of peer feedback. Lam (2010) proposed a four step procedure to prepare learners with different

concepts to use with their peers: Clarifying, identifying, explaining, and giving suggestions (Appendix 2).

After the introduction of the different procedures, learners will know and recognize that making errors is very common when learning to write properly, however, it is important to explain that when giving suggestions to other partners, they need to help themselves to improve the task. If there are no real or relevant comments, there will not be any improvement and the peer will not progress in this skill.

When everything is clear, the teacher will focus on the practice. According to Ferris (2011), in the writings learners can find treatable errors which are easy to explain, such as: capitalization, form, or verb agreement or untreatable errors which are more difficult to explain, such as: word choice, patterns, or unidiomatic sentences. To complete this part, learners will read again the writing task to find coherence in all the work.

Additionally, learners will be introduced to the way to give peer feedback by their teacher using a guidance sheet that is in (Appendix 3). Some of the questions provided in the sheet contain clues to help learners what to look for in the story. Learners will be assigned to read different stories and provide feedback according to the guidance sheet. Finally, students will do some corrections in their own writings and the action of giving feedback will be done again in order to follow and complete the rubric (Appendix 4).

The goal of the innovation will be to get students to produce short stories consisting of a brief introduction, development, and closure using different tenses. The topics of the stories will be chosen by the same students and according to their

imagination, however, the teacher will provide ideas in order to help students to initiate

the process. Learners will express freely using the topics seen in class.

To reach that goal, students will go through the acquisition of the different stages of

writing, specifically revision to write a story using phrases and vocabulary known by

themselves and from the unit using a digital app called Story Dice.

## Research Methodology

This study is action research because it suggests changes in a specific context,

and the author is involved in the study. Banegas and de Castro (2019) defined action

research as an implementation of an innovation to evaluate how it changes the

classroom or institution. Teachers have to look for a problem presented in any context,

act on it, try to determine a possible solution, and act again to see if there are changes.

The research design is mixed. It will use quantitative and qualitative instruments

to know more about the situation. To start the research, the students took a proficiency

test (Appendix 5) from the EF Standard English Test page

(https://www.efset.org/quick-check/) in order to know the level of students. The results

showed that 15 students had a B1 level and 15 students had an A2 level. Thus, a survey

(Appendix 6), a pre and post test (Appendix 7) will be taken to deepen students'

perspectives about peer feedback and its use in classes along with the progress of

learners during this study.

According to The Council of Europe (2018), they have to be able to write

connected sentences in a text about familiar or topics of their interest but some

expressions may be written with some circumlocutions in topics, such as: hobbies,

travel, family, and current events. Even when the text in general can be understandable,

some expressions can be unclear which "may cause a break-up in reading" (p. 174).

Also, students have to be able to write real or imaginary experiences or stories including feelings, reactions, and details. Occasionally, they may make errors that can be interpreted by the reader according to the context in which the text is written.

The instruments mentioned above would find an answer to the following research questions:

1. How does peer feedback improve the writing skill according to students' perspectives?

2. To what extent does Peer feedback facilitated by Evernote improve writing short stories?

**Participants**

The present research project will be conducted at a private school in the city of Guayaquil. The study will last four weeks (24 hours), and there will be 30 students from tenth grade who range in age from 13-15 years old.

All of the students have Spanish as their native language. The socio-economic background of the students belongs to medium class, however, this pandemic has increased the difficulty to access online classes due to internet connection problems, personal or family difficulties.

The proficiency test taken at the beginning of the research with a duration of 25 minutes allowed the researcher to know the level of students. The results were important to find the best way to help students in the acquisition, learning, and improvement of this language.

**Instruments**

Related to the research questions written above, the presented instruments were designed to find an answer and relevant data for this study:

1) How does peer feedback improve the writing skill according to students' perspectives? For this research question, a survey (Appendix 6) will be taken to extract specific data of how well students improve their writing skill through peer feedback in classes.

**Survey**

The survey will be elaborated taking into consideration the Likert scale, which consisted of: Never (1), Seldom (2), Sometimes (3), and Always (4) and other questions with: Strongly agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), Strongly Disagree (1). The statements will be written in Spanish with a translation into English to avoid confusion. This survey will allow the researcher to know the students' positive or negative points of view of this tool, the preparation they have to apply peer feedback in classes, and the motivation at the moment of working on tasks. It will also ask about the way students give their feedback to their partners and how this feedback is: constructive, helpful, specific, or respectful. It will also include what kind of methods students use to give feedback, and if this method helps and motivates them to continue working. The survey will be taken before implementing the innovation.

For the second research question 2) To what extent does Peer feedback facilitated by Evernote improve the writing of short stories? A pre and posttest will be applied before and after the implementation of peer feedback in order to measure the progress students have achieved during this research.

**Pre-Test and Post-Test**

This pre and post test will be adapted from the Exam English page (https://www.examenglish.com/PET/b1_preliminary_writing2_story.htm), and it will contain a task where students will need to write a story using a definite sentence. This

test will contain further instructions about some points students need to add, such as: the main idea, topic sentences, supporting sentences, and a conclusion. Along with that, the test will include the directions to consider coherence and respecting, capitalization, punctuation, and spelling.

**Data Analysis**

To answer the previous research questions, it is necessary to include the analysis of qualitative and quantitative instruments. The instruments applied such as: the survey and the pre and post-test will be taken into consideration. The data obtained will be entered into a spreadsheet in Excel and into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to get descriptive statistics: minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation.

**Ethical Considerations**

It is important to be responsible when dealing with participants at the moment of implementing different instruments to obtain data, especially when the participants are under 18 years old as in the present research. Orb et al. (2001) emphasized: "the protection of human subjects or participants in any research study is imperative" (p. 93). That is why participants' names will be confidential in the surveys and pseudonyms will be used to protect students' identities.

Also, a consent letter will be sent to students' parents in order to thoroughly inform the purpose of the research, the questions, and the use of the results when finishing the study (Arifin, 2018). A consent letter will be sent to the director of the institution in order to have the corresponding approval. The outcomes obtained in the instruments will be available only for the institution and parents if required. No pictures will be taken during the application of the instruments.

**Limitations**

One of the limitations presented in this study is the way to give classes due to the pandemic situation the country is facing. Classes are virtual, so there is not a face-to-face contact with students in order to give extra help during the sessions.

Furthermore, the internet service is not good for some students which takes more time for the explanation of the assignments.

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Appendix 1

Lesson Plan

Available upon request

Appendix 2

Four-Step Procedure

Available upon request

Appendix 3

Guidance Sheet for Peer Reviewers

Available upon request

Appendix 4

Short Story Writing Rubric

Available upon request

Appendix 5

**Proficiency test**

**The proficiency test was taken from the EF SET web page.**

https://www.efset.org/quick-check/

Appendix 6

Survey:

Available upon request.

Appendix 7

**A. Pre test/Post test Sample**

Available upon request