



**Peer Feedback of Students' Original Stories to Improve Writing in an Online  
Learning-Environment**

Nadia Lidia Cantos Lozano

Guide: Marco Aquino, MSc.

Modality: Innovation Proposal

Presented as Partial Fulfillment for the Degree of Magíster en Pedagogía de los Idiomas Nacionales y Extranjeros con Mención en la Enseñanza de Inglés. CES: RPC-SE-19-N°.140-2020. Cohort 2020 - 2021 Author's email: nadia.cantos@casagrande.edu.ec. Guayaquil, July 28<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

## **Peer Feedback of Students' Original Stories to Improve Writing in an Online Learning-Environment**

According to Richards and Renandya (2002), writing is the most challenging skill for L2 learners because it requires a high level of competence in generating, organizing ideas, and writing them into readable texts. For that reason, teachers should consider the principles to lead the class and record, ponder, and analyze the results to think over and improve their instructional practices to support the learning of writing skills.

First of all, teaching writing using CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) principles requires that teachers know more than choose the content according to the curricular requirements. It should encourage students to develop communicative competence through classroom activities specially designed to learn the purpose and function of the target language, among other aspects. Therefore, a communicative writing task should allow students to be creative, generate critical thinking and invite risk-taking (Richards & Renandya, 2002).

Moreover, the EFL National Curriculum emphasizes the representative aspects of language and the development of the four communicative skills by implementing activities that engage learners in purposeful communicative interaction. Indeed, it states that foreign language learning aims to turn learners into future citizens who are competent second language users capable of communicating written and orally (Ministerio de Educación del Ecuador, 2016). At this point, the English teachers' role is to be facilitators who generate a conducive learning environment to provide learners with meaningful learning opportunities to use the language and reflect on their learning.

In the Ecuadorian context, several studies have been carried out to demonstrate that EFL learners struggle with some weaknesses when writing in English, mainly because of the interference of the native language and lack of accuracy. For instance, Cabrera et al. (2014) found that writing skills were embedded with semantic, syntactic, and morphological mistakes such as misuse of verbs, personal and object pronouns, omissions, overuse of articles, false cognates, and invented words. The negative interference of Spanish in developing writing skills in English resulted from word-by-word translation and L1 thinking as a learning strategy; however, according to the author, there is a lack of teaching strategies to prevent those errors.

The study carried out by Soto et al. (2020) in three Ecuadorian public universities evidenced that the fossilization of these weaknesses in English students' knowledge is one of the reasons for errors since they might not have received appropriate feedback. Furthermore, the researchers explained that in most cases, the null exposure of students to the target language is related to Spanish interference.

In a recent participant observation in the institution where this study will be conducted, it was evident that 1<sup>st</sup> BGU students struggle with Spanish interference due to a lack of exposure to the target language in their immediate environment. Then, their writing production was embedded with mechanical, syntactic, and morphological errors related to direct translation from their L1. Therefore, a proposal with practical activities is required to enhance their writing competence through a peer feedback strategy.

## **Literature Review**

### **Writing process**

Nunan (1999) considered that the writing process involves a complex cognitive activity because the writer requires simultaneously demonstrating the control of

some variables. For that reason, "the writer must be able to structure and integrate information into cohesive and coherent texts or paragraphs" (Sari & Sabri, 2017, p. 76). Bearing in mind that practice plays an essential role, teachers should consider the principles to lead the class and record, ponder, and analyze the results to think over by improving their instructional practices to support the learning of writing skills. Besides, Ministerio de Educación del Ecuador (2016) argued that the writing process encourages learners to think creatively, critically, and use the target language.

According to Seow (2002), the writing process has four stages: planning, drafting, revising, and editing. Planning engages students in generating ideas and gathering information for writing. For drafting, the style should consider the audience; the revising stage requires the reexamination of the text written to verify how compelling has been the communication of the meaning to the reader. Finally, the editing stage involves students or peer review for grammar, spelling, punctuation, diction, sentence structure, and accuracy. Furthermore, Clark (2007, as cited in Megawati, 2020) agreed with those stages and described several additional components such as:

1. In the prewriting stage, learners generate ideas, brainstorm topics, web ideas together, think and talk about their ideas while teachers guide them about how they may get writing ideas from various sources.
2. In drafting, learners express their ideas by considering the genre, format, audience, and purpose.
3. In revising, the writing organization and structure are revised and analyzed by learners considering each writing trait: topic sentences, supporting details, descriptive language, and sequencing words.
4. In publishing, learners are ready to produce a final copy.

5. Reflecting is essential since it encourages learners to think about their writing and review whether the original goals were reached (p. 3)

At this point, Megawati (2020) highlighted the importance of applying each stage of the writing process and the role of teachers in convincing learners that "writing is actually a process, not a product" (p. 41). Thus, it is required "to allow learners to develop their intentions as authors, share and elaborate on ideas that matter to them and work collaboratively with others." (Ministerio de Educación del Ecuador, 2016, p. 26).

Finally, Mu (2005) recognized five writing strategies derived from ESL theories: rhetorical, metacognitive, cognitive, communicative, and social /affective strategies. Considering that learners need help to improve their writing content and learning control while gaining efficiency in writing production and confidence, thus the metacognitive strategy is considered the most efficient.

### **Guided writing strategy**

Dyan (2010, as cited in Ningsih, 2016) defined guided writing as "a process guided by the teacher limited to structuring sentences, direct answers to questions and language-based exercises" (p.132). Indeed, students' writing skills consist of a piece of writing which focus is developing vocabulary, reading comprehension, grammar, and oral skills. However, since writing strategy is a process guided and stimulated by the teacher, its design requires to be carefully planned with clear transfer goals. Furthermore, it should enable students to practice writing and develop a specific skill or strategy for individuals, a small group, or the whole group (Megawati, 2020).

According to the Western Australia Department of Education (2013), the writing strategy helps students become independent in writing texts of increasing difficulty.

Moreover, students develop individuality by practicing, exploring, experimenting, and taking risks in a supportive environment while developing the ability to self-monitor their writing and set writing goals, among other benefits. Meanwhile, using a guided writing strategy may improve the teachers' levels of efficiency in teaching writing. To provide students with an independent text production guide, the examination and discussion of models have to immerse students in the focus skill and text composition in groups while allowing them to share their writing with their partners (Ontario, 2005, as cited in Megawati, 2020).

Furthermore, Wahyuni (2014) argued that certain text types, including narrative, recount/spoof, report, procedure, news item, description, anecdote, hortatory exposition, analytical exposition, discussion, explanation, and explanation review, should be taught to students. Therefore, the teachers' creativity is required to take advantage of printed or media didactic sources such as magazines, newspapers, or online applications to become communicative in the writing teaching process.

### **Creative Writing**

The EFL national curriculum recognizes that the writing process fosters the learners' creativity and critical thinking. Additionally, as the students work through each stage of the process (from brainstorming to editing), they obtain valuable insights into giving and receiving feedback and finding ways to clearly and effectively express themselves (Ministerio de Educación del Ecuador, 2016).

In this venue, Göçen (2019) and some authors emphasized that creative writing activities enable students to demonstrate their creative skills by producing fluent, engaging, and authentic written texts avoiding boring and repetitive ones. Indeed, they agreed that creative writing activities allow students freedom of expression, design, practice thinking, and creating a product, improving imagination, developing

empathy, choosing methods and writing topics, and exploring different aspects of their lives.

Furthermore, the study carried out by Bayat (2017) evidenced that creative writing achievements were related to the creative writing activities performance since each learner had the power of creative thinking thanks to the teachers' support, exercises, and techniques applied within the process. Thus, teachers are responsible for carefully designing creative and emotionally appealing ESL activities to trigger learners' imagination and develop positive attitudes toward writing.

### **Peer Feedback**

Based on Vygotsky's theory regarding improving students' learning process through social interaction, Liu and Hansen (2002) described peer feedback as the role assumed by learners as the source of information and interactants in the writing process. The responsibilities related to this role are usually assumed by a formally trained tutor, teacher, or editor who comments and critiques each other's drafts in both oral and written formats. Indeed, Brahim (2019) considered that peer feedback is an alternative technique that allows the transfer of the responsibility of the teaching writing process from teachers to students gradually.

Bijami et al. (2013) and some researchers agreed about the fundamental role of peer feedback in improving writing skills and learning achievement. Indeed, it has to engage them in a self-assessment since revising and analyzing others' drafts enable learners to enhance their critical thinking, social interaction, autonomy, and language awareness (Maarof et al., 2011).

At this point, the benefits of the peer feedback strategy go beyond a learners' exchange of opinions about their writing production. Thus, regular practice and

training on peer feedback procedures will allow learners to reflect on and correct their own mistakes (Brahim, 2019).

Another advantage of peer feedback is that it allows students to be aware of the audience which will read their work. This strategy will let writers know how clear and compelling the message is by getting immediate feedback from their peers. In addition, it will encourage learners to improve their writing since a peer audience tends to be more emphatic than a teacher audience (Rollinson, 2005).

Therefore, training students on using peer feedback before the implementation is vital to guarantee the success of this strategy. Thus, the training process should follow some steps: creating a comfortable environment, modeling peer response, discussing appropriate vocabulary and expressions for peer feedback, discussing strategies for implementing peers' feedback in revision, and viewing - discussing video clips of a successful and an unsuccessful peer response session (Berg, 1999 as cited in Brahim, 2019).

On the other hand, some studies showed some disadvantages of this strategy. For example, students sometimes prefer teachers' feedback mainly because they perceive their peers' feedback as vague, sarcastic, and unhelpful (Leki, 1990 as cited in Hyland, 2003). Besides, Tsui and Ng (2000) found that most students consider that teacher is qualified to provide them with helpful feedback.

Bijami et al. (2013) referenced some studies that associate different biases, including friendship, reference, purpose (grading vs. development), feedback (negative feedback effects on future performance), and collusive bias (lack of differentiation) with peer feedback. Indeed, Storch (2005) found that another difficulty was the peer comments focused on product and local errors (sentences) rather than the writing process and global errors (ideas and content).



### **Innovation**

This work proposes fostering the students' writing production by creating original stories, which will be analyzed, reviewed, and provided feedback by peers. This innovative proposal will take four weeks and will be implemented with fifty students as part of the second term of the 1<sup>st</sup> year of BGU curricular planning. The main goal of this work is to improve students' written production through peer feedback by publishing original stories in a class blog. Students have to go through each writing process stage and interact with their partners to provide feedback according to a rubric to accomplish this goal.

The implementation of this proposal will start with a proficiency test to place students into homogeneous groups to foster their confidence. Next, they will be trained in writing, and peer feedback approaches. For this, checklists and rubrics are very useful tools to give students guidelines to revise their performance. These are key elements as they contain "a list of assignments and questions that students are supposed to answer" (Başak, 2019, p. 21). Furthermore, using checklists to provide feedback will allow students to reflect on their writing progress, learn from other strengths and weaknesses, and develop communicative abilities. Therefore, the teacher's role is to design the lesson plan, explain, support, and model the strategy.

The lesson plan will be developed in four weeks for three class hours. Each week homogeneous groups of students will be familiar with the transfer goal, objectives, and peer feedback strategy, which will be implemented throughout the whole process. In the first week, they will read, analyze and discuss in pairs the plot, type of text, tense, and grammar structure of an original story presented by the teacher. The second week will be focused on choosing the topic (from a group of appealing topics proposed by the teacher), learning about the writing process, and drafting the original story (using the

appropriate grammar structure according to the type of text chosen previously). The edition process will be developed during the third week. Finally, the work will be published on a blog created for the class. Students will provide positive feedback about their partners' stories (netiquette) and comment on their experiences as authors and editors. Therefore, students are expected to improve their writing production, develop their critical thinking, peer interact by supporting each other (collaborate), gain confidence by gathering their creative stories, and accomplish the standards required by the EFL Curriculum (B1 level).

### **Research Methodology**

This proposal focuses on increasing students' accuracy and creativity through peer feedback. A qualitative research approach will be employed to contextualize the data by giving methodological congruence to the study and inquiring into the causes of the learners' writing weaknesses after a long period of virtual education (Morse & Richards, 2002). The sponsoring academic coordinator will approve all activities and procedures. Since this study includes minors, students' parents will be asked to sign an informed consent form before starting the implementation. Considering that a pedagogical diagnostic is required at the end of the first term; therefore, all 1<sup>st</sup> year BGU students will do a placement test to know their actual English level and assess their accuracy to split the class into homogeneous groups. Then, the teacher will take a pretest and posttest using a rubric to grade them. It will allow students to review the result at the beginning and contrast it with the last written production in a posttest. Tabulating results in a statistical program will allow the teacher to assess students' progress and the strategy's effectiveness.

Finally, students will be invited to participate in an interview with questions focused on knowing their opinions about their English accuracy and expectations of this

pedagogical proposal. The researcher will conduct semi-structured interviews over two weeks during their coaching time. Interviews will last 25 minutes on average (range = 15-40 minutes); they will be audio-recorded and transcribed.

The study will inquire about the following research questions:

1. What are the students' perspectives on writing weaknesses?
2. What is the impact of peer feedback on improving writing skills?

### **Participants**

This study will be conducted at a bilingual educational institution located in Samborondón city with 50 students from 1<sup>st</sup> year BGU (Bachillerato General Unificado), ranging from 15 to 16 years. Female participants (76%) and male participants (24%) were selected because they will return to their classroom after two years of virtual teaching. Unfortunately, though the institution implemented an innovative teaching methodology, it did not reach the expected results due to the pandemic. In addition, those students showed a remarkable weakness in the last writing examination.

### **Ethical Considerations**

This study is committed to ethical considerations and is engaged with reliability and feasibility since the academic coordinator must review activities and procedures. Furthermore, participants' names will be protected all the time, and students' parents will require a written consent form (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Besides, it is an innovative proposal with a practical lesson plan designed to improve the students' writing considering their background and particular characteristics while preserving their confidentiality throughout the process. Finally, it is available to participate in future studies about this topic and acknowledges the contributions made by other researchers in previous studies.

### **Challenges and Difficulties**

It will be possible to face some challenges relying on the students' perception of peer correction despite the advantages of this proposal. Students are more likely to prefer teachers' comments mainly because they are considered linguistically competent to provide effective feedback. Furthermore, the drawback of reader knowledge may increase the tendency to judge and criticize others' work, and peer feedback can be ineffective and biased.

Students' training process may be complex and lengthy, so it could delay the implementation of the strategy and development of the lesson plan. Besides, teachers could face difficulties supervising all groups simultaneously during the interaction, which may decrease students' motivation, confidence, and commitment. Therefore, teachers must consider these challenges to plan students' training, group formation, and the right time to apply peer feedback during curricular development to get better results.

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**Appendix 1**

**Lesson Plan**

Available upon request.

**Appendix 2**

**Fichas**

Available upon request.

**Appendix 3**

**Self Assessment Checklist**

Available upon request.

**Appendix 4**

**Rubric for Assessing Original Stories**

Available upon request.

**Appendix 6**

**Creative writing Pretest – Sample (Victoria Education and Training, 2022)**

Available upon request.

**Appendix 7**

**Peer Feedback Checklist**

Available upon request.

**Appendix 8**

**Interview Questions**

Available upon request.