

EXPLORING PEER FEEDBACK AS AN ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT STRATEGY FOR ENHANCING WRITING PROFICIENCY AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL LEARNERS

Shumaila Mati, MPhil English Linguistics Scholar, Riphah International University, Islamabad

Hira Rafiq, Lecturer, Department of English Linguistics and Literature, Riphah International University, Islamabad

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the effectiveness of peer feedback as an alternative assessment tool for enhancing secondary school students' creative writing and motivation. Traditional assessment approaches often fail to capture the developmental aspects and nuanced nature of creative writing. However, peer feedback, grounded in well-established theoretical frameworks such as Operant Conditioning Theory and Self-Determination Theory, offers a more dynamic and student-centered approach. A quasi-experimental mixed-method approach was adopted, involving pre-test, post-test administered to a sample of 40 students, and structured questionnaire administered to 140 students from the Beaconhouse School System, Islamabad. Thematic analysis of creative writing samples revealed significant improvement in key linguistic dimensions such as vocabulary, grammatical structure, figurative language, coherence, cohesion, and revision effects. Post-test results highlighted an increased use of complex sentence structures, further enhanced lexical variety and cohesive narrative organization. Notably, 70% of the students integrated peer feedback into their post-test draft, demonstrating both cognitive and effective engagement. Furthermore, T-test analysis validated the results, showing statistically a significant improvement in creative writing score after peer comments. Peer feedback was found to reinforce desired writing behaviors (Operant Conditioning Theory) while simultaneously fulfilling students' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Self-Determination Theory). These psychological and behavioral mechanisms contributed to enhance students' motivation, deeper revision effect and improved metacognitive awareness. The study reveals the values of peer feedback not only in linguistic skills growth but also in shaping a collaborative and empowering classroom culture. By integrating mixed method approach findings, the study offers evidence that structured peer suggestion activities can substantially increase students' creative and descriptive writing skills. The findings suggest implications for curriculum designers, language instructors, and policy developer aiming to adopt more effective, formative assessment strategies. This research contributes to the evolving discourse on alternative assessments by centering students' perspectives and empirical learning outcomes in a Pakistanis secondary school educational context.

Keywords: Alternative assessments, peer feedback, Operant Conditioning Theory, Self-Determination Theory, creative writing, motivation, critical thinking, collaborative learning.

1.1 Introduction

Writing is one of the basic parts of language learning, especially at the secondary school level, where language learners are expected to express their complex ideas with clarity, coherence, and linguistic precision. However, the traditional assessment system commonly practiced in many classrooms setting which is often fail to address the dynamic nature of writing process. These approaches are mainly emphasized on summative evaluation, such as one-off text and final grading, which do not provide students opportunities for reflection, revision, and sustained improvement (Brown, 2004). In contrast, alternative assessment strategies, particularly peer feedback, have emerged as valuable assessment tool that align with the learners-centered learning practices. Additionally, this strategy promoting active engagement, critical thinking and collaborative advancement (Cheng et al., 2004).

Peer feedback refers to a formative assessment strategy in which learners evaluate and provide productive suggestion on each other's written draft, typically following specific guided criteria and rubrics. This strategy is grounded in constructive learning theories, which focuses on the significance of student interaction and reflection in knowledge construction (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). In the context of instructor guidance, peer feedback enables learners to

highlight area of improvement, increase their metacognitive awareness, and raise their writing skills more effectively. Moreover, it also favors the growth of assessment skills and promote students' autonomy by motivating to take responsibility for their own progress (Liu & Hansen, 2002). In recent years, education has observed a gradual change towards formative, process-oriented assessment approach, especially in language instruction. As such, peer feedback has obtained recognition for its potential to offer immediate, relevant and learner-friendly insightfulness towards writing assignments. According to Topping (1998), highlighted that peer feedback not only improve writing skills but also builds interpersonal collaboration and critical abilities, both of these skills essential for academic development of the students. Moreover, peer feedback during writing process help learners understand audience expectation and during conventions more deeply, which are often observed in traditional-led evaluations.

The relevance of this change is particularly significant in secondary school level settings, where basic language writing competencies are still being observed at developmental stage. Learners at this level often struggling with expressing their ideas fluently and accurately, further they may lack confidence in their writing skills. Alternative writing strategy of peer feed offers a means of reducing writing anxiety by providing a less confusing environment that teachers assessment process. As highlights by Rollinson (2005), students are more receptive to feedback form their peers, which facilitate them in constructive dialogue and increase motivation in foster their skills. this collaborative approach not merely improving writing proficiency but also contribute to a supportive learning culture in which learners feel valued and empowered. In the context of Pakistani educational setting, writing instruction at the secondary level is often teacher dominated, with limited opportunities for alternative assessment strategy and formative feedback. As a result, learners are deprived of engaging in reflective process that promote advance writing skills development beyond surface level grammar corrections. This particular gap indicates the need to explore peer feedback strategy that align with communicative and participatory models of language learning skills. Current study, therefore, seeks to examine the structured peer feedback sessions which can be used as an alternative assessment strategy to increase the secondary school level students' creative and motivation skills.

In sum, this study provides efficient contribution to the growing body of literature, further advocating for the alternative assessment strategies in writing settings. In centers to the voice of secondary school students in the context of Pakistan, aiming to reveal how alternative assessment strategy peer feedback impacts their writing proficiency and intrinsic motivation. By promoting cultural and collaborative learning, this study aspires to reshape traditional classroom practices and inform the future curriculum designer to better support their students' development and agency.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Students of secondary school level often face difficulty in writing various creative tasks assigned by the teachers. At times, due to limited time slot or inability to grasp the concept, students do not tend to learn and improve their skills as per their task requirement. This results in syntactic and semantic loss of the assigned task.

When the students are involved in peer discussions, they tend to learn through discussions and collaborations. They not only identify their grammatical and linguistic errors but also tend to learn collaboration and team work as well. This teamwork brings a positive change in uplifting the motivation of the students. This research aims to work on usefulness of peer feedback in improving creative writing abilities of secondary level students, and to see the impact of peer feedback in uplifting the motivation of students.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

1. To find out usefulness of peer feedback in improving creative writing of Secondary students.
2. To find out positive impact of peer feedback in uplifting the motivation of Secondary students.

1.4 Research Questions

1. How do Secondary students perceive and evaluate peer feedback in terms of its usefulness for improving their creative writing?
2. How can peer feedback impact positively in uplifting the motivation of Secondary students?

1.5 Significance of the study

The study plays a significant role by highlighting alternative assessment strategy of peer feedback. This strategy is considered as a powerful assessment strategy for increasing secondary school level students' writing proficiency. By focusing on learners' perspectives, the study sheds light on the how the peer feedback strategy fosters self-awareness, encouraging students' collaborative learning, and increases their motivation and confidence. The study further focuses on the shift from teacher-centered instruction to student-centered interactive approach. In this way the learners actively engage in the process of reviewing, reflecting, and commenting on each other's writings. The main purpose of the study is to contribute in to reshape the traditional assessment strategy and pedagogical practices by incorporating behavioral approaches that value peer interactions and constructive criticism. Finally, this study serves as practical guide for the educational stakeholders such as administrator, policymakers, and instructors to implement alternative assessment strategies, creating culture of mutually learning, and setting foundation for meaningful academic collaboration in secondary school level settings.

2.1 Literature Review

In modern educational discourse setting, traditional assessment approach in English language classroom, dominated by summative evaluation and instructor-centered grading have been increasing criticized for their assessment failure to capture the nuanced and developmental nature of writing skills. Studies conducted by Brown and Abeywickrama (2019) indicate that traditional educational practices, reliant on exams and final writing drafts which often overlook students' metacognitive engagement and revision process. Whereas, peer feedback strategy of alternative assessment process, have gained recognition for improving a more dynamic academia and student-centered environment.

Peer feedback is a structured interaction, where students review written word of each other by employing specific rubric and guiding criteria. This process of assessment not only supports linguistic growth of the students but also promote their critical skills, metacognitive awareness, and collaborative learning. Furthermore, it enables students to actively engage with the writing process, take responsibility for fostering and finally internalize assessment standards (Liu & Hansen, 2002). Similarly, another study by Rollinson (2005) indicates that peer feedback encourages students deeper thinking, increases their audience awareness, and builds a community for shared learning, and critical elements in writing development.

From a theoretical standpoint, the Skinner (1953) Operant Conditioning Theory and Deci & Ryan (1985) Self-Determination Theory, provide robust theoretical framework for understanding the alternative assessment strategy of peer feedback's impact. The Operant Conditioning Theory explains how constructive peer feedback input acts as positive reinforcement, which increases the likelihood of improved writing behaviors. On the other hand, Self-Determination Theory reveals how alternative assessment strategy of peer feedback

supports learners' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, thereby increasing their intrinsic motivation.

Empirical studies evidence confirms these theoretical claims. According to a study by Zundert et al. (2010) indicates that structure peer feedback improves learners' grammar, vocabulary, coherence, and content development. This development occurs especially when accompanied by training and teacher guidance. Another study by Min (2006) shown that students who engaged in peer feedback produced higher quality revisions and demonstrative improved of writing skills. In the context of Pakistani secondary school level, a study by Fareed et al. (2021) further confirm that peer feedback enhances motivation and nurture writing proficiency, aligning with the global best practices. Moreover, study by Gielen et al. (2010) shows that learners receiving peer feedback perceive it as more descriptive, timely and relatable than teacher comments. This peer exchange increases engagement and makes writing more purposeful. Similarly, a study by Nocol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006), emphasizes that formative assessment strategies deepen learning by involving student in co-construction of knowledge, which is particularly impactful in creative writing contexts. Despite that fact that alternative assessment strategy peer feedback benefits, there is also presents challenges, as a study of Liu and Carless (2006) highlighted, disparities in student abilities can affect feedback quality. Students may lack the guiding and robust training to offer constructive criticism or misinterpret peer comments. Additionally, as Harris (2011) warns, social dynamics such as peer degrading and pressure or fear of negative evaluation can influence the objectivity and honesty of feedback.

Nonetheless, when alternative assessment strategy implemented with structured guidance, rubrics, teacher facilitation, and peer feedback protocols, offers a transformative assessment experience. It not merely develops writing proficiency among the learners but also builds confidence, fosters collaboration, and supports lifelong learning dispositions such as self-regulation and critical inquiry.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

The study "Alternative Assessment in English Language Writing: Secondary Students' Perspectives on the Positive Impact of Peer Feedback, is grounded in two psychological theories; such as Operant Conditioning Theory (OCT) and Self-Determination Theory (SDT). These two frameworks provide a research lens through which analyzes the motivational and behavioral dimensions of peer feedback in language writing.

2.2.1 Operant Conditional Theory (OCT)

B.F. Skinner's theory of Operant Conditioning focuses on the consequences of the learners' behavioral (Skinner, 1953). Within the context of peer feedback in the language writing, positive reinforcement plays a significant role. When students receive constructive peer feedback that recognize their strength or improvements, such comments act as a reinforce, which enhance the likelihood of continued engagement and effort in writing activities. On the other hand, comments that highlight errors in a supportive manner functioning as a form of corrective reinforcement, fostering behavioral modifications in language writing practices.

In alternative assessment, peer feedback portrays an instrumental strategy that conditions students' behavior through cycle of reinforcement. For example, when peer positive comments improve students' writing skills, this reinforcement productive habits such as revision, attention to detail, and clarity of expression. The classroom thus becomes a place where peer interaction improves a learning environment built on continuous performance shaping and responses to feedback. The B.F. Skinners' theory justifies the effectiveness of peer feedback as a tool not only for linguistic improvement but also for behavioral change in the process of language writing engagement (Staddon & Cerutti, 2003).

2.2.2 Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Another framework is Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (1985) complements the behavioral insights of Operant Conditioning Theory by addressing psychological needs underlying motivation. According to Self-Determination Theory, three innate needs such as, autonomy, competence, and relatedness are important for intrinsic motivation and optimal learning (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Peer feedback supports autonomy by involving students in each other's activity evaluation process, further empowering them to take charge of their learning. This strategy improves competence by enabling students to understand language writing standards and evaluate their progress through collaborative input. Lastly, the act of giving and receiving peer feedback increases relatedness, as students form societal and academic connections, establishing a supportive language community (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Similarly, in the context of English language writing, Self-Determination Theory explains the students perceive peer suggestions as impactful, these suggestions nurture a sense of self-effectiveness, ownership and engagement. In contrast to traditional assessment, which is often top to down and summative evaluation. Peer feedback strategy motivates intrinsic motivation and reflective learning, aligning with the core principles of SDT. At the end, together Operant Conditioning Theory OCT and Self-Determination Theory SDT offer a robust framework for understanding peer feedback in alternative assessment settings positively encourages secondary school level students' language writing development and attitudes.

2.3 Synthesis

Both the theories of OCT and SDT offer a comprehensive framework for assessing how and why alternative assessment strategy of peer feedback is effective. OCT explains the behavioral mechanism of the students that reinforce improved their writing abilities, whereas SDT shed light on the intrinsic motivational structures that motivate learners to participate in and benefit from peer evaluation. This theoretical framework positions peer feedback as not merely a dynamic and multidimensional alternative assessment strategy. It aligns with modern principles of formative assessment processes, collaborative learning and learner autonomy, all of which are critical for improving writing proficiency in secondary school level setting.

3.1 Research Methodology

This study employed a quasi-experimental mixed method approach to explore the impact of peer feedback on secondary school students' writing proficiency and motivation. The study grounded in OCT and SDT, the study further employed pre- test and post- test assessment of the students, complemented of a structured questionnaire to gather both qualitative and quantitative data. Moreover, a stratified sampling technique was applied to select 140 from eight sections of the Beaconhouse School System, Islamabad. The intervention involved structured peer feedback sessions between the pre- and post-tests, with student trained to provide constructive commentary. Quantitative data analysis included descriptive statistics and Atkinson's formula to measure the learners' perceptions and improvement. Similarly for qualitative thematic analysis of the study writing samples of the students focused on linguistic elements such as vocabulary, grammar, cohesion, and revision effects. The study has rigorously followed the research ethical consideration to ensure student consent and supportive feedback setting.

4.1 Data Analysis

The data analysis was conducted in three phases: Thematic Analysis of pre- and post-tests of students' writings, descriptive analysis of questionnaire responses, and finally the statistical validation by employing T-tests and Atkinson's formula. The evaluation of both linguistic and motivational improvements sheds light on how alternative assessment strategy

of peer feedback fosters creative writing and metacognitive awareness in a student-centered setting.

4.2 Thematic Analysis of Writing Samples

The qualitative thematic analysis of the study focuses on five key linguistic components.

- Vocabulary
- Grammar
- Figurative Devices
- Cohesion and Coherence
- Revision Effect

4.2.1 Vocabulary Usage

Pre-test writing samples of the students largely featured basic Tier 1 vocabulary usage such as nice, bad, and so on, which indicating the learners' limited lexical variety. The post-test samples, in contrast, shown significant lexical choices improvement with more vivid and context-appropriate Tier 2 and Tier 3 vocabulary words like breathtaking, serene, and so on, suggesting that learners had internalized peer suggestions to enrich their descriptive skills.

4.2.2 Grammar

Pre-test analysis shown mainly simple sentence and fragment sentences are used, whereas post-test analysis revealed a significant marked improvement in students' sentence complexity and grammatical accuracy. Learners used a wide range of complex, compound and conditional sentences in their post-test samples. This shift indicates syntactic maturity and a deeper understanding of grammar conventions facilitated by peer feedback exchange.

4.2.3 Figurative Devices

The pre-test responses of the students lacked of imaginative creation and were devoid of literary devices, the post-test writing samples after effective peer feedback integrated figurative devices such as similes, metaphors, and personifications like;

"His anger erupted like a volcano"

Suggesting increased creative engagement and stylistic awareness in the students creative writing.

4.2.4 Coherence and Cohesion

In the pre-test samples, the student writing shown poor paragraph unity and weak use of transitional devices in their writings. After interactive peer feedback, there was a significant change towards better organization and logical flow has observed, with coherent ideas and appropriate use of linking words to ensure cohesion and coherence.

4.2.5 Revision Effect

Pre-test samples shown clear evidence of revisions based on peer comments, such as corrected sentence structures, improved lexical variety, and enhanced overall narrative quality. Approximately 70% of students integrated peer suggestions into their post-test samples' drafts.

Table 4.1 Final Report Display- Evidence from Thematic Analysis

Theme	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Peer Feedback Impact
Vocabulary	Predominated by Tier 1 and generic vocabulary use	Substantial change to Tier 2 and Tier 3, high-frequency and expressive vocabulary use	Peer feedback motivated lexical variety and contextually nuanced word choices
Grammar	Predominantly simple syntactic structure such as	Increased use of compound complex, conditional and	Peer suggestions encouraged students

	SVO, and minimal variation	abstract nouns are use	to use structural experimentation
Figurative Devices	Pre-test samples largely literal, lack of figurative language use	Rich use of figurative language such as metaphor, simile and personification	Peer suggestions prompted creative stylistic engagement
Coherence and Cohesion	Pre-test data is Fragmented, limited transitions and discourse marker	Logical flow with coherence and cohesion	Peer recommendations led to improved narrative structure, and clearer paragraph unity
Revision Effect	Minimal shift in initial draft; brevity and limited elaboration (average words count 120)	Significant expansion and structuring; average word count 240 with stronger imagery	Overall, 70% of student integrated peer feedback; revision effect deeper metacognitive and imaginative engagement

4.3 Qualitative Analysis

4.3.1 Descriptive Statistics

Questionnaire responses collected from 140 students were evaluated to examine their perceived usefulness and motivational outcomes of alternative assessment strategy of peer feedback.

- 80% of the students agreed that peer interaction improved their creative writings.
- 75% of the students reported that increased motivation to revise their drafts.
- 70% of the students' feedback over teacher only feedback.
- 65% of the students felt confidence in sharing their writing after peer feedback interactive sessions.
- 60% of the students acknowledged lexical variety and grammar improvement due to alternative assessment strategy.

4.3.2 T-Test Analysis

Statistical comparison of pre-test and post-test samples scores using paired and two test samples T-tests demonstrated statistically significant improvement in students' writing proficiency.

Pair T-Tests (Post test and Pre-Test Scores)

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Paired T Test for Post - Pre

Null Hypothesis: difference = 0.05

Alternative Hyp: difference \neq 0.05

Mean 1.9500

Std Error 0.3141

Mean - H0 1.9000

Lower 95% CI 1.2647

Upper 95% CI 2.5353

T 6.05

DF 39
P 0.0000

Cases Included 40 Missing Cases 0

Two-Sample T-Tests (Independent Analysis: Post-test vs. Pre-test)
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Two-Sample T Tests for Post vs Pre

Variable	Mean	N	SD	SE
Post	15.850	40	3.1909	0.5045
Pre	13.900	40	2.8175	0.4455
Difference	1.9500			

Null Hypothesis: difference = 0.05
Alternative Hyp: difference \neq 0.05

Assumption	T	DF	P	95% CI for Difference	
				Lower	Upper
Equal Variances	2.82	78	0.0060	0.6100	3.2900
Unequal Variances	2.82	76.8	0.0061	0.6097	3.2903

Test for Equality of Variances	F	DF	P
	1.28	39,39	0.2203

Cases Included 80 Missing Cases 0

- p-value < 0.05 confirmed a significant improvement in post-test scores, which was not due to chance.
- The effect size substantial, highlighting alternative assessment strategy of peer feedback has a meaningful impact on students' performance.

4.4 Impact on Students' Motivation and Critical Thinking

Peer feedback positively influenced students' intrinsic motivation by fulfilling their psychological needs as defined Deci & Ryan (1985);

- Autonomy: Students had more control over their learning through peer feedback.
- Competence: Students' engagement with peer feedbacks helped them to clarify performance standards and build confidence.
- Relatedness: Collaborative tasks created a sense of classroom community and trust.

Students also reported a significant increased ability to critically analyze texts and offer constructive feedback sessions aligned with Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS).

5.1 Conclusion

This study concludes that peer feedback serves as an effective strategy to increase secondary school level students creative writing proficiency. This alternative assessment strategy not only support students' linguistic development such as vocabulary, grammar and sentence structure and coherence, but also nurture their metacognitive skills, self-efficacy, and intrinsic motivation. By involving students in constructive dialogue and collaborative reflections, peer feedback bridges a significant gap between assessment process and learning. Furthermore, the theoretical underpinnings of OCT and SDT, showing that positive

reinforcement and fulfilment of autonomy, competence and relatedness has a positive contribution to better learning outcomes. This study also highlights the practical benefits of peer feedback in classroom settings, encouraging a prominent change from traditional teacher-centered approach to more formative, students-centered approaches. Finally, in the light of this study results, the research advocates for the integration of structured peer feedback in writing instruction across secondary school study level curricula. These finding further provide a valuable insight to educational stockholders, curriculum developer, and policymaker, by aiming to cultivate more effective and inclusive assessment frameworks that empower learners and elevate their creative writing standards.

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