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AUTHORS: Armagan Çiftci,Berna Çöker

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THE EFFECT OF A PEER FEEDBACK TRAINING PROGRAM ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF WRITING SKILLS

AKRAN DÖNÜT EĞİTİMİ PROGRAMININ YAZMA BECERİLERİNİN GELİŞİMİ ÜZERİNDEKİ ETKİSİ

Armağan ÇİFTÇİ*, Berna ÇÖKER**

ABSTRACT

The studies on writing reveal that applying process oriented writing has a positive and contributive influence on student's writing skill and proficiency. If students do not know how to respond to each other's papers, this method cannot be applied effectively. Considering this, it is believed that students should have a condensed and detailed peer feedback training program. Briefly, the aim of this study is to eliminate possible problems arising from the lack of peer feedback training and to make writing skill an essential part of communication instead of being a tiring and boring process. A two-hour peer feedback training program was conducted for an eight-week period in 2009. Four graduate writing classes consisting of a total of 75 students were selected from the preparatory program at Dokuz Eylül University, School of Foreign Languages. For this study an experimental design consisting of a pre-test/post-test control group was used. Furthermore, in order to obtain the views of the participants about the applied program on peer feedback training, oral questions were asked to the experimental group in group interviews and one-to-one interviews. The results show that training students on peer feedback will have a positive effect on their writing achievement.

Keywords: Process-oriented writing, Peer-feedback, Writing quality

ÖZET

Yazma konusunda yapılan araştırmalar süreç odaklı yazmanın öğrencilerin yazım becerisi ve dil yeterliliği üzerinde olumlu ve yapıcı bir etkisi olduğunu göstermiştir. Öğrencilerin birbirlerinin yazdıklarına nasıl dönüt vereceklerini tam bilmemeleri bu yöntemin verimli bir biçimde uygulanamamasına neden olmaktadır. Buradan yola çıkarak öğrencilerin mutlaka yoğun bir akran dönüt eğitiminden geçmelerinin gerekliliğine inanılmaktadır. Özetle bu araştırmanın amacı süreç odaklı yazma dersinin olmazsa olmaz bölümü olan akran dönütü konusunda öğrencilerin yeterince eğitilmemelerinden kaynaklanan sorunları gidermek ve yazma dersini, çoğu öğrenci ve öğretmenin sıkça dile getirdiği gibi sıkıcı ve yorucu bir çalışma olmaktan çıkartıp iletişimin vazgeçilmez bir aracı haline getirmektir. Bu çalışmada deney grubuna etkin bir akran dönüt eğitimi verilerek yazma dersindeki öğrenci başarısının arttığı ve verdiği dönütlerin daha bilinçli ve katkı sağlayıcı olduğu bilimsel olarak gösterilmeye çalışılmıştır. Araştırma Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi Yabancı Diller Yüksek Okulu'nda ki 4 ayrı lisans sınıfında toplam 75 öğrenciye uygulanmıştır. Akran dönüt eğitimi haftalık 2 saat olmak üzere 8 hafta sürmüştür. Uygulamanın başında ve sonunda ön test-son test başarı sınavı verilmiştir. Ayrıca uygulanan akran dönüt eğitimi ile ilgili deney grubunda ki öğrencilerin görüşlerini almak için yazılı ve sözlü olarak soru sorulmuştur. Elde edilen sonuçlar akran dönüt eğitiminin öğrencilerin yazma becerileri üzerinde olumlu etkisi olduğunu göstermiştir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Süreç odaklı yazma, Akran dönütü, Yazma kalitesi.

*Dr., Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi, Yabancı Diller Yüksekokulu. armagan.ciftci@deu.edu.tr

**Yard.Doç.Dr., Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi, Buca Eğitim Fakültesi, İngilizce Öğretmenliği Bölümü. berna.coker@deu.edu.tr

1. INTRODUCTION

It is well-known in the academic world of language teaching that ‘writing’ is a lengthy process and requires hard work. It is especially more challenging for writers when it is to be in a foreign language. Good writers should write as much as they can but it is important that they should be guided and given feedback by professionals, colleagues, critics or even classmates. While listening helps to improve one’s speaking skills, reading helps to improve one’s writing skills; thus, the more people read the better they write. Because of the multiple-choice testing system in Turkey, students have started to read and write less and they cannot compose effective and persuading texts that reveal their thoughts about the ‘real’ issues of life. So, how can such students write well-organized essays in a foreign language? To do this there should be an effective program which raises their interest and eases the process. There are many approaches to teach writing, mainly the product oriented and process oriented ones. The latter has become more common in most academic environments and the use of peer feedback is the most striking difference between them. However, asking students to give feedback while using checklists might not be enough to gain sufficient writing skills. There are lots of things that can be done during this process and teachers should know these and implement a well-organized training program especially in the ‘peer feedback step’. As Hairston (1982) points out, we cannot teach students to write by looking only at what they have. We must also understand how that product came into being, and why it assumed the form that it did. We have to try to understand what goes on during the act of writing if we want to affect its outcome.

Many students resist writing because they are unable to choose a subject, establish a thesis, discover ways of developing ideas and composing creative sentences with their limited vocabulary and grammar; however, writing is a must for university students who claim to know a second language. At present, both foreign language learners and teachers give great importance to writing since skill in writing becomes a basic necessity for language learners to cope with academic writing tasks and fulfill many individual needs in the target language. These reasons encourage the researchers to study more about writing and its applications like peer feedback activities.

1.1. Literature Review

Generally speaking, many traditional English composition writing classes are still under the effect of a product-oriented approach. However, most of the studies on writing reveal that a process-oriented writing approach has better results on students’ writing abilities and their proficiency in English. Although there are some teachers who use process approach in their classrooms, students are not able to benefit from it. One of the main reasons for this is because peer feedback is not applied efficiently and consciously in the classroom. Peer-feedback has been supported by many theoretical frameworks such as by the Socio-cognitive Approach, Collaborative Learning Theory, Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development and Second Language Acquisition’s inter-actionist theories. Reading their classmates essays and giving

written or oral feedback to them -either negative or positive- helps students both realize their weak sides and develop a natural skill in writing reflections. Furthermore, teachers can do their job more effectively by observing their students in their natural environment, looking for learning opportunities and cleaning the barriers whenever needed because of reading less papers and spending less time and energy.

The process approach is an innovative approach to teaching writing. It brings out the idea that "writing is a process" and that "the writing process is a recursive cognitive activity involving certain universal stages (prewriting, writing, revising)" (Cooper, 1986: 364). In other words, process writing represents a shift in emphasis in teaching writing from the product of writing activities to ways in which text can be developed: from concern with questions such as "What have you written?", "What grade is it worth?", to "How will you write it?" and "How can you improve it?" (Fumeaux, 2000: 1).

Feedback is a fundamental element of a process approach to writing. It can be defined as input from a reader to a writer with the purpose of providing information to the writer for revision. In other words, it is the comments, questions, and suggestions a reader gives a writer to produce 'reader-based prose' as opposed to 'writer-based prose'. Thus, feedback plays a central role in writing development and it is the drive which steers the writer through the process of writing on to the product.

Harmer (2004) defines 'peer feedback' that as a part of the process approach to teaching and is widely used in both LI and L2 contexts as a means to improve writers' drafts and raise awareness of readers' needs. Peer feedback was considered a necessary component in the process writing approach that emerged in the 1970's (e.g. Elbow 1973; Emig 1971). It is also supported by collaborative learning theory, which holds that "learning is a socially constructed activity that takes place through communication with peers" (Bruffee, 1984). Support for peer feedback also comes from Vygotsky's 'Zone of Proximal Development' theory (1978), which holds that the cognitive development of individual results from social interaction in which individuals extend their current competence through the guidance of a more experienced individual, which is also referred to as 'scaffolding'. Peer feedback is also supported by inter actionist theories of SLA, which hold that learners need to be pushed to negotiate meaning to facilitate SLA (e.g. Long & Porter, 1985, Hansen, 2005)

Proponents of peer feedback have made claims about its cognitive, affective, social, and linguistic benefits, most of which have been substantiated by empirical evidence. As cited in (Hansen et al., 2005: 16), peer feedback has been found to help both college (Villamil & de Guerrero, 1996) and secondary (Tsui & Ng, 2000) students obtain more insight into their writing and revision processes, foster a sense of ownership of the text, generate more positive attitudes

toward writing (Min, 2005), enhance audience awareness (Mendonca & Johnson, 1994, Mittan, 1989 and Tsui & Ng, 2000), and facilitate their second language acquisition (Bryd, 1994), and oral fluency development (Mangelsdorf, 1989).

It is obvious that good writing requires revision; writers need to write for a specific audience; writing should involve multiple drafts with intervention response at the various draft stages; peers can provide useful feedback at various levels; training students in peer response leads to better revisions and overall improvements in writing quality; and teacher and peer feedback is best seen as complementary (Chaudron 1984; Zamel 1985; Mendonca & Johnson 1994; Berg 1999).

1.2. The Importance of Peer Feedback

There are many reasons why teachers have chosen to use peer feedback in the ESL writing classroom. First of all peer readers can provide useful feedback. For example, Rollinson (1998) found high levels of valid feedback among his college-level students: 80% of comments were considered valid and only 7% were potentially damaging. Caulk (1994) had similar results: 89% of his intermediate/advanced level FL students made comments he felt were useful, and 60% made suggestions that he himself had not made when looking at the papers. He also found very little bad advice. It has also been shown that peer writers can and do revise effectively on the basis of comments from peer readers. Mendonca & Johnson's (1994) study showed that 53% of revisions made were incorporations of peer comments. Rollinson (1998) found even higher levels of uptake of reader feedback, and 65% of comments were accepted either completely or partially by readers. Finally, it may be that becoming a critical reader of others' writing may make students more critical readers and revisers of their own writing. Students themselves may not only find the peer response experience "beneficial" (Mendonca & Johnson, 1994: 765) and see "numerous advantages" of working in groups (Nelson and Murphy, 1992: 188), but "its social dimension can also enhance the participant's attitudes towards writing" (Chaudron, 1984: 12).

Peer feedback has the potential to be a powerful learning tool and it is claimed to have various benefits, some of which are helping to generate new ideas (Amores, 1997); building a wide sense of audience awareness (Mendonca & Johnson, 1994; Thompson, 2001); building self confidence (Chaudron, 1984); having the opportunity to make active decisions about whether or not to use their peers' comments as opposed to a passive reliance on teachers' feedback (Hyland, 2000); learning to take responsibility in order to make constructive efforts to correct his own mistakes and assess himself (Ndubuisi, 1990); and being exposed to not only different perspectives; but also different writing styles and organizational patterns (Dheram, 1993). Also, the feedback leads to consciousness-raising about the writing process since learners gain awareness of their ineffective or inappropriate writing habits, they realize that different people approach writing in different ways and become conscious of how their linguistic choices affect the identity they project through their writing (Porto, 2001).

“Sense of audience” has become a common term among researchers. Leki (1993:22) says, for example, “The essence of peer response is students' providing other students with feedback on their preliminary drafts so that the student writers may acquire a wider sense of audience and work toward improving their compositions”. Teachers endorse peer response because it develops a better sense of audience, reduces paper grading, exposes students to a variety of writing styles, motivates them to revise, and develops a sense of community.

The literature reveals many other positive effects for peer feedback. Tsui & Ng (2000) noted many advantages which various educators (Chaudron, 1984; Elbow, 1981; Keh, 1990; Nelson & Carson, 1994; White & Arndt, 1991) have claimed for peer feedback, such as:

1. Peer feedback is pitched more at learner's level of development or interest and therefore more informative than teacher feedback.
2. Peer feedback enhances audience awareness and enables the writer to see egocentrism in his or her own writing.
3. Learners' attitudes towards writing can be enhanced with the help of more supportive peers and their apprehension can be lowered.
4. Learners can learn more about writing and revision by reading each other's drafts critically and their awareness of what makes writing successful and effective can be enhanced.
5. Learners are encouraged to assume more responsibility for their writing.

1.3. Drawbacks of peer feedback

Besides the benefits stated above, teachers and some researchers question the value of peer feedback. The first criticism is for the truth-value of peer feedback. As Allei & Connor (1990), Nelson & Murphy (1993), Mangelsdorf (1992), and George (1984) state, students may not regard their peers as qualified enough to comment on their papers. That is, they might distrust and, therefore, underestimate their peers' feedback. Nelson & Carson (1998), Zhang (1995), and Saito (1994) view this as the main reason why students prefer receiving teacher feedback to peer feedback. Another problem with peer feedback is the fact that students from different cultural backgrounds might view peer feedback differently. As Paulus (1999) mentions, if students are defensive, uncooperative, and distrustful of each other, or primarily trying to avoid conflict, little productive work will occur in the classroom.

Saito & Fujita (2004) comment that there is a persistent belief among teachers that students are incapable of rating peers because of their lack of language ability, skill and

experience. Zhang (1995) asserts that less than profitable interactions have been found within peer groups, sometimes because of the participants' lack of trust in the accuracy, sincerity, and specificity of the comments of their peers. Some other examples of these negative results and the reasons why they may have occurred are; some students saw the teacher as the only feedback giver (Zhang, 1995; Sengupta, 1998; Carson & Nelson, 1998); some students suspected the validity of their peer responses due to cultural differences (Zhang, 1995); in other words, different cultural backgrounds might cause conflicts and discomfort in cross-cultural interactions in peer groups (Allaei & Connor, 1990; Carson & Nelson, 1994); some students could not work cooperatively together (Connor & Asenavage, 1994; Amores, 1997); some students felt uncomfortable when making negative comments; they were afraid of making honest and critical comments because they feared such comments might hurt other people's feelings (Allaei & Connor, 1990; Leki, 1990; Mangelsdorf, 1992); some students felt that their limitations in terms of language skills constrained them in making contributions in the peer response process (Allaei & Connor, 1990) and some students questioned the quality of the responses. They felt that their peers offered nonspecific, unhelpful and even incorrect feedback (Allaei & Connor, 1990; Leki, 1990).

Consequently, although first language writing studies have reported that peer response had various advantages, it is still questionable whether second language learners benefit equally from this technique. Those researchers who favor peer feedback maintain that 'second language students could benefit profoundly if teachers implemented the peer feedback procedure carefully and give students substantial training'.

2. METHOD

2.1. Introduction

In our country, studies on peer feedback are very limited and they are mostly about the students in the teaching departments. In this study prep class students from different departments of one of the biggest universities of Turkey were taken into consideration. This research attempts to examine the extent peer feedback training helps to improve the quality of peer feedback and the achievement of students in writing skills. To fulfill this aim, the researcher designed an eight-week peer feedback training program to familiarize students with the process of giving and responding to peer feedback.

2.2. Selection of Subjects

In this research, 75 graduate class students were selected who were at intermediate level in the preparatory program at Dokuz Eylul University, School of Foreign Languages. All subjects

were monolingual speakers of Turkish between the ages 17 and 19. Their placement test scores ranged between 60-69 and they were placed in 'B' level intermediate classes. Two classes of a total of 39 students were selected for the experimental group and two classes of a total of 36 students were selected for the control group. The classes in each group were nearly identical in every way; they were taught and tested by the same lecturers. Pre-study testing verified that there was no meaningful difference in the ability level between the groups. Moreover, it should be noted that none of the students had any experience with peer feedback process during their previous education.

2. 3. The Design of the Study

In this study, pre-test/post-test control grouped experimental design was used. The study was applied for two class hours in a week for an eight-week period in the second term of the academic year 2008-2009. To find the answer to the first research question; "Are there any significant differences between the writing achievement of the students who receive feedback training and those who do not?" the students in both groups were asked to write an essay on 'the problems of the education system in Turkey' as a pre-test and these essays were evaluated by two lecturers considering the criteria in 'The ESL Composition Profile' (Jacobs, H. L., Hartfiel, V. F., Hughey, J. B., & Wormuth, D. R. (1981). The students were not told that they were going to be given the same test at the end of the research process. At the end of the training period, the students were asked to write another essay for the same topic of the pre-test and by using 'The ESL Composition Profile' again; the same two lecturers evaluated the post-test of the students. The researcher tried to find whether there was an apparent change in the experimental group's writing achievement by comparing the results.

To find the answer to the second research question "Are there any significant differences in the quality of the feedback between the students who receive feedback training and those who do not?" the researcher and the second rater used 'The Rating Scale for Students Written Comments' (Zhu, 1995) for the evaluation of the students' feedback.

Furthermore, group interviews and one-to-one interviews were done to get the participants' impressions about the application. These student to student and student to teacher interviews were recorded with the participants' permission and decoded and transcribed. Considering this side of the research, it can be claimed that this research is not only 'qualitative' but also 'quantitative'.

2.2. The Training Program

Paulus (1999: 269) stresses the urgency by saying: "Studies that investigate the role of

training students on peer feedback are indeed urgently needed". Many researchers such as Zhu (1995) and Berg (1999) report positive results of trained peer feedback on student attitudes and communication about writing, revising types and better quality writing. Nelson & Murphy (1993), Stanley (1992), Chenoweth (1987), and Moore (1986) also report that if students are trained on how to give effective feedback and if students are continuously encouraged to trust their peers' feedback, the problems with peer feedback will be lessened.

There are probably as many different ways to conduct peer feedback as there are instructors to conduct it; the question then becomes, what elements of peer feedback must gain pedagogical priority? The key to making peer response a welcome component in writing classrooms lies in teacher planning and student training. Students can be encouraged to learn how to participate in the peer feedback process by designing properly organized classroom activities.

For this study, an 8-week peer feedback training program on how to give and respond to peer-feedback was conducted. In this period, detailed peer feedback training was given to the experimental group while the control group was given only the two pages long peer feedback explanations and activities in their writing course books. The researcher and the second rater were also the lecturers of both control and experimental groups. They provided the students in both groups with peer feedback checklists that included questions on content and organization of the papers. However, more time was spent for the experimental group to understand and practice using checklists effectively. On each week, two class hours were devoted to peer-feedback training program. The lecturers brought some sample student papers written in previous years to the classroom. As a whole class activity students commented on those papers. They were asked to focus on content and organization related errors first and then on language and mechanics related errors. Throughout the study, they also use professionally written examples mainly from their course books and the internet. They discuss the unique qualities of the types of writing students will be expected to do, as well as trying to reach a consensus about what makes the models effective. When students discuss what makes a piece of writing effective, they have a better understanding of how to write a composition of their own which incorporates those priorities.

Then in two-week-long periods the students were asked to write 'informative', 'compare and contrast' and 'cause and effect' type essays according to the applications of the process approach. After each essay, students were grouped in pairs and were asked to provide feedback for their partner's paper. After students provided feedback for each other's paragraphs, conferences were held between the student writer and the reviewer. These discussion sessions helped students to understand their peers' comments more clearly, enable them to ask for clarification about their peers' comments, and defend their paragraphs. Finally, regarding the feedback received from their peers, students revised their first drafts and wrote the second drafts. Actually, the lecturers spent several hours teaching their students how to read a paper for errors. The students were truly helping each other and themselves in eliminating errors from their papers.

Throughout the training program, students also practice how to respond to the comments made by their peers. The lecturers warned that the students should be critical to their peers' comments and should consult to dictionary, course material and their instructor whenever they had doubts about the truth value of their peers' feedback. On the other hand, they wanted the students to concentrate on what they wanted to say, not on what they thought the lecturers wanted them to say. The researcher thought that if they made specific suggestions, some students would follow them without thinking about whether they agreed or not.

To conclude, the aim of this training program was to introduce the peer feedback process to students and to emphasize the importance and advantages of it in addition to familiarizing students with the genre of the student writing, introducing students to the process of giving and responding to peer-feedback, and encouraging students to be collaborators. Throughout the training program, students were encouraged to believe they could trust their peers' comments.

2.3. Data Analysis

The data is analyzed in several steps. Firstly, since drafts were scored by two scorers, the inter-rater reliability (96%) was assessed by using SPSS. Secondly, the scores of the students in the pre-test and the post-test were compared in the control and experimental groups separately in order to analyze the effect of peer feedback training on students' writing achievement. Paired sample t-test was applied to see whether there is a statistically significant difference between the pre-test and the post-test scores' mean. In the third step, 'The Rating Scale for Students Written Comments' (Zhu, 1995) was used for the evaluation of the students' feedback quality. Last, the analysis of the qualitative data collected through written and oral questions about the impressions of the students' on peer feedback training program are given. Following these, the results were displayed in figures in order to demonstrate the findings in the visual form.

3. FINDINGS and RESULTS

3.1. Inter-rater Reliability

Table 1: Inter-rater Reliability by Pearson Correlations Rates

| Correlation | Pre-Test | Post-Test | Groups |
|-----------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------------|
| r 1.rater – 2. rater | .928** | .952** | Experimental |
| r 1.rater – 2. rater | .976** | .957** | Control |

** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

For inter-rater reliability the degree of congruency between raters was computed for both the experimental group and the control group. The results show that there is a high correlation between Rater 1 and Rater 2 for both groups indicating small difference between ratings indicating that similar scores were given by both raters to all participants of experimental and control groups.

3.2. Pre-test and Post-test Group Statistics

Table 2: Pre-test Scores of the Experimental and Control Groups

| Group | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | t | p |
|--------------|----|-------|----------------|-------|------|
| Experimental | 39 | 60.05 | 10.23 | 0.948 | .346 |
| Control | 36 | 62.27 | 9.95 | | |

*p<0.05

It is shown in Table 2 that the difference between the means of pre-test scores of the experimental group and the control group is not significant at the .05 level, indicating that there was no difference between both groups in their level of writing achievement before the application of the peer feedback training program.

Table 3: Post-test Scores of the Experimental and Control Groups

| Group | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | t | p |
|--------------|----|-------|----------------|-------|------|
| Experimental | 39 | 71.24 | 8.92 | 3.129 | .003 |
| Control | 36 | 64.67 | 9.28 | | |

*p<0.05

It is shown in Table 3 that the difference between the means of post-test scores of the experimental group and the control group is significant at the .05 level indicating that there was an apparent difference between both groups in their level of writing achievement after the application of the peer feedback training program. The findings of this research support the claim that the training program applied to experimental group has a positive effect on students writing achievement.' This can also be shown by a figure:

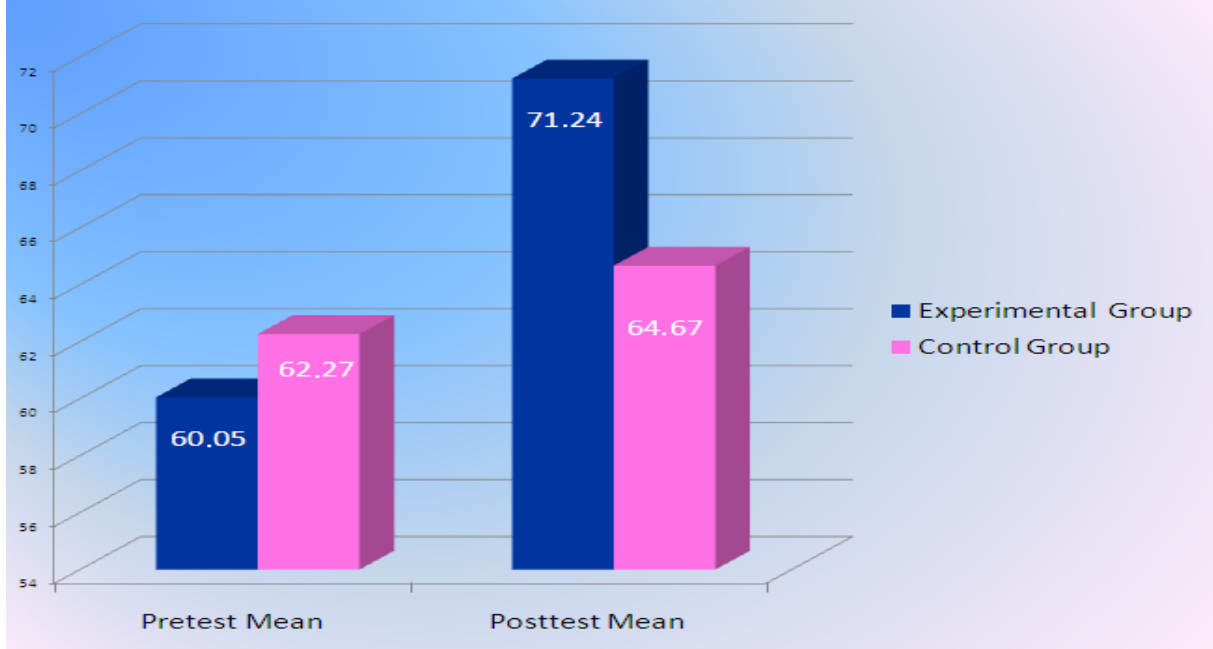


Figure 1: Comparison between the Experimental and Control Groups by Post-test Scores

In this figure too, it is obvious that the experimental group achieved much more than the control group when the change between the pre-test and post-test scores are examined. The achievement level of the experimental group went up to 11.19 % while it did 2.4 % for the control group. The limited increase rate (2.4%) of the control group can be expected after 8 weeks of standard schedule. In this content, it can be asserted that the applications for the experimental group help students to improve their writing skills more.

3.3. Writing Quality

Relevancy of peer feedback was established in the context of the drafts on which the feedback was provided. Totally 1134 comments (702 for experimental group and 432 for control group) in 225 essays (117 for experimental group and 108 for control group) were evaluated according to the criteria in the rating scale. Inter-rater reliability procedures resulted in 98%. To analyze the students' written comments specifically the qualitative data, all the written comments were rated on a three-point scale:

A "3" comment or suggestion is 'relevant and specific'. It (a) correctly identifies the strengths and / or weaknesses in a piece of writing in concrete terms, (b) raises a relevant question about a particular area of writing, or (c) provides correct and clear direction for revision.

A "2" comment or suggestion is ‘relevant but general’. It may correctly identify the strengths and weaknesses in a piece of writing, but fails to address them in concrete, specific terms. It may also raise a relevant but general question about the writing. Furthermore, it may provide correct but nonspecific direction for revision.

A "1" comment is ‘inaccurate or irrelevant’.

The mean scores to the comments in 225 essays by both raters are illustrated below:

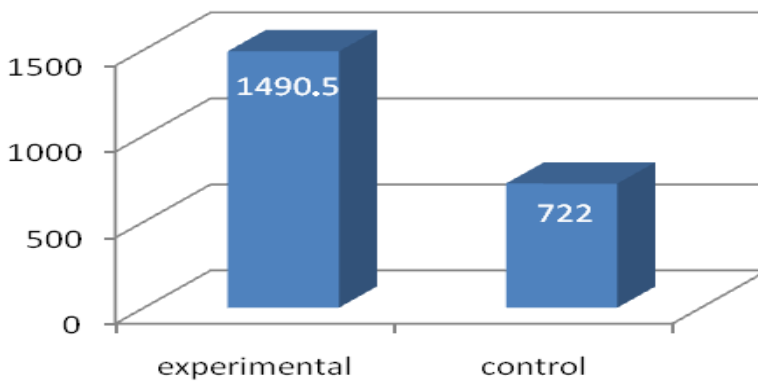


Figure2. Quality Score Means of Peer Feedback Given by the Experimental and Control Groups

Although the number of the essays written by the experimental and control group were similar, the number of the comments and the total scores for those comments were significantly different. 702 comments of the experimental group got about 1490 whereas 432 comments of the control group got only 722 as a total score. This result indicated that the quality of the comments given by the participants in the experimental group were much higher. Thus, it can be claimed that peer feedback training program helps students to give more qualified comments.

4.4. Students' Comments about Peer Feedback Training Program

In order to obtain the views of the participants about the applied program on peer feedback training, five written and oral questions (below) were asked and answers were recorded, transcribed and evaluated.

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Do you think that your training on peer feedback increases the quality of your essays?
2. Do you find the time length and the activities of this training program sufficient?

3. Do you believe that you contribute to your friends' writing by the help of this training program?

4. After this training program, do you think that you get better peer feedback? Can you give an example?

5. Do you have suggestions for writing course and peer feedback training?

After asking written questions to get the impression of the participants about the peer feedback training program, the written comments were coded as positive or negative. The findings are shown in the table and figure below:

Table 4: Students' Comments about Peer Feedback Training Program

| GROUP → Question ↓ | Experimental Group | | Control Group | |
|-----------------------|--------------------|-----------|---------------|-----------|
| | Positive | Negative | Positive | Negative |
| 1 | 30 | 9 | 28 | 8 |
| 2 | 29 | 10 | 16 | 20 |
| 3 | 27 | 12 | 26 | 10 |
| 4 | 29 | 10 | 27 | 9 |
| 5 | 23 | 4 | 20 | 8 |
| TOTAL | 138 | 45 | 117 | 55 |

Specifically, the result for the second question is striking. The participants in control group emphasized that the time length and activities of the peer feedback process were insufficient and they demanded more. Even this result is enough for the researcher to implement a detailed peer feedback training program for the following academic year. Moreover, it seems necessary to remind that the 5th question is asking for students' further comments and suggestions for the peer feedback training program. After evaluating and transcribing written and oral comments of both groups, 5 underlying themes emerged from the 55 student comments received on peer feedback training program. Some of the sample comments for these themes are:

Table 5: Samples of Students' Opinions for Common Themes

| Common Themes | Samples of Students' Opinions |
|------------------------------|--|
| Student-centered Process | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -This is a student-centered process which gives self confidence and makes us more responsible. -We realize our mistakes and do not make them again. -We open new windows according to our friends feedback -I realized that I had written in the same writing style in L1 and L2 for years, but I've started in different writing styles after this program -I liked seeing that my peer revised his paper according to my suggestions -We've become more self-confident with the help of this program. |
| Assessment Skills | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Each paper should be checked by more students. -Our classmates start acting like a teacher. -Sometimes an essay should be checked by all the students to have various comments even for the same mistake. -We've learned how to criticize others |
| Sense of Audience | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -While writing we think twice because we consider whether our readers will understand or whether they find lots of mistakes in our papers. -Considering that my classmate will read my paper before the teacher makes me a more careful writer and I spend much effort while writing. |
| Application Time and Content | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The number of the hours should be increased. -The content and the time limit should be extended. - Peer feedback training program should be given in a separate course. -Peer feedback training program should start earlier and should be more condensed. -Writing course should be at least 6 hours a week because we need to do more practice in foreign language; not to memorize grammar rules |
| Assessment Reliability | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -If my classmates were capable of checking my essays, we wouldn't be in the same classroom! -Only our teacher can give us useful feedback. -Some of my friends are resentful and they sometimes misunderstand their peers' comments. -If my classmates give enough importance to the process, peer feedback will become more useful. |

4. DISCUSSION and CONCLUSION

Overall, this study supports the claim of many researchers (Rollinson, 1998: 26; Caulk, 1994: 184; Mendonca & Johnson's, 1994: 766; Chaudron , 1984: 13; Tsui & Ng, 2000: Elbow, 1981: 64; Keh, 1990: 298; Nelson & Carson, 1994: 124; White & Arndt, 1991: 39) that peer feedback is a valuable form of feedback in L2 writing instruction. One of the purposes of a composition course should be to make students more confident and more independent writers. Peer response groups help to accomplish this purpose. In addition, good responders tend to

become better writers. For most students, as their ability as responders improves, their ability to revise their own compositions also improves because they have a better sense of how to approach the task. However, teachers should not expect all members of response groups to gain the same benefits from the experience. Teachers need to tolerate some partial failures even though they may have worked extensively with individuals trying to improve their performance.

The results also indicate that students are happy with the application of a peer feedback training program. While Leki (1990) was discouraged to find that peer feedback could not have the desired effect on students' writing achievement, the present study found that the students got much higher scores in the post test as a result of the well-organized peer feedback training program. Thus, it can be said that a peer feedback training program has a positive effect on the achievement of writing skills.

Another interesting aspect of the present study was the comparison of the number of peer comments given by the students in the experimental group and control group. Although the numbers of the participants for both groups were similar (39 in the experimental group and 36 in the control group), there were more than 700 comments in the experimental group papers whereas there were about 400 in the control groups papers. Likewise, the total mean score of the experimental group was almost twice as much (1491 to 722).

An issue that deserves attention is that the majority of the students in both groups have positive feelings towards a well-organized peer feedback training program. In answering the research questions, it can be stated that the results of this study have met the researchers' expectations.

5. SUGGESTIONS

It can be concluded that peer feedback activities can be very productive, but many studies show that the productivity does not come without a considerable investment of time and effort in preparing students for pair work. So, both teachers and students have vital roles in the process of providing feedback for better student writers.

Considering the results of the surveys in this area including also this one, teachers **should:**

- a) Create a comfortable environment for students to establish peer trust.**
- b) Provide students with linguistic strategies.**

c) Instruct students in how to ask the right questions.

d) Monitor student and group progress.

While the results of this study would indicate that peer feedback training have positive effects on students writing skills, more research is needed in this field especially in such countries like Turkey in regards to other feedback types and how they should be implemented.

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