English Language & Literature Teaching, Vol. 24, No. 3 Fall 2018

Features and Perception of EFL Students' Feedback on Their Peers' Writing

Kyeong-ok Yoon[*]
(Republic of Korea Air Force Academy)
Jeong-Won Lee[**]
(Chungnam National University)

Yoon, Kyeong-ok & Lee, Jeong-Won (2018). Features and perception of EFL students' feedback on their peers' writing. *English Language & Literature Teaching, 24*(3), 69-87.

The study aims at validating the effectiveness of peer feedback in an EFL writing context. Twenty-two college students participated in the study. On the basis of the analysis of scores and peer feedback of the participants' writing, and their responses to the questionnaire on the benefits and problems of the peer feedback activity, the following outcomes were obtained: 1) compared to the teacher's judgment on students' writings, they assigned significantly higher scores to their peers' writing; 2) their written comments on their peers' writing can be categorized into two features: micro-level comments and broad statements; and 3) they listed substantial benefits and drawbacks of the peer feedback activity. The pedagogical implication is that in order to foster the advantages of the peer feedback activity and overcome its drawbacks in EFL writing class, it is firstly required to help learners clearly understand the role of peer feedback in the revision stage, and then to devote efforts to organize a positive context to implement the activity effectively by establishing proper procedures of the activity and offering systematic practice in pre-training.

[peer feedback/writing instruction/written comments/qualitative study]

I. INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades, constant efforts to find meaningful teaching and learning methods for L2 writing learners have paid off in introducing some key concepts of learner-

[*] First author, [**] Corresponding author

centeredness, process-based learning, and task-based approach including learner autonomy. Especially, self-directed or autonomous learning has widely been acknowledged to allow learners to take active part in writing classes and, a step further, to take the initiative in achieving their goals. That is, autonomous learning leads students to be a responsible learner: a "good language learner" who is using language materials effectively, developing learning strategies actively, and organizing their time carefully (Hedge, 2000).

In accordance with learner autonomy, peer feedback has begun drawing attention as an alternative in L2 writing classes in order to provide feedback to L2 writers who have been used to receiving feedback only from their teachers. Despite a great number of studies on peer feedback to verify its effectiveness in L2 writing, there has not been any solid consensus among researchers on whether it plays a positive or negative role in ESL/EFL learners' writing performance. For instance, Richards (2003) has a positive view on peer feedback and enumerates its benefits, such as improving writing proficiency through students' awareness of good writing, gaining higher socio-affective competence through sharing their ideas, building more equal learning environment, and taking more ownership of their writing. It not only makes the learners active and self-directed but encourages them to be socially interactive through the process of reading their peer's writing product, analyzing it, sharing their ideas, and then revising their own writing based on the feedback. In other words, it may help them become active learners, develop their critical reading ability, set up an authentic context, and reduce teacher's workload (Richards, 2003).

According to Braine (2003), however, it also has negative aspects: task subjectivity, unfair exercise, strange activity, losing face among peers, and unqualified work. Moreover, another aspect to be considered is learners' affective preference for teacher feedback over peer feedback. It has been reported that a considerable number of learners are strongly likely to prefer feedback from their teachers to that from their peers due to uncertainty of their language use (Carson & Nelson, 1996; Richards, 2003; Zhang, 1995) as well as cultural reluctance in criticizing their peers (Richards, 2003). Leki (1990a) shared his view onto the priority given to teacher feedback, stating that learners' poor language proficiency might reduce their feedback merely to micro-level comments of orthographical or local grammatical errors, making them feel thirsty for more macro-level knowledge, which, in turn, make them rely more upon their teachers' comments.

Amid this longstanding controversy over the effectiveness of peer feedback in writing, one more thing worth mentioning is that the studies performed to clarify the issue are generally based on writing outcomes obtained from L1 (e.g., Faigley & Witte, 1982; Sommers, 1980) or from ESL participants (e.g., Berg, 1999; Caulk, 1994; Lundstrom & Baker, 2009; Mendonca & Johnson, 1994; Nelson & Carson, 1998; Paulus, 1999; Zhang, 1995), lacking an effort to investigate the issue in EFL context.

In addition, as many of the studies conducted in an EFL situation are usually based in a China or Hong Kong setting (e.g., Min, 2008; Miao, Badger, & Zhen, 2006; Tsui & Ng, 2000; Zhang & Curry, 2016; Zhao, 2010), more research is needed to provide a clearer direction on peer feedback in the Korean context (Y. Cho, 2005; Park, 2010). In this respect, the current study aims at identifying the features of peer feedback on EFL students' writing and validating its effectiveness through observing how EFL writing learners perceive the peer feedback activity and why they do so, using quantitative and qualitative data. To fulfill this purpose, the following research questions were posed:

1. How do EFL students evaluate their peers' writings in the quantitative and qualitative manner?
2. How do EFL students perceive of the peer-feedback activity in terms of its effectiveness and drawbacks?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Necessity of Feedback in L2 Writing

There has long been no doubt that high-quality writing skill is a crucial component for a modern society, which requires its members to be actively communicative and interactive. Along with the increasing development of IT, they are facing more diverse contexts to express and share their thoughts and ideas, especially in recent times (Yoon, 2015). In other words, by consistently experiencing a lot of information and simultaneously acquiring knowledge through a wide variety of multimedia platforms, they are forced to be placed in an environment that yields what they produced in many ways, including writing skills in particular. In this situation, the improvement of writing skills has become a challenging task not only for L2 learners but for researchers and practitioners. Furthermore, both a variety of approaches and strategies for enhancing L2 learners' writing skills have already been on the rise in the field of English writing instruction. While much time and effort has been put towards instruction, teaching and enhancing EFL learners' writing skills is still a complex issue for those involved.

Writing feedback, whether coming from the teacher, the peer, the computer, or oneself, has been considered a critical factor to play a key role in L2 learners' writing improvement (Arndt, 1993; Leki, 1990b; Richards, 2003). To date, however, its effectiveness as a way of improving their writing ability has still been questioned (K. Cho, 2013; Richards, 2003). In fact, some studies investigating its effectiveness have reported little impact on learners' writing improvement (Cohen, 1987; Leki, 1990b). For

example, Truscott (1996) strongly claimed its uselessness in his case study against grammar correction in L2 writing classes, suggesting more focus on global matters of content and organization (Richards, 2003). On the contrary, other researchers were taking a positive stance on giving feedback, arguing that it made appreciable differences in learners' first and revised drafts, and that learners favored teacher and/or peer comments on their macro and micro writing matters (Fathman & Whalley, 1990; Ferris 1995). Fathman and Whalley (1990) found that their students produced more quality writing tests after receiving feedback on both content and form.

Notwithstanding different voices concerning the effects of feedback in L2 writings what needs to be positively considered in L2 writing is that feedback provides an opportunity for learners to generate and get different points of view, and to raise their awareness of rhetorical and linguistic modes through the interactive process of feedback (Arndt, 1993; Kroll, 2002). Therefore, what matters is not to determine whether feedback will be engaged in EFL writing classes but to study how feedback will be involved. It is generally agreed that the types of feedback—teacher feedback, peer feedback, or self-feedback—and the forms—oral feedback, written commentary, corrective feedback, teacher-student conferencing, etc.—are essentially taken into account. It should surely be remembered that well-provided feedback may produce quite different and good-quality revised writing results, considering the features of feedback and learners' perception of it.

2. The Role of Peer Feedback in EFL Writing

Despite positive assertions of a number of researchers on teacher feedback, there has been continuing inconsistency on its effectiveness. Peer feedback emerged as an alternative to teacher feedback and stood out as a major interest in the feedback discipline (Tsui & Ng, 2000). Quite a few studies have pointed out its effectiveness and drawbacks. Although there are some challenges to implementing peer feedback such as concerns about credibility and validity due to peer's poor L2 proficiency, students' preference of teacher feedback, time constraints, a degree of authority, or lack of comprehensive feedback, the benefits of peer feedback have been emphasized by many researchers.

First, peer feedback is widely practiced in L2 writing settings since it is claimed that it serves to improve learners' writing proficiency by acquiring awareness of good writing through reading their peers' writing outcome. One of the peer-feedback advantages that Richards (2003) suggested is that it encourages learners to develop their critical reading skills, which, in turn, enhances learner's academic performance. Second, it helps them to gain higher socio-affective competence through responding to each other's work. As learners actively participate in the collaborative task, they offer themselves greater learner

autonomy, build their comfortable learning settings, and even reduce apprehension about writing (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Burish, 2000; Richards, 2003; Tsui & Ng, 2000). Additionally, peer feedback has proved to be beneficial in that it encourages learners to take more ownership of their writing and thus helps them to become a successful writer.

In order to verify positive/negative effectiveness of peer feedback, a good many researchers have studied its varied issues: peer feedback training, comparison of teacher/peer feedback, different types of peer feedback, influence of writers' proficiency, the effects of peer comments on ESL/EFL students' revision and outcomes, and the effects of affective factors, just to name a few. Berg (1999), for example, did research on whether peer feedback training had an effect on ESL learners' revision types and writing performance. It was found that peer feedback training positively affected learners' revisions and writing results. As for L2 writing proficiency as another significant factor, Suzuki (2008) suggested that those who have high language proficiency more actively negotiated with their peers and engaged in the peer feedback activities (Mendonca & Johnson, 1994). In addition, giving feedback itself to low proficiency students is likely to play a positive role in enhancing their writing ability (Allen & Mills, 2014; Lundstrom & Baker, 2009). Contrary to high-level learners, it is claimed by Allen and Mills (2014) as well that the students with low language proficiency tend to get more benefits by receiving feedback from high-level peers than those with low language proficiency.

On the other hand, many a researches have reported negative aspects of peer feedback. Specifically, Nelson and Carson (1998) mentioned that the activity of peer response was not so successful in a sociocultural dimension, arguing that peers had a tendency not to give constructively critical comments in an attempt to avoid "a sense of discomfort and uneasiness" generated from assessing their peers (Liu & Sadler, 2003, p. 194). This response was referred to as "cultural reluctance" by Richards' (2003). This phenomenon may be related with an affective factor that peers are likely to maintain a harmonious interpersonal relationship between themselves and their peers and not "lose face."

Another problem with peer comments was identified by Leki (1990a), stating that students' task was limited to surface-level errors—grammar, spelling, or punctuation—not to textual or deeper level structure such as content and organization. Sommers (1980) concludes, based on this concern, that peer comments do not play a positive role in facilitating both a good-quality revision and valid advice. Braine (2003) also presents several reasons for his negative attitude toward peer assessment such as task subjectivity, unfair exercise, strange activity, losing face among peers, and unqualified work. Table 1 shows Richards' (2003, p. 199) summary of potential pros and cons of peer feedback in detail.

TABLE 1

Potential Pros and Cons of Peer Feedback

Advantages	Disadvantages
Active learner participation	Tendency to focus on surface forms
Authentic communicative context	Potential for overly critical comments
Nonjudgmental environment	Cultural reluctance to criticize and judge
Alternative and authentic audience	Students unconvinced of comments' value
Writers gain understanding of reader needs	Weakness of reader's knowledge
Reduced apprehension about writing	Students may not use feedback in revisions
Development of critical reading skills	Students may prefer teacher feedback
Reduces teacher's workload	

A more important point to be highlighted from the previous studies is that many studies and their findings of peer feedback's role were conducted mostly on L1 and/or in ESL situations, and only a few implemented in EFL settings, particularly in Korea. Not only lacking studies in a Korean EFL setting, but there also exists an inconclusive nature of peer feedback, causing hesitation in active incorporation for its potential benefits into EFL writing instruction. For instance, while Choi (2013) and Cho and Sohn (2007) proved the complementarity of peer and teacher feedback, and claimed its usefulness for English writing, Kim's findings (2009) corroborated with Carson & Nelson's research (1996) that the students preferred teacher feedback to peer. As such, there is lack of consensus on the effectiveness of peer feedback even in Korean EFL writing settings.

III. METHOD

1. Participants

Twenty-two college students participated in the study, who enrolled in an *English Writing* class as a compulsory course during the fall semester, 2016. The participants were all sophomores (21 males and 1 female), and they were in the 19 to 23 age range, majoring in Foreign Studies in a college. Of the participants, only two had been exposed to an English-speaking environment. Their TOEIC scores were 829.25 on average, ranging from 710 to 950, approximately an intermediate-high level. Compared to their level of English proficiency, however, it appeared that they had little chance to acquire English writing skills. According to the pre-survey results, 12 students had never studied English writing before this study, and the rest had a bit of experience in writing: at least above one month (9%), about 6 months (18%), and over 1 year (18%). Additionally, those with experience in English writing reported that they learned it from high schools, private

English institutes, private tutors, on-line websites, etc.

2. Instruments

1) Writing Samples

The 22 students wrote 9 times in total by completing the first, second, and final drafts in each of three writing genres: narrative, expository, and argumentative. Among the collected 198 writing samples, only 132 writing samples were evaluated with the aim of measuring the difference between the first and the second drafts, excluding the final one. The topics were "The Most Memorable Trip I Have Ever Had" for narration, "Important Things to Remember When Purchasing a New Smartphone" for expository writing, and "Nowadays smart phones are indispensable in our life. Some people think they bring us much convenience, while others argue they make more trouble. Which view do you agree on? Choose one view and support your argument in English" for argumentation.

While writing the three genres of essays, the students were in a timed-test situation to raise their concentration on the writing tasks. It took one and a half hour for each writing task from generating ideas to revising their draft. Additionally, they were not allowed to use any reference materials, and they were informed that the writing test results would be valued for their final credit.

When completing the first writing task for each genre, the students were provided with a peer review sheet, which was based on five categories of content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics, using a scale of 1 to 5 points, and then asked to assess their peer's writing. They were also guided to write any comments and/or suggestions, if any, on the feedback form. The second draft modified with the feedback from their peers was submitted to assess the development of their writing outcomes.

For the quantitative assessment of the writing samples, the analytical scoring method was adopted to measure the students' writing performance with the criteria of content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics (Jacobs, Zinkgraf, Wormuth, Hartfiel, & Hughey, 1981; J.-W. Lee, 2012). Two raters took part in the scoring procedure: a Canadian native English teacher who has been teaching almost over 20 years in Korea and one of the researchers with approximately 14 years of English teaching experience in colleges in Korea. They discussed the scoring rubric, remembering the importance of maintaining consistency while rating students' writing samples. Inter-rater reliability was calculated using Cronbach alpha: .783 and .789 for first and second narrative writing each; .881 and .757 for the first and second expository writing each; and .783 and .906 for first and second argumentative writing each. The reliability ranged from a moderate-high to a high degree, which safely permits further analysis.

2) Questionnaire

A pre-survey questionnaire was administered before the experiment so as to obtain the participants' background information: age, gender, TOEIC score, English writing experience, etc. And a semi-structured post-survey questionnaire was followed by the writing tasks to examine their perception of the peer feedback activity. The items in the questionnaire were provided in an open-ended format to investigate their thoughts and opinions at a deeper level. The items were as follows: Did the peer feedback activity affect your English writing proficiency?; Did it have positive or negative effects on your English writing?; and if so, why do you think that way?

3. Procedures

In the first class, after a pre-survey questionnaire was conducted, the detailed accounts for what peer feedback is, how to assess peer's writing, and what sorts of writing genre they were going to compose were offered. In addition, each participant was asked to make pair up with one of the students in the class to exchange and share his/her feedback, resulting in eleven groups for peer review. After a preliminary practice of peer feedback with the students' pre-writings, the full-scale experiment of writing with three writing genres—narrative, expository, and argumentative—was conducted in a two-week interval throughout the writing course.

In the part, the students first wrote the narrative, exchanged their drafts with their partners, and then gave their peer feedback, including written feedback with suggestions, if necessary. For the peer feedback, they were given a peer review sheet for structured guidance on what features should be considered while assessing their peers' outcome (Holst, 1993). They were asked to assign scores on five analytic criteria—content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics—on a five-point scale, followed by jotting down written comments or suggestions. Based on the feedback from their peers, they revised their first writing and handed in the second draft to the instructor. After getting the teacher's corrective feedback on their second draft, the students rewrote their writing for the final draft. The finals, however, were excluded from the assessment for the purpose of the study. With the same process as the first genre: narrative, the two writing genres (expository and argumentative) were dealt with during the semester. At the end of the semester, the raters scored the revised second drafts to compare the difference between the students' and the teachers' assessment of the writing outcomes.

Lastly, the participants' perception of the peer feedback activity was examined through a post-survey questionnaire at the end of the course. They responded to the survey in their first language to rule out any undesirable effects caused by the use of English on

advancing their thoughts and opinions about the activity.

4. Data Analysis

For the analysis of the results, first, *t*-tests were conducted based on the mean scores assigned by the two groups on the students' writing to determine how different the students' assessment of their peers' writing from the teachers' assessment of the students' writing. Next, using the content analysis approach to infer meanings from the data, written comments the students made on their peers' essays were collected and reviewed thoroughly to elicit distinctive features that they clearly portrayed, and coded the features according to the categories, grouping similar comments together to provide an overall sense of them (Krippendorf, 2004). Finally, open-ended questionnaire items about the benefits and drawbacks of peer feedback were also analyzed using the content analysis approach to clarify the students' perception of the peer feedback activity.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. EFL Students' Evaluation of Their Peers' Writing

1) Students' assessment of their peers' writing

As one part of the peer feedback process, the students were asked to assign scores on their peers' writings. It would be beneficial to compare their scores and the teachers' to determine how they responded to their peers' writing quantitatively. T-tests were conducted based on the mean scores of the two groups to identify any differences in the scores given by the students and the teachers.

As shown in Table 2, the students' scores were statistically significantly higher than the teachers' at $p < .05$. One possible explanation is that they do not have enough English proficiency to critically assess their peers' writings, which implies that they are not able to assume the role of substitute for the teacher (Rollinson, 2005). It is supported by a participant's articulation in the questionnaire that he needs teacher feedback no matter how beneficial peer feedback is (Mendonça & Johnson, 1994; Zhang, 1995). Another may come from Carson and Nelson's (1996) observation that they don't want to impair the relationship with their peers, which is in line with their comment of withholding critical feedback in the questionnaire.

TABLE 2

Difference Between Teachers' and Students' Assessment of Students' Writings

Genre	Group	*Mean (SD)*	*t*	*p*
Narrative	Teacher	18.80 (2.386)	-5.548	.000
	Student	22.15 (2.777)		
Expository	Teacher	18.80 (2.336)	-6.346	.000
	Student	22.40 (1.789)		
Argumentative	Teacher	19.48 (1.788)	-10.376	.000
	Student	23.30 (1.455)		
Total	Teacher	19.03 (2.174)	-12.045	.000
	Student	22.62 (2.108)		

2) Students' written comments on their peers' writing

For peer feedback, the students were also asked to write comments and/or suggestions that would facilitate revision of the writings. Two distinctive features were observed in their comments: micro-level comments and broad—not specific or concrete—statements.

Most of the comments or suggestions the students made on their peers' writing came up at micro-level features of writing instead of textual or organizational ones (Leki, 1990a; Tsui & Ng, 2000). They must have difficulty in offering "suggestions for the whole piece of writing" (Cault, 1994, p. 184) which will help make major changes in their writing. It is quite understandable that they might not have confidence to make macro-text-related suggestions, considering that it would be a cognitively demanding business to think critically and make comments on macro-level features (Arndt, 1993; Tsui, & Ng, 2000).

While providing written comments on their peers' writings, they frequently mentioned grammar usage of verb tense (S2, S4, S7, S10, S13), articles (S2, S6, S7, S10), prepositions (S4, S9, S10, S13), conjunctions (S6, S16), and singular/plural forms (S2, S4, S7). Moreover, they indicated errors of punctuation marks usage (S2, S20) and capitalization (S6, S10). In other words, their comments remained mostly at the surface level of writing and apparently lacked in-depth suggestions to facilitate successful revision.

When the students made comments related to macro-level features such as content or organization of writing, although such comments were rarely reported, they failed to express their intention in a concrete and comprehensible manner that may well be a key to effective revision (Arndt, 1993; Leki, 1990a; Tsui & Ng, 2000). Suggestions were usually made about vocabulary use, content-related issues, and textual organization.

A variety of vocabulary needs to be used. (S2, S4, S5, S12, S13)

Content is a little bit not concrete. (S13)

The conclusion part needs some revision. (S6)

I couldn't see the big picture of the story. (S11)

I felt the lack of introduction, main body, and conclusion a bit. (S5)

I found an awkward division. (S18)

Their comments were so broad and general—sometimes ambiguous and confusing—that it seemed hard for the writer to decide upon the reader's intention specifically. This may have significant bearing on the writer's misgivings about the credibility and accuracy of the comments (Zhang, 1995), which, in turn, is most likely to dissuade the writer from incorporating the comments into her writing.

2. EFL Writers' Perception of Peer Feedback

1) Effectiveness of peer feedback

A number of research projects have reported the beneficial effects of peer feedback in L1 writing (e.g., Gere & Abbot, 1985; Kroll & Vann, 1981) and L2 writing (Arndt, 1993; S. Cho, 2011; Choi, 2013; Min, 2005; Tsui & Ng, 2000). In the current study performed in the EFL context, the proposition was validated that the students enumerated the benefits of peer feedback they gave and received, even though most of them have never experienced getting feedback from peers according to the survey.

The first and foremost benefit they mentioned was raising awareness of their weaknesses in their writing (Tsui & Ng, 2000). Peer feedback was conceivably conducive to enhancing their awareness of problems in their written work. They confessed that they were not able to find certain errors or mistakes in their writings for themselves, and that reading others' writings helped them notice those problems.

Reading and giving feedback on my partner's writing, I found something wrong in my essay. (S1, S6)

Reading my partner's writing, I could catch some grammatical mistakes I had made that I usually failed to notice when I wrote… (S2)

When I wrote an essay, I could pay attention to every part of it. But I could check what I had missed while reading my partner's essay. (S10)

While reading others' writings, I have come to better notice errors and problems I made in my writing. (S18)

The most frequently reported benefit of peer feedback was that they could learn how to make writing effective and successful while reading their peers' writings, giving feedback on them, and incorporating the feedback received from their peers in their writing. This goes well with the outcome of previous studies (Berg, 1999; Mendonça & Johnson, 1994; Rollinson, 2005; Tsui & Ng, 2000) that peer feedback provides writers with an opportunity to become a critical reader of others' writings, which can help them be more critical of their own writing to become more effective revisers and, finally, lead to overall improvements in their writing quality. The participants articulated what they learned from the peer feedback activity during the multiple drafting procedures, from specific grammar points and mechanics to vocabulary and expressions and even to organization of an essay.

My partner's essay reminded me of grammar and vocabulary usage that I've learned, which helped enhance my writing proficiency and English ability. (S9)

…I learned expressions I do not use often from my peer's writing… (S3)

Through reading others' writing, I can make greater efforts not to commit the same mistakes that I make frequently… (S13, S14)

Reading my friends' essays and giving feedback on them, I think we learn from each other about how to organize thoughts and opinions persuasively in my essay as well as to use vocabulary appropriately and grammar points accurately. (S17)

Another feature they reported has to do with social domain and attitude. One of the participants pointed out that it was effective in his writing procedure to get feedback from his supportive peer, which resulted in positive attitudes toward the peer feedback activity and ultimately EFL writing (Leki, 1990a; Tsui & Ng, 2000). The activity tends to motivate him to keep writing in English with the help of his supportive peer.

My peer was so supportive in his peer feedback that I felt quite comfortable performing writing in English. I think the peer feedback activity is one of the useful techniques to improve English writing ability. (S8)

Now we know for sure that students find the peer feedback activity in writing class beneficial and effective (S. Cho, 2011; Choi, 2013; Min, 2005; Tsui & Ng, 2000), and that its socially supportive feature can foster students' attitudes toward writing (Mendonça & Johnson, 1994). In spite of its potential demerits, peer feedback is undeniably beneficial when the learners are engaged in multiple drafts in ESL (and EFL) writing.

2) Drawbacks of peer feedback

In spite of the beneficial aspects of peer feedback mentioned above, it is also true that students have considerable doubts about its effectiveness concerning quality, accuracy, credibility, time constraints, and cultural consideration to name a few (Carson & Nelson, 1996; Leki, 1990a; Zhang, 1995). Moreover, the doubts appear to be considerably serious enough to challenge the advantages of peer feedback acknowledged in many studies.

The participants of the present study worried most about lack of credibility in their partner's writing proficiency as a capable evaluator. They tend to lack confidence in their peers because they think that their peers' English writing ability is more or less the same as theirs and that the peers are less likely to be knowledgeable enough to critique their writing and provide sensible comments in a clear and comprehensible way (Carson & Nelson, 1996; Leki, 1990a; Tsui & Ng, 2000; Ur, 2012).

I'm not sure the evaluator has enough English ability to provide feedback clearly on my writing. (S7)

It would be difficult for my partner to give me in-depth feedback on my essays since his English proficiency might be low… (S10)

There were several cases that my partner pointed out some things as errors in my paper which, I think, are not errors at all. (S20)

Another serious and frequently reported doubt, which was closely connected to the quality concern of themselves as a judge or evaluator of their peers' writing, arose about accuracy and/or quality of peer feedback. Due to the students' lack of trust in their own qualification, they voiced reasonable doubts about whether the feedback they provided was valid (Leki, 1990a; Tsui & Ng, 2000; Zhang, 1995) and how valuable their feedback was in terms of its level (e.g., macro-/micro-level features, local/global errors) (Cault, 1994; Leki, 1990a; Tsui & Ng, 2000).

Due to lack of my English proficiency, I'm not sure the feedback I gave on my partner's

writing was correct and helpful. So I couldn't actively engage in the feedback-giving activity. (S1)

I had difficulty giving feedback and I wasn't sure the feedback I've received from my peer was valid. (S12)

I wasn't sure the feedback I was giving on my partner's essays was accurate and valuable. It was hard to provide concrete suggestions in the macro level which might facilitate revision. (S8)

My English knowledge is in a quite shallow level that I mostly responded to surface errors in my partner's essays… (S5)

A couple of students mentioned time constraints as one of the problematic aspects of peer feedback (Rollinson, 2005). They might have difficulty finding time to read drafts usually more than once, jotting down notes, and writing comments and suggestions which will assuredly take a considerable amount of time.

It was quite difficult to read and comment on my partner's drafts because I was busy and I didn't have enough time to do the tasks. Especially, I couldn't find time figuring out what the essay was clearly about. (S11)

It took much time to give feedback on my partner's writings. I don't think I gave him useful feedback. (S13)

An interesting response was found that a student worried about claiming a degree of authority, considering the relationship between his peer and himself (Carson & Nelson, 1996). He was reluctant to give critical comments on his peer's writing such as not to spoil their friendship and to maintain group harmony.

I thought that giving any kinds of feedback on my friend's essays might compel him to conform to my style of writing. I think he can have different point of view from mine about what good writing should be. So I have to respect his opinion. That's what a friend has to do. (S19)

V. CONCLUSION

The current study was performed to validate the issue of the effectiveness of peer feedback in an EFL writing context. Based on the analysis of 22 students' quantitative and qualitative data on their peers' writing and their responses to the questionnaire on the effects and problems of the peer feedback activity, the following outcomes were obtained.

First, compared to the teacher's judgment on students' writings, the students assigned significantly higher scores to their peers' writings. This may signify that they are reluctant to assess the writing products critically, probably because of their lack of writing proficiency (Rollinson, 2005) and/or probably because of their desire to maintain group harmony (Carson & Nelson, 1996) judging from the reports they made in the questionnaire.

Next, the students' written comments on their peers' writing can be categorized into two features: micro-level comments and broad statements. As for the first feature, their comments and/or suggestions stayed strictly at the surface level, lacking text-related macro-level ones, which will surely be more beneficial for the improvement of writing quality (Leki, 1990a; Tsui & Ng, 2000). It appears to be an inevitable result, considering their lack of confidence in their English writing proficiency (Rollinson, 2005; Ur, 2012). When it comes to the second feature, their attempt to offer macro-level comments, though they were made fairly rarely, was not successful in that the students failed to get their message across effectively through the comments since they were mostly so broad and general as well as very often ambiguous and confusing. The students may well pay little attention to the comments when they revise their drafts.

Finally, the students listed substantial benefits and drawbacks of peer feedback. They confessed, ironically, that raising awareness of the problems in their writing in the process of giving and receiving feedback offered them a perfect opportunity to be a critical reader, effective reviser, and successful writer (Berg, 1999; Mendonça & Johnson, 1994; Rollinson, 2005; Tsui & Ng, 2000), and to enhance positive attitudes toward writing through socially supportive cooperation with their peers (Mendonça & Johnson, 1994).

The drawbacks the students voiced were mostly about accuracy and/or quality of the comments of their peers and their own triggered by reasonable doubts about their peers' and their writing ability. They articulated serious concerns for their qualification as a feedback provider and the validity and usefulness of their feedback (Cault, 1994; Leki, 1990a; Tsui & Ng, 2000; Ur, 2012). It can be interpreted that they are asking for some opportunity to practice to become more self-reliant writers as well as critical readers. They also worried about time constraints for carrying out the activity faithfully (Rollinson, 2005) and claiming a degree of authority over their peers' writing (Carson & Nelson, 1996).

Though effectiveness of peer feedback in L2 writing has been proven in principle and practice, learners still need substantial and practical assistance to perform this potentially

rewarding activity properly, considering that offering it on their peers' writing is surely a cognitively demanding task. In order to foster the advantages of the peer feedback activity and overcome its drawbacks in an EFL writing class, therefore, it is required firstly to help learners clearly understand the complementary role peer feedback can play in the revision stage, and then to devote efforts to organize a positive context to implement the activity effectively by establishing proper procedures of the activity and offering systematic practice in pre-training (Rollinson, 2005). This will be conducive to lowering their anxiety about writing in English and developing a sense of autonomy over their own writings.

The current study was performed with the limitation of the small sample size because it did not aim to generalize the findings obtained from the participants but to provide authentic and detailed descriptions of what they think of the peer feedback activity undertaken in their English writing class, hoping that this study may be of substantial help to enhance the quality of EFL writing instruction using the peer feedback activity. Accordingly, along with the sample size, learner variables such as age, cultural background, and writing proficiency, and whether and to what extent students' peer feedback is incorporated in revision, which may have a decisive effect on better understanding of the role of peer feedback in EFL writing, need to be taken into account in the future studies so as to ascertain the issues raised in the present study (G. Lee, 2016; Rollinson, 2005).

REFERENCES

Arndt, V. (1993) Response to writing: using feedback to inform the writing process. In M. N. Brock & L. Walters (Eds.), *Teaching composition around the Pacific Rim: Politics and pedagogy* (pp. 90-116). UK: Multilingual Matters.

Berg, E. C. (1999). The effects of trained peer response on ESL students' revision types and writing quality. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 8*(3), 215-241.

Braine, G. (2003). From a Teacher-Centered to a Student-Centered Approach: A study of peer feedback in Hong Kong writing classes, *Journal of Asian Pacific Communications*, 13, 269-288.

Carson, J. G., & Nelson, G. L. (1996). Chinese students' perceptions of ESL peer response group interaction. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 5*(1), 1-19.

Cault, N. (1994). Comparing teacher and student responses to written work. *TESOL Quarterly, 28*(1), 181-188.

Cho, K. (2013). Does peer feedback affect L2 writers' L2 learning, composition skills, metacognitive knowledge, and L2 writing anxiety? *English Teaching, 68*(3), 187-213.

Cho, S. (2011). The effects of giving peer feedback: Case studies of Korean learners of English. *English Language and Linguistics, 21*(2), 41-59.

Cho, Y. (2005). The effectiveness of peer feedback in Korean EFL writing classrooms. *English Language Teaching, 17*(4), 33-59.

Cho, Y. & Sohn, T. (2007). Complementarity of peer and teacher feedback in Korean high school English classes. *English Teaching, 62*(3), 307-329.

Choi, J. (2013). Does peer feedback affect L2 writers' L2 learning, composition skills, metacognitive knowledge, and L2 writing anxiety? *English Teaching, 68*(3), 187-213.

Cohen, A. D. (1987). Student processing of feedback on students' compositions. In A. Wenden & J. Rubin (Eds.), *Learner strategies in language learning* (pp. 57-69). London: Prentice-Hall.

Eksi, G. Y. (2012). Peer review versus teacher feedback in process writing: How effective? *International Journal of Applied Educational Studies, 13*(1), 33-48.

Fathman, A., & Whalley, E. (1990). Teacher response to student writing: focus on form versus content. In B. Kroll (Eds.), *Second language writing: Research insights for the classroom* (pp. 178-190). Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press.

Ferris, D. R. (1995). Student reactions to teacher response in multiple-draft composition classrooms. *TESOL Quarterly, 29*(1) 33-53.

Fuchs, D., Fuchs, L. S., & Burish, P. (2000). Peer-assisted learning strategies: An evidence-based practice to promote reading achievement. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice, 15*(2), 85-91.

Gere, A. R., & Abbot, R. (1985). Talking about writing: The language of writing groups. *Research in the Teaching of Writing, 19*, 362-385.

Hedge, T. (2000). *Teaching and learning in the language classroom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Holst, J. K. (1993). *Writ 101: Writing English*. Wellington, NZ: Victoria University.

Jacobs, H. L., Zinkgraf, S. A., Wormuth, D. R., Hartfiel, V. V., & Hughey, J. B. (1981). ESL composition scoring profile. In S. C. Weigle (Ed.), *Assessing writing* (pp. 108-139). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kim, B. (2009). Examining the effects of trained peer feedback on EFL students' writing. *English Language & Literature Teaching, 15*(2), 151-168.

Krippendorf, K. (2004). *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Kroll, B. (2002). Considerations for teaching an ESL/EFL writing course. In M. Celce-Murcia (Ed.), *Teaching English as a second or foreign language* (3rd ed.) (pp. 219-232). Boston: Heinle & Heinle.

Kroll, B., & Vann, R. (1981). *Exploring speaking-writing relationships: Connections and contrasts*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Lee, G. (2016). Korean college students' reflections on peer reviews and variables involved in the review process. *English Teaching, 71*(1), 97-117.

Lee, J.-W. (2012). The effects of writing task types on EFL students' English writing performance. *English Language Teaching, 24*(1), 75-93.

Leki, I. (1990a). Potential problems with peer responding in ESL writing classes. *CATESOL Journal, 3*, 5-19.

Leki, I. (1990b). Coaching from the margins: Issues in written response. In B. Kroll (Ed.), *Second language writing: Research insights for the classroom* (pp. 57-68). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Liu, J., & Sadler, R. W. (2003). The effect and affect of peer review in electronic versus traditional mode on L2 writing. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes, 2*, 193-227.

Lundstrom, K., & Baker, W. (2009). To give is better than to receive: The benefits of peer review to the reviewer's own writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 18, 30-43.

Mendonça, C. O., & Johnson, K. E. (1994). Peer review negotiations: Revision activities in ESL writing instruction. *TESOL Quarterly, 28*, 745-769.

Miao, Y., Badger, R., & Zhen, Y. (2006). A comparative study of peer and teacher feedback in a Chinese EFL writing class. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 15*(3), 179-200.

Min, H.-T. (2005). Training students to become successful peer reviewers. *System, 33*(2), 293-308.

Min, H.-T. (2008). Reviewer stances and writer perceptions in EFL peer review training. *English for Specific Purposes, 27*(3), 285-305.

Nelson, G. L., & Carson, J. G. (1998). ESL students' perceptions of effectiveness in peer response groups. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 7*, 113-131.

Park, E. (2010). Korean university students' attitudes towards peer review in EFL writing. *Modern Studies in English Language & Literature, 54*(2), 297-316.

Paulus, T. M. (1999). The effect of peer and teacher feedback on student writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 8*(3), 265-289.

Richards, J. (2003). *Second language writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rollinson, P. (2005). Using peer feedback in the ESL writing class. *ELT Journal, 59*(1), 23-30.

Sommers, N. (1980). Revision strategies of student writers and experienced adult writers. *College Composition and Communication, 31*(4), 378-387.

Suzuki, M. (2008). Japanese learners' self-revisions and peer revisions of their written compositions in English. *TESOL Quarterly, 2*, 209-233.

Truscott, J. (1996). The case against grammar correction in L2 writing classes. *Language Learning, 46*, 327-369.

Tsui, A., & Ng, M. (2000). Do secondary L2 writers benefit from peer comments? *Journal of Second Language Writing, 9*(2), 147-170.

Ur, P. (2012). *A course in English language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Yoon, K.-o. (2015). Effects of prompts on EFL students' English writing performance based on their writing proficiency. *Journal of the Korea English Education Society*, *14*(4), 47-65.

Zhao, H. (2010). Investigating learners' use and understanding of peer and teacher feedback on writing: A comparative study in a Chinese English writing classroom. *Assessing Writing*, *15*, 3-17.

Zhang, L. J., & Curry, M. J. (2016). Understanding the role of learners with low English language proficiency in peer feedback of second language writing. *TESOL Quarterly*, *50*(2), 483-494.

Zhang, S. (1995). Reexamining the affective advantage of peer feedback in the ESL writing class. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, *4*(3), 209-222.

Examples in: English
Applicable language: English
Applicable Levels: Adolescents and College

Kyeong-ok Yoon
Dept. of Foreign Studies (English Education)
Republic of Korea Air Force Academy
28187 Saseoham 335-1, Namil-myeon, Sangdang-gu
Cheongju, Chungbuk, Korea
Email: yk8302@hanmail.net

Jeong-Won Lee
Dept. of English Education
Chungnam National University
34134 Daehang-no 99, Yuseong-gu
Daejeon, Korea
Email: jeongwon@cnu.ac.kr

Received in July 13th, 2018
Reviewed in August 24th, 2018
Revised version received in September 5th, 2018