

## **Online Vs Face-to-Face Peer-Editing: The Effect of Each Mode in Developing the Writing Skills of Egyptian College Students**

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### **Abstract**

This paper compares between face-to-face and online peer-editing to detect which mode is more effective in developing the writing skills of Egyptian public university students. To carry out this study, thirty-four third year students from the English department in the faculty of Arts, Ain Shams University volunteered to participate. They were divided into two groups. The first was the control group which consisted of seventeen students who commented on their peers' papers in the classroom while the second was the experimental group which incorporated the same number of students but edited online. Both groups were trained to comment correctly using the assigned mode. Moreover, a detailed compiled rubric was distributed to help them. The study lasted for one semester and each session was 90 minutes long. Students were asked to write 4 essays-with 2 drafts for each- throughout the semester. Afterwards, the first and final drafts of each essay were collected and graded. Finally, the differences between the drafts of each essay in both groups are to be compared through independent T-tests to detect which mode helped in improving the students' writing skills more. Results were statistically insignificant, meaning that both groups developed equally. This study is short-termed and has some limitations but it highlights the fact that online peer editing is beneficial. Future research studies should avoid such limitations and focus more on the online mode being not introduced in Egyptian public universities before.

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## مقارنة بين مراجعة الزملاء للمقال وجها لوجه و على الإنترنت :فاعلية كل من الطريقتين فى تنمية مهارات الكتابة لدى طلاب الجامعة المصريين

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### ملخص

يقارن هذا البحث بين أسلوب التحرير وجها لوجه وتحرير الأقران من خلال الإنترنت، وذلك لمعرفة أي الأسلوبين أكثر فاعلية في تطوير مهارات الكتابة لدى طلاب الجامعات الحكومية المصرية. تطوع ٣٤ طالب بالسنة الثالثة بكلية الآداب، قسم اللغة الإنجليزية، جامعة عين شمس للمشاركة في إتمام هذا البحث. تم تقسيم المتطوعين الى مجموعتين، المجموعة الأولى وهي المجموعة الضابطة، وتتكون من ١٧ طالب قاموا بالتعليق على أبحاث أقرانهم في الفصل الدراسي بينما المجموعة الثانية هي المجموعة التجريبية، وتتكون من نفس العدد من الطلبة و لكنهم قاموا بالتحرير من خلال الإنترنت. كلتا المجموعتين تم تدريبها لتعلق بطريقة صحيحة باستخدام الطريقة المحددة. بالإضافة إلى ذلك تم توزيع مجموعة من المبادئ المفصلة لمساعدتهم. امتد البحث لمدة فصل دراسي واحد ومدة المحاضرة 90 دقيقة. تم سؤال الطلبة أن يقوموا بكتابة أربع مقالات بمسودتين لكل مقالة منهم خلال الفصل الدراسي. بعد ذلك، تم جمع المسودة الأولى والمسودة الأخيرة لكل مقال في كلتا المجموعتين وإعطائها درجة. في نهاية البحث، تمت المقارنة بين الاختلافات الموجودة بين المسودتين من خلال اختبار "T" المستقل، وذلك لاكتشاف أي طريقة ساعدت أكثر في تحسين مهارات الكتابة لدى الطلبة. النتائج كانت عديمة الأهمية إحصائياً، بمعنى أن تطور كلتا المجموعتين جاء متساوياً. هذه الدراسة قصيرة الأمد وبها بعض القيود ولكنها تسلط الضوء على أن تحرير الأقران عن طريق الإنترنت مفيدة. يجب أن يتجنب البحث المستقبلي تلك القيود، ويركز أكثر على أسلوب التحرير من خلال الإنترنت والذي لم يتم طرحه في الجامعات الحكومية المصرية من قبل.

## **Introduction**

The idea of “peer-assessment” was the main topic of many researches since the 1960’s. Researchers had a growing interest in the use of alternative assessments (other than teacher assessments) and thus many resource books and a collection of research papers in the field of foreign and second language learning were published ([O'Malley and Valdez Pierce, 1996; Jacobs, Curtis, Braine, Huang, 1998; Matsuno, 2009]). This interest arose from the fact that correcting students' assignments became a burden on teachers. “Peer-editing”- referred to as “peer feedback”, “peer review”, “peer evaluation”, or “peer response”- which is considered part of the greater field of “peer- assessment” became the main concern of researchers to see its effect on the development of the students' writing skills. (Both concepts will be defined later.)

There has been a great deal of discussion about the value of peer editing in writing classes. Amores (1997) said that receiving negative comments may produce counter- productive responses on behalf of the writer-student as he/she feels a student of the same status is correcting for him/her. On the other hand, the results of a number of research studies on peer involvement in classrooms proved that peer editing/feedback is challenging, useful and valuable (Rothschild and Klingenberg, 1990; Shalaby, 1994).

Since peer-editing proved to be beneficial, researchers began to question its usefulness in different modes of interaction other than the traditional mode or the face-to-face one. More recently, with the evolution of the Internet and the Web, researchers have been investigating peer feedback through technological modes like using the internet i.e. using online peer feedback which is commonly referred to as electronic feedback or e-feedback. Thus the effect of e-feedback on the students or the participants and their written assignments has been examined.

Results of such studies suggested that electronic peer feedback proved to be effective as well. Tuzi (2001) stated that electronic feedback has a positive impact on second language writers in terms of the quality of their revisions and their involvement in the writing process. In their study, Guardado and Shi (2007) showed that students who performed in online peer assessment displayed some important

cognitive skills such as critical thinking and monitoring. Students perceived it as an effective learning process and an incentive to learn. Pol, Berg, Admiraal and Simons (2008) stated that online peer-editing saves time and effort.

Hattie and Timperley (2007) concluded that still surprisingly few studies have investigated the impact of “peer feedback”, either face-to-face or online, on learning and achievements. Due to this reason, in this study, I attempt to detect the effect of e-peer feedback on the development of the students’ writing and to see how this lies in comparison with the traditional (face-to-face) peer feedback. With the experience of the large number of students at Ain Shams University, I am trying to deal with this problem by using modern methods of teaching. This is an attempt to increase students' writing abilities as well as to increase their motivation as most of their generation enjoys online interaction.

#### **Definitions of Constructs**

**Peer assessment** is defined as “an arrangement in which individuals consider the amount, level, value, worth, quality, or success of the products or outcomes of learning of peers of similar status”(Topping, 1998, p.250). Another definition is "an arrangement for learners and/or workers to consider and specify the level, value, or quality of a product or performance of other equal status learners and/or workers" (Topping, 2003, p.65).

**Peer-editing** is defined as an activity in which "students learn to describe the organizational structure of a peer's paper, paraphrase it, and comment both on what seems well done and what the author might do to improve the work" (Bruffee, 1984, p.637-638). Peer-editing, thus, is part of the greater field of "peer assessment." Hafernik, 1983, simply defines it as “students’ reading and commenting on classmates’ papers” (p.48). It is worth mentioning that peer editing is also referred to as peer-review, peer-evaluation, and peer-feedback (Mangelsdorf, 1992).

**Electronic-feedback or (e-feedback)** according to (Tuzi, 2004, p.217) is “feedback in digital, written form and transmitted via the web- transfers the concepts of oral response into the electronic area”.

## **Review of Related Research**

### **1. Studies on the effectiveness of face to face peer editing/feedback**

Researchers generally agree that peer editing is beneficial. They supported this by stating that it is an essential part of the writing process (Falchikov, 1986; Kroll, 2003). It helps students improve their writing as it involves them directly in learning and promotes personal responsibility. It makes the students part of the whole process of writing, revision and editing and thus promotes self-awareness. They also found that it increases responsibility for learning, analyzing, monitoring and getting engaged in the learning community. According to Falchichov (1986), students found it both challenging and helpful. In a similar vein, Shalaby (1994), reporting on the efficiency of face to face peer revision in university composition classes states that students found it effective. Students reported that their colleagues did provide them with useful input and revising the essays of their colleagues made them more aware of their own mistakes. In addition to the previous, Topping (1998) said that teachers found peer assessment beneficial in terms of developing student's higher level and cognitive thinking. Moreover, he said that working with peers in the classroom is a critical means of promoting learning. Topping (1998) provided an overview of past studies of peer assessment and found it to be a reliable and valid evaluation method. Finally, Berg (1999) reported that when students are trained, they are able to give advice and point out problems with content and rhetoric.

### **2. Studies on the benefit of electronic peer-editing**

Researchers have pointed out the advantages of online peer-editing. For example, Warschauer (1996) found that the online mode resulted in more conversation in comparison to the face-to-face one as the less vocal students seemed to participate more. He reported that the participants in his study expressed their opinions more in electronic communication and it also resulted in using more complex sentence structures. Liu and Sadler (2003) said that it extends the interaction possibilities upon the classroom walls as it enables participants to collaborate outside the classroom. They added that online feedback helps in producing more comments without being

hindered by space. They also mentioned that a student doesn't have to consult outside resources; instead, he/she just has to right-click on the mouse to check the alternatives. Finally, Laura Macleod (1999) and Tuzi (2004) summarize and highlight several important characteristics about e-feedback. First, it helps students to be more honest in responding because they edit without facing the writers. Second, the reviewers feel more comfortable when they state their true thoughts. Third, e-feedback had a great impact on revisions at the clause, sentence, and paragraph levels. In the end, it helps the writer student to focus on the strengths and weaknesses of his writings and finally it encourages students to re-think their paper and revise more.

### **3. Studies comparing between both modes**

Studies that compared the two modes of interaction and their effects in developing students' writing skills are only a few. For example, Waraschauer (1996) and Braine (1997) compared between the online and the face-to-face peer editing to point out which of the two modes constructed more participation of the students. They also questioned whether the mode that generated more participation would benefit the students more. Results were not similar in both studies, because as Warashauer found that the online mode was better than the traditional one in that it led to more student participation, Braine showed that the online mode helped the students in developing their writing quality and produced more peer feedback and at the same time the traditional mode helped in a higher improvement in the students' drafts. According to Braine, both modes were equally important. DiGiovanni and Nagaswami (2001) questioned whether online peer review could replace face-to-face peer review while Liu and Sadler (2003) questioned whether the differences between the two modes will affect the nature of comments and have an impact on revision. The results were also in each other's way. Although Braine suggested that online peer feedback can replace the face-to-face one, DiGiovanni and Nagaswami suggested that both modes were equally important as each mode helps the students develop in a certain skill.

#### **The Need for the Present Study**

Since peer-feedback proved to be beneficial (Shalaby, 1994; Paulus, 1999), and with the widespread usage of the internet in almost every field, this study is needed as it investigates using the online mode

in English writing classrooms, and sees its effect on developing the writing abilities of public university students. The study derives its importance from comparing the traditional peer-editing with electronic peer-editing in developing the students' writing skills. Many researchers have investigated the effect of the face-to-face peer feedback on students' written work; however, not many have examined the effect of online peer feedback. Meanwhile, a very few number of studies had compared the two modes together. At the same time, none of these researchers applied this comparison upon students of public universities in Egypt. This study, however, specially focuses on Egyptian college students, in addition to investigating how both modes affect their writing skills.

### **Research Questions**

This paper addresses one major question:

Which mode of peer- editing (electronic/online or face-to-face) is more effective in enhancing/developing the writing skills of Egyptian university students?

### **Methodology**

#### **Participants in the study**

The participants in this study are 34 ESL (English as a second language) third year students studying in the Department of English-Ain Shams University. They were from intermediate and high proficiency levels. They were divided into:

- 1- The control group: 17 students who used the traditional or face-to-face mode i.e. the students will exchange papers in class in order to edit their colleagues' papers and give their feedback.
- 2- The experimental group: 17 students who used the online or electronic mode i.e. the students will exchange papers online, gave their e-feedback and sent them via mail to be revised by the author.

#### **The control group**

The students in the control group were asked to attend every week. In the first week, they listened to the explanation of the first type of essay, and were asked to write an essay about a specific topic at home and come the following week ready to exchange papers and peer-edit using the compiled rubric. The editor was asked to write his comments on the same sheet to be considered by the author. Because

not having enough space to write the editor's comments in the paper was one of the cons of face-to-face peer editing as Liu and Sadler (2003) mentioned, it was allowed to write extra comments in the rubric where the researcher has left enough space for commenting. The rubric was then stapled with the first draft. After that, the author was asked to write a final draft and bring it the following class to be corrected and graded by me and another grader. This process was repeated 4 times, three times for each essay, throughout 12 weeks. It was also stressed upon that every couple would be changed with every peer-editing session; this was done to make sure that the students with the intermediate proficiency level would edit for the students with high proficiency level and vice versa.

### **The Experimental/Treatment group**

I developed a database web-site-specially designed for writing and responding- to host all the essays and responses of the students who belonged to the experimental group. Students wrote their essays and posted them directly on this web-site so that the participants could read, respond, and give their feedback easily. Each student had a user name and a password to allow him/her to log onto the web-site. Unlike the control group, the participants of the experimental group were asked to attend in class every other week. In the first week, they attended to listen to the explanation of the essay they were asked to write a draft about. The following week they weren't supposed to attend in class but were told to post their drafts online. There was a deadline for the students to post their first drafts and a maximum of six days to peer-edit and finally post their final drafts online. The students had the option of revising their peers' papers online or they could download the essays, revise them, and then re-post them. Throughout the semester, they wrote 4 different kinds of essays just as what the control group did. All the essays were suggested by me and the students had to write about them. Finally, the drafts were printed out and graded by 2 graders (a grader and me). Both groups were given the same rubric for peer revision as a guarantee that the results are firmly based.

### **Data analysis**

Throughout the semester, each student wrote 4 assignments, 2



drafts for each. The researcher's role was to detect the correctness of the feedback and how students responded to it. I investigated the development of the students' written work by analyzing it. The analysis focused on the development of their writing skills and abilities. Each first and final draft of the 4 essays written by the students in both groups will be graded out of twenty. Through a series of independent T-tests, tests which compare between two means, the difference between the grade of the final and the first draft of each essay in one group was drawn, and compared to the difference of those in the other group. Through this comparison, it was detected whether the control group or the experimental one developed more, performed better and got better grades. In addition to that, the difference between the grades of the final drafts of the fourth essay and the final drafts of the first essay in one group was detected and compared with that of the other group. This comparison showed which of the two modes helped in better achievement of writing skills of the students belonging to a certain group.

### **Discussion of Argument**

After viewing the literature related to the two modes of peer-editing, a gap is detected. Although traditional peer-editing proved to be effective in essay writing classrooms, the idea of online peer-editing has not been investigated by many researchers. Therefore, this study fills in this gap by focusing on online peer-editing and how it affects the improvement of the students' written essays. The study also compares between online and traditional peer-editing and tries to conclude which mode helps students more in improving their writing skills and in becoming better writers. Consequently, the means of the first and the final drafts' grades of the essays in both groups are detected, and then the difference between the final and the first drafts of each essay in one group is compared with those in the other group to be able to know which group outperformed the other. Another way of realizing the better group is comparing the means of the difference between the final drafts of the fourth essay and the final drafts of the first essay in the two groups. This is mentioned in details in the following section.

**Results and Discussion**

As mentioned earlier, to be able to detect which group performed better and was able to develop their writing skills more, the differences between the grades of the final and the first drafts of each essay in one group were drawn, and compared to the differences of those in the other group. To have this comparison, it was important to calculate the means and standard deviations and then compare the two groups together.

Table 1

The means and standard deviations of the first drafts, final drafts and differences of both drafts of the 4 essays done by the control (face-to-face) group

Sd	Means	1 <sup>st</sup> essay			2 <sup>nd</sup> essay			3 <sup>rd</sup> essay			4 <sup>th</sup> essay		
		First draft	Final draft	Difference	First draft	Final draft	Difference	First draft	Final draft	Difference	First draft	Final draft	Difference
1.833	10.882												
1.801	12.647												
0.752	1.765												
2.062	11.00												
2.267	12.471												
0.874	1.471												
1.693	11.353												
2.00	13.0												
0.931	1.647												
1.691	10.882												
1.908	12.529												
1.367	1.647												

Table 2

The means and standard deviations of the first drafts, final drafts and differences of both drafts of the 4 essays done by the experimental (online) group

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Sd	1 <sup>st</sup> essay			2 <sup>nd</sup> essay			3 <sup>rd</sup> essay			4 <sup>th</sup> essay		
	First draft	Final draft	Difference	First draft	Final draft	Difference	First draft	Final draft	Difference	First draft	Final draft	Difference
12.705	10.235	12.353	2.118	10.824	12.353	1.529	11.706	12.647	0.941	12.118	13.176	1.059
1.166				2.580			2.733		1.088	1.965		
0.514												
2.621												
1.741												
0.899												

In order to check which of the two groups made a better progress through the mode used, it was essential to compare the means of the differences calculated out of each essay in both groups. This means that the average of the difference between the 2 drafts of each essay in one group will be compared with its correspondent in the other group resulting in 4 T-tests.

Table 3  
T-test scores

	1 <sup>st</sup> essay		2 <sup>nd</sup> essay		3 <sup>rd</sup> essay		4 <sup>th</sup> essay	
	Face-to-face	Online	Face-to-face	Online	Face-to-face	Online	Face-to-face	Online
Means	1.765	2.118	1.471	1.529	1.647	0.941	1.647	1.059
SD	0.752	1.166	0.874	0.514	0.931	1.088	1.367	0.899
t-test score	-1.0648		-0.2357		1.8065		1.8065	
P value	P= 0.3028		P= 0.8167		P=0.0897		P= 0.1978	

\* p is significant when  $p < 0.05$

It is clear from table 3 that both groups did a better job and progressed when peer-editing was involved in revising their first drafts and writing their final ones. At the same time, the table shows that the progress (shown through the means) in each essay in both groups was nearly the same. That is, both groups progressed equally. In the four essays, the p value was smaller than 0.05 and thus the previous analysis showed clearly that there is no significant difference in the progress made by the traditional group and the face to face one.

In order to check the results, it was essential to compare the progress made by the students, starting with the final draft of the first essay and ending with the final draft of the fourth essay, in the 2 groups. To be able to draw this comparison, it was important to calculate the difference of grades between the final draft of the fourth assignment and the final draft of the first assignment in the online and the traditional groups along with calculating their means and standard deviations. This is illustrated in the following table.

Table 4  
Means, standard deviations

	Face to face group			Online group		
	Final draft	Final draft (1st)	Difference	Final draft	Final draft (1st)	Difference
Means	12.592	12.647	0.11	13.176	12.353	0.8235
Sd	1.908	1.801	2.525	1.797	3.117	2.856

Finally, a T-test comparing between both means would identify which group performed better than the other. This is clear in the following table.

Table 5

T- test score and p value

	Face to face group	Online group
	Difference	Difference
Means	0.11	0.8235
T-test score	-0.8832	
P value	0.3902	

\*p is significant when  $p < 0.05$

It is clear that there was no significant difference between the progress done by the traditional group and the online one ( $p = 0.3902$ ). This means that neither of the two groups outperformed the other and in this study the change of the mode didn't result in having one group progressing more than the other. This result just supports what had been proven before when the development through the drafts of a single essay was compared in both groups.

## Conclusion

The findings suggest that there was not a significant difference between the development detected in the students' written essays in both groups. When the means were compared in both groups, the outcome was similar. In other words, students in both groups developed and progressed equally. This suggests that both modes in this study were helpful to the students but at the same time one didn't outperform the other and consequently one group did not develop or progress more than the other.

It has to be mentioned that some limitations and some extraneous variables might have affected the results of this study, so these ideas will be discussed in the following two sections respectively.

## Limitations of the Study

### 1. Number of participants

The number of the participants in this study is 34 students, 17 in each group. This is considered a small number and it is suggested that if the number of the students increased, the results could differ. That is to say that if the number of students was more, the results

could be statistically significant.

## **2. Duration of the study**

The study is a cross-sectional one. The duration of the study was fairly short; it extended for one semester long which consisted of 12 weeks. Thus, further studies could be longitudinal ones.

### **Some Extraneous Factors**

#### **1. Motivation**

The participants of this study were volunteer students. They were not granted any extra marks than those who did not participate. Were they given extra marks, results would have differed.

#### **2. End-of-term exams**

One of the most important factors that seriously affected the results was the end-of-term exams. Although only a few students in the experimental group commented that they didn't have time to post edited final drafts online because they were engaged studying for final exams, it was clear that the majority of the students in the online group posted the final drafts of the last 2 essays online without implementing most of the comments written by their peers regardless of what the comments were. Of course, this affected the results.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Future research is needed to either support or refute the findings of this study. There is a need to carry out more studies which compare between the online and the face-to-face modes of interaction and detect their effects on the development of the writing skills and the writing quality of Egyptian students in public universities. These studies should be extended longitudinally, and with a larger sample.

In the end, "peer-editing" is considered an important topic for both teachers and students. Therefore, researches investigating its different modes and their effects are still needed. Although the present study is short-termed and has some limitations, yet it drew the attention to the fact that online peer review is as at least important as the face-to-face one. It also highlights the importance that the online mode should be introduced in Egyptian public universities, and that comparisons between the two modes of interaction, and their effects on written essays should be applied more in the future.

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