

Peer Feedback in ESL Writing: A Boon or a Bane?

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Peer feedback is widely recognized as an effective strategy in producing a piece of writing. Though peer feedback plays a pivotal role in the writing process, students from secondary and tertiary level educational institutions in Sri Lanka rarely use/ have been trained to use peer feedback in ESL Writing. In such a context, the purpose of conducting this research study was to uncover student and teacher perceptions of using peer feedback in the writing process. Approximately one hundred students enrolled in an English as a Second Language (ESL) Program offered by a Sri Lankan state university and four ELT professionals responsible for teaching these students participated in the research project. As part of the study, the students completed a collaborative writing activity and revised their pieces of writing based on peer feedback. A questionnaire survey was then administered to explore student perspectives regarding the use of peer feedback whereas a focus-group interview was conducted to uncover teacher perceptions of peer feedback. Classroom observations and pieces of writing revised by randomly selected groups of students based on peer feedback forms were also employed as part of the data collection procedure. According to the findings, most of the student respondents believe that peer feedback is beneficial for writers in accomplishing what they wish to accomplish as writers. An analysis of the revised pieces of writing associated with the said peer feedback forms also testifies to the crucial role played by peer feedback in the writing process. Additionally, the teachers who participated in the focus-group interview unanimously agreed on the positive aspects of using peer feedback in teaching ESL Writing. Classroom observations further helped strengthen the beliefs of the research participants regarding peer feedback. The results provide implications for ELT professionals involved in administering ESL Programs, designing curricula, & preparing lesson material.

Keywords: ESL Writing, Peer Feedback, ESL Students, ELT Professionals