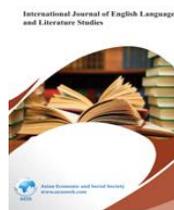




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### ON THE EFFECTS OF PEER FEEDBACK AND TEACHER FEEDBACK ON IRANIAN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS, WRITING ABILITY

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#### ABSTRACT

*Among different forms of giving feedback to students, peer feedback is the one which has been more studied in recent years. Peer feedback is the process in which students are required to give feedback to their peers through collaborative discussions, compared with teacher feedback in which the students receive feedback merely from the teacher. This study examines the effects of peer-feedback and teacher-feedback on Iranian EFL learners' writing ability. 52 homogenous undergraduate university students majoring in English literature and translation at Arak University, Iran, participated in the study and were placed in control and experimental groups. The experimental group received some instructions regarding peer feedback and how to comment on their peer's essays, while the control group received feedback from the teacher. Both groups wrote five essays on five different topics as tasks of elicitation. The participants' writings were scored by two raters using Paulus's rating scales, and then compared via t-tests and ANOVA. The results indicated that peer feedback is not more effective than teacher feedback in helping the learners improve their writing ability. Possible explanations of the results of the study and implications of the findings for language teaching, especially teaching writing, will be discussed and presented.*

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**Keywords:** Peer feedback, Teacher feedback, Language learners, Language education, Writing ability, Assessment.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Assessment and evaluation are pivotal elements in all education, particularly in language education. Assessment is necessary because it can inform the students of their progress, and tell the teachers about the effectiveness of their teaching. Different skills including writing require different forms of assessments which have been the focus of research in recent years. Writing assessment can take various forms such as teacher assessment, peer assessment, self-assessment, and portfolio assessment, which are called alternative assessment. Peer assessment or peer feedback, as a form of alternative assessment, has been studied in different contexts, with various results. Peer feedback is a process in which the learners are required to comment on their peers' writing assignments and help them improve their writing ability. Studies on peer feedback have so far focused on different aspects and dimensions of using this procedure such as the effects of peer feedback on development of different skills like writing (Hu, 2005; Wakabayashi, 2008), comparisons between peer feedback and other forms of alternative assessments like teacher observation (Mazdayasna and Tahririan, 2001), the amount of negotiation between individuals (Suzuki, 2008), different modes of giving feedback and their effect on learners' language development (McGroarty and Zhu, 1997), just to mention a few. However, less research has been reported to take into consideration the effects of peer feedback on Iranian EFL contexts, particularly writing, to date. The present paper, thus, focuses on this point and aims to examine possible effects of peer feedback and teacher feedback on Iranian EFL learners' writing ability to supplement the existing studies.

## 2. BACKGROUND

In the process of language acquisition, one of the important skills is writing. Great advances in technology made the nations to communicate with each other more than before; written communication necessitates the ability to write. Also, in the context of second language learning, it becomes important to teach writing along with other skills to have capable language users. Talking about teaching/learning a particular skill appeals to evaluation of that skill and the same is true for writing (Cushing Weigle, 2002).

For many years, the dominant school of thought in language teaching/ learning activities was Behaviorism which was to identify the classroom behaviors of teachers (Hadley, 2003; Mitchell, 2009), but this trend changed into more classroom interaction approaches in which both learners and teachers became prominent in classroom activities. Language education changed its directions to more learner-oriented and process-based approaches (Hadley, 2003; Kumaravadivelu, 2008). As such, writing instructors changed their focus toward the process-based approach to writing. "The process approach argues that writers create and change their ideas as they write and that writing is recursive: When and how often writers rework things depend on their personal writing style as well as the writing task and context" (Caulk, 1994). The process-based approach to writing means writing is exploratory and recursive rather than linear; in classroom activities, it means that teachers, and often peers, intervene at one or several points in the writing process (Connor, 1987; Zamel, 1987; Long and Doughty, 2009; Yusof *et al.*, 2012).

In every piece of writing that language learners hand in, there is an expectation from learners to receive some feedback on their work in order to be able to correct and revise their writing. The aim of feedback is to bring about self-awareness and improvement. Feedback can be defined as: “information that is given to the learner about his or her performance of a learning task, usually with the objective of improving this performance” (Ur, 1996; Van Gennip *et al.*, 2009). Nation (2009) classifies feedback and argues that there are some factors in providing feedback to learners such as *source of feedback* by which he means whether feedback is given by teacher, peer, or self; *mode of feedback*, which means whether feedback is written or spoken; *size of audience*, which is whether feedback is given to a group or individuals; *form of feedback*, which means feedback can be guided by the use of checklists or scales (P, 139-140).

Feedback can take a number of forms: giving praise and encouragement, correcting, setting regular tests, having discussions about how the group as a whole is doing, giving individual tutorials, etc. (Gower *et al.*, 1995). In the process of writing, there are some forms of giving feedback including peer feedback, teacher feedback, self-assessment, teacher assessment and so forth (Nation, 2009). Peer review is central in process-oriented writing instructions (Nelson and Murphy, 1993; Hu, 2005), because: “it matches the conceptualizations of writing and learning to write promoted by advocates of process approaches: that is, writing is a recursive, socially constructed process of invention, meaning-making and knowledge-transformation, and that learning to write is best supported by an environment in which students are acknowledged as writers, encouraged to take risks, and engaged in creating meaning” (Hu, 2005); peer review is ‘a collaborative activity involving students’ reading, criticizing and providing feedback on each other’s writing’ (ibid, p.321).

The process of peer feedback involves a kind of collaborative activity among the students in which the students are required to interact in their social environment. Peer feedback is related to and has been talked about in sociocultural theory because of the interaction and mediation of the learners. The sociocultural theory suggests that the most important forms of human cognitive activity develop through interactions within the social and material environments (Polio and Williams, 2009), or cultural-historical timescales (Mitchell, 2009). In this relation, Lantolf (2000 cited in (Mitchell and Myles, 2004) asserts:

The central and distinguishing concept of sociocultural theory is that higher forms of human mental activity are *mediated*. Vygotsk (1978) argued that just as humans do not act directly on the physical world but rely, instead, on tools and labor activity, we also use symbolic tools, or signs, to mediate and regulate our relationships with others and with ourselves... The task for psychology, in Vygotsky's view, is to understand how human social and mental activities are organized through culturally constructed artefacts and social relationships (p. 194).

Then, Vygotsky (1978) introduced *zone of proximal development* (ZPD) was introduced, that is, the distance between the level of actual development and the level of potential development when assisted by either a more capable actor or a peer (Mynard and Almarzouqi, 2006; Ellis, 2008;

Polio and Williams, 2009; Zhao, 2010). According to (Ellis, 2008), ZDP is closely associated with the concept of assisted performance, and it has a formative view of the role of assessment; assessment of what learners can do with assistance at the present moment rather than what they are capable of doing. This notion of assistance which is called scaffolding is achievable through interaction and pair works (Hansen and Liu, 2005; Attarzadeh, 2011).

Mendoca and Johnson (1994) emphasize the importance of interaction during peer feedback and believe that interaction helps learners to negotiate their ideas and test and revise their hypothesis about the L2. Min (2005) suggests that social interaction and assistance are best provided in peer feedback; rhetorical theorists believe in social nature of writing and the importance of communication; they insist on using peer feedback because it can provide the amount of collaboration and interaction needed. Furthermore, in the process of peer review, the reviewer and the writer may not have the same proficiency, so, a more proficient learner may assist the other to improve his/her proficiency (Min, 2005).

Zamel (1981) asserts that the feedback that students receive is more likely to be reinforcing rather than informative. The feedbacks learners receive just tell them about their language performance and may not help them develop their writing. In Zamel's view, if feedback is informative, it should reduce ambiguity, uncertainty of alternatives. Zamel also believes that effective transmission of feedback can bring useful changes in learners' performance.

Although peer feedback may seem to be an effective way, many teachers and students still have doubt in using this procedure in classrooms. Teachers may consider peer revision time consuming and they may not be sure about its effectiveness. Students, on the other hand, may think that their peers are not good choices to correct their writings and comment on them. Learners may believe that someone at the same level as them is not qualified enough to comment on their papers, and learners may still prefer their teachers as the most qualified persons to comment on their papers (Zhao, 2010).

## 2.1. Feedback and the Concept of Alternative Assessment

Alternative assessment is the term used to refer to alternatives to standardized testing and assessment. It is defined as "efforts that do not adhere to the traditional criteria of standardization, efficiency, cost-effectiveness, objectivity, and machine scorability... students are evaluated on what they integrate and produce rather than on what they are able to recall and reproduce" (Garcia & Pearson, 1994 cited in (Huerta-Marcias, 2002)). Traditionally, teachers alone would assess the learners' progress, and there was no place for learners and their thought. In contemporary language teaching, learners are trained to assess their own developments; they can understand their weaknesses or strengths and where they need more help (Nunan, 2001).

Alternative assessments can include checklists, journals, logs, videotapes and audiotapes, self-evaluation, teacher observation (Huerta-Marcias, 2002), portfolios, conferences, diaries, self-assessment, and peer assessments (Brown and Hudson, 1998). Brown and Hudson listed some characteristics for alternative assessments as follows; they

1. Require students to perform, create, produce, or do something;
2. Use real-world contexts or simulations;
3. Are nonintrusive in that they extend the day-to-day classroom activities;
4. Allow students to be assessed on what they normally do in class every day;
5. Use tasks that represent meaningful instructional activities;
6. Focus on processes as well as products;
7. Tap into higher level thinking and problem-solving skills;
8. Provide information about both the strengths and weaknesses of students;
9. Are multiculturally sensitive when properly administered;
10. Ensure that people, not machines, do the scoring, using human judgment;
11. Encourage open disclosure of standards and rating criteria; and,
12. Call upon teachers to perform new instructional and assessment roles (Brown and Hudson, 1998).

Hence, alternative assessments can potentially be used and produce as good results as traditional forms of assessment, but they require some investigations in real contexts to be proved. In recent years, research has been done on different forms of alternative assessments and their effects on different skills, with different, and to some extent contradictory, results (e.g. (Nelson and Murphy, 1993; Hu, 2005; Min, 2005; Diab, 2010)). However, in Iranian contexts less has been done focusing on writing skill and its development, and the ones been done have been either on different contexts or on different skills; so, the present research is going to complement the present states of the art in this relation, the writing skill. Among the various forms of alternative assessments mentioned above, peer feedback is the concern of this research which is going to be compared with teacher feedback, the details of which are presented below.

### 3. THE STUDY

As mentioned before, this study aims to examine possible effects of peer feedback on Iranian EFL learners' writing ability, particularly compared with teacher feedback. In this regard, the following research questions were raised:

1. Can peer feedback help Iranian EFL learners improve their writing ability?
2. Is peer feedback more effective than teacher feedback in improving Iranian EFL learners' writing ability?

To answer the above questions, the following hypotheses were formulated to be tested out:

1. Peer feedback can help Iranian EFL learners improve their writing ability.
2. Peer feedback is more effective than teacher feedback in improving Iranian EFL learners' writing ability.

#### 3.1. Participants

For conducting this research, 70 male and female undergraduate students majoring in English literature and English translation at Arak University, Iran, were asked to participate in the study.

They were homogeneous in their proficiency level according to their scores on the *Oxford Placement Test (OPT), version 1.1 (2001)* (see appendix B). Based on the OPT results, 60 students were selected and put into a control and an experimental group, each consisting of 30 subjects, though of the experimental group 8 did not complete the treatment sessions and the tasks and were thus excluded from the experiment. Consequently, totally 52 learners took part in the study. The participants had already passed *advanced writing* courses; so, they were experienced enough to know how to write and/or how to have good writings, without any treatment sessions. Also, two raters were asked to score the participants' writing assignments based on a rating scale (adapted from (Paulus, 1999)).

### 3.2. Instrumentation

There were five instruments used in this study including the *OPT, a guide to peer feedback, sample essays, a rating scale, and writing tasks*. As mentioned earlier, the OPT was used to measure the homogeneity of the participants. For the purpose of this research, that is to see the effects of peer feedback on the learners' writing, the researchers tried to focus on giving feedback to learners and its effects on writing development rather than instructing them on how to write. For this reason, the students in the experimental group received some instructions on how to give feedback to their peers in writing. In the instruction sessions, the participants were given some necessary information on peer feedback and the ways it can be applied to writing. In order to make the experimental group more involved in the process of peer feedback, two sample essays were taken from TOEFL preparation book which were practiced in class times. All the participants in the experimental group received these essays and they were asked to read each of them and comment on it. They were required to discuss the points with the whole class and share their ideas. Moreover, a rating scale was required to have a yardstick against which the students could be assessed. Paulus's scale was found to be more relevant and appropriate for the purpose of this study than others; thus, it was adopted and used to score the participants' writings. This scale consists of six general categories and each of them comprises 10 defining features (Appendix A). The most important instruments were five writing activities (as tasks of elicitation) which were used for the purpose of this study. The tasks were based on cause and effect, comparison and contrast, argumentations, and discussions of advantages and disadvantages.

### 3.3. Procedures

After selecting the participants based on the OPT results, they were randomly assigned to the experimental and the control groups. The subjects in the experimental group were supposed to comment on their peer's papers and the subjects in the control group received feedback from their teacher only. The participants were told about what they were to do during the experiment. Moreover, the students were assured that their scores would remain confidential. After assigning the students in the control and experimental groups, in the first session, they were required to write an essay as their pre-test. This was necessary to assess the students' writing ability before the

experiment. Then, in the following session, the participants in the experimental group were given instructions on how to give feedback. Also, they were asked to write an essay in the class and their writings were randomly given to their peers to be commented. The students were asked to comment on both the form and content of each essay and if they had any problem in understanding any part, they could ask for clarification. The control group just wrote their essays on the same topic and handed them in to their teacher. The teacher gave comments on the form and content of the writings, and the students had the opportunity to exchange their ideas about their essays with the teacher. All the participants were told to revise and deliver their writings the following session. The experiment phase took three sessions and in each session the groups were required to write essays and follow the same procedures as the above. At the end, another essay was written by both groups as their post-test. The final drafts of all essays were rated by the raters based on the given rating scale. To prevent any scoring biases, the subjects' writings were anonymous.

### **3.4. Data Analysis and Results**

To answer the first research question, whether peer feedback can help learners improve their writing ability, a t-test was employed to compare the subjects' pre- and post-tests scores to see any possible changes in their scores. Furthermore, repeated measure ANOVA was used to compare the participants' mean score changes across the three tests conducted in the treatment period. To answer the second research question regarding the preference of either of the two procedures, it was necessary to compare the groups with each other to see which group had outperformed the other.

#### **3.4.1. Results of Homogeneity Test**

In order to compare the groups, it was necessary to have comparable groups. To estimate the comparability among different groups, the OPT was used. The primary data to show equality of the groups was descriptive statistics of the experimental and control groups. The descriptive statistics of the two groups' language proficiency test scores manifested that the mean score of the control group's language proficiency test is 36.47 (with standard deviation of 4.99) and the experimental group's mean score is 38.14 (with standard deviation of 6.11). Also, in the table of t-test (Appendix B), the t-value is 1.083, with 50 degrees of freedom; the critical t-value is 2.01, which is above the value presented in the table. Furthermore,  $p=.284$  which is far above the .05 critical value and it shows that there is no significant difference between the experimental and the control groups regarding their language proficiency level.

#### **3.4.2. Inter-rater Reliability**

All the participants' writings were given to two raters to score based on Paulus (1999) ten point scale. Nevertheless, even if the raters use a well-defined rating scale such as Paulus's, they may not rate the essays exactly the same; so, inter-rater reliability should be measured to see if there were consistency between the raters' scores. There were five sets of essays which were rated

by the two raters and reliability statistics was calculated for all of them which showed an acceptable value. The reliability values for the raters in all tests are as follows:

$$r(\text{pre-test}) = .71 \quad r(\text{test1}) = .87 \quad r(\text{test2}) = .85 \quad r(\text{test3}) = .79 \quad r(\text{post-test}) = .63$$

Moreover, inter-rater reliability for the two raters' scores on all the tests was calculated by Cronbach's alpha using SPSS software. The  $r = .82$  indicates an acceptable level of reliability between the raters' scores.

### 3.4.3. Within-group comparisons

The experimental group's pre-test and post-test scores were compared. Based on the statistics, the experimental group's mean score in the pre-test is 46.54 with standard deviation (SD) of 7.21, and the mean score in the post-test is 53.47 with SD of 3.70 (Table 1). Accordingly, there was a substantial change in the group's mean score from the pre-test to the post-test. Also, reduction of the amount of standard deviations shows that the group became more homogenous during the experiment; that is, the participants' scores were close to the mean score in the post-test. However, this measurement alone cannot tell us firmly whether the difference between the group's pre-test and post-test score was significant or not; therefore, a t-test was used to compare the pre-test and post-test scores. The results (table 2:  $df=21, t=4.954 > 2.08$ , sig., two-tailed,  $=.000, p < .05$ ) confirms that there was a significant improvement in the experimental group's writing performance. The mean increase from the pre-test to the post-test is 6.93 with 95% confidence interval ranging from 4.02 to 9.84. In addition, the Eta squared indicates .53 which is considered as a large effect size based on Cohen's classification (.01=small, .06= moderate, .14= large; (Pallant, 2007). In other words, the group's mean score changed significantly from the pre-test to the post-test.

**Table-1.** Descriptive Statistics of the Experimental Group's Pre-test and Post-test

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
pretest	46.5455	22	7.21673	1.53861
posttest	53.4773	22	3.70321	.78953

**Table-2.** T-test Results of the Experimental Group's Pre-test and Post-test

#### Paired Samples Test

	Paired Differences				95% Interval Difference	Confidence of the	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower					
pretest - posttest	-6.93182	6.56251	1.39913	-9.84147	-4.02216	-4.954	21	.000	

Level of significance, 0.05 (two-tailed)

The same procedure was used for the control group’s pre-test and post-test scores and similarly, there was a significant improvement in the control group’s writing ability (pre-test: M=47.66, SD=5.02; post-test: M=53.30, SD=3.40). The t-value, as is presented in table 5, is 5.50 >2.04 with df=29. Moreover, the sig. (two-tailed) value shows .000 <.05; thus it can be concluded that there is a significant difference between the control group’s mean score in the pre-test and the post-test (Tables 3- 4).

**Table-3.** Descriptive Statistics of the Control Group’s Pre-test and Post-test

Paired Samples Statistics				
	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
pretest	47.6667	30	5.02765	.91792
posttest	53.3083	30	3.40871	.62234

**Table-4.**t-test Results of the Control Group’s Pre-test and Post-test Scores

Paired Samples Test									
	Paired Differences				95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Error	Lower	Upper			
	pretest - posttest	-5.64167	5.61735		1.02558				

Level of significance, 0.05 (two-tailed)

Based on the results, peer feedback could help the learners improve their writing ability; so, the hypothesis is confirmed and the first question is answered.

**3.4.4. Between-group Comparison of the Groups’ Pre-test and Post-test**

To answer the second research question regarding which of the two procedures, peer feedback or teacher feedback, is more effective in L2 learners’ writing development, a comparison between the two groups’ pre-test and post-test scores was carried out. The groups’ descriptive statistics shows that there is no significant difference between the groups in terms of their pre-test scores (Experimental group: M=46.54, SD=7.21; Control group: M=47.66, SD=5.02). However, a t-test was used to determine the significance between the two groups, if any. Referring to the table of t-test (Table 5), it can be observed that the t-value is -0.626 (df=35, t< 2.03, p=.535, p>.05) which confirms that there is no significant difference between the groups’ mean scores in the pre-test.

**Table-5.** T-test of the Experimental and Control Groups' Pre-test Scores

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	8.800	.005	-.661	50	.512	-1.12121	1.69662	-4.52897	2.28654
Equal variances not assumed			-.626	35.365	.535	-1.12121	1.79162	-4.75705	2.51463

Level of significance, 0.05

During the treatment period, three different essays were written by the participants in both groups, as tests 1, 2, 3. A comparison had to be made between these tests to see the pattern of changes in mean scores across the three tests; so, a one-way repeated measure ANOVA was used to make this comparison. Descriptive statistics (Table 6) shows the mean scores for all the tests which make it easier to compare the scores. In tests 1 and 2, the control group with  $M=52.79$ ,  $SD=7.32$  (for test 1), and  $M=53.67$ ,  $SD=6.83$  (for test 2) outperformed the experimental group with  $M=47.07$ ,  $SD=9.00$  (test 1), and  $M=49.20$ ,  $SD=6.18$  (test 2). However, in test 3, the experimental group with  $M=50.61$ ,  $SD=5.75$  outperformed the control group with  $M=47.45$ ,  $SD=5.03$ . It can be observed that the experimental group's mean scores steadily improved from test 1 to test 3, but the control group gained a higher score in the first two tests though their mean scores reduced substantially in test 3. The ANOVA table (Table 7) gives the F values alongside sig. values for all the tests; the F values for tests 1, 2, and 3 are 6.348  $p=.015$ , 5.870  $p=.019$ , and 4.441  $p=.040$ , respectively; based on the degrees of freedom which are 1 for numerator and 50 for denominator, the F critical value is 4.04 (in .05 value); therefore, the F ratios are larger than the critical value which shows that there is a significant difference between the mean scores of the groups. Moreover, the sig. values for tests 1, 2, and 3 are .015, .019, and .040, respectively; clearly, these values are below the .05 (alpha) critical values; so, there exists a significant difference between the groups' mean scores. The effect size for test 1 is 0.11, for test 2 is 0.10 and for test 3 is 0.08, which according to Cohen's classification provided earlier, makes a medium effect size.

**Table-6.** Descriptive Statistics of the Two Groups' scores of Three Tests

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
test1	experimental group	22	47.0795	9.00971	1.92088
	control group	30	52.7917	7.32735	1.33778
	Total	52	50.3750	8.48969	1.17731
test2	experimental group	22	49.2045	6.18689	1.31905
	control group	30	53.6750	6.83997	1.24880
	Total	52	51.7837	6.88028	.95412
test3	experimental group	22	50.6136	5.75633	1.22725
	control group	30	47.4500	5.03197	.91871
	Total	52	48.7885	5.52565	.76627

**Table-7.** ANOVA Statistics of the Two Groups' Three Tests

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
test1	Between Groups	414.129	1	414.129	6.348	.015
	Within Groups	3261.684	50	65.234		
	Total	3675.812	51			
test2	Between Groups	253.655	1	253.655	5.870	.019
	Within Groups	2160.598	50	43.212		
	Total	2414.254	51			
test3	Between Groups	127.032	1	127.032	4.441	.040
	Within Groups	1430.141	50	28.603		
	Total	1557.173	51			

Level of significance, 0.05

Regarding the two groups' post-tests, the descriptive statistics does not show any significant change between the groups (the experimental group: M=53.47, SD=3.70; the control group: M=53.30, SD=3.40). The results of t-test ( $t=.170$   $df=50$ ,  $p=.86$ ,  $p>.05$ ) state that there is no significant difference between the two groups' post-test scores (Table 8).

**Table-8.** T-test Results of the Experimental and Control Groups' post-test Scores

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means							
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Interval Difference		Confidence of the
								Lower	Upper	
Equal variances assumed	.288	.594	.170	50	.866	.16894	.99235	-1.82426	2.16214	
Equal variances not assumed			.168	43.142	.867	.16894	1.00532	-1.85828	2.19616	

Level of significance, 0.05

To answer the second question regarding which procedure is more helpful, it can be said that none of the procedures is more helpful than the other; that is, both of the procedures led to similar results. Then, the second hypothesis that peer feedback is more helpful than teacher feedback is rejected.

#### **4. DISCUSSION**

The present study was conducted to examine the effects of peer feedback on Iranian EFL learners' writing ability and its possible superiority over teacher feedback. Analyses and comparisons of the pre-test and the post-test scores of the experimental group indicated that the group improved in their writing ability from the pre-test to the post-test. At the beginning of the study, the experimental group's mean score was low, but after treatments it increased to the same mean score as the control group, which clearly shows an improvement. Furthermore, the experimental group's substantial change in the standard deviation shows that in the pre-test the participants' scores had a great range and dispersed from the mean, but the scores in the post-test were mostly close to the mean; this shows that the group developed in writing. The ascending of the experimental group can also prove the improvement and development in the group's writing ability. Therefore, the first research question regarding whether peer feedback can help Iranian EFL learners improve their writing ability was answered and the first hypothesis was confirmed. This improvement was achieved since the students had the opportunity to act as readers and writers simultaneously and consciously. Being responsible for their peer's writings made the learners critical readers which in turn made them critical about their own writings to some extent. These findings are in line with the findings of previous research studies. For instance, a study by [Diab \(2010\)](#) investigates the effects of peer-editing versus self-editing on the students' revision of language errors and the findings indicated that collaboration in peer-editing helped the learners find out and reduce their errors in subsequent drafts.

Regarding the second question as which of the two procedures of peer feedback and teacher feedback is more helpful, the findings showed that none of these two procedures can be said to be more effective than the other. Analysis of the pre-test and the post-test scores of the control group indicated that the group's mean scores increased from the pre-test to the post-test. Also, between groups comparison of both groups' pre-test and post-test scores showed no significant difference between the groups' mean scores. As none of the groups could outperform the other in terms of its post-test score, it can be concluded that none of the procedures was superior to the other. Thus, the second hypothesis could not be confirmed.

As mentioned above, contrary to the second hypothesis, the experimental group could not outperform the control group; one of the possible explanations refers to the subjects' lack of enough knowledge about the process of peer feedback and giving feedback. Although instructions and guides were given to the subjects in the experimental group, the participants could not gain enough experience and it seems that more hours of instructions were needed for a better result. Talking to the researchers, most of the students stated that they were not so accustomed with the

peer feedback procedure and some of them mentioned that they had not heard of it before. The results of this research might be different if the subjects had got more time to get familiar with the process and could get more involved in peer feedback. In this regard, [Min \(2005\)](#) asserts that spending more time on properly training the learners can bring about more fruitful results (see also [Zhu, 2001](#)). Moreover, a study done by [Mazdayasna and Tahririan \(2001\)](#) on the effects of peer feedback on the participants' writing ability in a different context from the present one indicated better performance of the peer feedback group versus teacher-feedback one.

Seeking for another explanation, the researchers think that some of the learners in the experimental group were cautious about accepting and applying their peers' comments on their essays (see also [Nelson and Murphy, 1993](#); [Suzuki, 2008](#)). This may be due to the students' perspective towards their peers' capabilities and may root in the traditional educational system which is teacher-based and almost all students are more accustomed with it. Having improved in their writing ability from the pre-test to the post-test and not being substantially different from the control group shows that the process of peer feedback may potentially be a successful process which requires more attention. On the whole, the results and findings show that peer feedback can activate the students' sense of authority and make them critical to some extent; otherwise, they could not improve in their writing ability. Although in the findings peer feedback was similar to teacher feedback, the power of peer feedback should not be underestimated, since on the whole the experimental group showed to perform slightly better than the control group. In other words, although the results indicated that the difference between the groups in their pre-test and post-test was not significant, the experimental group can be said to performed a bit better than the control group because they improved from a lower score in the pre-test to the same score as the control group in the post-test. Such slight difference between them is in favor of the experimental group.

## **5. CONCLUSION & IMPLICATION**

This study aimed to determine possible effects of peer feedback on Iranian EFL learners' writing. From what stated earlier, it can be concluded that peer feedback is, at least, as effective as teacher feedback, and to some extent even better than it, in helping Iranian EFL learners improve their writing ability. The findings of this research present some implications for language teaching and learning, particularly writing. One of the implications of this study is that as peer feedback proves to be at least as effective as teacher feedback, it can be used as an alternative to teacher feedback in EFL/ESL contexts. Moreover, peer feedback is a learner-centered approach which allows the learners to take the responsibility of their own learning and participate more in doing the tasks. Also, with limited class times, peer feedback can be used as a part of the evaluation process along with teacher feedback since it saves the time and at the same time has its own effects and productivity. Another implication of this research is that educational authorities can place alternative assessments in general and peer feedback in particular among the teaching and learning materials. As mentioned above, the students' lack of knowledge and familiarity with peer feedback and the domination of the traditional teacher feedback led to the results which were not as what

might be expected. Therefore, designing teaching materials in a way that make the students familiar with such processes and encourage more student-centered activities may lead to some better results. Furthermore, by doing so, the students' attitudes and perspectives toward peer feedback may change and they would rely on their peers' capabilities more self-assuredly; this may result in using this process more widely in the classrooms. From another perspective, the results of this study could provide a contrasting view against the generally held concept among teachers that peer feedback cannot be a good choice for assessment and consequently be used in classrooms. That is, teachers are mostly tempted to believe that students are neither qualified enough nor capable of giving useful comments. The results proved that students' feedback can also be efficient and help the peers to enhance the quality of their own writing. Finally, cautions should be taken when generalizing the findings of the present research; this study was conducted in Iranian EFL contexts and with the topics that required the students' point of view and perspectives. Whether or not the same result can be obtained in other contexts with other topics requires further investigations.

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Appendices

Appendix A: The Rating Scale (Paulus, 1999)

	Organization/unity(20)	Development(20)	Cohesion/coherence(20)	Structure(15)	Vocabulary(15)	Mechanics(10)
1	No organization evident; ideas random, related to each other but not to task; no paragraphing; no thesis; no unity (2)	No development (2)	Not coherent; no relationship of ideas evident (2)	Attempted simple sentences; serious, recurring, unsystematic grammatical errors obliterate meaning; non-English patterns predominate (1.5)	Meaning obliterated; extremely limited range; incorrect/unsystematic inflectional, derivational morpheme use; little to no knowledge of appropriate word use regarding meaning and syntax(1.5)	Little or no command of spelling, punctuation, paragraphing capitalization (1)
2	Suggestion of organization; no clear thesis; ideas listed or numbered, often not in sentence form; no paragraphing/grouping; no unity (4)	Development severely limited; examples random, if given. (4)	Not coherent; ideas random/unconnected; attempt at transitions may be present, but ineffective; few or unclear referential ties; reader is lost. (4)	Uses simple sentences; some attempts at various verb tenses; serious unsystematic errors, occasional clarity; possibly uses coordination; meaning often obliterated; unsuccessful attempts at embedding may be evident(3)	Meaning severely inhibited; very limited range; relies on repetition of common words; inflectional/derivational morphemes incorrect, unsystematic; very limited command of common words; seldom idiomatic; reader greatly distracted (3)	Some evidence of command of basic mechanical features; error-ridden and unsystematic (2)
3	Some organization; relationship between ideas not evident; attempted thesis, but unclear; no paragraphing/grouping; no hierarchy of ideas; suggestion of unity of ideas (6)	Lacks content at abstract and concrete levels; few examples (6)	Partially coherent; attempt at relationship, relevancy and progression of some ideas, but inconsistent or ineffective; limited use of transitions; relationship within and between ideas unclear/non-existent; may occasionally use appropriate simple referential ties such as coordinating conjunctions (6)	Meaning not impeded by use of simple sentences, despite errors; attempts at complicated sentences inhibit meaning; possibly uses coordination successfully; embedding may be evident; non-English patterns evident; non-parallel and inconsistent structures(4.5)	Meaning inhibited; limited range; some patterns of errors may be evident; limited command of usage; much repetition; reader distracted at times (4.5)	Evidence of developing command of basic mechanical features; frequent, unsystematic errors (3)

4	<p>Organization present; ideas show grouping; may have general thesis, though not for persuasion; beginning of hierarchy of ideas; lacks overall persuasive focus and unity (8)</p>	<p>Underdeveloped; lacks concreteness; examples may be inappropriate, too general; may use main points as support for each other (8)</p>	<p>Partially coherent, main purpose somewhat clear to reader; relationship, relevancy, and progression of ideas may be apparent; may begin to use logical connectors between/within ideas/paragraphs effectively; relationship between/within ideas not evident; personal pronoun references exist, may be clear, but lacks command of demonstrative pronouns and other referential ties; repetition of key vocabulary not used successfully(8)</p>	<p>Relies on simple structures; limited command of morpho-syntactic system; attempts at embedding may be evident in simple structures without consistent success; non-English patterns evident (6)</p>	<p>Meaning inhibited by somewhat limited range and variety; often uses inappropriately informal lexical items; systematic errors in morpheme usage; somewhat limited command of word usage; occasionally idiomatic; frequent use of circumlocution; reader distracted (6)</p>	<p>May have paragraph format; some systematic errors in spelling, capitalization, basic punctuation (4)</p>
5	<p>Possible attempted introduction, body, conclusion; obvious, general thesis with some attempt to follow it; ideas grouped appropriately; some persuasive focus, unclear at times; hierarchy of ideas may exist, without reflecting importance; some unity (10)</p>	<p>Underdeveloped; some sections may have concreteness; some may be supported while others are not; some examples may be appropriate supporting evidence for a persuasive essay, others may be logical fallacies, unsupported generalizations(10)</p>	<p>Partially coherent; shows attempt to relate ideas, still ineffective at times; some effective use of logical connectors between/within groups of ideas/paragraphs; command of personal pronoun reference; partial command of demonstratives, deictics, determiners (10)</p>	<p>Systematic consistent grammatical errors; some successful attempts at complex structures, but limited variety; clause construction occasionally successful, meaning occasionally disrupted by use of complex or non-English patterns; some nonparallel, inconsistent structures (7.5)</p>	<p>Meaning occasionally inhibited; some range and variety; morpheme usage generally under control; command awkward or uneven; sometimes informal, unidiomatic, distracting; some use of circumlocution (7.5)</p>	<p>Paragraph format evident; basic punctuation, simple spelling, capitalization, formatting under control; systematic errors (5)</p>
6	<p>Clear introduction, body, conclusion; beginning control over essay format, focused topic sentences; narrowed thesis approaching position statement; some supporting evidence, yet ineffective at times; hierarchy of ideas present without always reflecting idea</p>	<p>Partially underdeveloped, concreteness present, but inconsistent; logic flaws may be evident; some supporting proof and evidence used to develop thesis; some sections still undersupported and generalized; repetitive (12)</p>	<p>Basically coherent in purpose and focus; mostly effective use of logical connectors, used to progress ideas; pronoun references mostly clear; referential/anaphoric reference may be present; command of demonstratives; beginning appropriate use of transitions (12)</p>	<p>Some variety of complex structures evident, limited pattern of error; meaning usually clear; clause construction and placement somewhat under control; finer distinction in morpho-syntactic system evident; non-English patterns may occasionally inhibit meaning (9)</p>	<p>Meaning seldom inhibited; adequate range, variety; appropriately academic, formal in lexical choices; successfully avoids the first person; infrequent errors in morpheme usage; beginning to use some idiomatic expressions successfully; general command of usage; rarely distracting</p>	<p>Basic mechanics under control; sometimes successful attempts at sophistication, such as semi-colons, colons (6)</p>

	importance; may digress from topic(12)				(9)	
7	Essay format under control; appropriate paragraphing and topic sentences; hierarchy of ideas present; main points include persuasive evidence; position statement/thesis narrowed and directs essay; may occasionally digress from topic; basically unified; follows standard persuasive organizational patterns(14)	Acceptable level of development; concreteness present and somewhat consistent; logic evident, makes sense, mostly adequate supporting proof; may be repetitive (14)	Mostly coherent in persuasive focus and purpose, progression of ideas facilitates reader understanding; successful attempts to use logical connectors, lexical repetition, synonyms, collocation; cohesive devices may still be inconsistent/ ineffective at times; may show creativity; possibly still some irrelevancy (14)	Meaning generally clear; increasing distinctions in morpho-syntactic system; sentence variety evident; frequent successful attempts at complex structures; non-English patterns do not inhibit meaning; parallel and consistent structures used (10.5)	Meaning not inhibited; adequate range, variety; basically idiomatic; infrequent errors in usage; some attention to style; mistakes rarely distracting; little use of circumlocution (10.5)	Occasional mistakes in basic mechanics; increasingly successful attempts at sophisticated punctuation; may have systematic spelling errors (7)
8	Definite control of organization; may show some creativity; may attempt implied thesis; content clearly relevant, convincing; unified; sophisticated; uses organizational control to further express ideas; conclusion may serve specific function (16)	Each point clearly developed with a variety of convincing types of supporting evidence; ideas supported effectively; may show originality in presentation of support; clear logical and persuasive/convincing progression of ideas (16)	Coherent; clear persuasive purpose and focus; ideas relevant to topic; consistency and sophistication in use of transitions/referential ties; effective use of lexical repetition, derivations, synonyms; transitional devices appropriate/effective; cohesive devices used to further the progression of ideas in a manner clearly relevant to the overall meaning(16)	Manipulates syntax with attention to style; generally error-free sentence variety; meaning clear; non-English patterns rarely evident (12)	Meaning clear; fairly sophisticated range and variety; word usage under control; occasionally unidiomatic; attempts at original, appropriate choices; may use some language nuance (12)	Uses mechanical devices to further meaning; generally error-free (8)
9	Highly effective organizational pattern for convincing, persuasive essay; unified with clear position statement; content relevant and effective (18)	Well-developed with concrete, logical, appropriate supporting examples, evidence and details; highly effective/convincing; possibly creative use of support(18)	Coherent and convincing to reader; uses transitional devices/referential ties/logical connectors to create and further a particular style (18)	Mostly error-free; frequent success in using language to stylistic advantage; idiomatic syntax; non-English patterns not evident (13.5)	Meaning clear; sophisticated range, variety; often idiomatic; often original, appropriate choices; may have distinctions in nuance for accuracy, clarity (13.5)	Uses mechanical devices for stylistic purposes; may be error-free (9)
10	Appropriate native-like standard written English (20)	Appropriate native-like standard written English(20)	Appropriate native-like standard written English (20)	Appropriate native-like standard written English (15)	Appropriate native-like standard written English (15)	Appropriate native-like standard written English(10)

**Appendix B: T-test result of OPT**

T-test Results of the Experimental and Control Groups' Language Proficiency Test Scores

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	1.963	.167	1.083	50	.284	1.670	1.542	-1.427	4.766
Equal variances not assumed			1.050	3.971E1	.300	1.670	1.591	-1.546	4.885

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