

Experimental Study on the Effect of Feedback Methods on College Students' English Writing

—A Reasonable Combination of Teacher Feedback and Peer Feedback

Song Xiaohuan

Basic Course Department, Modern College of Northwest University, Xi'an city, Shaanxi province, 710130

Keywords: English writing; different ways of feedback; writing performance

Abstract: By comparing three kinds of feedback methods (teacher's feedback, peer feedback, the combination of teacher and peer feedback) on the writing performance of three groups and their writing scores of CET-4, it has been concluded that: (1) The writing performance of the three groups has been improved respectively in a certain degree; (2) The gap of the writing performance within each group has been narrowed. Among the 3 groups, the writing gap in "teacher + peer" feedback group students has been narrowed to the largest extent compared with the other 2 groups; (3) Both the writing performance and the overall level of the five error indicators (discourse cohesion, vocabulary, grammar, syntax and technical mistakes) of the subjects in "teacher + peer" feedback group are improved to the largest degree; (4) There is a significant difference among the three group subjects' English writing ability after the experimental study; (5) The combination of "teacher + peer" group showed a strong advantage than other two feedback ways; (6) The "teacher + peer" feedback group had the greatest impact on students' CET-4 writing performance. It is hoped that these findings can expand the field of writing teaching and provide important reference to help English teachers to adopt effective feedback methods to improve the current situation of college English writing.

1. Introduction

Writing, as an important form of language output, is an important means of human communication. As the important process in teaching writing, feedback has been an important research topic in the field of English writing teaching. The purpose of writing feedback is to provide the writers with information to modify their composition, which plays a key role in improving the quality of writing (Keh, 1990; Zhu Lijuan, 2010). However, after reviewing the existing studies of writing feedback, we find that the current situation of feedback on English writing in China is mainly based on teacher feedback and its form is single. Most scholars have conducted a comparative study between teacher feedback and peer feedback (Zhang Ying, 2000:24-28; Xie Xiaoyan, 2011:5-51; Li Hong, Wu Shengmei, 2005:81-91; Bei Xiaoyue, 389- 398 + 437), but the researches on the combination of these two kinds of feedback are very rare so far and what kind of feedback on the writing can help students improve their writing level most? These uncertain points make the author try to do the research: whether the combination of teacher feedback and peer feedback can enhance the effectiveness of feedback in writing? From this point of view, the author carried out a longitudinal study of 2 terms to make a comparison of the 3 kinds of feedback on English writing from the following aspects: discourse cohesion, vocabulary, grammar, syntax and technical mistakes of Non-English majors, tentatively explored the most effective way of feedback on English writing with the purpose of improving the Non-English majors' writing performance to the greatest degree, enriching the feedback theory and practice on English writing teaching and providing some guidance and help for English teachers in their teaching process.

2. Research Design and Implementation

The experiment lasted for 2 semesters, beginning from September, 2013 and to June, 2014 when

the 90 participants took part in CET-4, aiming to answer the following questions:

(1) How about the degree of improvement in the three group students' English writing after receiving 3 different ways of feedback (teacher feedback, peer feedback and "teacher + peer" feedback)?

(2) Are there significant differences in 3 group subjects' writing performance after this experimental study?

(3) Can the combination of teacher feedback and peer feedback improve the subjects' writing performance better than the other two forms of feedback?

The subjects of this experimental study were chosen from CET-4 pre-test tutorial class of a university in Northwest of China. The research divided them into 3 groups randomly according to 3 kinds of feedback and there were 30 students in each group. The researcher carried out a one-way AVONA of the 3 group subjects' English scores of last term, which showed that there was no significant difference ($P=.852$) in their English level. In the course of the experiment, the three experimental groups were given a 3-hour writing practice per week.

The researchers analyzed the data by SPSS 19.0 from 4 aspects: (1) a pared-samples T test was employed to compare the writing scores of pre-test and post-test of the 3 groups respectively after this experiment; (2) one-way AVONA was conducted to compare the numbers of errors in five indicators (discourse cohesion, vocabulary, grammar, syntax and technical mistakes) in 3 groups' pre-post writing test; (3) a pared-samples T test was carried out to analyze the improvement of errors in five indicators in their English writing of the three groups respectively; (4) one-way AVONA is conducted to find whether there was a significant difference in their CET-4 writing scores after the 3 groups students receiving 3 different ways of feedback on writing?

3. Analysis and Discussion of Experimental Results

Table1: pared-samples T test of pre-post writing scores of each group receiving 3 different feedback methods

Group		N	AVE.	SD.	95% Confidence Interval		P
					Min.	Max.	
Teacher feedback	Pre-test	30	61.61	1.5916	-13.1294	-12.4039	.000
	Post-test	30	73.53	.8172			
Peer Feedback	Pre-test	30	61.67	1.6470	-7.8025	-7.1377	.000
	Post-test	30	69.13	1.2242			
Teacher + Peer feedback	Pre-test	30	61.96	2.0254	-19.5430	-17.9902	.001
	Post-test	30	80.73	.7396			

The researcher employed pared-sampled T test to measure the 3 group subjects' pre-post writing scores respectively to determine the extent of the improvement in their writing performance among the three groups. As shown in table 1, the writing scores of the three groups have a significant difference, with the P values at .000, .000 and .001. And 95% confidence interval of three feedback ways doesn't contain 0, which illustrates that the writing performance of the subjects in 3 different groups has improved in different degrees. Besides, there is a significant difference in the degree of improvement in their English writing. The writing score of "teacher + peer" feedback subjects improved most (18.77 points); the teacher's feedback group increased 11.92 points which ranks the 2nd place; the peer feedback group improved least (7.46) which ranks the 3rd place after comparing their pre-test score and post-test score respectively. Furthermore, the standard deviation of writing in each group reduced to different degrees. From the statistics, the researcher found that the reduction degree of standard deviation in the "teacher + peer" group is the highest (1.2858) among the 3 groups; the reduction degree of standard deviation is 0.7744 in teacher's feedback and 0.4228 in peer's feedback respectively. That is to say, the SD of writing performance of each group has decreased to different degrees, but the reduction degree of SD in peer group is lower than those of the other 2 groups. The results may due to the uneven English level of the participants in peer group. In the process of correction, we found that some right language points are mistakenly corrected. In

addition, Chinese students tend to believe teacher's ability and they not only hold negative attitude towards peer's feedback, but also worry about the level of their own language ability, all of which reflect that the feedback from peers with different language levels is inferior to that of other 2 ways.

Table 2. Results of AVONA test on the number of errors counted from post-writing of the 3 group subjects'

5 indicators	groups	n.	Average.	standard deviation	F	P
discourse cohesion	group 1	30	3.86	2.08	7.405	.001
	group 2	30	5.30	2.43		
	group 3	30	3.23	1.83		
vocabulary	group 1	30	5.93	3.16	11.390	.000
	group 2	30	3.30	4.72		
	group 3	30	3.86	2.56		
grammar	group 1	30	5.26	3.12	17.360	.000
	group 2	30	6.30	3.55		
	group 3	30	3.73	2.36		
syntax	group 1	30	4.13	2.68	7.325	.001
	group 2	30	5.93	3.54		
	group 3	30	3.43	1.88		
technical errors	group 1	30	3.06	2.47	6.616	.002
	group 2	30	2.46	3.26		
	group 3	30	2.73	1.77		

Group 1=teacher feedback; group 2=peer feedback;
group 3="teacher + peer" feedback

The research did a one-way AVONA on the 5 indicators (discourse cohesion, vocabulary, grammar, syntax and technical mistakes) of the 3 group subjects' post-writing. As is shown in table 2, the P value is .001, .000, .000, .001 and .002 respectively after the experiment, which demonstrates that the number of errors of five indicators in their post-writing is significantly different. From the numbers of errors of the five indicators, we can easily see that the number of cohesion error, grammatical error, syntactic error is 3.23, 3.73 and 3.43 respectively in the "teacher + peer" group, which, without exception, are lower than those of the other two groups; while the error number of vocabulary(3.30) and technical errors(2.46) reaches the lowest in peer feedback group which shows that peer feedback is inferior to the other 2 ways of feedback in the aspects of discourse cohesion and syntax, but it plays a fairly important role in the aspects of language accuracy such as spelling, capitalization and fixed collocation. The result illustrates that teachers' feedback plays more attention to cohesive means, syntactic structure which are usually neglected by peer feedback group who attaches much importance to spelling, capitalization, technical aspects and etc. Thus, the researcher puts forward that the combination of teacher's feedback and peer's feedback should be employed effectively to improve the Non-English majors' English writing.

In order to analyze the most effective way of improving the subjects' writing performance, the author did a one-way AVONA test on the reduction numbers of the five indicators form pre-post writing test of the 3 group subjects and regarded it as the degree of improvement on the five indicators in their writing. As is shown in table 3, the P values of each indicator of the 3 groups are .015, .001, .000, .035 and .012, all of which are less than .05 which indicate that the reduction number of errors of five indicators in 3 group subjects' writing have significant difference. From the statistics, we can say that the reduction number of errors in discourse cohesion (3.40), grammar (3.30), and syntax (3.43) in "teacher + peer" feedback group reach the highest among the 3 groups; the error reduction number in the above 3 indicators(discourse cohesion, grammar and syntax) are

2.27, 2.94 and 3.00 respectively in teacher's feedback group which ranks the 2nd place. However, in terms of error reduction number in vocabulary and technical errors, the peer feedback group is the best one, which suggests that the emphasis of teacher feedback and peer feedback is different and they have different functions. Therefore, the combination of the 2 ways of feedback can be further improved the effectiveness of the writing teaching and the performance of subjects' writing.

Table 3 the results of AVONA test of the error reduction number of five indicators in the three groups' pre-post writing

5 indicators	groups	pre-test	post-test	error	Reduction number	F	P
discourse	group 1	6.13	3.86	2.27			
cohesion	group 2	6.63	5.30	1.33	2.415	.015	
	group 3	6.63	3.23	3.40			
vocabulary	group 1	10.80	5.93	4.87			
	group 2	9.33	3.30	6.03	7.491	.001	
	group 3	9.53	3.86	5.67			
grammar	group 1	8.20	5.26	2.94			
	group 2	8.30	6.30	2.00	11.923	.000	
	group 3	7.03	3.73	3.30			
syntax	group 1	7.13	4.13	3.00			
	group 2	7.26	5.93	1.33	3.487	.035	
	group 3	6.86	3.43	3.43			
technical	group 1	5.83	3.06	2.77			
errors	group 2	5.76	2.46	3.30	4.640	.012	
	group 3	5.96	2.73	3.23			

Group 1=teacher feedback;

Group 2=peer feedback

Group 3=teacher + peer feedback

Table 4. The ANOVA result of the writing score of the three groups

groups	N.	AVE.	SD.	F	P
Teacher's feedback	30	85.40	4.86		
Peer's feedback	30	79.27	9.73	52.791	.000
Teacher + peer feedback	30	97.53	5.39		

In order to analyze whether the three types of feedback have influence on the writing score of the subjects' CET-4 test taken in Sep., 2016 after the experiment, the researcher collected the writing score of the 3 group subjects and did a one-way ANOVA test to do a deep analysis. As is shown in table 4, the average writing score of the "teacher feedback" is 97.53, which is higher than that of single teacher feedback (85.40) or peer feedback (79.27). Moreover, the result of probability statistics shows that $P=.000(<.05)$, which shows that the writing score of the 3 groups reach significant difference, demonstrating that the reasonable combination of "teacher + peer" feedback can ultimately improve the overall writing performance of the subjects.

4. Conclusions

From the above statistics, it's undoubtedly that the teaching mode on writing has its advantages and defects. The peer feedback plays an important role in teaching writing to some extent without question and the combination of "teacher + peer" feedback is much more effective than single teacher's feedback or peer feedback. Thus, in the field of writing teaching, we should combine traditional teacher feedback's professional, comprehensive and systematic with the peer feedback

which has the characteristics of participation, practicalness and interactivity of peer feedback. As teachers, they should combine the 2 ways of feedback appropriately according to the characteristics of subjects and apply it to the teaching of English writing, which will be more effective than the traditional way of feedback, and thus can better improve college students' English writing ability and maximize the feedback effect on teaching writing.

Acknowledgments

Fund Project: Research Project on Teaching Reform of Higher Education in Shaanxi Province (Project Number: 17BY126)

Fund Project: The Science Research of the "Thirteenth Five-plan" of the Higher Education Academy of Shaanxi Province (Project Number: XGH1626)

References

- [1] Ferris, D. R. Student Reactions to Teacher Responses in multiple-draft composition Class [J]. TESOL Quarterly, 1995, (29): 33-53.
- [2] Hansen, J. G. and Liu, J. Guiding principles for effective peer response [J]. ELT Journal, 2005, 59(1): 31-38.
- [3] Zamel, v. Responding to student writing [J]. TESOL Quarterly, 1985, 19:79-101.
- [4] Li Hong, Wu Shengmei. An Overview of the Impact of Teacher feedback on Students' attention in English writing [J]. Journal of Chongqing University, 2005(2):88-91.
- [5] CAI Jigang, Chinese College English Writing –Comparison Study of Peer Feedback and Teacher Feedback [J]. Foreign language, 2011(2):66-72.
- [6] Zhou Yishu, Comparative Study on the ways of feedback of College English Writing [J]. Foreign language, 2013(3):87-96.