

## Investigating the Effectiveness of Peer Reviewing in a Moroccan University EFL Writing Class

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### Abstract

Although the effectiveness of peer reviewing has been established in some second language (L2) and foreign language (FL) writing contexts, its effectiveness in the Moroccan EFL context remains unexplored. The present paper reports on a quasi-experimental study designed to investigate the effectiveness of peer reviewing activity in Ibn Zohr University in Agadir, Morocco. The study aimed at (a) examining the effect of peer reviewing on the writing quality of the students' revised drafts, (b) evaluating the validity and relevance of feedback provided by peers, (c) and surveying the students' perceptions and attitudes towards the peer reviewing activity. Participants were 60 Moroccan freshmen who were enrolled in a spring semester composition course. The participants had been taught a twelve-session paragraph writing course, during which they received instruction and training on peer feedback practice. A pre-test post-test research design was used to collect data, which included the first drafts of participants' paragraphs, their revised drafts, the written comments and suggestions provided in checklists, and the participants' responses to a post-task questionnaire. The findings of both quantitative and qualitative analyses showed that peer reviewing is an effective activity in the Moroccan university EFL context: the paired t-test results revealed that significant improvements ( $p < .005$ ) were made in the revised drafts; the quantitative analysis of the completed checklists proved the participants' ability to provide valid feedback, and the qualitative analyses of the questionnaire revealed

a general acceptance of peer reviewing as a useful and appropriate pedagogical activity for Moroccan university students. The findings of the study are interpreted with regard to some limitations it involves as well as some research areas that need to be investigated by future studies.

**Key words:** Peer reviewing; Peer feedback / assessment; Effectiveness; L2/ FL writing; Valid feedback

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### INTRODUCTION

Feedback has been viewed as a key element to the process of learning development, in general, and to the improvement of writing skills in particular. The usefulness of feedback to develop the composition skills has been particularly acknowledged by process-oriented writing pedagogies in both L2 and FL contexts (K. Hyland & F. Hyland, 2006). These innovative process-oriented pedagogies have brought about significant changes in feedback practices in a way that empowers the student as an active learner and effective feedback provider, and, meanwhile, challenges the traditional product-oriented approaches.

In this respect, peer feedback/ assessment has received massive attention as an alternative assessment method and as a student-empowering feedback practice which challenges the traditional teacher-centered methodologies. Recently, there has been a growing interest in the field of L2 writing research regarding the usefulness of peer feedback in L2 contexts (Al-Hazmi & Scholfield, 2007; Carson & Nelson, 1996; Ferris, 2003; Hu & Lam, 2010; K. Hyland & F. Hyland, 2006; Kamimura,

2006; Mangelsdorf, 1992; Rollinson, 2005; Rouhi & Azizian, 2013; Tsui & Neg, 2000; Wakabayashi, 2008). Despite the proved benefits of the activity in L1 and L2 contexts, its implementation in EFL contexts has raised the issues of its pedagogical effectiveness and cultural appropriateness.

The present article reports on a quasi-experimental study which was conducted to investigate the effectiveness of peer reviewing activity in a Moroccan university EFL writing class. The study aimed at (a) examining the effect of peer reviewing on the writing quality of the students' revised drafts, (b) evaluating the validity and relevance of feedback provided by peers, (c) and surveying the students' perceptions and attitudes towards the peer reviewing activity.

## 1. LITERATURE REVIEW

The studies that have investigated the effectiveness of peer reviewing activity in the L2 contexts have been marked by inconsistency in terms of the research findings. Despite the fact that the activity is supported by insights from process writing theory (Elbow, 1973; Seow, 2002; Hansen & Liu, 2005), collaborative learning theory (Bruffee, 1984), Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (Santrock, 2011) and interaction and Second Language Acquisition (Long, 1985), the effectiveness of peer reviewing in L2 writing classes remains a controversial issue. The following section reviews some studies with conflicting results, which represent different perspectives regarding the effectiveness of peer reviewing in L2 writing contexts.

### 1.1 Perspectives on Peer Feedback

#### 1.1.1 The Learning Potentials of Peer Feedback

According to Ferris (2003), most of the studies that have investigated the effectiveness of peer response in L2 contexts have yielded positive results. Ferris (2003) has summarized the benefits of peer feedback, as reported in several studies, as follows: first, students increase their confidence and critical thinking skills as a result of reading texts written by peers on similar tasks. In addition, peer feedback has the value of enabling students to get more feedback from peers than what they usually get from a single teacher. In addition, they obtain multiple perspectives on their work as they get feedback from a more diverse audience. Finally, peer feedback activities build a sense of classroom community among students.

In addition, many studies have confirmed that peer reviewing has social, cognitive, affective and methodological benefits (Rollinson, 2005). Rollinson (2005) argues that peer feedback is effective in many ways. First, it has been proved that students can be effective feedback providers and revisers as well. Also, the feedback provided by peers tends to be of a different kind

from that of the teacher in the sense that peers' feedback is more specific and more focused. In addition, reading critically others' writings is likely to make students self-critical and reviewers for their own writings. Moreover, peer feedback offers students the opportunity to write in a more communicative way because the "real" audience can provide immediate feedback, which will enable students to reformulate their messages more effectively. Another advantage of peer audiences is of affective value. Peer audiences are more sympathetic than the teacher audience which is viewed as distant and probably more judgmental.

Similarly, Keh (1990, cited in Kamimura, 2006) argued that peer feedback enables students to get opportunities to develop their ability to give constructive feedback, receive advice on their drafts, have a broader audience for their work, and see different approaches other students have taken in responding to an assignment.

Wakabayashi (2008) has investigated the effectiveness of peer feedback on EFL writing. The focus of the study was on the Japanese university students. It aimed at examining the effects of peer feedback on learners' writing quality, revision behavior, and perceptions of the peer reviewing task. After the students' drafts have been scored by five independent raters, a comparison was drawn between the essay scores of the original and the revised draft. The result of this comparison showed significant increases in the mean scores (the mean scores of the first and the revised drafts were 65.96 ( $SD = 11.31$ ) and 73.24 ( $SD = 7.90$ ) respectively.). In addition, this study showed that students provided more content-based feedback than form-based. Moreover, the results of the questionnaire which was administered at the end revealed students' positive attitudes towards the usefulness of peer feedback.

Lundstrom and Baker (2009) have examined the effectiveness of peer feedback by distinguishing between the effects it has on the writing quality of both the feedback provider and the feedback receiver. Comparing the writings of two groups (receivers and givers) at the beginning and the end of semester revealed that givers have made more significant gains in their own writing over the course than did the receivers (significant effect of treatment:  $F(1,45) = 15.899, p < .0001$ ).

Rouhi and Azizian (2013) have done a quasi-experimental study examining the benefit of peer review to the feedback giver. They have compared the effect of providing corrective feedback to receiving it from peers. Similarly, the results of the study showed that feedback givers made significant improvements in their writing than feedback receivers ( $p < .0001, \eta^2 = .395$ ). This implies that the benefits of peer reviewing are bidirectional. Reviewers do not only improve their writing skill, but they also develop self-evaluation skills.

Hu and Lam (2010) have conducted a study to explore peer reviewing in terms of its cultural appropriateness

and pedagogical efficacy with adult Chinese students, learning English as a second language. This study examined how learner's perceptions, their previous experience, and culturally based beliefs and practices affect the effectiveness of peer reviewing. The participants were twenty Chinese students who were enrolled in a postgraduate program in a Singaporean university. The researchers collected the data from the students' original and revised drafts, the checklist used for revision, questionnaires and interviews. The results of the study have proved that peer reviewing is an appropriate and effective pedagogical tool in L2 writing instruction for Chinese students. The participants have shown their ability to provide valid feedback (74.58% of the provided comments by peers were valid) and then incorporate it in their revised drafts, which has significantly improved the quality of the revised drafts. The mean score of the second drafts ( $M=55.78$ ) is significantly higher than the one of the first drafts ( $M=53.40$ ). Additionally, the majority of the participants (80%) expressed their desire to have their peers' suggestions as one type of feedback besides the teacher's one. Moreover, the participants' indicated preference for the teacher's feedback over peer feedback didn't affect their actual peer review behaviors.

### 1.1.2 Challenges of Incorporating Peer Feedback

Although the effectiveness of peer reviewing has been established and strongly supported by the findings of many studies cited previously, the incorporation of the practice in the EFL class involves challenges of different types. These constraints are related to the learner, the teacher, the learning context, and pedagogical considerations.

Rollinson (2005) stressed time constraints, students' characteristics, and their inappropriate cultural interaction, age and linguistic level as well as the teacher's comfort as hindrances to the adoption of process writing approach to teach writing for L2 students. He focused mainly on the problematic aspects of incorporating peer feedback in ESL classes. Peer reviewing is a long and time consuming process that involves reading drafts, making notes, negotiating with peers and commenting on their writings. In addition to that, students' personal characteristics also influence their engagement in peer reviewing activity. Some students may not be convinced of the worth of peer feedback. They would consider their peers as less qualified to comment on and critique their writings. Others may see the interaction involved in peer reviewing as culturally inappropriate. Also, students' age and linguistic level may hinder students from engaging effectively in peer feedback activity. Moreover, the teacher himself may not feel comfortable to hand over his traditional role to students because teachers would find it difficult to monitor the peers' interactions while they are taking place simultaneously.

Moreover, some opponents of peer feedback have maintained that ESL/EFL writers can't provide valid

feedback as they are still struggling with language problems (Leki, 1990; Tsui & NG, 2000). Moreover, they argue that learners from a non-Western rhetorical/cultural background, where harmony is emphasized, have considerable difficulty engaging themselves in peer feedback sessions in which participants' active negotiation is required (Mangelsdorf, 1992; Carson & Nelson, 1996).

Al-Hazmi and Scholfield (2007), in an action research study, found out that peer reviewing has limited effects on students' writing quality. The study aimed at improving the writing quality of low proficiency Saudi university students. Although students have made improvements in the use of mechanics, the content and the organization of their writing didn't improve. This was attributed to the fact that students couldn't abandon their traditional product-based learning habits, where the focus was on error correction. This weakness, however, can be overcome by training students regularly on peer reviewing.

Generally, the counter arguments regarding the effectiveness of peer feedback in an EFL context revolve mainly around the students' weak language proficiency and their educational and cultural backgrounds. This usually results in students' inability to provide valid and appropriate feedback. For this purpose, some researchers argue that pre-training sessions are needed to equip students with the necessary skills to be both effective feedback providers and users. Many studies have confirmed the usefulness of training in exploiting the potential of peer reviewing (Hansen & Liu, 2005; Min, 2005; Min, 2006).

### 1.2 Students' Perceptions and Stances Towards Peer Reviewing

Many of the studies that were cited in the previous chapters seem to indicate that the majority of students who have been engaged in peer reviewing activity hold positive attitudes regarding the usefulness of peer feedback. This section deals with studies that have deeply explored the students' perceptions and stances.

Maarof et al. (2011) has examined the ESL students' perceptions of the role of teacher's feedback, peer feedback and combined teacher-peer feedback in ESL writing. The results of the study have shown a general tendency to favor the teacher's feedback. The participants perceived that their teachers tend to use more positive and more facilitative feedback than peers. Also, they believe that the teacher's role is very indispensable in giving feedback. They expect the teacher to provide both general and specific feedback that can address all their written errors. However, the study revealed that 150 Malaysian secondary school students from five schools hold positive attitudes towards the combined use of teacher and peer feedback. They think that both teacher feedback and peer feedback can enhance their writing skill when used together.

Nelson and Careson (1998) have conducted a microethnographic study to investigate the Chinese and Spanish speaking students' stances and assumptions of their interaction in peer response groups. The subjects of the study were three peer response groups in an advanced ESL class. The analysis of the data, made of videos of the activity and interviews with participants, has shown that participants preferred negative comments that identified problems in their drafts. Also, they showed a preference for the teacher's comments as opposed to their peer's feedback. Although the participants from the two groups were convinced that the purpose of peer feedback was to help them improve their writing, they agreed that feedback was sometimes ineffective and that, at times, they felt that too much time was spent on useless issues. However, the cultural differences between the two groups have been a main factor behind the participants' incorporation of their peers' feedback in the revised drafts. Chinese students tend to depend more on the group consensus to guide decisions about changes.

Aoun (2008) has cited some studies that confirmed the students' favorable views toward peer feedback and assessment. The results of a survey questionnaire, for example, have shown that 80% of the respondents believe that the improvement they made in their writing was the result of their peer feedback. They also felt more motivated thanks to their engagement in peer assessment, which they viewed as an incentive to perform well.

Mangelsdorf (1992) has conducted a survey to explore the views of a heterogeneous group of freshman students who were enrolled in a first semester ESL composition course at the University of Arizona. The results of this study revealed that most students perceived peer feedback as a beneficial technique that helped them revise their writing, particularly the content and organization areas. Moreover, students have stressed that peer reviews helped them clarify and discover their ideas because their peers' comments and suggestions enabled them to be aware of the needs and expectations of the audience.

However, some other studies have demonstrated that peer reviewing is not always a welcomed activity in the classroom. According to Mangelsdorf (1992), many students have believed that peer feedback didn't help them feel responsible about their improvement. They didn't also feel confident about their ability to critique a text. Accordingly, the largest negative views regarding peer review in this study concerned the students' lack of trust in their peer responses to their texts and, generally, the limitations of students as critics. Students' complaints about their peer feedback mentioned such problems as student ignorance, apathy, and/or vagueness. Additionally, another problem with peer reviewing that this study has revealed is the fact that students from Asian cultures might resist such a student-centered activity because they were not familiar with a collaborative, student-centered environment.

Similarly, Fei (2006 in Wang, 2014) argued that without receiving sufficient training on peer feedback practice, most Chinese EFL learners view peer feedback as non-useful for draft revision. Also, Mangelsdorf (1992) has hypothesized that students' perceptions of the usefulness of peer feedback would change over time as students would be made more familiar with the practice. Yet, this hypothesis has been challenged by the findings of a recent study conducted by Wang (2014). Contrary to Mangelsdorf's hypothesis, Wang (2014) found out that students' perceived usefulness of peer feedback decreased over time. This was attributed to these factors: Students' knowledge of assigned essay topics, students' limited English proficiency, students' attitudes towards the peer feedback practice, time constraints of the in-class peer feedback session, and students' concerns with interpersonal relationship.

To conclude, most studies that have been cited in this section show that the majority of students hold positive attitudes regarding the usefulness of peer feedback. The negative views that some students have expressed can be attributed to such factors as students' educational and cultural backgrounds, lack of training on peer reviewing practice, lack of knowledge about the writing topic and students' poor language proficiency. Apparently, most of these factors are related to classroom teaching and learning practices. This implies that composition teachers can play a paramount role in guiding students and preparing them to view peer reviewing in a positive way. To achieve this, effective implementation of the activity in ESL/EFL context should account for students' actual language proficiency, their knowledge about the issue of writing and their cultural background.

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## 2. THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

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Teaching the writing skill has been one of the most challenging tasks that Moroccan EFL instructors encounter especially at the tertiary level. The teaching and learning conditions at the Moroccan universities and colleges make the task of the writing instructor more challenging. One of the main challenges that face the Moroccan university instructors is the large class size. Because the number of enrolled students in the English department is gradually increasing, the problem of over crowdedness is getting worse year after year (the class size usually exceeds 100 students). As a result, many writing instructors find it impractical to meet their students' needs for feedback and scaffolding, which are considered as key elements to encourage and consolidate students' learning of the composing skills. Certainly, studying in such conditions deprives many Moroccan university students from the potential benefits of feedback and, hence, hinders their writing skill development. Therefore, it was hypothesized that the exploitation of the potentials and benefits of peer



reviewing in the Moroccan university writing class can remedy the current unfortunate situation.

### 3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main purpose of the current study was to investigate the effectiveness of peer reviewing activity in a Moroccan university EFL class. The first objective of the study was to explore the effects of in-class peer reviewing activity on the writing quality of students' revised drafts by comparing between the mean scores of the students' original draft and the revised version. Also, it was hoped that the study would enlighten us about other related issues like the importance of class instruction and training, and the several ways through which students can benefit from the activity. Second, the study was conducted with the objective of evaluating the validity of the feedback provided by the participants in the checklist they had used during the peer reviewing session. The analysis of the peers' comments and suggestions would provide insightful information about the particular writing areas on which students can provide more valid feedback as well as the writing areas that cause troublesome problems. Finally, the third dimension of the effectiveness of PF was the students' attitudes and perceptions towards the activity. Therefore, another objective of the study was to gain a deep understanding of the participants' attitudes and perceptions towards the usefulness of PF activity.

### 4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The issue of the "effectiveness" of peer reviewing in this study was addressed in a tridimensional way by focusing on three main aspects: (a) the improving quality of the revised drafts after peer reviewing sessions, (b) the validity of the feedback provided by the participants, (c) and the extent to which the participants hold positive attitudes and informed perceptions regarding the peer reviewing activity. On the basis of this, the following three research questions guided the study:

Question 1: Is there a significant change in participants' scores in paragraph writing following their participation in peer reviewing activity?

Question 2: To what extent are Moroccan university EFL students able to provide valid feedback about different aspects of paragraph writing?

Question 3: Do Moroccan university students hold positive or negative attitudes towards the usefulness of peer feedback?

### 5. METHODOLOGY

The design of this study was a quasi-experimental design in which the form of one group pre-test post-test design was adopted. The participants included 60 male and female second semester university students enrolling at the faculty of Arts, Ibn Zohr University, Agadir, Morocco. To address the research questions of the study, three data collection instruments were used. First, after the class had engaged in the peer reviewing activity, the first and the revised drafts were collected and scored in order to compare between the scores the students gained before and after the activity. Second, the checklist used by the participants to provide feedback about their peers' paragraphs was analyzed in order to assess the validity of the feedback provided. Finally, a post-activity questionnaire was administered to survey the participants' views and perceptions of the peer reviewing activity.

### 6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study have been largely consistent in responding to the general question of the potential effectiveness of peer reviewing activity in the Moroccan EFL University writing class. The results of the study will be presented and discussed in correspondence with the research questions:

**Question 1: Is there a significant change in participants' scores in paragraph writing following their participation in peer reviewing activity?**

First, the comparison between the mean scores of the participants' first and revised drafts (Table 1) indicated that there was a significant improvement in the writing quality of the participants after their engagement in peer reviewing activity (1st draft:  $M= 62.12$  / 2nd draft:  $M= 66.45$ ). Moreover, the paired samples t-test (Table 2) which was conducted to compare the means of the gained scores in the first and the revised drafts has yielded significant results. The two-tailed p-value ( $p=.000$ ) was substantially smaller than the specified alpha value of .05. ( $p< .05$ ) in all the tests which were run to compare the gained total scores as well as the scores obtained at specific areas of writing (content, organization, vocabulary, language, mechanics) (Table 3). This can be considered a clear indication that the participants made significant improvements at all areas of paragraph writing after their engagement in peer reviewing session.

**Table 1**  
**Paired Samples Statistics Comparing the Mean Scores of First and Second Drafts**

		Mean	N	Std. deviation	Std.error mean
Pair 1	The participants' overall scores in the first draft	62.1250	60	15.33762	1.98008
	The participants' overall scores in the second draft	66.4583	60	15.03197	1.94062

**Table 2**  
**Results of Paired Samples *T*-Test Comparing the Overall Scores of the First and the Revised Draft**

	Paired differences					<i>T</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Std. error mean	95% confidence interval of the difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 ■ The participants' overall scores in the first draft ■ The participants' overall scores in the second draft	-4.33333-	3.49778	.45156	-5.23691-	-3.42976-	-9.596-	59	.000

**Table 3**  
**Results of Paired-Samples *T*-Tests Comparing First and Second Drafts in Terms of Scores Obtained at Different Aspects of Writing**

Aspect	1 <sup>st</sup> drafts		2 <sup>nd</sup> drafts		<i>df</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>P</i> (2-tailed)
	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>			
Content	21.55	4.382	22.31	4.260	59	-5.442-	.000
Organization	12.23	3.461	13.33	3.393	59	-7.856-	.000
Vocabulary	12.32	3.249	13.05	3.280	59	-5.952-	.000
Language	13.47	4.876	14.62	5.002	59	-6.854-	.000
Mechanics	2.78	.761	3.22	.865	59	-5.957-	.000

These findings are strong evidence that the participants benefited from the complex process of peer reviewing that involves receiving and giving feedback, negotiating meanings, self-reflection and self assessment. This had a remarkably positive effect on their overall score in the revised draft compared to the total scores obtained in the original one. This considerable improvement can be considered as a clear evidence that the participants have benefited from the peer reviewing activity in several important ways. These findings are largely consistent with those reported in other studies (Ferris, 2003; Wakabayashi, 2008; Kamimura, 2006), which have proved the effectiveness of peer reviewing activity in EFL writing contexts.

However, the results of the present study do not support the findings reported in Mangelsdorf (1992), and Carson and Nelson (1996) who claimed that learners from non-western backgrounds can't be effective peer reviewers because of their concern about maintaining the group harmony, which can be threatened by the critical comments they provide for their peers. Also the results of the present paper are not consistent with the study conducted by Al-Hazmi and Scholfield (2007), which found out that peer reviewing has limited effects on Saudi students' writing quality, especially the levels of content and organization.

This discrepancy between these results and the ones of the present study can be attributed to the training factor. The sixty participants of the present study had taken a four-sessions training on peer reviewing prior to their engagement in the current study. They had been, first, instructed on the importance of peer reviewing activity. Later, they were trained on and familiarized with providing feedback for their peers using a checklist developed for this purpose. Actually, the use of checklist has enabled the

participants to provide clear suggestions and comments which addressed specific areas in their peer's paragraphs. This supports the findings of the studies conducted by Min (2005 and 2006), in which he concluded that training students on providing clear and specific feedback has positive effects on the quality of feedback received and the rate of feedback incorporation. In addition, the majority of the participants belong to the new generation of Moroccan learners who, as high school students, have studied in standards-based instruction programs (Ministry of Education, 2007), in which process writing is emphasized in the writing methodology. This strongly implies that training students on providing feedback with checklists and regular practice of the activity in the classroom can yield effective results in any EFL writing class regardless of the students' cultural backgrounds.

Also, the improvement in the participants' scores after the peer reviewing activity could have resulted from the feedback that was received either in the written mode (the comments and suggestions on checklists) or the oral one (negotiations between the participants), or both. As Hansen and Liu (2005) stated, the peer feedback can be transmitted through four main modes depending on the classroom context. In the current study, the class size (60 participants) has allowed for various modes of peer response. During the peer reviewing session, the participants often engaged in peer to peer negotiations, and sometimes in group discussion. Apparently, the pairs resorted to consulting other peers when there was disagreement among a pair of students. This could have allowed the peers to benefit from various perspectives, and, hence, the quality and validity of the feedback received would have been improved.

However, the score improvement could have been the result of other contributing factors that were involved

in the revision process. For example, reading a peer's well written paragraph might have triggered the writers to self-evaluate their own paragraphs (Rollinson, 2005), and therefore make necessary improvements. Also, the comments and suggestions received from the peer might not have been incorporated in the revised draft. Instead, they could have acted as cues that pushed the participants to reconsider their ideas and correct their mistakes, and hence, improve the quality of their paragraphs.

Moreover, it was found out that feedback providers make more significant improvements in their writing than feedback receivers (Lundstrom & Baker, 2009; Rouhi & Azizian, 2013). This suggests that the benefits of feedback can be bidirectional. To illustrate this, providing feedback is beneficial for both the "giver" and the "receiver". The feedback provider might learn from both the strengths and weaknesses of his peer's writing. In the present study, the improvement in scores can't have been exclusively attributed to the received feedback, but also to the process of providing feedback itself. For example, the good writing proficiency of the writer might encourage the reviewer to improve the quality of his own paragraph by comparing it to his peer's well written paragraph. On the other hand, the mistakes that the reviewer spot in his peer's paragraph might have pushed him to self evaluate his own writing and avoid similar mistakes.

#### **Question 2: To what extent are Moroccan university EFL students able to provide valid feedback about different aspects of paragraph writing?**

The major concern about peer review in L2 writing classes is that students may not be linguistically qualified to provide useful feedback (Leki, 1990; Tsui & NG, 2000). Therefore, measuring the proportion of valid suggestions offered by peers is a crucial criterion for the effectiveness of the activity and the usefulness of the feedback provided.

The results of the analysis of the comments and suggestions provided by peers in checklists (Table 4) revealed that the participants provided a great deal (67.66% of the total feedback) of valid feedback about different aspects of paragraph writing. This percentage is comparable to the findings of some similar studies which investigated the validity of the feedback provided by L2/FL peer reviewers. For instance, Hu and Lam (2010) found out that 75% of the total feedback provided by 20 Chinese university students were valid. Similarly, Rollinson (2005) has found out that a higher level of valid feedback (80%) was provided by college-level Spanish students who participated in his study. This general consistency in the obtained results evidently shows that EFL Moroccan university students are no exception in their ability to provide valid feedback. The high level of the valid feedback provided can be generally explained by the proficiency level of the participants, who have taken their second writing course at their first year at the university. Also, the training on

using the peer feedback checklist that the participants had undergone prior to the study would have been effective in enabling students to focus on particular areas of paragraph writing, and hence provide specific and focused feedback. The slight difference between the results of the former studies and the present one can be attributed to the sample investigated in the current study (60 participants), which is significantly larger than that of Hu and Lam's (2010) study (20 subjects), for example. A smaller sample of participants is more manageable for the researcher regarding training them on PF activity and monitoring their work while they engage in the revision process.

Additionally, the results have shown that the organization oriented feedback (348 comments and suggestions) provided by the participants outnumbered that of other writing areas (content, language and mechanics). This result was not compatible with the findings of a study conducted by Villamil and Guerrero (1998) in which they investigated the impact of peer revision on writers' final drafts among 14 Spanish speaking ESL college students. They found out that the organization area was the least attended aspect in both the narrative (3% of the total revisions) and argumentative modes (7% of the total revisions). The explanation hypothesized by the researchers was that students' focus on expanding and elaborating on content led them to assume that they were also reorganizing the material.

In the present study, the high percentages of organization related comments provided by the reviewers can be attributed to the content of the writing courses which the participants had taken during the first and the second semester. The main objective of the two courses had been to enable students to write well organized paragraphs. Therefore, the focus has been mainly on the areas of organization, coherence and cohesion. Apparently, the knowledge and skills that the participants had developed throughout these two courses have rather enabled them to provide adequate feedback about the area of organization more than other areas.

Moreover, the results indicated that the ratio of content related feedback (259 comments and suggestions) outnumbered the language based one (76 comments and suggestions). This result is compatible with the findings of Kamimura's (2006) study, in which he compared between the performance of two groups of high and low proficient level students. He found out that the great majority of the students' feedback fell into meaning- based categories for both groups. In the present study, the argumentative topic selected for the writing activity (*whether students prefer to live with their families or with their mates*) might have facilitated the participants' task to provide feedback about the content area. The topic falls within the university students' interests and taps into their daily experiences. This suggests that the topic choice can affect the quality of the content feedback provided by the students.

Similarly, the area of mechanics was among the areas in which the participants provided a great deal of feedback (223 comments and suggestions, 144 of which were valid). Actually, this writing area allows itself for more feedback because students, even the advanced ones, tend to have problems with the use of punctuation marks particularly. However, the participants failed to provide a similar high rate of language related feedback (only 76 comments and suggestions) compared to other areas. The scarcity of this type of feedback can be explained by

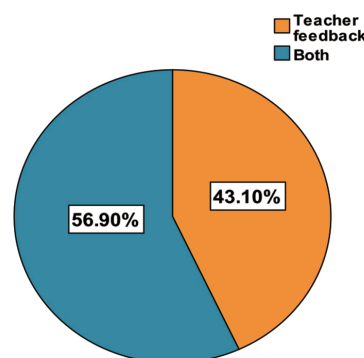
the students' linguistic knowledge as first year university students, who may not have grasped some grammatical rules. Another possible reason why the reviewers refrained from providing feedback about this area was the fact that the language related rubric in the checklist was not sufficiently clear. In addition, the technical language used in the instruction (sentence fragment, word order,...) might have caused comprehension difficulty and wrong interpretations among the participants. This could have led many reviewers to skip this item in the checklist.

**Table 4**  
**Proportions of Suggestions and Comments Which Were Provided by Peers**

	Organization	Content	Language	Mechanics	Total
No. of suggestions & comments	348	259	76	223	906
No. of valid suggestions & comments	220	193	56	144	613
% of valid suggestions	63.21%	74.51%	73.68%	64.57%	67.66%

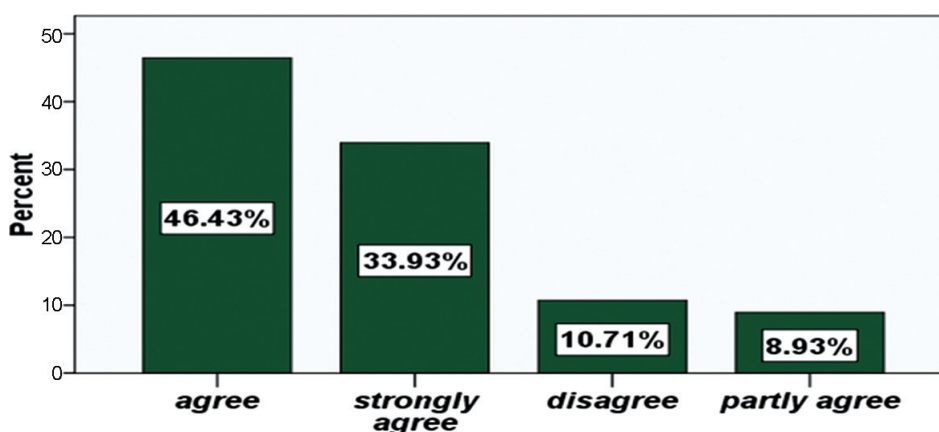
**Question 3: Do Moroccan university students hold positive or negative attitudes towards the usefulness of peer feedback?**

Finally, the questionnaire findings strengthened the tendency of the positive results of other instruments. Generally, the respondents seemed to hold positive stances and informed knowledge and perceptions regarding the usefulness of reviewing activity. The results (Figure 1) showed that 56.90% of the participants demonstrated their preference for receiving feedback from both the teacher and peers. They argued that peer feedback offers them the opportunity to benefit from different perspectives.



**Figure 1**  
**Students' Feedback Preference**

**Attitude8: Peers can help to correct one's mistakes**



**Figure 2**  
**The Students' Attitudes Towards the Impact of Peer Feedback on Their Writing Accuracy**

This tendency, therefore, contradicts the results of the early survey studies which yielded opposite results (Nelson & Careson, 1998; Zhang, 1995). For example, Zhang (1995 in Tsui & NG, 2000) found out that 76% of the

eighty-one L2 college freshmen who were surveyed about their feedback preference stated that they preferred the teacher's feedback to peer and self-feedback. In this study, the respondents were guided to choose either the teacher



feedback, the peer feedback or self-feedback. By not suggesting the option of a combined teacher-peer feedback model, the respondents were misguided, intentionally or unintentionally, to make exclusive choices.

On the other hand, the arguments stated by the proponents of incorporating PF in the writing class are supported by the results of a comparative study (Miao, Badger, & Zhen, 2006) of peer and teacher feedback in a Chinese EFL writing class, and a survey study conducted by Maarof et al. (2011). The former proved that the improvement in the participants' revised drafts was attributed to the incorporation of both the teacher's and peer's feedback. In addition to this, the researchers argued that the peer feedback group has made more meaning changes than did the teacher feedback group. The latter study (Maarof et al., 2011) found out that although there was a tendency among the 150 Malaysian secondary students to favor the teacher's comments and suggestions, the participants were very positive about benefitting from the combined use of teacher and peer feedback. This suggests that teacher feedback and peer feedback should be regarded as complementary rather than exclusive.

The questionnaire results have also shown that a significant number of the participants held positive attitudes towards the usefulness of peer feedback in improving different areas of their paragraphs. They seemed to be convinced that their peers' comments and suggestions had helped them improve the language (35% strongly agree; 33.3% agree), content (16.95 % strongly agree; 44.07% agree), organization (17.24% strongly agree; 41.30% agree) and mechanics (35% strongly agree; 41.7% agree) of their first drafts. Actually, it was noticeable how the positive attitudes of the respondents were consistent along the questionnaire items that targeted their views regarding the potentials of peer feedback in improving these four main areas of paragraph writing. This consistency implies a strong conviction among the participants that peer reviewing had positive effects on the overall quality of their paragraphs.

Obviously, the peers' comments are assumed to have stimulated the writers to review their writings in a particular way, and would have enabled them to spot and then correct certain mistakes in their first drafts. Another potential advantage of feedback from peers is that it enables the writer to be aware of the needs and expectations of the audience so that he can clarify and improve his ideas to meet these needs and expectations (Ferris 2003; Rollinson, 2005). Generally, this attitude underlies a high level of trust that the participants placed upon their peers' language proficiency and their ability to provide valid feedback. This positive attitude provided a counter-evidence to Carson and Nelson (1996)'s study which made the claim that peer feedback is not a welcomed activity among students coming from non-western cultures because of their cultural backgrounds. Meanwhile, the results of the present study are supported

by the findings of other studies which have been conducted in EFL contexts (For example: Hu & Lam, 2010; Wakabayashi, 2008).

The trust that the participants of the present study seemed to place upon feedback they received from their peers was consistently confirmed by the significant results of the subsequent questionnaire items. The majority of the respondents (46.43% agree, 33.93% strongly agree) believed that their peers can help them correct their mistakes, and hence improve the accuracy of their paragraphs. In addition, a significant number of them was very positive about the linguistic qualifications of their peers and the reliability of their comments. More importantly is the attitudes of the participants towards the effect of their peers' language proficiency on the reliability of the feedback they provided. It seemed that the participants have developed a positive awareness regarding this area. It was only 7.27% who strongly agreed, and 36.36% agreed with the view that the reliability of the peer's feedback is dependent on his language proficiency.

A possible explanation of this positive inclination among the participants might be both the explicit instruction on the usefulness of the activity, which the participants had received at the beginning of the course, and their actual experience of the usefulness of peer reviewing throughout the four sessions in which they had practiced the activity in the classroom. Moreover, a whole class discussion on the importance of the activity used to follow each peer reviewing session. It is assumed, therefore, that these factors altogether could have contributed to form these positive stances among the participants. This interpretation could be supported by Mangelsdorf' (1992) hypothesis that students' perceptions of the usefulness of peer feedback would change over time as students would be made more familiar with the practice. In the same way, Fei (2006 in Wang, 2014) argued that the negative attitude most Chinese EFL learners hold towards the usefulness peer feedback for draft revision is due to their lack of sufficient training on peer feedback practice.

Similarly, the participants seemed to hold positive views about the reliability and usefulness of the feedback they themselves provided for their peers. The results showed that the majority of them believed that their comments and suggestions would be of some use for their peers. This was not a surprising attitude since the participants had already expressed a positive attitude toward the feedback they received from their peers. In this respect, some studies have proved that the feedback giver benefits from the peer reviewing activity more than the feedback receiver (Lundstrom & Baker, 2009; Rouhi & Azizian, 2013). The results of these two studies showed that feedback givers made more significant improvements in their writing than feedback receivers. The bidirectional nature of the benefits of peer reviewing may justify the

positive stances the participants had toward both the feedback they received and the one they themselves provided.

In the same pattern, the positive stances the participants held towards peer reviewing were reflected on their perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of the activity. The results revealed that the majority of the participants were aware of the main learning and psychological advantages of the activity. For instance, more than a half (55.6%) of them thought that peer reviewing would help them improve their writing

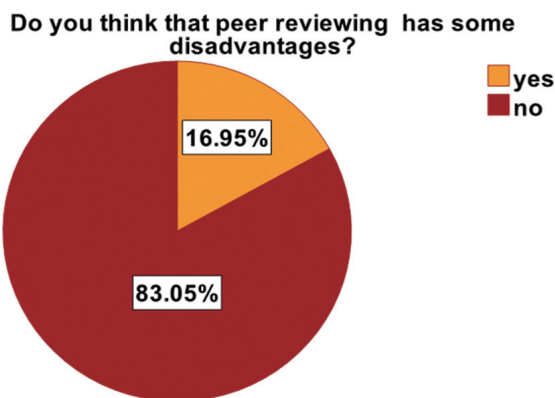
skills, 46% believed that PF is effective in helping them identify and correct their mistakes, and 38.9% argued that their ideas about the writing topic improved thanks to their engagement in the peer reviewing activity. More importantly, the participants included other psychological benefits of the activity in their responses. They associated the activity with such advantages as increasing self confidence and self-esteem of students. These perceived benefits by the participants have been reported in several studies like Ferris (2003), Keh (1990), Rollinson (2005), and Wakabayashi (2008).

**Table 5**  
**The Advantages of Peer Feedback as They Are Perceived By Students**

	Adv.1: To improve one's writing skills	Adv.2: To find out new ideas about the topic	Adv.3: PF fosters communication between students.	Adv.4: PF raises students' self esteem	Adv.5: The peer is more communicative than the teacher	Adv.6: To correct one's mistakes	Other advantages
Percent	55.6 %	38.9 %	13.0 %	5.6 %	3.7%	46.3%	37.0 %

Likewise, the results of the participants' perceptions of the possible disadvantages of PF activity were consistent with the previous ones. While most participants (83.05%) believed that PF has no disadvantages, a small number (16.95%) had an opposite view.

2014) which investigated the effectiveness of teaching planning and monitoring as meta-cognitive strategies on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' argumentative writing accuracy. The results of this experimental study revealed that the eight weeks of meta-cognitive instruction had positive effects on the experimental group's writing performance (the mean scores of the experimental group in the pretest and posttest are 10.90 and 12.40 respectively). The implication is that meta-cognitive instruction should be an integral part in the EFL writing class.



**Figure 3**  
**Students' Opinions About the Disadvantages of Peer Feedback**

Obviously, these informed ideas and perceptions expressed by the participants can be attributed to the aforementioned classroom instruction and training that students received and to the discussion that used to follow each peer reviewing session. This brings to forth the importance of meta-cognitive instruction and reflective learning in EFL writing classes. In the present study, raising students' awareness to the importance of writing process in general, and to the usefulness of peer reviewing activity in particular, and encouraging them to reflect on the activity and evaluate its effectiveness has proved to be an effective learning process through which the majority of the participants have identified the benefits of the activity. This implication could be supported by the results of an Iranian study (Panahandeh & Esfandiari Asl,

## 7. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

There are useful implications that can be drawn from the implementation of peer reviewing as an integral part of process-oriented approach in the Moroccan EFL context.

To begin with, the findings of this study have shown that peer reviewing can be an effective pedagogical activity in Moroccan university EFL writing classes. In addition to the fact that students' writing proficiency has significantly improved after the peer reviewing session, the activity created opportunities for self-assessment and revisions, purposeful interaction and collaborative learning. Therefore, the potentials of the activity go beyond improving the quality of the students' paragraphs to empowering them communicatively to be able to interact effectively, making them have a better understanding of their writing ability by engaging in oral discussions with their peers and developing their awareness as to what constitutes good and poor writing.

Additionally, providing meta-cognitive instruction on the potentials of peer reviewing as a learning process is essential to prepare students psychologically in order

to approach the activity with a positive stance. Students' attitudes play determining roles in the learning process in general. Therefore, the success of any classroom activity certainly depends on how students value it more than how the teacher does. Moreover, training students regularly on providing focused feedback using checklist is a prerequisite for a successful implementation of peer feedback in the writing class. When students regularly practice providing feedback for their peers by using a checklist, they develop their awareness about different aspects of writing, and, hence, learn how to provide focused feedback about each aspect of their peer's writing. Therefore, the checklist should be tailored according to each writing lesson objectives focusing each time on a particular area of writing instead of addressing different areas all at once. More than that, the regular integration of the activity will create opportunities where students experience success in their writing achievement. This will improve their self confidence and facilitate their acquisition of autonomous writing skills (Hu & Lam, 2010).

More than this, the outcome of the study strongly implies that the large class size should not discourage the university writing instructors from using peer reviewing in their classes. Introducing the activity at an initial stage of the course, raising students' awareness to its potentials and training them on reviewing their peers' drafts using a checklist are essential procedures to familiarize students with the activity regardless of the class size. It was indeed noticed during the current study that the size of the class played an advantageous role. Because the discussions often extended beyond the pair work mode, the large class size has allowed for various modes of peer response, which gave students more opportunities for multiple interactions, and hence multiple audiences. More importantly, it was found out that the benefits of engaging in peer reviewing activity are bidirectional (Lundstrom & Baker, 2009; Rouhi & Azizian, 2013). This implies that both high and low achievers learn from the process of giving and receiving feedback. Therefore, writing instructors are recommended to exploit the potentials of multiple ability nature of large classes at the university.

Furthermore, the findings of the present study show that the Moroccan university students were able to provide many valid comments and suggestions about each others' paragraphs. This provides strong evidence against the claim that the language proficiency of EFL learners does not qualify them to provide valid feedback. Therefore, university writing instructors need to place trust on their students by empowering them to be feedback providers. This would increase students' learning autonomy and reduce the teacher's workload. Actually, handing over some responsibility to students does not mean that peer feedback should replace the teacher's. Rather,

peer feedback and teacher feedback should be seen as complementary forms of assistance in the EFL writing class. Therefore, the concern should be finding appropriate ways through which peer revision can contribute to students' writing development in a way that complements teacher's feedback (Villamil & Guerrero, 1998).

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## CONCLUSION

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The findings of the present study have shown that peer reviewing is an effective learning activity that can contribute to the writing development of the Moroccan university learners in many ways. First, students made significant improvement in their paragraph writing after they had engaged in the process of peer reviewing. Their writings have been improved at the levels of content, organization, vocabulary, language and mechanics. Next, during the peer reviewing session, students were offered an unparalleled opportunity to discuss textual problems, make comparisons and acquire a sense of audience. Such learning behaviors have the potentials of involving students in active learning process and strengthening their autonomous learning skills. Besides, through the peer reviewing practice, students had the chance to develop their critical thinking skills, and improve their meta-cognitive knowledge about the writing skill in general. Moreover, the benefits that students gained from their peers' feedback would not have gained elsewhere. Studying in such large classes usually deprives students from any type of regular feedback because it is often considered impractical to provide feedback for such a number of students. Above all, Moroccan university students have displayed their qualifications to be both effective feedback givers and receivers.

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