

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD ELECTRONIC PEER FEEDBACK ON WRITING

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to explore the students' attitudes toward the use of electronic peer feedback (e-PF) through Facebook in writing classes and their suggestions about implementing e-PF. A total of 37 first-year students of Srinakharinwirot University in Bangkok, Thailand were the participants of this study. The research design was a mixed method of quantitative and qualitative research. Questionnaire and interviews were used as the instruments for gathering data for the study. Data collected were analyzed using means, standard deviation and t-test (two-tailed). The research findings were the positive changes of students' attitudes after using electronic peer feedback on writing and their suggestions about implementing it. Implications of findings were also made for future researchers in this area.

Keywords: Students' Attitudes, Electronic Peer Feedback, Writing.

Introduction

Writing seems to be one of the most difficult skills for EFL learners. To achieve one's goal in this competitive world, according to Graham and Perin (2007), writing skill is a factor to be used in predicting academic success and a basic requirement for participation in the global economy. However, it is found that although most Thai students have studied English for many years, they still cannot communicate well in English (Thongrin, 2002; Wanchid, 2010). As Thailand is now preparing itself for the challenge of ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), it is necessary for Thai students to prepare themselves to effectively use English to communicate with other people.

The problems in writing for Thai students seem to include inappropriate language use, disorganized text, and incomprehensible passages (Wanchid, 2013). Such educators as Watcharapunyawong and Usaha (2013) have noted that if learners have insufficient linguistic knowledge, it will certainly have a negative impact on students' writing proficiency and their second language writing ability. Nevertheless, these problems may be resulted from insufficient feedback, large-sized classes, and mixed proficiency levels of students, the teacher's heavy workload, and negative attitudes toward English language.

There is evidence that the concept of peer feedback plays an important role in a writing class as it is critical in improving and considering learning (Hyland, 2003). Therefore, if students have positive attitudes toward peer feedback, they would think positively and let their friends give some comments on their writing. This will lead

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to students' development in writing in the future. Furthermore, as now social media such as Facebook deem to have a great impact on students and others around the world, the researcher is interested in exploring students' attitudes toward electronic peer feedback through Facebook in their writing classes, and identifying their suggestions for implementing this kind of electronic peer feedback.

Objectives

The objectives of the current study are as follows:

1. To explore the positive aspects of electronic peer feedback through Facebook on students' learning of writing.
2. To explore the negative aspects of electronic peer feedback through Facebook on students' learning of writing.
3. To identify students' suggestions for implementing this kind of electronic peer feedback.

Conceptual Framework

This study mainly aimed to explore the changes of students' attitudes (both positive and negative aspects) after using electronic peer feedback through Facebook on their writing. Figure 1 below showed the conceptual framework of this study.

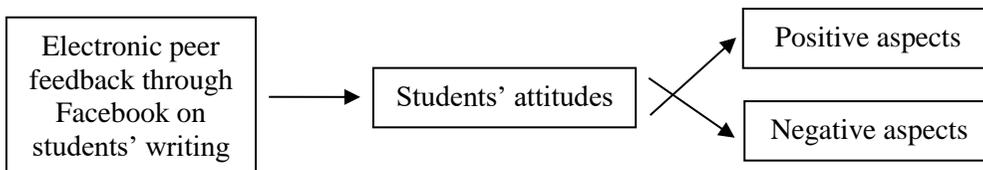


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of This Study

Literature Review

Electronic peer feedback has been recently in the spotlight in educational area. Before moving into detail, it is useful to provide the background of peer feedback and electronic peer feedback, and the differences between them.

Peer feedback, which is also known as 'peer review' (Keh, 1990), 'peer editing' (Keh, 1990), 'peer evaluation' (Keh, 1990; and Chaudron, 1984), 'peer critique' (Keh, 1990), 'peer commentary' (Connor & Asenavage, 1994) and 'peer response' (Keh, 1990; Liu & Hansen, 2002; Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005), can be defined as the: use of learners as sources of information and interactants for each other in such a way that learners assume roles and responsibilities normally taken on by a formally trained teacher, tutor, or editor in commenting on and critiquing each other's drafts in both written and oral formats in the process of writing. (Liu & Hansen, 2002: 1)

According to other experts such as Rollinson, (2005) and Topping (1998, 2000), peer feedback can also be defined as an educational arrangement, which students can comment on their fellow students' work for such purposes as formative or summative ones. Storch (2004) reports that in spite of the strong bases of peer feedback, the use of this feedback in the classroom is quite limited. However, as Saito and Fujita (2004) state, some research into peer assessment in various areas covered by psychology and

mainstream education has been conducted. The findings of this research suggest that peer response is consistent, and can be used as a reliable assessment tool in schools (Saito & Fujita, 2004). Peer feedback takes many forms depending on their purposes. It can be employed in the form of written feedback, electronic feedback, conferencing as well as oral comments, or both simultaneously (Liu & Hansen, 2002). According to Mooko (1996), Hyland (2003), and Rollinson (2005), the ‘flexibility’ is another useful aspect of peer feedback. Peer feedback can also take many formats, some of the most common ones are: 1) to assign groups of two, three, or four students and ask them to exchange their first drafts and give comments on each other’s drafts before making final versions and submit to their teachers; 2) to make students read their own essays aloud, or get a colleague to read it instead, while the other students listen and provide feedback, either written or oral, on the work that they have just heard; 3) is not to restrict feedback to the time after students have written their essays, as it may be possible for students to use this type of feedback in the pre-writing stage by asking other students to comment on each other’s outlines, or to carry out a brainstorming session (Hyland, 2003).

Electronic peer feedback, unlike other kinds of peer feedback, gets students involved in working collaboratively in groups and providing opinions on each other’s work via electronic media, e.g., Facebook, e-mail, etc. Such researchers as Ciftci and Kocoglu (2012) have investigated the effect of electronic peer feedback through blogs on Turkish EFL students’ writing, and found that the analysis of end-of-semester questionnaires and interviews showed the positive perception on the use of electronic peer feedback in their writing classes.

Another work that confirms the effectiveness of electronic peer feedback is the study of Wanchid (2013). Wanchid (2013) conducted her research to compare the students’ writing achievement scores and attitudes toward the use of self-correction, paper-pencil peer feedback, and electronic peer feedback. The study was conducted with 90 engineering students having different levels of general English proficiency in a 3x3 factorial design. The participants were randomly selected and assigned into three groups: 1) self-correction, 2) paper-pencil peer feedback, and 3) electronic peer feedback. At the beginning of the course, the students in the first group were trained in how to do self-correction while the students in the second and third groups were trained in how to provide comments to their classmates effectively via the medium assigned. The results showed that the different types of feedback had a significantly different effect on the students’ writing achievement. The students in the electronic peer feedback group performed the best. Those in different ability groups all performed differently, whereas there was no interaction effect between types of feedback and levels of general English proficiency on the students’ writing achievement. The students in the three experimental groups had highly positive attitudes in most aspects.

As stated above, peer feedback is a writing activity which can be in the form of a written, oral, or computer-mediated mode (Liu & Hansen, 2002). As far as we are concerned, the way to provide feedback has moved from the traditional paper-pencil or face-to-face mode to the new form of electronic mode due to the influence of computer technology. As this study focuses on the use of electronic peer feedback, the differences between paper-pencil peer feedback and electronic peer feedback will be described in Table 1.

Table 1: Common Features and Differences in Paper-pencil Peer Feedback, and Electronic Peer Feedback

Criteria	Paper-Pencil Peer Feedback	Electronic Peer Feedback
1. Mode of communication	– Written/ mostly one-way communication	– Written/ two-way communication
2. Pressure to respond	– Pressure to respond by next class	– No pressure to immediately respond
3. Place and time	– Place and time dependence	– Place and time independent
4. Components of communication	– No nonverbal components	– No nonverbal components
5. Personal distance	– More or less personal distance depends on the situation	– More personal distance
6. Level of cultural barriers	– Greater cultural barriers	– Fewer cultural barriers
7. Involvement with others	– Greater sense of Involvement	– Greater sense of involvement
8. Frequency of meaning negotiation	– Less negotiation of meaning	– More negotiation of meaning
9. Delivery effort	– Greater delivery effort	– Less delivery effort
10. Other facilities	– No cut & paste	– Cut & paste
11. Message permanence	– Fewer feelings of message permanence due to unpublished messages	– Greater sense of message permanence due to the visible online messages

Adapted from Tuzi (2004), cited in Wanchid (2010)

It can be seen from Table 1 that the features of the electronic modes are somewhat different from the traditional mode. According to Baron (1998), electronic peer feedback reside somewhere between speech and written communication in formality and style.

To solve the problems of Thai student's writing, peer feedback from more advanced peers may provide the scaffolding technique which can help reduce problems related to other kinds of peer feedback, such as the one-way communication of paper-pencil modes.

Specifically, as now social media such as Facebook are now easily accessed, therefore to solve the problems mentioned above, peer feedback through Facebook is considered as a worthy activity that could help the teachers and students to overcome these limitations in the teaching and learning context. It is believed by Wanchid (2013) that providing peer feedback via Facebook not only increases the students' learning motivation but also enhances the interaction among the students' classmates and

teacher in a virtual context where the target language is not limited in a traditional classroom. It is also expected that the use of Facebook possibly reduces the language and cultural barriers in the EFL writing class.

As a number of arguments have been discussed to support this kind of feedback in the aspect of writing, this study aimed to explore the students' attitudes toward this issue. Also, as there might be both positive and negative aspects of attitudes towards this kind of feedback, this study will apply these aspects from Bay's study (2011), which is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: The Opinions of Perspective Teachers on Positive and Negative Aspects of Peer Feedback

Aspects	Themes	Details of Opinions
Positive Aspects	Quality of Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Increase in the level of interaction among the learners – A good example of student centered learning – Development of critical thinking – Active participation of learners in learning – Improvement of ability to decide and improvement in observation skills – More attention and interest in the course – Contribution to the self-assessment skills of learners – Better understanding of the subject evaluated – Contribution to the self-reliance of learners – More attention to the work for the fear of the evaluation by other groups – Extensive experience, especially of the teaching profession
	Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Learning how to do their work while evaluating the other groups – Chance of seeing mistakes and problems from different perspectives – Possibility of seeing the mistakes and -deficiencies during learning – Ability to compare the work of learners with that of others – Opportunity to gain feedback, teacher excluded
Democratic Values		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Encourages collaborative learning instead of survival strategy learning – Increase in the level of responsibility – More respect for other opinions – Acceptance of the mistakes revealed after the criticisms – Learning the importance of objectiveness when evaluating others – Agreement in the decisions, sharing, and skills

Table 2: The Opinions of Perspective Teachers on Positive and Negative Aspects of Peer Feedback

Aspects	Themes	Details of Opinions
	Reliability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Effective evaluation of friends working on the same level and in the same field of study – More objective assessment of groups as the names are not given – Detailed evaluation of the works – Introduction to the criteria to be used in -assessment being more instructive and of more use – Better assessment of scoring people in the process
Negative Aspects	Timing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Prevention of evaluation within a limited time from attentive evaluation – A lot of time given because of the number of groups – Limited time for evaluation
	Reliability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – A difficult and objective assessment of a student's friend – Some learners influenced by emotions in the assessment – Fake scoring due to friendship – Negative effect of friendship on the evaluation – Thought of peer assessment as an unreliable method – High scores given to each other being friends due to agreement of the groups
	Competency/ Readiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Unreadiness of learners due to unawareness as a teacher – Disadvantage of being the first group – Inexperience in evaluating
	Personality/ Interpersonal traits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Sensitivity of some friends – Objections of some friends to criticisms – Conflicts among some peers

Adapted from Bay (2011), pp. 916-918

Research Methodology

This research was conducted using both questionnaire and interview forms. The participants of this study were 37 first-year students of Srinakharinwirot University in Bangkok, enrolling in the academic year 2014. The questionnaire was designed to assess students' attitudes toward e-PF through Facebook on their writing before and after the treatment, consisting of three parts.

Part 1 comprises demographic data about students' gender, age, and number of years of studying English

Part 2 includes five-point Likert scale, covering 16 positive and 11 negative items of students' attitudes. Both aspects consist of 4 themes adapted from Bay's study (2011).

Part 3 covers open-ended questions, asking about the issues that are important for the students to use electronic peer feedback through Facebook in their writing classes.

The questionnaire was verified by three experts in Srinakharinwirot University in Bangkok. The number of questionnaire returned was 100%. In addition, the researcher also interviewed the students about their additional suggestions or comments after using electronic peer feedback through Facebook.

Findings/ Results

In terms of demographic data, the proportion of gender among the 37 participants was 24 female students (64.9%) and 13 male students (35.1%). The number of years of their English study ranged between 10 and 16 years. All of them were first-year students aged between 17 and 19 years.

Research Objective One

Research objective one was to explore the positive aspects of electronic peer feedback through Facebook on students' learning of writing.

Table 3: Students' Attitudes Before and After Implementing Electronic Peer Feedback through Facebook on Writing (Positive Aspects)

Students' Attitudes	Item (s)	Before Implementing e-PF		After Implementing e-PF		Interpretation (Level of Agreement)	Interpretation (Level of Agreement)
		Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		
1. Quality of Learning	1.10-1.90	3.84	0.76	4.51	0.58	High	Highest
2. Feedback Opportunity	1.10-1.12	3.80	0.85	4.50	0.62	High	Highest
3. Democratic Value	1.13-1.15	3.84	0.80	4.53	0.62	High	Highest
4. Reliability	1.16	3.49	1.02	4.30	0.78	Neutral	High
Overall		3.81	0.81	4.51	0.61	High	Highest

Table 3 showed the positive aspects of students' attitudes before and after implementing electronic peer feedback through Facebook on writing. This table illustrated the overall mean score of 3.81, in the range of 3.51-4.50, which means that before implementing e-PF, the students' attitudes were at the "high" level. However, the overall mean score after implementing e-PF was 4.51, in the range of 4.51-5.00, which means their attitudes were changed to the "highest" level.

Table 4: Overall Mean Scores of Students' Attitudes Before and After Implementing e-PF through Facebook (Positive Aspects)

Students' Attitudes	Mean	S.D.	t-test		
			t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
1. Before e-PF	3.81	0.59	-9.759	72	.000*
2. After e-PF	4.51	0.39			

*Sig.<0.05

Table 4 indicated that when compared between the overall mean scores of students' attitudes before and after implementing e-PF through Facebook on writing (in the positive aspects), the significance of t-test was .000, which was smaller than .05. This means that there were significant differences between these two overall mean scores. So, it can confirm the results from Table 3 that after implementing e-PF, the students' attitudes (in the positive aspects) were changed significantly.

Research Objective Two

Research objective two was to explore the negative aspects of electronic peer feedback through Facebook on students' learning of writing.

Table 5: Students' Attitudes Before and After Implementing Electronic Peer Feedback through Facebook on Writing (Negative Aspects)

Theme	Item(s)	Before Implementing e-PF		Interpretation (Level of Agreement)	After Implementing e-PF		Interpretation (Level of Agreement)
		Mean	S.D.		Mean	S.D.	
1. Timing	2.1	2.43	0.83	Low	1.76	0.83	Low
2. Reliability	2.2-2.5	2.71	0.96	Neutral	1.96	0.89	Low
3. Competency/ Readiness	2.6-2.8	3.28	0.98	Neutral	2.42	0.93	Low
4. Personality/ Interpersonal Traits	2.9-2.11	2.55	1.07	Neutral	1.86	0.79	Low
Overall		2.80	1.03	Neutral	2.07	0.90	Low

Table 5 illustrated the negative aspects of students' attitudes before and after implementing electronic peer feedback through Facebook on writing. This table showed the overall mean score of 2.80, in the range of 2.51-3.50, which means that before implementing e-PF, the students' attitudes were at the "neutral" level. Nevertheless, the overall mean score after implementing e-PF was 2.07, in the range of 1.51-2.50, which means their attitudes (in the negative aspects) were changed to the "low" level.

Table 6: Overall Mean Scores of Students' Attitudes Before and After Implementing e-PF through Facebook (Negative Aspects)

Students' Attitudes	Mean	S.D.	t-test		
			t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
1. Before e-PF	2.80	0.61	7.880	72	.000*
2. After e-PF	2.07	0.60			

*Sig. < 0.05

According to Table 6, when compared between the overall mean scores of students' attitudes before and after implementing e-PF through Facebook on writing (in the negative aspects), the significance of t-test was .000, which was smaller than .05. This means that there were significant differences between these two overall

mean scores. Therefore, it can confirm the results from Table 5 that the students' attitudes (in the negative aspects) after implementing e-PF were changed significantly.

Research Objective Three

Research objective three was to identify the students' suggestions for implementing electronic peer feedback through Facebook.

After the treatment, the research also gathered the qualitative data from open-ended questions and interviews.

Most of the students thought that electronic peer feedback was very beneficial for their writing development because they could get interesting comments from their friends and they could see a variety of their friends' writing styles, including organization, content and language control. The following examples from open-ended questions and interviews were the students' opinions, showing a lot of useful comments and suggestions.

The results from open-ended questions:

“Students need to have more time to be trained how to do e-PF effectively.”
(S.2's suggestions)

“There should be more than two friends who provide e-PF so as to make this method more reliable because a variety of feedback will be provided for each student.”

(S.9's suggestions)

“To make feedback more fruitful, there should be both e-PF and teacher feedback.”

(S.16's suggestions)

“Students need to practice more in their grammatical knowledge so as to provide effective e-PF to their friends.”

(S.29's suggestions)

The results from interviews:

“e-PF stimulates writers' creativity mind. It encourages students to look things in different ways. Students can learn writing techniques as well as gain experiences in writing while analyzing their friends' work. Writers who read more will improve their writing ability in the future.”

(Interview with S.3)

“e-PF is good because it's convenient and can encourage involvement and responsibility on student's own writing.”

(Interview with S.4)

Discussion

The results regarding the positive and negative aspects of students' attitudes toward e-PF through Facebook on their writing showed the positive changes in their attitudes because the level of agreement in the positive aspects has been changed from the “high” level to the “highest” one; whereas that in the negative aspects has been changed from the “neutral” (or “not sure”) level to the “low” one. Also, the results from t-test also confirmed that there were significant changes in students' attitudes after using e-PF through Facebook. These results were congruent with the work of Ciftci and Kocoglu (2012) which showed the positive perception on the use of electronic peer feedback in their writing classes.

In addition, the suggestions from students about implementing e-PF through Facebook on writing provided useful information for further research. This can be confirmed by the study of Wanchid (2013), stating that peer feedback via Facebook could increase the students' learning motivation and enhance the interaction among the students and teacher.

However, for effective e- PF, there is a need to provide more time in training students before implementing it. Also, clear criteria or guidelines are needed for students to implement this kind of feedback.

All in all, the results of this study would be beneficial to learning and teaching environments, especially in the aspect of writing skill for university students. It is hoped that this feedback would enable students to obtain some valuable of ownership and collaborative learning, which can lead to autonomous lifelong learning of the students in the future.

Implications of Findings

There are three implications:

1. Using electronic peer feedback can promote students' learning development, their sense of ownership and responsibility.
2. This method should be employed with teacher feedback. This is because a variety of feedback forms would provide more useful comments than using the only one form.
3. To solve the problems of negative aspects in reliability, the teachers should provide sample writing for the students, and should make criteria extremely explicit so as to help the students to give this kind of feedback more effectively. Additionally, they should provide more time in training students to practice this method so as to gain more confidence before implementation.

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