

Student Feedback Literacy in Technology Mediated Peer Feedback Tasks in Academic Writing

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Abstract

Studies on students' feedback literacy through technology-mediated peer feedback tasks in academic writing are scarce in the Indian higher education context. The present research integrates an online peer feedback mechanism with writing classroom instruction in an Indian university. The study tries to assess the feedback literacy of the students over a period of six weeks. This has been done through adopting mixed-methods research. Data collection was done through transcripts and logs of peer feedback, student questionnaire, and semi-structured interviews. The data was analysed by performing text analysis of the students' feedback, quantitative analysis of the questionnaire and qualitative analysis of the interview transcripts. The results indicate that the students acknowledge the inculcation of feedback literacy, but there is a need to refine and develop it further with increased focus on specificity and justification of the feedback points. The study implies that a close analysis of feedback literacy among students can be used to address the concerns related to student engagement in online peer feedback and could be of significant help in formative assessment and scaffolding of academic writing skills in the higher educational context.

Keywords: Academic Writing; Feedback literacy; Peer feedback; Scaffolding

INTRODUCTION

Feedback literacy in second language writing is gaining the attention of language scholars across the globe. Efforts are being made to define and measure the concept of feedback literacy through triangulated research (Coppens et al., 2023; Zhang and Mao, 2023) and validations (Wang et al., 2023; Yu et al., 2022) to further analyse the course of writing and feedback processes. Feedback literacy is a highly crucial aspect that is entwined with the process of peer feedback. Increased number of peer feedback activities also provides opportunities to work on the enhancement of feedback literacy among students, thus, scaffolding their writing skills (Yu & Liu, 2021; Zhang & Mao, 2023). In cognizance of this, there is a need to integrate peer feedback activities in second language writing classrooms through various modes in different educational contexts. This would help the researchers to collaboratively understand the ways in which feedback literacy could be worked upon for scaffolding writing skills. The present study is an attempt in the English Language classroom of a university in India. An online platform named *Eli Review* is integrated with a writing task that

exposes students to peer feedback activity through multiple inbuilt options. This study could help in assessing students' feedback literacy in the tertiary education context in India and assessing the utility of the online tool for facilitating the process of instructional scaffolding for second-language writing.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Peer Feedback, Feedback Literacy, and Academic Writing

Feedback literacy works intrinsically with peer and instructor feedback activities, and the concept has been increasingly studied in the contexts of second language writing classrooms (Yu & Liu, 2021; Zhang & Mao, 2023). Writing skills require continuous efforts and support that is enabled through feedback processes. Receiving and giving of peer feedback relies on the intricate concept of feedback literacy of the learners (Han & Xu, 2019). Thus, many studies have attempted to conceptualize feedback literacy (Sutton, 2012, Carless and Boud, 2018; Yu et al., 2022; Coppens et al., 2023; Zhang and Mao, 2023; Wang et al., 2023;). Sutton (2012) gave epistemological, ontological, and practical dimensions to feedback

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literacy. This was further extensively developed by Carless and Boud (2018), and they assigned four dimensions to feedback literacy: appreciating feedback, making judgments, managing affect, and taking action. This has become the basis of many studies related to feedback literacies and student engagement. Zhang and Mao (2023), after analysing the existing literature of feedback literacy, have given a succinct definition of student feedback literacy in second language writing contexts and said, “Feedback literacy is an essential capacity that students need for understanding and making productive use of feedback on writing” (p.3). It is suggested to see the inculcation and enhancement of student feedback literacy as embedded with learning activities in the writing classroom (Ma et al, 2021; Yu & Liu, 2021; Hoo et al, 2022; Zhang & Mao, 2023). The existing research on assessing peer feedback is mostly limited to some developed nations. There is a need to integrate peer feedback activities in second language writing classrooms in different educational contexts to get varied perspectives on the concept and observe collaborative progression of research for further validation and new insights.

The present study was conducted in the English Language classroom of a private university in India. An online platform named *Eli Review* was integrated with a writing task that exposes students to peer feedback activity through multiple inbuilt options. This study tried to address the need to assess feedback literacy in varied educational contexts and assess the utility of the technology in enabling peer feedback activities in writing instruction. The study proposes to address two research questions in this regard:

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How do students perceive their feedback literacy after the peer feedback assignment?
- What is the pattern and quality of peer feedback provided by the students on *Eli Review*?

METHODOLOGY

Research Execution

The context of the present study is a private university in India. The students are enrolled in the compulsory English course in the second semester of an undergraduate degree. The focus of the course is to impart second language

learning with a greater focus on writing and interpretation. The study involved 73 students enrolled in the course. The students were given a task of writing a paragraph on the online platform of *Eli Review*, which is a web-based application that motivates students to work on their writing skills through peer feedback and the revision process. The research was conducted over a period of six weeks. The scaffolding layout began with the classroom instruction on the basics of paragraph writing and peer feedback, and gradual integration of technology for online task completion of submission of initial drafts, giving and receiving peer feedback, responding to the peer feedback, making a revision plan, and submitting the revised drafts (Fig 1).

Task Type	Task Name	Due Date	Progress
Resubmit	Revision of Paragraph Writing	2023-05-05	83%
Revision	Revision Report for Paragraph Writing	2023-05-03	68%
Review	Paragraph Peer Review	2023-04-28	95%
Writing	Paragraph Writing	2023-04-25	96%

Figure 1. Instructional Scaffolding Layout for Peer Feedback on *Eli Review*

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Mixed-method research was employed to collect data for the purpose of assessing feedback literacy. Data collection was done through student questionnaire, semi-structured interviews and transcripts and logs of peer feedback.

The questionnaires were administered to 73 students after the completion of the peer feedback assignments. The items in the questionnaire were adapted from a validated scale proposed by Zhan (2022). Minor changes in the framing of the items were made to meet the contextual demands. A total of 24 items were kept in the questionnaire to measure the feedback literacy on six dimensions. Each dimension contained 4 items. The feedback literacy dimensions included: eliciting feedback, processing it, enacting the feedback, appreciating the feedback, readiness to change and commitment to engage with the feedback. The responses on the questionnaire items were collected on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 6 (strongly disagree).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 6 students who volunteered to share their experience. These students provided overall insights into students' experiences of the peer

feedback activity. A semi-structured interview is a highly valuable method of data collection as it opens up the scope of evaluation of a certain intervention (Dilshad & Latif, 2013). The interviews were audio recorded, and the questions were open-ended in nature to know the students' overall experience through free and detailed expression.

Transcripts and logs of the peer feedback on the writing task were collected for textual analysis of the peer feedback. This was done to know the pattern of peer feedback along with the quality of peer feedback to get reflections upon the level of students' feedback literacy on content-focused (Yu et al., 2019) and form-focused feedback (Han & Hyland, 2015). The feedback was collected on different types of questions to get information on

feedback points: trail identification (2 items), rating scale (1 item), Likert scale (2 items) and contextual comments. These are the standard question options on *Eli Review* that can be customised as per the nature and genre of the writing task.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis comprised two parts to answer the two research questions: Firstly, the quantitative analysis of the questionnaire and qualitative analysis of the semi-structured interviews to know how students perceive and assess their feedback literacy over the six-week duration. Secondly, the text analysis of transcripts of online peer feedback to find the pattern of peer feedback and feedback literacy through the pattern (Table 1).

Table 1: Summary of data collection and analysis

Research questions	Research Objectives	Data Collection	Data Analysis
How do students perceive their feedback literacy after the peer feedback assignment?	To assess feedback literacy of the students	Questionnaire Semi structured interviews	Quantitative analysis Qualitative analysis
What is the pattern and quality of peer feedback provided by the students (on <i>Eli Review</i>)?	To explore the pattern and quality of peer feedback provided by the students	Transcripts of online peer feedback	Text Analysis

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Students' perception of their feedback literacy after the peer feedback assignment

The questionnaire results on the students' perception of their feedback literacy after the peer feedback assignment are collated on the six dimensions of feedback literacy proposed by Zhan (2022): Eliciting, processing, enacting, appreciation of feedback, readiness to engage, and commitment to change. The results indicate that for these dimensions, the mean value lies in the range of 1.79-2.70 on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 6 (strongly disagree) (Table 2). This indicates that the students have perceived themselves as moderately able to communicate, seek feedback, and interpret the feedback. One of the students, in a semi-structured interview, vouched for his ability to elicit information and said, "It is not the other person's test, but your test at the same time, we get to know about the various aspects of writing we know and ask others about more." The students could also find themselves able to process others' comments, judge the quality of

their comments by identifying the key actionable information and recognise their standpoints. It is also reflected in the students' responses during the interview and their contextual comments while engaging with the peer feedback:

- "The peer feedback was not specific. It was vague. The evaluator must point out where the mistake lies, what the mistake is and how to correct it."
- "Seemingly minor things like a comma or semicolon make a big difference in the meaning."

Table 2: Students' perception of their feedback literacy

S. No.	Dimensions of Feedback Literacy (Zhan, 2022)	Strongly agree / disagree	
		M	SD
1	Eliciting	2.50	1.222
2	Processing	2.56	1.13
3	Enacting	2.68	1.176
4	Appreciation of feedback	1.79	0.975
5	Readiness to Engage	2.25	1.231
6	Commitment to change	2.70	1.229

While responding to the aspects of appreciating the feedback and enacting on it, the students have

agreed to their ability of doing these. To quote some students, “Got to know about my weak points and different perspectives on the same topic when I received the feedback.” The students agreed that the enactment to improve the writing requires efforts: “Not an easy task, requires genuine efforts – either you know the mistake and check about it, or you research about it – both ways you learn.”

The questionnaire results also indicate students’ readiness to engage with the feedback and reflects their commitment to do revision by overcoming their hesitation and changing their learning strategies. This adds to the open-minded approach while receiving the comments and suggestions on their writing.

Pattern of Peer Feedback

Text analysis of transcripts of online peer feedback was done to find the pattern of the peer

feedback and quality of feedback literacy through the pattern. The feedback points for textual analysis were analysed under two categories: Content focused, and form focused. Content focused dimensions included: attention grabber, thesis statement, support, organisation, concluding statement, coherence, and transition. Form focused components were related to grammar, vocabulary, and sentence construction. The identified components under form focused points were number, tenses, articles, subject verb agreement, punctuation, preposition, word choice, and sentence structure. The evaluation criteria for all feedback points were compliments, comments, and suggestions.

Table 3 shows that maximum number of suggestions under content focused dimensions were given for ‘support’ to the thesis statements in the form of evidence and reasoning.

Table 3: Pattern and Quality of Peer Feedback

Feedback point		Evaluation			Remarks
		Compliments	Comments	Suggestions	
Content focused (Yu et al., 2019)	Use of attention grabber	1	1	4	
	Thesis statement	8	6	3	
	Support	13	8	20	need to read and research more, give some specific examples, need statistics for better support, change in perspective, keeping the reasoning unbiased, need of strong evidence, need of more facts, need of diverse examples etc
	Organisation	49	3	3	
	Concluding Statement	5	5	2	
	Coherence	7	6	0	
	Transition	3	1	0	
	Total	86	30	32	
Form-focused concerns (Han & Hyland, 2015).	Overall grammar, vocabulary and sentence construction	26	18	3	Unspecified (indirect)
	Number (Singular/plural)	0	0	7	Specified (direct)
	Tenses	0	2	3	Specified (direct)
	Articles	0	0	3	Specified (direct)
	Word Choice	2	7	15	used fancy words, difficult to understand, paragraph seems copied, avoid repetition, replacing certain words (specific examples given)

Sentence Structure	0	1	7	Specified (direct)
Sub-verb Agreement	0	1	3	Specified (direct)
Punctuation	0	9	17	error (not specified), poor, not great, too much use of inverted commas, could revise, mostly specified at all places, full stop, hyphen, inverted commas, capital, lower case,
Preposition	0	1	3	Specified (direct)
Conjunction	0	0	1	Specified (direct)
Spelling	0	4	1	Specified (direct)
Total	28	43	63	

Content-focused feedback points received a large number of compliments, with a total of 86 comments, and the highest amongst these was on the organisation of the paragraph, with a count of 49 comments. It was observed that most of these appreciations were not backed up by reasoning as to why the peers found the organisation good or bad.

It was noted that the maximum number of direct suggestions (how to improve) under form-focused feedback were given on word-choice, punctuation, and sentence structure: “The words ‘depletion’ and ‘depleting’ have been used redundantly throughout the write-up making it sound wordy and showing a lack of vocabulary. Consider using synonymous terms like diminishing, reducing, exhausting, draining, etc.”

Other comments and suggestions about the form of writing were vague and general.

CONCLUSION

The study attempted to assess feedback literacy of the students and to explore the pattern and quality of peer feedback provided by the students over an online platform named *Eli Review* in the English Language classroom of a university in India. The results indicate that the students acknowledge inculcation of feedback literacy but there is a need to refine and develop it further with increased number of activities and enhanced focus on specificity and justification to the feedback points. The study implies that a close analysis of feedback literacy among students can be used to address the concerns related to student engagement in online peer feedback and could be of significant help in formative assessment and scaffolding of academic writing skills in the higher educational context.

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JOURNAL OF TEACHING AND RESEARCH IN ENGLISH LITERATURE (JTREL)

ISSN: 0975-8828 | Open Access | No Publication Fee

published quarterly by English Language Teachers' Association of India (ELTAI)

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