

Peer Feedback in IELTS Academic Writing Task 1

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ABSTRACT

Peer feedback is viewed as an effective activity in foreign language teaching and learning that allows students to receive more feedback on their writing performance for improvement. This study was carried out to investigate the second-year English majored students' attitudes towards giving and receiving peer feedback as well as their evaluation of peer feedback in IELTS Academic writing Task 1. Questionnaires were used to collect the data. The findings obtained from the questionnaires showed that the English sophomores faced a lot of difficulties in giving and receiving peer feedback in IELTS academic writing Task 1 in terms of four criteria although all students were well aware of the significant role of peer feedback in developing their writing skills. From the findings, it is recommended that teachers should provide students with adequate training and practice while deploying peer feedback activities in IELTS academic writing teaching so that students can benefit a great deal from peer feedback in their writing production enhancement.

Keywords: peer feedback, evaluation, academic writing Task 1

1 Introduction

Nowadays, the International English Language Testing Systems (IELTS), which involves the assessment of four English language skills, namely listening, reading, writing and speaking has been regarded as the preferred test to measure English language proficiency of non-native English learners who would like to gain admission at a tertiary institution or apply for immigration in English-speaking countries. It is now accepted by as proof of English proficiency in a variety of industries, academic institutions, and immigration bodies, especially in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the UK (Cushing et Ren, 2022). Achieving a high score in this international exam is, therefore, the key that enables candidates to open the door to their future perspectives.

Among the four English language skills assessed by IELTS, writing skills pose difficulties for test-takers since writing requires a higher level of productive language manipulation. According to a survey published in the official IELTS website (<https://www.ielts.org/for-researchers/test-statistics/test-taker-performance>) the academic mean performance in writing skills was the second lowest with 6.0 score in comparison with the overall mean band score of 6.2 for Vietnamese test-takers for academic training in 2022.

In this paper, the main focus is on the investigation into English majored students' attitudes towards giving and receiving peer feedback as well as their evaluation of peer feedback in IELTS academic writing Task 1. Once the students' perception of peer feedback is properly identified, teachers will have a better understanding of students' attitudes as well as their evaluation of peer feedback and thus can apply appropriate strategies with a view to assisting students in achieving a higher score for their IELTS writing Task 1.

2 Literature review

2.1 Previous Studies

The analysis of peer feedback in writing has been a topic of interest for language researchers and educators (Bijami et al., 2013; Kusumaningrum et al., 2019; Liu & Chai, 2006; Luo & Liu, 2017; Nguyen, 2019;



Nguyen, 2022; Parthasarathy, 2013, 2014; Taufiqulloh et al., 2016, Tridinanti et al, 2020; Tuomey, 2014; Wahyudin, 2018; Zeqiri, 2011). In practice, a substantial amount of research reveals that peer feedback makes a great contribution to enhancing students' writing skills effectively. For example, Alhomaidean (2016) explored the value of peer feedback in English writing class, and pointed out that the majority of Saudi tertiary ESL students had a positive attitude towards the employment of peer feedback in their writing due to the fact that they received useful comments for their essay revision.

Nguyen (2019) undertook an investigation into the benefits of peer feedback activities in writing revealed that peer-feedback drew a great attention from the third-year English majored students in her writing classes and her students had a constructive outlook on peer feedback as it made a contribution to their English writing improvements although it took time to have peer-review in academic writing.

Another study undertaken by Shirly et al. (2019) analyzed the effects of two types of peer feedback provision on the students' writing performance and found that EFL students of the English Department had better writing performance after they were exposed to either in-class peer feedback provision or small group peer feedback provision.

Contributing to the picture of peer feedback in IELTS writing is the study conducted by Alizadeh (2021) on the effects of peer online learner- driven feedback using Google Docs. The findings showed that learners' IELTS academic writing skills were remarkably enhanced thanks to learner- driven feedback, and the learners had constructive perceptions towards the use of online learner-driven peer-editing on academic writing skills. It was suggested that teachers should encourage their students to use Google Docs to write and share their drafts with their peers to be edited based on learner-driven peer-editing.

In a similar vein, Nguyen et. al. (2021) examined the effectiveness of teacher's feedback on students' IELTS writing Task 2. The study confirmed that teacher's feedback, which contributed to the idea brainstorming process, grammar, word choice, spelling, as well as cohesion and coherence, had an effect on revision and long-term development of the general writing skills.

It can be inferred from the reviewed literature that most of the studies mentioned above provide insights into feedback in writing. However, the practical deployment of peer feedback in IELTS writing Task 1 with a view to improving students' writing quality should be further researched, particularly in the teaching context in Vietnam. Therefore, the current study investigates the English majored students' attitudes towards giving and receiving peer feedback as well as their evaluation of peer feedback in IELTS academic writing Task 1 in order to give some implications for effective deployment of peer feedback in accordance with the situation.

2.2 Theoretical Background

2.2.1 Peer feedback

Peer feedback is the comment made by students of equal status in pairs or groups on structure, content, linguistic performance that adhere to the criteria (Forrer et al., 2015; Leggette et al., 2013). In the study, peer feedback is a reciprocal activity conducted by teachers, in which students are required to give comments and to provide suggestions for correction in their peers' writings basing on the peer feedback guidelines.

2.2.2 IELTS academic writing Task 1

The IELTS academic writing test takes one hour, and test-takers must complete two tasks, of which Task 1 requires an at-least-150-word interpretation of factual information provided in the form of a table, a line graph, a bar chart, a pie chart, a map or a diagram. In IELTS academic writing Task 1, candidates' pieces of writing are assessed according to four criteria namely Task achievement, Coherence and cohesion,

Lexical resource, and Grammatical range and accuracy of equal value (25%) of the total marks for writing Task 1.

3 Methodology

The study was conducted with the aim of finding out the second-year English majored students' attitudes as well as their evaluation of peer feedback in IELTS writing Task 1. As a result, questionnaires were used as an instrument to examine the students' attitudes towards peer feedback and their evaluation of the effectiveness of peer feedback in IELTS writing Task 1.

The questionnaire consists of both types of closed-questions and opened-questions indicating the frequency of peer feedback deployed in IELTS academic writing Task 1 (Question No.1), students' difficulties in indicating the mistakes and providing suggestions related to four criteria and their causes (from Question No. 2 to Question No. 4), students' expectations and attitudes towards their peer's suggestions (Question No. 5 and Question No. 6), students' evaluation of peer feedback tasks deployed in the class (from Question No. 7 to Question No. 9) and the students' suggestions for peer feedback in IELTS academic writing Task 1 (Question No. 10). They were delivered to 29 out of the total 36 English sophomores in class DT21TAN01 because 7 students were absent on the day the questionnaires were delivered. All the questionnaires were distributed and collected on the spot. The questionnaire was written in English with careful and clear instructions as well as guidance to make sure that the respondents could easily understand and give appropriate answers to the questions. To complete the questionnaire, students were carefully instructed and they were free to discuss so that the researcher could get higher accuracy, reliability and objectiveness.

4 Results and Discussion

4.1 Frequency of employing peer feedback in IELTS academic writing Task 1

Table 1: Frequency of employing peer feedback in IELTS academic writing Task 1

Question	Rate: 1 = Always 5 = Never				
	1	2	3	4	5
<i>How often do your teacher carry out feedback in IELTS academic writing Task 1</i>	0	24	5	0	0
	0%	82.8%	17.2%	0%	0%

As shown in Table 1, the majority of students (82.8%) said that the teacher often deployed peer feedback activities in IELTS academic writing Task 1. A small minority number of students (17.2) claimed that peer feedback activities were sometimes employed. No one stated that peer feedback activities were always or rarely or never carried out. The figure from the questionnaire indicated that the students believed on average that peer feedback activities were often used.

4.2 Students' difficulties in indicating the mistakes in their peers' writings

The survey reveals that about three quarters of the students (6.9% for grade 1, and 65.5% for grade 2) thought that it was difficult to indicate the mistakes related to Grammatical range and accuracy in their peers' pieces of writing. It is clear that most students were advised to use a variety of grammatical structures, but many were still confused about this. It is likely that students were not good at grammatical structures, especially complex sentences.

Coherence and Cohesion, is related to the logical and clear organization of ideas, is one of the four categories evaluated in IELTS writing Task 1. For a piece of writing to be coherent, the sentences in each paragraph must be logically arranged and consistent in content to clarify the main idea

presented. The paragraphs are arranged logically to make the report coherent in addition to appropriate and tactical use of cohesive devices. However, evaluating this criterion is not simple because it does not have a clear way to determine whether it is a proper arrangement or not. Therefore, a considerable number of respondents (27.6% for grade 1 and 41.4% for grade 2) stated that they struggled with indicating the mistakes related to Coherence and cohesion.

Failing to point out Task achievement errors occupied the third position, with 17.2% for grade 1, and 48.3% for grade 2, making up 65.5% of the participants' choices. Task achievement is one criterion used to assess the candidate's ability to answer the question properly with at least 150 words. To evaluate the task achievement criteria, learners need to know an overall trend, identify key features of the graph as well as the information presented by their peers' writing.

Regarding the students' difficulties in Lexical resource, the results show that over half of the students (62%) had difficulty in indicating this kind of mistakes. In particular, 3.4% and 58.6% of them found it "very difficult" and "difficult" respectively to point out this kind of mistakes. The reason why so many students had difficulty in finding out this type of errors may be due to the fact that their vocabulary was limited or they did not know how to use the correct synonyms or uncommon lexical items to enrich their writing. Therefore, vocabulary also caused students a lot of difficulties in learning English in general and learning to write in particular.

Table 2: *Students' difficulties in indicating the mistakes*

Question 1	Rate: 1 = very difficult; 2 = difficult; 3 = neutral; 4 = easy; 5 = very easy				
	1	2	3	4	5
Difficulties in indicating the mistakes related to Task Achievement	5 17.2%	14 48.3%	10 34.5%	0 0%	0 0%
Difficulties in indicating the mistakes related to Coherence and cohesion	8 27.6%	12 41.4%	6 20.7%	3 10.3%	0 0%
Difficulties in indicating the mistakes related to Lexical Resource	1 3.4%	17 58.6%	8 27.6%	3 10.3%	0 0%
Difficulties in indicating the mistakes related to Grammatical range and accuracy	2 6.9%	19 65.5%	5 17.3%	3 10.3%	0 0%

4.3 Students' difficulties in providing suggestions for the mistakes in their peers' writings

When giving feedback on their peers' writing, students indicated the mistakes and provided suggestions for improvement. With reference to the students' difficulties in providing suggestions for the mistakes in their peers' writings, Table 3 shows that the majority of students, accounting for 82.8% admitted that they had difficulty in providing suggestions related to Grammatical range and accuracy, particularly 20.7% and 62.1% of the students confessed that it was very difficult and difficult, respectively. In addition, 79.3 % (34.5% for grade 1 and 44.8% for grade 2) of respondents claimed that it was difficult to give suggestions for mistakes in Task achievement. About 65.5 % (27.6% for grade 1 and 37.9% for grade 2) and 51.7% (6.9% for grade 1 and 44.8% for grade 2) of the students came up with obstacles in providing suggestions for mistakes in Coherence and cohesion and Lexical resource respectively. And none of the students in the survey thought they had

no difficulty in providing suggestions to improve the mistakes. As a result, it can be inferred that providing suggestions for improvement was as difficult as indicating the mistakes.

Table 3: *Students' difficulties in providing suggestions for the mistakes*

Question 1	Rate: 1 = very difficult; 2= difficult; 3= neutral; 4=easy; 5= very easy				
	1	2	3	4	5
Difficulties in providing suggestions for the mistakes in Task achievement	10 34.5%	13 44.8%	6 20.7%	0 0%	0 0%
Difficulties in providing suggestions for the mistakes in Coherence and cohesion	8 27.6%	11 37.9%	7 24.2%	3 10.3%	0 0%
Difficulties in providing suggestions for the mistakes in Lexical Resource	2 6.9%	13 44.8%	11 40%	3 10.3%	0 0%
Difficulties in providing suggestions for the mistakes in Grammatical range and accuracy	6 20.7%	18 62.1%	3 10.3%	2 6.9%	0 0%

4.4 Causes of difficulties in giving feedback in IELTS academic writing Task 1

There is no doubt that peer feedback in the writing classroom is time-consuming, but it is not a waste of time. The fact that students were put in pairs or groups to detect mistakes, and provide suggestions in peer writing had improved their writing skills significantly in IELTS writing Task 1. However, based on the gained research results, it seems that students not only were confused in pointing out mistakes, but faced difficulties in giving suggestions for correction as well. The vast majority of students (93.1%) confessed that they were not good at IELTS writing Task 1, and over half of respondents (58.6%) stated that they did not understand the ideas of their peers. Only 17.3% and 10.3% of the participants were even afraid of hurting their friends and being misunderstood by their peers respectively.

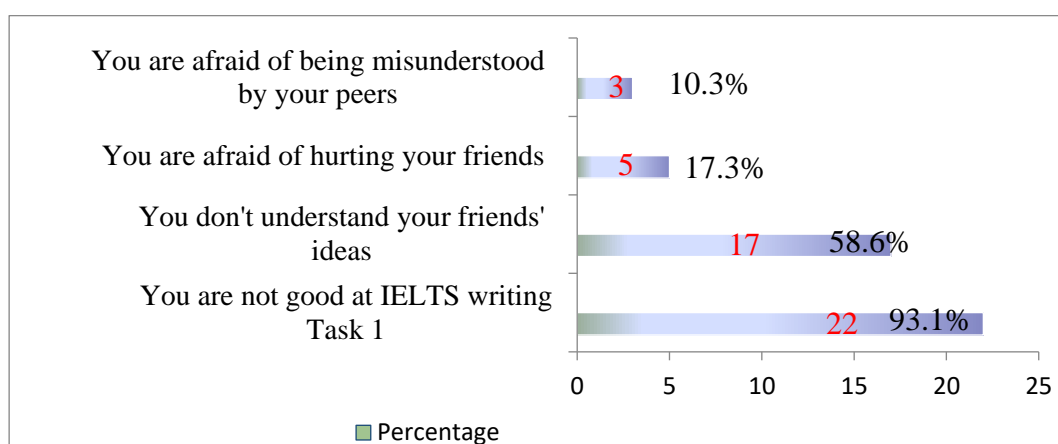


Figure 1: *Causes of difficulties in giving peer feedback in IELTS academic writing Task 1*

4.5 Students' expectations towards peer feedback in IELTS academic writing Task 1

It cannot be denied that peer feedback occupies a crucial part in writing. The findings show that 100% of students expected their peers to give them suggestions when having peer feedback activities.

Table 4: Students' expectations of peer feedback in IELTS academic writing Task 1

Question	Rate (%)	
<i>Do you expect your peer to give you suggestions when having peer feedback activities?</i>	Yes	No
	29	0
	100%	0%

4.6 Students' evaluation of peer feedback in IELTS academic writing Task 1

In respect to the students' thinking about their friends' suggestions to their writing, a large number of the students, accounting for 65.5% thought that their peer suggestions were useful, even 24.2% of the participants believed that their friends' suggestions were very useful. About 10.3% of the students had neutral attitudes, and no students found it useless.

Table 5: The students' evaluation of their friends' suggestions in IELTS academic writing Task 1

Question	Rate: 1 = very useful; 2= useful; 3= neutral; 4= not useful			
	1	2	3	4
<i>What do you think about your friends' suggestions to your writing?</i>	7	19	3	0
	24.2%	65.5%	10.3%	0%

4.7 Students' expectations and evaluations of the teacher's employment of peer feedback in IELTS academic writing Task 1

In terms of the students' expectations of receiving their teacher's suggestions, the findings display that 8 out of 29 students indicated they would like their teacher to always provide them with suggestions. 41.4% of respondents claimed that their teacher should often give them suggestions. Just under a third of the students, making up 31% stated that they liked sometimes receiving their teacher's suggestions. The fact proved that in addition to peer feedback, most of students would like to receive teacher feedback so that they could improve their writing skills.

Table 6: Students' expectations of teachers' suggestions in IELTS academic writing Task 1

Question	Rate: 1 = always; 2 = often; 3 = sometimes; 4 = rarely; 5= never				
	1	2	3	4	5
<i>How often would you like your teacher to provide you suggestions if you don't receive your peer's feedback?</i>	8	12	9	0	0
	27.6%	41.4%	31%	0%	0%

With reference to the students' evaluations of peer feedback tasks employed by teachers in IELTS academic writing Task 1, a substantial number of students (62.1%) acknowledged that the peer feedback tasks were effective, and 20.7% of the respondents rated them very effective. 4 out of 29 participants had a neutral attitude to peer feedback activities carried out in IELTS academic writing Task 1. Even one student found these activities ineffective.

Table 7: Students' evaluations of peer feedback tasks employed by teachers in IELTS academic writing Task 1

Question	Rate: 1 = very effective; 2 = effective; 3 = neutral; 4 = not effective			
	1	2	3	4
<i>How do you think about peer feedback tasks that the teacher asks you to do?</i>	6 20.7%	18 62.1%	4 13.8%	1 3.4%

Another point that the study takes into account is the students' willingness to apply peer feedback to other subjects. When being asked if they would like to apply peer feedback to other subjects to improve their learning of English, a significant number of students (89.7%) indicated that they would like to use peer feedback in learning other subjects. Only 3 out of 29 respondents, accounting for 10.3% said no to this question.

Table 8: Students' willingness to apply peer feedback to other subjects

Question	Rate (%)	
<i>Would you like to apply peer feedback to other subjects to improve your learning of English?</i>	Yes 26 89.7%	No 3 10.3%

4.8 Suggestions for peer feedback in IELTS academic writing Task 1

In order to achieve effectiveness in peer feedback in IELTS academic writing Task 1, the following points should be paid more attention to.

First, as analyzed above, students encountered many difficulties when giving feedback in Task 1 writing; therefore, teachers should carefully guide students on what to do in peer feedback tasks in terms of all four criteria, using rubric peer feedback guidelines and have some demonstrations so that students are more aware of pointing out mistakes and providing suggestions for improvement. Teachers had better highlight some common mistakes and illustrate them by giving examples so that students can avoid making such mistakes and find out the mistakes in their friends' writing more easily. This process provides students with scaffolding in analyzing their peer's report and helps them perform the task more effectively later.

In addition, peer feedback in IELTS writing Task 1 was believed to be difficult not only for the students to perform but also for the teacher to manage the writing lesson as well. That's why the teacher should be aware of their roles, and they should keep monitoring the class to check the students' work and give them instant assistance.

5 Conclusions

To sum up, the data generated from the questionnaire reveal that peer feedback was really an effective tool for writing skill improvement. However, the English sophomores at the Department of Foreign Languages at Quang Nam University still faced a lot of difficulties when giving feedback on their peers' writing Task 1 in terms of four criteria, namely Task achievement, Coherence and cohesion, Lexical Resource, Grammatical range and accuracy, and providing suggestions. These difficulties were due to the fact that the students were not good at IELTS writing Task 1, they did not understand their peers' ideas and they were even afraid of hurting their friends and being misunderstood by their peers. As a result, gaining insight into students' perception of peer feedback may serve as background information which enables

teachers to have an overall outlook on students' writing competence and to provide students with adequate training and practice and immediate assistance in carrying out feedback activities in IELTS academic writing Task 1 so that students can benefit a great deal from peer feedback in their writing production enhancement.

6 Declarations

6.1 Study Limitations

The number of participants in the survey was limited to the second-year English majored students. If the number of participants was greater, the researcher could capture clearer data on difficulties students encountered in peer feedback tasks and provide more suggestions to gain effectiveness in peer feedback in IELTS academic writing Task 1.

6.2 Publisher's Note

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