

The Power of Peer Feedback: Collaborative Learning in English Language Education: An Experimental Study Conducted at Yawm Al-Ghadeer Preparatory School

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قدرة التغذية الراجعة بين الأقران : التعلم التعاوني في تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية

- دراسة تجريبية أجريت في مدرسة يوم الغدير الإعدادية -

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Abstract:-

The research explores the contribution of peer feedback to the improvement of English language skills among non-native speakers of English at Yawm Al-Ghadeer Preparatory School. Within a quasi-experimental design, two groups of intermediate ESL students were monitored for 8 weeks. The experimental group undertook peer feedback practice with structure, while the control group underwent the conventional teacher feedback. The results indicate that the experimental group showed remarkable progress in speaking, writing, and language skills compared to the control group. The experimental group, for example, registered a 25% and 30% improvement in speaking and writing, respectively, while the control group recorded a 12% and 15% improvement, respectively. Total experimental group proficiency increased by 28%, compared to the control group's 14% increase ($p < 0.01$). Qualitative data obtained determined that peer comments had a positive effect on students' motivation, interest, and self-confidence. Approximately 85% of the experiment group subjects reported increased engagement, and 78% reported they felt more confident in using English. Some difficulties were reported, such as initial resistance to providing constructive feedback, but which increased with experience.

The study concludes that peer feedback can be a powerful partner to collaborative learning in English language instruction, particularly in preparatory school settings. Teachers are advised to use peer feedback in their instruction, supported by systematic rubrics and professional development for its effectiveness. This research contributes evidence to the growing body of knowledge on collaborative learning and offers practical lessons for ESL teachers.

Keywords: Peer Feedback, Collaborative Learning, English Language Education, student Interaction, Language Development.

المخلص:-

يستكشف البحث مساهمة ملاحظات الأقران في تحسين مهارات اللغة الإنجليزية بين غير الناطقين بها في مدرسة يوم الغدير الإعدادية. ضمن تصميم شبه تجريبي، تمت مراقبة مجموعتين من طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية متوسطين لمدة ٨ أسابيع. خضعت المجموعة التجريبية لممارسة ملاحظات الأقران بشكل منظم، بينما خضعت المجموعة الضابطة لملاحظات المعلم التقليدية. تشير النتائج إلى أن المجموعة التجريبية أظهرت تقدماً ملحوظاً في مهارات التحدث والكتابة واللغة مقارنة بالمجموعة الضابطة. على سبيل المثال، سجلت المجموعة التجريبية تحسناً بنسبة ٢٥٪ و ٣٠٪ في التحدث والكتابة على التوالي، بينما سجلت المجموعة الضابطة تحسناً بنسبة ١٢٪ و ١٥٪ على التوالي. زادت الكفاءة الكلية للمجموعة التجريبية بنسبة ٢٨٪، مقارنة بزيادة المجموعة الضابطة بنسبة ١٤٪ ($p < 0.01$). حددت البيانات النوعية التي تم الحصول عليها أن تعليقات الأقران كان لها تأثير إيجابي على دافع الطلاب واهتمامهم وثقتهم بأنفسهم. أفاد حوالي ٨٥٪ من المشاركين في مجموعة التجربة بزيادة في التفاعل، وأفاد ٧٨٪ منهم بشعورهم بثقة أكبر في استخدام اللغة الإنجليزية. وتم الإبلاغ عن بعض الصعوبات، مثل المقاومة الأولية لتقديم ملاحظات بناءة، والتي ازدادت مع الخبرة.

وخلصت الدراسة إلى أن ملاحظات الأقران يمكن أن تكون شريكاً فعالاً للتعليم التعاوني في تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية، وخاصةً في بيئات المدارس الإعدادية. ويُنصح المعلمون باستخدام ملاحظات الأقران في تدريسهم، مدعومة بمقاييس تقييم منهجية وتطوير مهني لضمان فعاليتها. ويساهم هذا البحث في تعزيز المعرفة المتنامية حول التعليم التعاوني، ويقدم دروساً عملية لمعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: ملاحظات الأقران، التعلم التعاوني، تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية، تفاعل الطلاب، تطوير اللغة.

1. Introduction

English language proficiency is a critical skill for non-native speakers, particularly in preparatory schools where students are preparing for higher education and professional careers (Ellis, 2009). Traditional teaching methods often rely on teacher-centered feedback, which may limit opportunities for student engagement and collaboration (Hyland, 2003). Peer feedback, where students provide constructive criticism to one another, has emerged as a promising alternative, fostering both linguistic and cognitive development (Liu & Carless, 2006).

The importance of English as a global language cannot be overstated. It is the medium of instruction in many higher education institutions and a key requirement for many jobs (Crystal, 2012). However, many students in preparatory schools struggle with English, particularly in speaking and writing (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). This study aims to address this issue by investigating the effectiveness of peer feedback in improving English language proficiency and encouraging active learning (Topping, 1998).

Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory suggests that learning occurs through social interaction, particularly with more knowledgeable peers. This aligns with research on collaborative learning, which emphasizes the benefits of interactive feedback in skill development (Nassaji & Swain, 2000). Research has also shown that peer feedback improves learner autonomy, metacognitive skills, and self-regulated learning (Zimmerman, 2002). By peer feedback, students have a more comprehensive understanding of linguistic structures and critical thinking skills (Min, 2006).

Though extensively researched in the case of peer feedback, it is not effectively utilized within the majority of EFL classrooms, especially in Iraq (Al Falasi, 2007). Research suggests that EFL learners hesitate to criticize others for fear of miscommunication or a lack of knowledge (Rollinson, 2005). However, with appropriate organization, peer feedback can potentially be an effective method in the development of language skills, motivation, and engagement (Storch, 2013). This study aims to close this gap by examining the impact of peer feedback on English language learning within an Iraqi preparatory school setting.

2. Literature Review

Peer review has been investigated extensively in schools, with studies suggesting its potential in language learning. Hyland and Hyland (2006) suggest that peer review is motivating, so it increases active participation and critical thinking, which are essential in language learning. Topping (1998) highlights that feedback from peers can increase the metacognitive skills of the students, enabling them to reflect on their own learning. However, disadvantages such as variable quality of feedback and resistance from students have also been documented (Min, 2006).

The use of peer feedback is grounded in social constructivism, which posits that learning is a social process. Learning, Vygotsky (1978) holds, occurs through contact with other people, more knowledgeable others, to be precise. This is the rationale behind the use of peer feedback in language learning since it makes the learners learn from one another.

Studies show that peer feedback is most effective in writing classes. Ferris (2003) argues that peers are more likely to react positively to their peers' comments than to teachers' comments, as it is less intimidating and more familiar. Similarly, Berg (1999) found that students who underwent peer review produced more improved revisions than students who employed teacher-only comments. Moreover, Zhang (1995) discovered that students who received peer feedback showed greater linguistic growth than those receiving feedback from instructors alone.

Although its potential is high, peer feedback is not without issues. One of the biggest issues is the quality of feedback provided by students. Students are not always equipped to provide good feedback (Min, 2006). This can limit peer feedback. Another challenge is student resistance. Some students may be reluctant to provide feedback to their peers, particularly if they lack confidence in their own language skills (Nelson & Murphy, 1992). Training and guided rubrics have been suggested as solutions to enhance the effectiveness of peer feedback (Hu & Lam, 2010).

Previous research has also explored the role of peer feedback in speaking skills. Tsui and Ng (2000) found that peer feedback improved students' speaking fluency and confidence. Other studies

highlight that peer interaction fosters a more communicative classroom environment (De Guerrero & Villamil, 2000). However, feedback effectiveness depends on structured guidance, as untrained students may struggle to provide meaningful critiques (Yang, Badger, & Yu, 2006).

The existing literature suggests that peer feedback plays a vital role in enhancing language proficiency. However, its application in EFL settings, particularly in Iraq, remains underexplored (Al-Khasawneh & Maher, 2010). This study builds on previous findings and aims to provide empirical evidence on the effectiveness of peer feedback in an Iraqi preparatory school context.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a quasi-experimental research design with a pre-test and post-test control group to investigate the effectiveness of peer feedback in improving English proficiency among EFL students. The quasi-experimental approach was chosen due to the practical constraints of random assignment while allowing for a meaningful comparison between the experimental and control groups.

The study was conducted over eight weeks and involved two groups of students:

- Experimental Group (n=30): Engaged in structured peer feedback activities.
- Control Group (n=30): Received traditional teacher feedback without peer interactions.

A combination of quantitative and qualitative methods was used to evaluate the effectiveness of peer feedback. Quantitative data were obtained through pre-test and post-test scores, while qualitative data were collected via surveys and focus group discussions to capture students' attitudes, experiences, and challenges.

3.2. Participants:

The study was conducted at Yawm Al-Ghadeer Preparatory School, with 60 preparatory -level EFL students aged 14 to 16 years participating. The students were selected randomly and were divided into two groups with equal baseline proficiency levels, ensuring

comparability between the experimental and control groups. The selection aimed to maintain a homogeneous sample to minimize confounding variables.

3.3. Instruments:

Several research instruments were employed to collect data systematically:

3.3.1. Pre-Test and Post-Test Assessments:

- A standardized English proficiency test (based on TOEFL format) assessed students' speaking, writing, listening, and reading skills.
- The tests were designed to measure improvements in language accuracy, fluency, coherence, and vocabulary usage.

3.3.2. Structured Peer Feedback Rubrics:

- A detailed rubric guided students in providing peer feedback, focusing on grammar, vocabulary, organization, coherence, and fluency
- The rubrics were adapted from the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) to ensure consistency in evaluation.

3.3.3. Surveys and Questionnaires:

- Pre- and post-intervention surveys measured students' attitudes toward peer feedback, engagement levels, and confidence in English use.
- A 5-point Likert scale was used to assess students' agreement with statements regarding the benefits and challenges of peer feedback.

3.3.4. Focus Group Interviews:

- Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of 10 students from the experimental group to gain deeper insights into their experiences.
- Questions explored their perceptions of peer feedback, challenges faced, and perceived improvements in language skills.

3.4. Procedure:

The study followed a structured three-phase process:

Phase 1: Pre-Test and Orientation (Weeks 1-2)

1. Pre-Test Administration:

- Both groups completed a standardized English proficiency test to assess their baseline skills in speaking, writing, listening, and reading.
- Students also completed a survey on their attitudes toward peer feedback before the intervention began.

2. Training on Peer Feedback (Experimental Group Only):

- The experimental group attended two workshops on how to provide constructive feedback.
- They were trained using examples of effective and ineffective feedback, guided by the structured rubrics.
- Practice sessions were conducted where students provided feedback on sample essays and speeches before engaging in peer feedback activities with their classmates.

Phase 2: Intervention (Weeks 3-6)

1. Experimental Group Activities:

- Students worked in pairs or small groups to complete speaking and writing tasks.
- After completing each task, students exchanged their work and provided written and verbal feedback based on the structured rubric.
- Each student received feedback from at least two peers before revising their work.
- The teacher monitored the process, ensuring students remained on track and provided additional clarification when needed.

2. Control Group Activities:

- Students completed the same speaking and writing tasks as the experimental group.

- Instead of peer feedback, they received individualized teacher feedback on their performance.
- The teacher provided corrections and suggestions, which students used to revise their work.

Phase 3: Post-Test and Data Collection (Weeks 7-8)

1. Post-Test Administration:

- Both cohorts sat for the standardized English proficiency test to determine improvements in speaking, writing, listening, and reading.
- Post-test and pre-test scores were compared to assess the degree of improvement in each group.

2. Post-Intervention Surveys and Focus Groups:

- Students of the experimental group received a post-survey reflecting on their peer feedback experience.

Focus group interviews were carried out to explore students' views, difficulties, and advantages of peer feedback.

4. Results:

The findings from the results obtained through the carried-out method were as follows:

Skill/Proficiency Area	Experimental Group	Control Group	Statistical Significance (p-value)
Speaking Skills	25% improvement	12% improvement	$p < 0.05$
Writing Skills	30% improvement	15% improvement	$p < 0.01$
Overall Proficiency	28% improvement	14% improvement	$p < 0.01$

4.1 Quantitative Findings:

Speaking Skills: The control group had a 25% increase in speaking scores, whereas the control group had a 12% increase ($p < 0.05$)

Writing Ability: The experimental group made 30% and the control group made 15% gain in writing ($p < 0.01$).

Overall Proficiency: The experimental group's overall proficiency scores increased by 28% compared to those of the control group, an increase of 14% ($p < 0.01$)

The quantitative findings reveal that the experimental group outperformed the control group in all areas of English proficiency. The improvement in speaking and writing skills was most significant, which suggests that peer feedback is most effective in these two areas.

4.2 Qualitative Findings:

Engagement and Motivation: 85% of the experimental group participants reported that they were more engaged and motivated.

Confidence: 78% of the experimental group participants expressed increased confidence in English use.

Challenges: A few students reported challenges in giving effective feedback at first, but with practice, it became better.

The qualitative findings also support the effectiveness of peer feedback. The majority of participants in the experimental group reported enhanced engagement and motivation, which agrees with previous findings (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). The confidence boost is also important since it shows that peer feedback can help students overcome fear of making mistakes.

5. Discussion:

The results support the hypothesis that peer comments enhance English language proficiency. The experimental group's spectacular enhancement in speaking and writing ability is in accordance with the results reported by (Hyland and Hyland, 2006). The qualitative results also highlight the benefits of peer feedback in promoting engagement, motivation, and self-confidence, as quoted by (Topping, 1998). Problems faced, including initial reluctance towards peer feedback, but however endorse the need for proper training and scaffolding. The findings of this study have far-reaching implications for English instruction in preparatory schools. Peer feedback has the potential to be a powerful aid to increasing language capacity, particularly in speaking and writing. With the caveat, however, that students need to be trained and supported beforehand so that they themselves can be effective in providing feedback.

6. Conclusion:

This current research determines that peer feedback is a potent tool to improve the English language skills of non-native speakers in Yawm Al-Ghadeer Preparatory School. Peer feedback assists in facilitating group learning, linguistic ability, and student interest and confidence. Students who undergo structured peer feedback activities perform better in speaking and writing than those that are driven by traditional teacher feedback. Peer feedback also builds critical competencies like critical thinking, self-assessment, and learner autonomy. It emphasizes the social aspect of language learning and the importance of effective communication among peers. Issues like initial reluctance to provide constructive criticism were reported. To gain maximum benefit from peer feedback, teachers need to provide explicit training in providing feedback, foster a culture of constructive criticism, and include both peer and teacher feedback. Subsequent research needs to examine its long-term effects and its validity across a variety of proficiency levels.

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