

# **EXPLORING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PEER FEEDBACK IN ADDRESSING ERRORS PRODUCED BY ESL LEARNERS IN THEIR ACADEMIC WRITING**

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## **Abstract**

The investigation under this study pertains to the effectiveness of peer feedback for bringing improvement in students' academic English writing skills. Under this study it is examined that how does peer feedback reduce frequently occurring errors related to grammar, cohesion, vocabulary and orthography particularly in using English for academic writing by undergraduate students. This study which is embedded in the quasi experimental research, has engaged 50 participants from a public sector university in Pakistan to and utilizes pre-test and post-test designs in order to measure reduction in the errors. The obtained results show that the ESL errors like grammatical errors are decreased by 28.33%, cohesion related issues decrease by 15% alongside notable reduction in other categories for instance lexical errors decrease by 10.34% and orthographic errors decrease by 8%. These findings emphasize the significance of peer feedback as a useful pedagogical intervention that positively helps in developing academic writing competence, fostering collaborative learning, and enhancing linguistic accuracy. Results of this study provide a room to infer that peer driven activities are both potential and supportive in traditional instruction based academic settings as these empower learners for refining and improving their target by means of active engagement and participation. By emphasizing the transformative influence of peer feedback this study contributes to applied linguistics and language pedagogy.

**Key Words:** *English Language Writing, Peer Feedback, Academic Writing, Language Errors*

## **1. Introduction**

Situated in quasi-experimental design, this quantitative study conducted to explore the potential of peer feedback for tackling language errors made by undergraduate students in their English Academic writing has revealed that peer feedback is effective in tackling errors while writing in academic English language. There is researcher's teaching practice as well review of existing literature pertaining to the issue as main motivations behind this study, the research study comes with certain findings revealing significant reduction in grammatical and cohesion errors that underscores the profound effect of

focused strategies i.e. peer feedback on enhancement of learners' linguistic abilities. Besides, the observed consistency in pre-test and post –test that such pedagogical interventions like peer feedback are effective in addressing learners' English language errors in their academic writing.

### **1.1 Objectives of the Study**

This study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- To identify the most frequently occurring errors in ESL students' academic writing
- To examine the usefulness of peer feedback in reducing these errors.
- To analyze the impact of peer feedback as a pedagogical strategy within a quasi-experimental framework.

### **1.2 Research Questions**

This study attempted to answer the following research questions:

- I.      What are common errors made by participants in their writing of English for Academic Purposes
- II.     What is the impact of peer feedback upon the learners in minimizing the errors while writing in English for Academic Purposes?

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

This section pertains to a systematic review of existing research pertaining to the issue and relevant perspectives are presented accordingly.

### **2.1 WRITING AND WRITING SKILLS**

Writing is not only a set of symbols and rules of a given language are used to encode an intended message or content but it is also a manifestation of human thoughts and ideas. Its origins date back to ancient Egyptian and Sumerian civilizations and has developed in the course of time from earliest forms like proto writing to pictographs and to the present day complex systems. Additionally, there is a huge variety of languages at present and most of the languages have their own writing systems with own peculiarities and English is not an exception to this. The linguistic sources used in a writing system

mainly include grammar, vocabulary, punctuation and spellings as far as graphological and orthographical aspects are concerned. On the other hand, writing forms are manifested differently ranging from a single sentence to relatively large and complex texts and drafts including paragraphs, essays and reports with each having its own functions thus making writing as a source of documented information of very fields of human knowledge i.e. religion, science, literature, history, education and information. Hence in first instance writing system in a language appears as a representative of various levels of language structure but its fundamental objective is serving as a means of encoding language for reading and understanding across time and space (Chandio Ali, Exploring the Issues and Challenges of English Language Writing in Pakistan, MA Thesis (unpublished) University of Warsaw, Poland). According to Graham & Perin, 2007, however, writing is not only considered as a tool for spreading knowledge but it also reflects someone's critical thinking and analytical abilities. The term writing skills stands for abilities and skills an individual is required to possess in order to create or produce a meaningful, expressive and grammatically correct text as far as the linguistic structure of such a text is concerned. However, it is not only the syntactic structures or language mechanics that constitute writing but it also includes a cognitive system governing the entire activity thereby taking writing beyond its linguistic appearance. It also includes visual and cognitive information as well as semantic and pragmatic orientations alongside language mechanics. In this regard cognitive aspect of writing is concerned with production and organization of thoughts and ideas to formulate a visible text. In terms of classification based on its form and function, writing has exhibited various types for example narrative writing, expository writing, argumentative writing amongst others from form based distinction; however, on the basis of its functions writing is considered as academic writing, scientific writing, legal writing and journalistic etc. and our main agenda here rests with academic writing in English.

## **2.2 ROLE OF ENGLISH WRITING SKILLS IN ACADEMICS**

Academic writing skills in English are crucial for success in many fields, including business, education, and research. The ability to effectively communicate ideas, analyze information, and present arguments in a clear and concise manner is essential for academic and professional success. Individuals who are sound in writing skills can comfortably compete for advancement of their career in their educational as well as professional fields due to the fact that writing skills don't merely mean certain arrangement of language structures only rather it also means an added value to such individuals in the form of critical thinking skills and problem-solving abilities alongside cultivation analytical understanding of important concepts. Therefore, the efforts to equip oneself with sound writing skills has promised return in the form of ease and success in academic and professional life. Ultimately, mastering academic writing in English can open up a world of opportunities and pave the way for a successful and fulfilling career in various fields.

## **2.3 Writing for Academic Purposes or Academic Writing**

The term academic writing is used to define a formal writing style which is used for academic purposes for communicating or describing intricate or complex concepts in a clear and concise manner wherein writer focuses upon evidence as compared to his personal opinion, (Stephen Bailey) and such an evidence based on reasoning leads to constructing a persuasive argument (Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein) exhibiting logical organization with no ambiguity (The Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL). It is generally used not only in educational institutions particularly colleges and universities but also for scholarly publications.

## **2.4 IMPORTANCE OF ACADEMIC WRITING SKILLS**

According to Lunsford and Lunsford (2008), there is a strong connection between the ability of effective academic writing and academic success due to the fact that students' writing is expected to demonstrate their complex ideas and arguments. What has made academic writing proficiency more critical is globalization influenced academic settings vividly reflected in diverse cultural and linguistic

identities of students making writing proficiency in English much needed. Hyland, 2003 maintains that the scope of writing skills is much extended as it not only allows student's deeper engagement with course contents but also supports the progressive and coherent academic reputation which is vital for academic and professional success.

## **2.5 COMMON ERRORS IN ACADEMIC WRITING**

Notwithstanding the significance of academic writing, many undergraduate students, particularly at institutions where English though used as a Medium of Instruction is not their first language come across a situation where they are prone to make a range of errors in their writing and those errors can be categorized rather pertain to different areas like Grammar, Sentence Structure, punctuation and formatting errors. A study conducted by Zhang (2017) shows that those students' challenges while working with verb tense consistency aspect are reflected in recurring shifting between past and present tenses within a single piece of writing and inconsistencies of this sort can confuse the reader and may ultimately detract him or her from the clarity of the thought intended to be conveyed in such a text. Another study reveals that students often misuse articles (definite and indefinite), which can significantly alter the meaning of sentences (Master, 2002).

Besides grammatical errors, the most critical issue affecting the effectiveness of student writing lies with structural problems as many students remain unsuccessful in producing well-organized and coherent essays that causes unclear thesis statement and weak transitions between paragraphs (Perry, 2016). Since a coherent structure is critically important for engaging and guiding the readers through argument; therefore, absence of essential for guiding readers through logical flow can cause misunderstandings of key points. For instance, a study by Khairuddin and Rahman (2020) highlighted that recurring lack of clear introductory and concluding paragraphs in undergraduate essays makes it very difficult for readers to understand its theme and scope. Another prevalent issue pertaining to student errors in academic writing pertains to errors of punctuation. Such errors are manifested in

incorrect use of commas, semicolons, and other punctuation marks which can not only disrupt the flow of writing but also can also cause confusion for the reader (Graham & Perin, 2007). Moreover, there is also an inconsistency among students in their adherence to formatting conventions; such as citation styles APA, MLA, etc. This inconsistency causes certain problems for students most notably the ones related to their academic integrity for example unintentional plagiarism (Pecorari, 2003).

## **2.6 CAUSES OF ERRORS IN WRITING**

There are certain factors or causes that cause undergraduate student to make errors while they write their academic content particularly in English. Such causes can emerge from a range of aspects including language proficiency, educational and cultural background. While deliberating upon above mentioned aspects, language proficiency is considered as one of the core determinants of quality in writing. A study by Huang & Tuan, 2016 suggests that grammatical and structural errors are more likely to occur in writing of the students with limited English proficiency. Another study conducted by Riazi and Riasati (2011) shows that problems with those students whose first language is not English i.e non-native English speakers are such that they mostly struggle with the content containing or demanding complex sentence structures and rich vocabulary and ultimately such problems cause their writing less coherent and less appealing. For the students who have had limited exposure to the language before entering university for their studies such complexities of English grammar can be even more challenging. So far as students' academic background is concerned it certainly has a pivotal impact on their writing abilities. It is a sort of norm that the students who enter a university or any other institution for their undergraduate studies have mostly transitioned from diverse secondary education systems mostly demonstrating variation in their level of preparedness for writing for academic purposes required at university level writing (Perry, 2016). Another study by Ortega (2009) suggests that developing critical thinking and analytical skills necessary for effective academic writing may be challenging for the students educated in a

system or systems that where preferred rote memorization is prioritized. Hyland, 2003 further holds that the misconstructions or misinterpretations about constituents of an acceptable model of writing practices can also be caused by cultural differences in academic conventions

One more factor that has a very prominent role in shaping student's writing practices pertains to culture. In each culture it is different rather distinctive norm system related to artifacts and specimen of writing argumentation, style, and the use of evidence (Huang & Tuan, 2016). For example, students from cultures where emphasis is laid upon indirect communication feel it challenging to cope with academic writing in Western contexts where directness is valued. (Chen & Zhang, 2010). Culture differences of this sort can create a confusing and stressful situation for students who endeavor to adapt their writing styles in order to meet the expectations of their instructors.

## **2.7 STRATEGIES FOR IDENTIFYING AND ADDRESSING ERRORS IN WRITING**

In order to improve students' writing skill in general and academic writing skills in particular it is pertinent to employ various strategies to help students towards identifying and rectifying such errors. There are various strategies used to identify and address such errors for instance Self-Assessment Techniques (Harris, 2001) Feedback Mechanisms (Nicol & Macfarlane- Dick, 2006) and peer feedback. This paper shall discuss is aimed at formulating academic discourse on efficacy of peer feedback in addressing errors of students while writing in English for their academic purposes.

## **2.8 PEER FEEDBACK**

Peer feedback is defined as a pedagogical intervention or strategy or a process that involves individuals having identical levels of the process where individuals at a similar level of expertise in a given field provide constructive criticism and suggestions on each other's research work. This feedback normally occurs in a manner that is not threatening or intimidating but the supportive and congenial. It has a goal of supporting the recipient to grow his or her skills or overcome certain issues in a field of studies. Engagement of individuals in peer feedback results in many areas of improvement including but not

limited to inter-personal and communication skills and identifying the weak areas and overcome their problems. Upon receiving feedback from their peers, students not only identify but also learn the ways and means to address their weak areas in various domains of academics including English Language writing skills for academic purposes.

### **2.8.1 PEER FEEDBACK IN ACADEMIC WRITING**

Peer feedback is nowadays increasingly recognized as a beneficial tool for improving writing skills. With its two-fold purpose of improvement in writing skills as well as creating a collaborative learning environment, its efficacy is noteworthy (Topping, 1998). A study by Cho & Schunn, 2007 suggests that peer feedback has potential of improving students' skills of critical thinking and reflective practice as these are important instruments for developing effective academic writers.

### **2.8.2 BENEFITS OF PEER FEEDBACK**

While deliberating on the uses of peer feedback various studies hold that peer feedback has the potential of improving students' writing skills. For instance, a study conducted by Liu and Carless (2006) suggests that the students receiving peer feedback exhibit much improvement in their writing quality compared to those who did not. The study further investigated that the students who participated in peer review activities ended up with producing qualitatively superior drafts which supports the conviction that through peer feedback through its positive outcome leaves positive results not only on students' writing outcomes but also on their response towards diverse viewpoints augmenting their knowledge of difference styles and techniques involved in writing. Another benefit of peer feedback that existing literature mentions is such that it improves students' critical thinking skills because while reviewing their fellows' drafts students follow certain academic standards. A study conducted by Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick in 2006 conducted holds that by peer feedback facilitates students' deeper engagement with writing process in the sense that it helps them weigh and rationalize their analysis

further helping them to acquire interdisciplinary skills.

### **2.8.3 CHALLENGES OF PEER FEEDBACK**

Peer feedback no doubt offers certain benefits for students as well as teachers; however, it has several challenges associated with itself particularly in the context of teaching writing in academia. Amongst such challenges are variability in the quality of feedback as revealed in Yang and Carless (2013), students' resistance to peer evaluation as cited in Saito 2016 and lack of accountability as cited by Wu and Liu 2020. Notwithstanding such challenge mentioned herein, peer feedback, however, is capable of producing good results when adequate strategies are employed while implementing it as a strategy to overcome student errors in writing in English for academic purposes. Such strategies include clear guidelines as cited in a study conducted by Mertler, 2001, student training as cited in Liu and Carless (2006) and use of technology as cited by a study conducted by (Koh & Hill, 2019).

## **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Research methodology refers to a systematic procedure to carry out a research study that involves defining research questions, research participants, data collection and data analysis as its integral parts

### **3.1 DATA COLLECTION**

This quantitative research study used quasi-experimental research in which non-probability sampling was employed in order to develop initial understanding of a small or under-researched population instead of testing a hypothesis, and not to test a hypothesis. The main reason behind using this sample was the sample's being cost-effective, simple, and time-efficient in terms of data collection. Pre-test and post-test design is a form of quasi-experimental research that allows for the assessment of an intervention applied to a group of study participants

### **3.2 RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS**

Participants of this study comprised 50 undergraduate students a public sector university in Sindh Province of Pakistan. The research participants produced Essays on different topics related to their

syllabus before and after peer feedback and both of their drafts i.e .pre-feedback and post-feedback were evaluated to explore the effectiveness of peer feedback in minimizing errors in writing in English for academic purposes.

### **3.3 DATA ANALYSIS:**

The errors collected during data collection process were categorized using error detection sheet and those categories included the following:

- Grammatical Errors
- Cohesion Issues
- Lexical Errors
- Orthographic Errors.

Grammatical Errors were those ranging from related to subject-verb agreement, tense usage and sentence structure to deviations from standard syntax or morphology. Lexical Errors included word choice and incorrect collocations. However, cohesion issues were reflected in challenges in maintaining logical flow and connectivity between sentences or ideas and lastly orthographic errors were those related to spelling and punctuation disorders.

The total number of errors was calculated for both pre-test and post-test, followed by a detailed categorization. Descriptive statistics, including mean, median, and standard deviation, were calculated for both datasets to assess central tendency and variability. Additionally, percentage reductions were determined for each error type to quantify improvements.

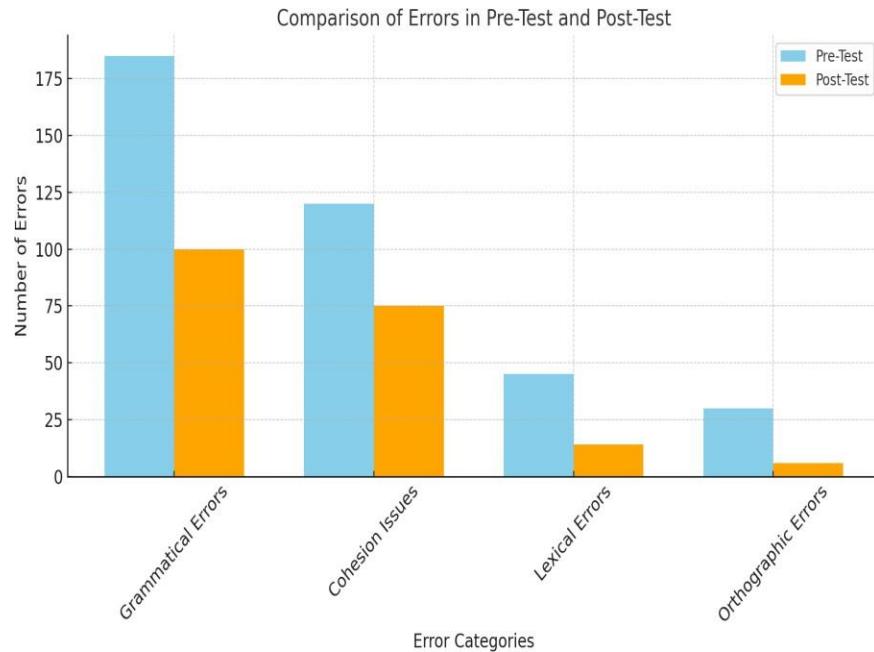
## **4. FINDINGS**

The results of the data analysis are presented in a manner that in the table given below containing pre-test and post-test statistics:

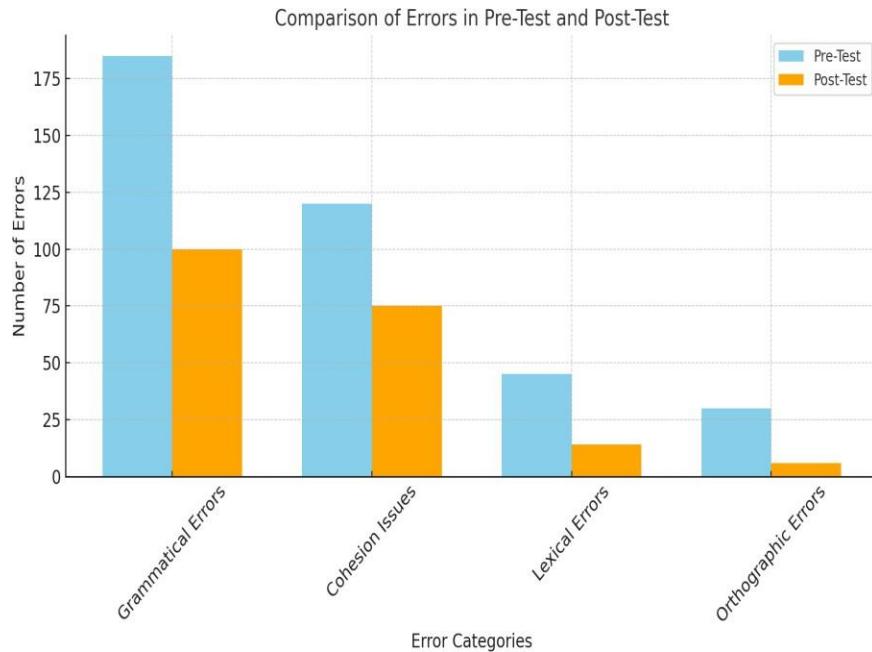
<b>PRE-TEST RESULTS</b>		<b>POST-TEST RESULTS</b>	
Mean	95.0	Mean	48.75
Median	82.5	Median	44.50
Standard Deviation:	62.15	Standard Deviation	39.85

The reduction in error categories is presented as under:

Grammatical Errors were reduced from 185 errors or 61.66% at the pre-test to 100 errors or 33.33% at post-test thereby placing the reduction from pre-test to post-test at 28.33%. There was also a marked reduction of errors in cohesion issues as the errors were reduced from 120 errors or 40% at pre-test level to 75 errors or 25% at post-test level hence a 15% reduction was recorded between the pre-test and post-level. As far as lexical errors are concerned the data from this study shows a reduction from 45 errors or 15% at the pre-test level to 14 errors or 4.66% at post-test level hence indicating 10.34% reduction. Lastly, in the domain of orthographic errors there was also reduction from also from 30 errors or 10% at pre-test to 6 errors or 2% at post-test hence showing 8% reduction. The following bar chart illustrates the comparison of errors in the pre-test and post-test evaluations:



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## 5. DISCUSSION

The data analysis reveals a marked improvement in all error categories, with the highest reductions observed in grammatical and cohesion issues. This suggests that the pedagogical intervention namely peer feedback was particularly effective in addressing syntactic and discourse- level challenges. The substantial reduction in errors, particularly grammatical and cohesion issues, reflects improved linguistic competence. Grammatical errors, which showed the highest reduction (28.33%), suggest that the intervention enhanced participants' syntactic and morphological awareness. This aligns with theoretical perspectives on interlanguage, where learners refine their grammatical structures over time.

Improvement in students' tackling of the issues related to cohesion show their ability to tackle the challenges in the way of one's efforts to gain proficiency in discourse-level skills which are very important for creating a coherent and logically connected text. The pedagogical intervention i.e peer feedback lays emphasis on learning effective strategies for linking ideas by addressing common issues such as pronoun referencing and the use of conjunctions. Though to a comparatively smaller extent

yet the lexical and orthographic improvements indicate that such improvements also show advances in vocabulary usage and attention to written conventions. The higher variability in the pre-test ( $\sigma = 62.15$ ) compared to the post-test ( $\sigma = 39.85$ ) indicates a more consistent performance among participants after the intervention, reflecting reduced disparity in linguistic proficiency.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

The present study has affirmed that peer feedback is very effective because its impact is beyond rectifying superficial errors as it also builds and strengthens learner awareness of other aspects of writing in English for instance affirms that peer feedback does more than correct superficial errors; awareness of syntactic structures, discourse organization, and appropriate vocabulary usage. A part from this the peer feedback also takes part in developing students' critical thinking skills and reflective practices through students' engagement with peers' work that ultimately leads to the deepening of their understanding academic writing conventions. The process of collaborative learning brought about by the peer feedback mechanism has also contributed in encouraging accountability and self-regulation amongst the students and these qualities that are essential for sustainable academic success. Besides this, the findings of this study also align with notable theoretical constructs like development of interlanguage and sociocultural perspectives on learning a language emphasizing the role of interaction and feedback in language acquisition. Since peer feedback has served as both a cognitive and social resource to enable students to negotiate meaning, test hypotheses about language use, and refine their writing in a supportive environment; therefore, these aspects of peer feedback highlight the potential for peer-driven strategies to complement teacher-led instruction and to promote learner autonomy. In terms of its implications for educators, the findings suggest that systematic integration of peer feedback activities into writing classrooms can potentially minimize the teacher workload while enhancing students' linguistic performance. The extended implications of peer feedback beyond teachers suggest that policy makers and curriculum designers can work to bring strategic changes in

academic writing pedagogy through encouraging and adopting collaborative assessment strategies. In short, this study lays main emphasis upon effectiveness of targeted pedagogical interventions aimed at reducing errors across multiple domains. It further demonstrates that focused instruction has potential of students' language abilities. For determining sustainability of these findings further research can be carried out to explore longitudinal impacts.

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