

PEER FEEDBACK ON FACEBOOK: The Use of Social Networking Websites to Develop Writing Ability of Undergraduate Students

**Saovapa WICHADEE
Language Institute
Bangkok University, THAILAND**

ABSTRACT

The current study explores how integrating a social networking website called Facebook with peer feedback in groups supports student learning, investigates the nature of feedback students received on their writing, and examines their attitudes towards the use of Facebook for peer feedback. The study involves 30 undergraduate students who participated in giving and receiving feedback on Facebook with an aim to develop their writing competence over the fundamental English course of one-semester study. Data were collected from the first and final drafts of writing assignments, written peer comments, a questionnaire and an interview. While the document analysis was the main data collection method, a questionnaire and an interview provided crucial information.

The results revealed that the nature of students' feedback focused on content more than grammatical errors. However, quantitative analyses of the peer comments and revisions to the drafts show that feedback given on Facebook had an effect on improving revised drafts. There was statistically significant improvement in the revised drafts which was linked to peer feedback. Finally, the analysis of interviews indicated positive attitude on the use of Facebook for peer feedback in the English class.

Keywords: Peer feedback, writing skill, Facebook, on-line feedback, social networking

INTRODUCTION

Feedback can be used as an instructional tool of writing courses to increase the learner's writing ability. It reveals the errors in the writing tasks. Grammatical and content errors stated in feedback are more than signs of the learner's failure; they provide insights into how the data of the language are processed, (Littlewood, 1984; Williams, 2011). Many studies have supported the benefits of feedback so far. For instance, the study conducted by Alghazo, Abdelrahman, and Qbeitah (2009) confirms that corrective feedback can improve students' self-correction abilities in their writing.

Also, Liu (2008) finds that students' writing accuracy improves after receiving feedback. Although the effectiveness of feedback is mostly agreed by many researchers, the question of who should correct the errors is raised because feedback can either be student or teacher response. Some people believe that the teacher should provide the correct form for students. Teacher is seen as the authority and the source of knowledge in the classroom, so students prefer to be corrected by their teachers. However, giving the students the correct answers does not establish a pattern for long term memory (Walz 1982). From my experience in teaching writing skill, students always made the same mistakes although the feedback was continuously given to them. The students have never learned from the errors they made in their writing. After receiving the papers with discouraging red pen, they just look at the score, fold it desperately, keep it and never look at it again.

As mentioned earlier, the traditional way of error correction has not proved successful and might be inappropriate for teaching writing. Peer feedback is recommended as it seems to be more specific than feedback from the teacher (Rollinson, 2005). Peer feedback is one source of useful information where students read each other's drafts and give comments on the drafts. As such, both writers and commentators gain benefits from peer feedback. It helps the writers to get guidance and feedback on their writing. They can use those comments and suggestions from their peer to write the next draft. By this process, they will be aware of their writing problems and see their own progress (Krashen, 1978 cited in Erfanian, 2002). By reading others' writing, students become more critical readers and revisers of their own writing (Rollinson 2005). Villamil and De Guerrero (2009) state that peer feedback fits the learner-centered process because it promotes students to be active learners. Giving them more chance to correct their friends' papers will increase their interaction (Poehner & Lantolf, 2005). In addition, collaboration with peers contributes to the development of self-regulation that is the capacity for independent problem solving.

PEER FEEDBACK IN AN ON-LINE DISCUSSION BOARD

Having students read and give feedback on their peer's paper in class rather takes time, and the way to provide feedback is not restricted to in-class communication. According to Black (2005), on-line discussions have the potential to motivate student inquiry and create a context in which collaborative learning occurs, promoting both reflection and critical thinking. Many studies employed tools in a Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) environment such as discussion board, wiki, and blog to increase students' interaction and facilitate the peer feedback process. Research has shown that the use of constructive feedback can enhance the quality of student discussion responses (Ertmer & Stepich, 2004; Ciftci & Kocoglu, 2012).

The use of peer feedback in an online learning environment provides a number of advantages such as increasing the timeliness of feedback, offering new learning opportunities for both givers and receivers of feedback, humanizing the environment, and building community through online interaction (Corgan et al, 2004).

In an on-line discussion, all students can participate in one another's learning by providing constructive feedback to their peers. Through this process, they also achieve greater understanding and appreciation for their peers' perspectives.

PEER FEEDBACK ON FACEBOOK

Wanchid (2010) states that feedback can be provided either face-to-face or through the Internet. Among many technologies, Facebook is the most popular social networking website for college students. They usually use Facebook to discuss and share photos and among friends. Two research studies show that anywhere between 85 and 99% of college students use Facebook (Jones & Fox 2009; Matney & Borland 2009). According to Selwyn (2009), the main reasons university students used Facebook are reflecting on the university experience, exchange of practical and academic information, and displaying supplication. In another study, Madge et al (2009, 141) reported that the majority of the surveyed university students used Facebook for social reasons. Interestingly, DeSchryver, Mishra, Koehler, & Francis (2009) found that students were generally comfortable with using Facebook for classes. Since the percentage of students who use Facebook is high, Facebook is deemed a new choice to be used as a learning tool for language writing development.

One possible way of using Facebook for writing development is to make a group to exchange feedback. When compared with face-to-face environment, peer feedback on Facebook provides more opportunities for students to practice communication with their peers. The peer feedback activity on Facebook that blends written and electronic communication can promote student motivation, participation, and collaboration among peers (Warschauer, 2002). In a study, Ooi and Loh (2010) created a Facebook group for the Chinese language class of secondary school so that students could share course resources and give feedback. Also, in Blattner and Fiori (2009)'s work, Facebook was used to provide language learners with opportunities to develop the aspects of pragmatic competence and sense of community by participating in 'Group' writing discussions from various parts of the world where the target language is spoken natively. Integrating peer feedback with Facebook groups can change passive learning to active learning since it helps students raise pragmatic awareness.

Results from many previous studies point out that Facebook is an interesting learning tool for teaching and learning due to its positive outcomes. For instance, in Shih's study (2011), it was found that combining Facebook and peer assessment to evaluate and observe others' writings could highly enhance student learning. Wang, Lin, Yu, & Wu (2012) used Facebook as a valuable tool for students to learn and work together, and the results revealed students' achieving better grades, higher engagement, and greater satisfaction with the university learning experience. Also, Wang, Woo, Quek, Yang & Liu (2012) found that students were satisfied with the implementation of Facebook because it has the same functions as a Learning Management System. Moreover, a study showed that students strongly believed that Facebook could be utilized as an online environment to facilitate the learning of English (Kabilan, Almad, & Zainol, 2010).

So, it would be beneficial to use facebook as a platform for students to give and get feedback since it creates authentic language interaction, increases student motivation

and enhances their English learning achievement. When Facebook is employed for study, not for fun, it is necessary to investigate students' learning procedure. With these reasons, the researcher would like to conduct this study in order to learn more about students' feedback given in an on-line environment and find out whether the feedback has an effect on their final drafts. Moreover, having students reveal their attitudes towards the use of Facebook will provide useful information for teachers to create more motivating environment.

The current study will offer the insight into how faculty staff can use social networking to facilitate student learning and how much it can improve student writing performance. The results will be helpful for making a decision whether technology is a suitable learning mode for the faculty staff to implement in other courses.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study has five main objectives as follows:

- to explore the nature of feedback that students receive on their writings
- to find out the extent the peer feedback in Facebook improve students' writing ability
- to examine the extent to which peers' comments are incorporated into their subsequent revisions
- to study students' attitude towards peer feedback activity
- to study students' attitude towards the use of Facebook for peer feedback

METHOD

Participants

The participants in this study were 30 first-year students (9 male and 21 female) in a private university, who enrolled in a fundamental English course. It was a 3-unit credit course that met three hours weekly within a 14-week period. This course was usually taken by undergraduate students from different faculties during first semester.

Instruments

The data were gathered from postings of freewriting as well as feedback given on Facebook. Throughout the course, students in this study were assigned to write two pieces of freewriting, each of which contained 100 words and 10 points. The topics used for writing consisted of

- my family and
- good things to do in free time.

Since the feedback activity was done in groups of 6 students, each group had to create Facebook for mutual learning. Then all students submitted their writing on Facebook and were responsible for giving comments to their peers.

Each posting was read and commented by five peers. So, each student acquired five peers' comments to revise his/ her own work. The feedback from the peers can be used for revising the paragraph. After they made a revision, the final draft would be posted on Facebook again.

In addition, to learn how well the use of facebook for giving and receiving feedback was accepted by the students, a semi-structured interview was administered to all students after the intervention. The interview comprised five questions as follows:

- Was the use of the personal Facebook for giving and getting feedbacks a worthwhile experience? Why and why not?
- In your view, did the Facebook allow you to interact with peers in a meaningful way? Why and why not? Use examples to justify your answers.
- Did you find the peer comments useful? If so, in what ways?
- What did you gain from carrying out this activity? How satisfied were you with the activity?
- Did you experience any difficulties? Write any additional comments.

Student Writing Quality

As one purpose of the present study was to see students' writing improvement, the writing quality issue was taken into consideration. The criteria of scoring the first and final drafts focused on 1) content (creative/interesting), 2) language use (understandable), 3) the length which meets the requirement, and 4) grammatical accuracy. The full scores of each writing task were 10 points, and the scoring rubric was used to measure the writing quality.

This research study employed three raters for marking the writing papers. In order to confirm the reliability of first and final draft scores, the inter-rater approach of reliability estimates was applied. That is, the correlation coefficients between three different raters were calculated, and the results from the first draft were .732 (rater 1-2), .750 (rater 2-3), and .628 (rater 3-1). The correlation coefficients of the final draft scores were .835(rater 1-2), .840 (rater 2-3), and .742 (rater 3-1).

Data Analysis

Feedback posted under the first drafts of two writing tasks were categorized into various types by using frequency while the first and final drafts were compared to detect what students changed according to the given feedback. To see the improvement of student writing, the mean scores of the first draft and the final draft were compared by using Paired Samples Test.

At the end of the course, all students were invited to participate in the interview session conducted by the researcher. Data from the interview were transcribed and interpreted to discover any relevant information that related the attitudes toward the use of Facebook for peer feedback.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Research Question 1:

What kinds of feedback did the students receive on Facebook?

Table: 1
Frequency and Types of Feedback Found in the First Draft of Two Assignments

	Content	Grammar	Language use	Organization	Creativity	Total
Writing 1	52	49	38	12	8	159
Writing 2	49	36	44	15	5	149
Total	101	85	82	27	13	308

Sixty writing tasks were analyzed for types of feedback students received on Facebook. Table 1 demonstrates the overall picture of feedback which was given on content the most, followed by grammar, and language use. When looking at the first writing, it was found that the importance was still placed on the same issues. That is, students commented on the content the most, followed by grammar and language use. However, in the second writing assignment, they turned to focus more on language use than grammar while the content was still the most frequent comments given in their peers' work. It is noted that the students gave fewer feedbacks on the second writing than the first one. Feedback could be categorized into two kinds: the feedback which helped the writer change the writing, and the feedback which did not help the writers change the drafts.

Research Question 2:

To what extent did the peer feedback on Facebook improve students' writing performance?

To explore the possible progress in the students' writing, the first and final drafts of each writing task were scored by three examiners and calculated for mean. Then data were compared by using paired samples t-tests, and the results were demonstrated in Table: 2.

Table: 2
Comparisons of Students' Writing Performance between the First Draft and Final Draft

Assignment	Mean	S.D.	df	t	p
Writing 1 (1 st draft)	5.98	1.25	29	9.10	.000
Writing 1 (final draft)	7.32	1.21			
Writing 2 (1 st draft)	6.18	1.14	29	15.03	.000
Writing 2 (final draft)	7.47	1.21			

Table: 2 shows that the students' average scores in the first draft, as evaluated by the researcher and two experts, were 5.98 and 6.18 respectively. The average scores for the final draft were 7.32 and 7.47.

So, it can be concluded that the students gained increasing average scores after they revised their paper. Thus, a series of paired t-tests was used to further compare the score changes. The results reveal that the obtained scores of the final draft were statistically higher than those of the first draft ($p < .001$). That is, the students significantly improved their writing performance after they learned the errors in a form of feedback given by peers and made a decision to revise the writing tasks accordingly. It is interesting to see that students could develop their writing skill after they had got the feedback in the first writing, so the first draft average score in the second writing was higher than that in the first writing (6.18, 5.98).

**Research Question 3:
To what extent were the peers' comments incorporated into their subsequent revisions?**

**Table: 3
Frequency of Writing Elements Changed Due to the Feedback**

	Group					Total	Percent
	1	2	3	4	5	Total	
Spelling	3	2	4	4	2	15	20.27%
Tense	3	4	2	2	2	13	17.57%
Content removed/ added	2	3	2	1	1	9	12.16%
Subject/verb agreement	2	1	1	1	2	7	9.46%
Sentence structure	-	1	2	1	1	5	6.76%
Word choice	-	-	2	1	1	4	5.41%
Capitalization	1	1	1	-	1	4	5.41%
Singular-plural	1	1	1	-	1	4	5.41%
Punctuation	-	1	1	1	-	3	4.05%
Word form	2	-	1	-	-	3	4.05%
Article	1	1	1	-	-	3	4.05%
Preposition	1	1	-	-	1	3	4.05%
Pronoun	-	-	-	1	-	1	1.35%
Total	16	16	18	12	12	74	100%

By content analysis, the first and second drafts were compared to find out the changes which students made in their work due to the feedback received. Table 3 provided an overview of writing elements changed. It can be seen that changing spelling was the most frequent (20.27%), followed by changing tenses (17.57%), and content removed or added (12.16%). The least frequent writing elements were changing pronoun (1.35%).

**Research Question 4:
What was the students' attitude towards the use of Facebook for peer feedback?**

As for qualitative data, the students were asked to express their attitude towards the use of facebook for peer feedback through a semi-structured interview from five questions.

When asked if the use of Facebook for giving and getting feedbacks was a worthwhile experience, it was found that 26 out of 30 participants agreed that giving feedback via Facebook was a valuable learning experience for them. At first, they were rather excited to practice writing on Facebook since they had never done this before; they could not imagine how it would be when their writing was posted and the others could see it. Many of them looked forward to reading feedback from peers and hoped to get interesting feedback. Giving feedback was deemed a new experience for most students, so they tried their best to provide useful and meaningful comments. On the contrary, three of them felt uncomfortable to show their writing tasks on Facebook, while one of them stated that this activity was rather demanding. Reading and giving comments on peers' writing gave him a big burden.

When asked whether the Facebook allowed them to interact with others in a meaningful way, 28 out of 30 students replied that they liked to communicate with peers via Facebook although it was done for a study, not for fun. Most of them agreed that Facebook can be more than a platform for chatting or sharing pictures. With the useful feature of Facebook, it helped them improve their writing skill. After reading their peer's writing, they could easily post comments. So, they were motivated to work with the team members. However, two students did not agree with this idea. They did not appreciate using Facebook for academic purpose. For them, the information to be posted should be fun.

It is interesting to find out that all students accepted the peer comments as useful. However, only 25 out of 30 agreed to use the feedback from peers to make some changes in the final draft. When five students who did not change the drafts due to the comments from peers were asked about the reasons, they replied that they were not sure about the suggestions, so they would rather consult others such as teacher. They still believed that teacher was the person they could trust more in terms of knowledge. Their peers might provide wrong comments or advice.

What students gained most from this activity is having a good chance to read other pieces of work written by peers (25 out of 30). Some students clarified that it was hard to believe that their peers could do a very good job because many pieces of writing were full of creative ideas and excellent language use. Most students (23 out of 30) stated that receiving useful feedback enabled them to detect the errors in their work for improvement. Another important thing mentioned by some students was learning to give comments in a positive way (6 out of 30). It was rather difficult for them to inform others about errors, so they learned to identify the strength before the weakness. In addition, 26 out of 30 stated that they were satisfied with the peer review activity on Facebook. Twenty-eight out of 30 did not experience difficulties in this activity, and only 4 students complained about some students' lack of responsibility. They got bored when someone in the team posted the assignment late. When they waited for a long time and did not see any postings, they had to take action. These students reminded their peers by posting the deadline on Facebook or asking for their friends' cooperation.

DISCUSSION

The type of feedback that students incorporated into their subsequent revisions the most was content. This can be explained by the nature of students themselves. It's easier to seize an interesting point from the story and repeat it as the feedback. This is similar to wordings they always use when they write in personal Facebook. In addition, students avoid specifying exactly what should be done to correct mistakes about grammatical structure when they were not sure. This is probably because they did not have much capacity to help each other in solving linguistic problems in written work. Students who could correct the mistakes for peers were the ones who had a chance to consult the teacher or check with the textbook about whatever they suspected. So, this activity provided a good opportunity for them to review grammars they had just learned and enabled the teacher to share the responsibility for learning with them. Furthermore, the majority of students used evaluating feedback such as "Your writing is good and it flows," "You have produced good writing," "Your idea is not clear," and "I don't understand some sentences." which does not inform the writers for the next improvement; it just makes the writers realize the quality of their work. The judgment was more positive than negative.

One interesting finding which should be discussed was students' giving fewer feedbacks on the second task than the first one. This is probably because the first draft of their second task was better than that of the first task. In addition, some feedback was a kind of overall impression such as "Your work is better than the last one." Some students did not know what to comment, so they just provided a short feedback like "well-done or good job."

The findings reveal that peer feedback is useful and has an impact on revised papers. Students' writing performance was significantly improved when the first and final drafts were compared. This is probably because students realized that their written work were reviewed or read by their peers; this encouraged them to write more carefully (Krashen 1978 cited in Erfanian 2002). Peer review process concerns any activities which help promote interaction and construct knowledge in order to move from the actual development level to the potential development level (Poehner & Lantolf, 2005). Students can use comments and suggestions from their peer to write the next draft. The findings can be supported by the results from previous studies stating that peer feedback was effective in helping the subjects to revise the drafts (Liu 2008; Alghazo, Abdelrahman, & Qbeitah 2009, 142).

It is also noted that students paid more attention to the feedback about wrong spelling than other elements and tried to correct as many mistakes as they could.

By so doing, their tasks were more understandable. Using wrong tenses was the second mistake they decided to change in the revised draft. This might be due to the fact that grammatical structures of 'tenses' were taught in class during the first four weeks as a requirement of this course.

The results from the interview indicate that most students were satisfied with the peer review activity on Facebook. This is probably because communication via Facebook provides more interaction and strengthens their relationship. Facebook can create more meaningful learning environment; giving feedback becomes less burdensome and boring. Also, the comments in Facebook are well-organized and can be seen any time when compared with the ones written in a piece of paper. Students can express an opinion in response to the peer's feedback on Facebook, but they do not have a chance to respond to it in a paper. Apart from using Facebook for social activities, students enjoyed posting their work and giving comments on the others' work. The findings could be employed to support what DeSchryver et al (2009) found in that students were generally comfortable with using Facebook for classes. The results were also in accordance with Villamil and De Guerrero's statement (1998) in that giving students more chance to correct their friends' papers will increase their interaction. This qualitative data from the interview also helped to investigate the strengths and weaknesses of the feedback activity. For example, most students described how they benefited from feedback while few students reflected negative feeling such as wasting time or feeling uncomfortable to post their work on Facebook. This information should be taken into account since it may be one factor affecting the success of this learning process.

CONCLUSION

If the on-line peer feedback can reduce the teacher workload, it is possible to include this learning activity in other English courses. Apart from satisfaction which students have as well as increasing interaction among them, giving feedback on Facebook helps the teacher to save time in class. Time can be more spent on grammatical issues or other skills needed in the course. For future studies, students should be grading their peer's work using the rubric score criteria provided. Moreover, teacher may instruct them to provide a higher level of cognitive skill in feedback based on Bloom's taxonomy.

BIODATA and CONTACT ADDRESS of AUTHOR



Assoc. Prof. Saovapa WICHADDEE received a M.A. degree in English from Srinakharinwirot, Thailand. She is now working as a full-time lecturer at the Language Institute, Bangkok University, Thailand. Her research interest includes teaching methodology in EFL, learners' characteristics, and teacher self-development. She has experienced in writing many textbooks and instructional materials, such as Writing for Business Purposes, English for Art and Design, and Business Conversation.

Assoc. Prof. Saovapa WICHADDEE
Language Institute,
Bangkok University, THAILAND
Tel: 662-9020299 ext 2680
Email: saovapa.w@bu.ac.th

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