

# A Study on the Application of Peer Feedback among EFL Students in Blended Teaching

Zhou Xu

School of Foreign Languages, Hubei University, Wuhan, Hubei, 430000, China

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history

Received: 8 April 2024

Revised: 15 April 2024

Accepted: 26 April 2024

Published Online: 30 June 2024

### Keywords:

Peer Feedback

EFL

Blended Teaching

## ABSTRACT

Recent years have witnessed the rise and popularity of blended teaching for EFL students, yet the lack of face-to-face communication and insufficient interaction lead researchers and educators to explore methods of improving the effectiveness of teaching. Peer feedback, a teaching strategy used to raise the bars by exposing instructions to a new teaching perspective to enhance students' online and offline collaboration, has received the lion's share of attention in recent studies. On the basis of literature review, class records, and interviews, this paper, in hope of supporting advances in teachers' practice and field researches, examines the possible approaches to effectively implementing the application of peer feedback in blended teaching mode with a special focus on teachers' roles.

## 1. Introduction

The fact that in-class instruction alone is insufficient to nurture autonomous learning, positive attitudes towards English, and practical abilities has caused wide concern among language teachers and researchers. Since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, online education has been gaining increasing popularity and recognition which is seen as a modern approach that provides innovative and revolutionary solutions through an effective mix of traditional in-class instruction with distance learning and online activities for both teachers and students. The higher education circle is witnessing and experiencing extensive application of blended teaching model, combining online and offline methods. In this background, elevating

students' self-directed learning ability and initiative, and specifying key factors in improving teaching effectiveness, have aroused interests and created significant challenges for foreign language teachers.

Peer feedback, also known as peer response, peer review, peer editing, and peer evaluation, emphasizes the activity of peer involvement in learning (Bijami, 2013) and, to a certain degree, compensates the lack of face-to-face communication and in-person engagement in blended teaching mode. It is also believed that peer feedback can develop critical thinking social interaction among students. Through literature review and interview, this paper examines the possible approaches to implementing peer feedback in a more effective and targeted manner among EFL students in college English classes and maximizing

*\*Corresponding Author:*

Xu Zhou (1993-),

male,

Research direction: English teaching, Second language acquisition, lecturer, School of Foreign Languages, Hubei University, China;

Email: [aaronxu@hubu.edu.cn](mailto:aaronxu@hubu.edu.cn)

its role in blended teaching mode.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Previous Studies on Peer Feedback

The role and necessity of peer feedback has gained great popularity and wide recognition among teachers and researchers. Narciss (2008) defines feedback as “all post-response information that is provided to a learner to inform the learner on his or her actual state of learning or performance.” The rationale of peer feedback can be explained by Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory. Vygotsky (1978) emphasizes that learning is not an individual activity,

but rather a cognitive activity. In other words, mind develops through one’s interaction with the world around them. There are more social supports in peer responses than in teacher feedback (Elbow, 1973). Yang, Badger and Yu (2006) comment on its benefit saying that it features stronger student-centeredness and is therefore conducive to promoting autonomous learning ability. Lin, Liu, & Yusenet (2001) study peer interaction from psychological perspective and point out that it is cardinal to improving students’ learning as it offers students the chance to construct knowledge through social sharing and interaction

There are controversies as well. Zhang Shuqiang (1995) points out that with regard to writing training, peer feedback among EFL students is comparatively more time-consuming and even inefficient. Berger (1990) conducted a study among 54 ESL students familiar with peer- and self-directed feedback to choose the method they felt would help them the most. Regardless whether they had been exposed primarily to peer- or self-directed feedback, both groups greatly favored teacher feedback. For peer feedback to play a part, it needs to be specific, appropriate, high-quality, timely, accurate, constructive, outcome-focused, encouraging, positive, understandable and focused on what is done correctly and what needs to improve (Gielen & De Waver, 2015), which is challenging for EFL students.

### 2.2 Previous Studies on Blended Teaching

The change of communication patterns determines that changes in language education necessary and irreversible. It successfully breaks through time and space limitations, which is conducive to solving the problems of insufficient in-class hours and lack of language learning contexts outside the classroom in College English course. Research on blended teaching began in the early 20th century and has received increasing attention in recent years with the rise of mobile teaching and online teaching. He (2004) proposes the concept of Blended Learning by emphasizing

that the network online learning technology is not just an auxiliary teaching, by using network information technology to create an ideal teaching mode, to achieve efficient teaching effect. Garrison & Kanuka (2004) highlight that blended learning should be distinguished from that of enhanced classroom or fully online learning experiences. What makes blended learning particularly effective is its ability to facilitate a community of inquiry. Community provides the stabilizing, cohesive influence that balances the open communication and limitless access to information on the Internet. The platform of blended teaching is also a vital factor. Gui Ying (2006) highlights that different media have differing capabilities to transmit the non-verbal and vocal cues that produce feelings of immediacy in face-to-face communication. Therefore, it is very important for teachers to know different media so that they can choose the most appropriate one for their own use in the new teaching environment. Engaging and effective blending can involve countless possible combinations of human-and technology-mediated instruction—neither conceived nor implemented unilaterally. Wu & Luo (2022) put forward the concern that blended teaching increased their time commitment to their jobs, and senior faculty faced technology challenges. In general, it is a pity that current research on blended teaching leans more toward theoretical studies, with fewer empirical studies on teaching effectiveness (Luo, 2024), which sheds some light upon future researches.

### 2.3 Research Subjects and Content

Students of an EFL class at a university in Wuhan, China, participated in this study. The class was titled *College English I*, offered primarily to freshmen (mostly 18 years old). It was a 12-week, 2-credit, compulsory course, open to any level of students. The purpose of the course is to achieve basic English skills in reading, speaking, listening, writing and translation.

In the first unit of *Integrated Course*, there are abundant interesting examples of exaggeration, a commonly-used rhetoric device in both Chinese and English, which is determined as the teaching highlight for this unit. The ultimate goal is to build students’ awareness of using this rhetoric device in their own speech and writing and command basic principles in mobilizing this device. After analyzing the examples from the text and explaining its definition and effects, the teacher uploaded a micro-lecture onto the digital learning platform, UNIPUS, and then required students to form pairs to revise their partners’ pre-submitted composition by mobilizing the rhetoric device of exaggeration. The title of the composition is “*My First Week of College*” and students are required to

describe the most unforgettable moments and interesting events that have taken place in the past week. Their compositions are written on their exercise book, so they will first exchange their exercise books and then submit their revisions of certain sentences onto the Discussion Section of UNIPUS for public review and discussion. When this round of revision is over, the teacher invites the whole class to use the “Like” function to show their preference to their classmates’ revisions and then choose the most impressive works, which will help the writers to some awards from the teacher.

The three most popular revisions are as follows.

**Sentence 1:** The campus is very small.

**Revision:** My first class starts at 8:00. I wake up and realize it is 7:55, yet I am not worried about being late at all.

**Sentence 2:** I am so tired after attending three lectures in a row.

**Revision:** Merely keeping my eyes open becomes such an arduous task for me.

**Sentence 3:** When the teacher asks me to answer that question, I feel very nervous.

**Revision:** My heart almost jumps out of my throat when the teacher calls my name.

When the writing and revision are brought to an end, the teacher puts the following three questions in the Discussion Section to evaluate students’ response and attitude to peer feedback in this blended teaching mode. Students are given the autonomy to choose whichever questions to answer. Meanwhile, it must be noted that their answers for this part of the research is confidential, which allows them to express their ideas without worrying about offending their partners or classmates.

**Question 1:** What differences have you noticed between peer review and teachers’ feedback?

**Question 2:** How do you think peer review in this blended teaching mode in benefitting you?

**Question 3:** How do you evaluate your own role in peer review in this blended teaching mode?

### 3. Interview Results and Discussion

The teacher first carefully examines both the students’ original writing and their partners’ revisions and then thoroughly collect their answers to those questions to select the following representative answers.

**Student 1:** Personally, I enjoy this kind of interaction with my partners and classmates. I notice that the greatest difference is that peer review in this blended teaching mode is time-saving and efficient. Without the digital learning platform, we would have to report our answers one by one in class. That will definitely cost us much

time. In addition, when those sentences and revisions are reported orally, they may not linger in our memory for more detailed analysis and evaluation.

**Student 2:** I have to admit that I am a little bit nervous about demonstrating my writing in front of the whole class. The idea that everyone, including the teacher, can see my answer is almost disturbing for me. But on the bright side, I would acknowledge that such peer review has urged me to take my assignments more seriously and draw on my classmates’ strength. Another important benefit is that I can check the micro-lecture repetitively to better comprehend the information and apply the skills in my revision. If the video is only played once in class, I doubt how much I can remember.

**Student 3:** I guess I have three different roles. First, I am a participant in this blended teaching mode, which requires me to make better arrangements of my time and keep updated with the latest trend in English learning and teaching. Second, I give and receive feedback for our writing. In this process, I attach more importance to my assignments and endeavor to offer use suggestions to my partners. Third, I am an observer and voter for my classmates’ overall performance. I get to appreciate so many interesting and imaginative answers and then express my own preference. This role is particularly mind-opening and impressive for me.

**Student 4:** My partner’s writing is not very understandable and readable. The teacher requires us to choose two sentences from their compositions and revise with exaggerations. However, it was truly difficult for me to find a logical and well-expressed sentence. Also, I don’t appreciate the revision provided by my partner. His revision is “I think I can fall asleep as soon as my head touches the pillow.” In my view, it is just an awkward word-for-word translation from a Chinese idiom. I would say I prefer more straightforward feedback from the teacher, whom I trust more. If that is not a possible option, then I hope I can be given to chance to work in a bigger group.

Students’ answers to those questions reveal mixed attitudes towards peer review in such blended teaching mode, which is in accordance with the teacher’s expectations. Regardless of the complexity of the learning task, some students may find non-traditional settings like blended or online instruction to produce a certain level of anxiety. A number of factors, such as the quality of their partners’ work and confidence in their English proficiency, determine the effectiveness of application of peer feedback in such teaching modes.

### 4. Conclusion

Based on the previous discussions and interview re-

sults, this part will illustrate the application of peer feedback among EFL Students in blended teaching mode with a particular focus on pedagogical recommendations.

#### **4.1 To provide diversified and optimized teaching resources**

Blended teaching model undoubtedly caters to individual and collective learning needs by providing a customizable package of mandatory and selective learning resources and training projects. This ensures that students' knowledge requirements are met in terms of both breadth and depth. Students usually have higher expectations and stronger interests for materials that are provided on digital platforms, since those resources, which create immersive virtual simulations, compensate the reduction of class hours and instruct the necessary knowledge to students to enable them to finish the following peer review task.

To this end, teachers are supposed to achieve more strategic resource allocation for online and offline environment. Specifically, in-class instructions can be assisted by shorter audio and video documents to trigger students' passion or introduce the topic while more complicated materials should be made available on platforms so that students can check repetitively according to their individual needs. Meanwhile, instead of listing all the relevant materials in a unit in an illogical and clustered manner and risking consuming students' patience, teachers should choose the most optimal and pertinent materials for students to offer quality feedback for their peers. Personalization and flexibility may also motivate learners to employ greater effort and cognitive strategy use.

#### **4.2 To create a cooperative learning mode between students and teachers**

It is worth mentioning that nearly one fourth of students in this class have expressed their dissatisfaction for either their partners' original work or feedback, which becomes an even more urgent problem in the blended teaching mode. This result does not go beyond the teacher's anticipation since students feature different degrees of English proficiency and study motivations. Blended learning may diversify the learning pathways available to accomplish a task, which increased flexibility and personalization abets curiosity, absorption, and attention (Esteban-Millat et al., 2014).

The lesson teachers can draw is that a focus on cognitive and emotional engagement in the internal processes is paramount and teachers should fully mobilize the interactive nature of blended teaching to monitor students' learning progress in real-time, facilitating instructional

improvements and continually enhancing the overall learning experience. A sense of community is also necessary to sustain the educational experience over time. For instance, teachers can lead the whole class to vote for the most popular and recognized feedbacks and offer certain awards. Additionally, when peer feedback is brought to an end, teachers should voluntarily emphasize their own role as a more sophisticated and professional instructor to provide feedback from different aspects. In this way, teachers and students can cooperate to create a complete and systematic learning mode, in which teachers can maximize their presence in the learning process in a subtle yet effective manner.

#### **4.3 To monitor and regulate students' emotional attitudes**

Since both the assignments and feedback will be kept on a variety of digital platforms to the end of the semester and play a part in final assessment, students are automatically directed to pay more attention to their classmates' evaluation of their work. Though positive emotions, such as a sense of control, exhilaration, and deep happiness, have been observed in the process, a considerable proportion of respondents in the interview reports negative emotions that derive from both themselves and their peers. For example, some experience nervousness and anxiety about presenting their work in front of the whole class while some others complain about the disagreement and even criticism that have occurred in the feedback process. With regard to those negative emotions, teachers should be fully aware of their regulatory roles and offer timely and targeted assistance. The strategies teachers may deploy include adjusting the difficulty of the task and providing more tangible incentives. Brew (1999) identified that the highest level of involvement of peer feedback is demonstrated when students analyze the given criteria and share their reflections to improve their partners' writing productions, which enlightens us to take a more flexible and inclusive attitude towards disagreements.

#### **4.4 To designate clear goals and cultivate practical skills**

The blended model seamlessly integrates theoretical instruction with practical application, effectively enhancing students' practical skills. However, the prerequisite is that teachers should designate clear goals that match with the overall unit goals and supply high-quality and understandable materials on the digital learning platforms. Take the feedback task in this interview as an example, the teacher doesn't merely require students to decide whether their



partners' work is "good" in terms of vocabulary complexity or grammar accuracy. Instead, the specific task is to polish their work with exaggeration, a newly picked-up skill in the micro-lecture. Feedback activities can also be organized in larger groups so as to create more stimulations for the class. The combination of offline classrooms and online virtual learning experiences supports students in initially exploring practical scenarios for theoretical knowledge, while the offline practical phases guide students into hands-on practice, boosting their practical application abilities and enhancing their faith in blended teaching.

## References

- [1] Berger, V. (1990). The effects of peer and self-feedback. *CATESOL Journal*, 3, 21-35.
- [2] Bijami M, Kashef SH, Nejad MS. Peer Feedback in Learning English Writing: Advantages and Disadvantages. *Journal of Studies in Education*. 2013; 3(4): 91.  
doi: 10.5296/jse.v3i4.4314.
- [3] Brew, A. (1999). What is the scope of self assessment? In: Boud D (ed) *Enhancing learning through self assessment*, Kogan, Philadelphia.
- [4] Elbow, P (1973). *Writing without teachers*. London: Oxford University Press.
- [5] Esteban-Millat I, Martínez-López FJ, Huertas-García R, et al. Modelling students' flow experiences in an online learning environment. *Computers & Education*. 2014; 71: 111-123.  
doi: 10.1016/j.compedu.2013.09.012
- [6] Garrison DR, Kanuka H. Blended learning: Uncovering its transformative potential in higher education. *The Internet and Higher Education*. 2004; 7(2): 95-105.  
doi: 10.1016/j.iheduc.2004.02.001
- [7] Gielen M, De Wever B. Structuring peer assessment: Comparing the impact of the degree of structure on peer feedback content. *Computers in Human Behavior*. 2015; 52: 315-325.  
doi: 10.1016/j.chb.2015.06.019
- [8] Guo Y. (2006), An Analysis of the Role of Teacher in Distance Learning: A Comparative Study of the Instructor in SLN and the Tutor of Beiwai Online, *The Journal of Asia TEFL*, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 59-76.
- [9] He K. (2004). From Blending Learning to see the new development of educational technology theory (Part 1) [J]. *Electronic Education Research*, 4,22-26.
- [10] Lin SSJ, Liu EZF, Yuan SM. Web-based peer assessment: feedback for students with various thinking-styles. *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning*. 2001; 17(4): 420-432.  
doi: 10.1046/j.0266-4909.2001.00198.x
- [11] Lingling L. Research on the Application of the New Blended Teaching Model Based on Virtual Simulation Technology in Foreign Language Teaching. *Journal of Critical Studies in Language and Literature*. 2024; 5(2): 22-31.  
doi: 10.46809/jcsll.v5i2.255
- [12] Vygotsky, L.S. (1978). *Mind and society: The development of higher mental processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- [13] Wu H, Luo S. Integrating MOOCs in an Undergraduate English Course: Students' and Teachers' Perceptions of Blended Learning. *SAGE Open*. 2022; 12(2): 215824402210930.  
doi: 10.1177/21582440221093035
- [14] Yang M, Badger R, Yu Z. A comparative study of peer and teacher feedback in a Chinese EFL writing class. *Journal of Second Language Writing*. 2006; 15(3): 179-200.  
doi: 10.1016/j.jslw.2006.09.004
- [15] Zhang, S. (1995). Re-examining the affective advantages of peer feedback in the ESL writing class. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 4, 209-222. [https://doi.org/10.1016/1060-3743\(95\)90010-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/1060-3743(95)90010-1)