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through real world problems.

Future research studies need to investigate the effect of different variables in the collaborative learning process. Group composition: Heterogeneous versus homogeneous, group selection and size, structure of collaborative learning, amount of teacher intervention in the group learning process, differences in preference for collaborative learning associated with gender and ethnicity, and differences in preference and possibly effectiveness due to different learning styles, all merit investigation. Also, a psycho- analysis of the group discussions will reveal useful information.

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them into tools for intellectual functioning.

In the present study, the collaborative and peer response medium provided students with opportunities to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate ideas cooperatively. The informal setting facilitated discussion and interaction. This group interaction helped students to learn from each other's scholarship, skills, and experiences. The students had to go beyond mere statements of opinion by giving reasons for their judgments and reflecting upon the criteria employed in making these judgments. Thus, each opinion was subject to careful scrutiny. The ability to admit that one's initial opinion may have been incorrect or partially flawed was valued.

### **Implications for Instruction**

From this research study, it can be concluded that collaborative learning fosters the development of critical thinking through discussion, clarification of ideas, and evaluation of others' ideas. Therefore, if the purpose of instructing how to develop a paragraph is to enhance critical- thinking and problem- solving skills in the form of a well developed paragraph, then collaborative learning and peers' feedback is more beneficial.

For collaborative learning to be effective, the instructor must view teaching as a process of developing and enhancing students' ability to learn. The instructor's role is not to transmit information, but to serve as a facilitator for learning. This involves creating and managing meaningful learning experiences and stimulating students' thinking

at the probability level of  $p < 0.05$  has not been significant. Consequently sex plays no role in this study.

### **Conclusion**

After conducting a statistical analysis on the test scores, it was found that students who participated in collaborative learning had performed significantly better on writing an effective paragraph than students who just received teacher's feedback.

Foreign- language students are often anxious about writing, and need to be encouraged to see it as a means of learning, rather than demonstrating learning. In order to do this, we need to provide them with opportunities to respond to constructive feedback on their work. Peer group feedback provided the ground for the students to make the best use of their peers' comments to improve their writing ability. This result is in agreement with the learning theories proposed by proponents of collaborative learning.

According to Vygotsky(1978), students are capable of performing at higher intellectual levels when asked to work in collaborative situations than when asked to work individually. Group diversity in terms of knowledge and experience contributes positively to the learning process. Bruner(1985) contends that cooperative learning methods improve problem- solving strategies because the students are confronted with different interpretations of the given situation. The peer support system makes it possible for the learner to internalize both external knowledge and critical thinking skills and to convert

Group	Sex	Mean	Std. Deviation	Number
Control	F	13.2500	2.65219	34
	M	12.1667	2.04124	6
	Total	13.0875	2.57674	40
Experimental	F	15.2857	2.02837	21
	M	15.2273	1.73729	11
	Total	15.2656	1.90494	32
Total	F	14.0273	2.61126	55
	M	14.1471	2.33696	17
	Total	14.0556	2.53365	72

**Table 5: Rater two scores, Descriptive Statistics**

The table clearly demonstrates the higher achievement of the experimental group that received peer group assessment. But to investigate if the apparent differences were also statistically significant, a two way ANOVA was applied in the following table.

Source	F	Sig.	Partial Eta	Observed Power
Corrected Model	5.604	.002	.198	.932
Intercept	1739.640	.000	.962	1.000
Group	14.444	.000	.175	.963
Sex	.725	.397	.011	.134
Group sex	.584	.447	.009	.117

**Table 6: two way ANOVA, rater two scores for the two groups (alpha <=.05)**

The F observed indicates that there is a significant difference between the mean scores of the two groups. Then peer assessment, once more, proved to be effective. Again, the interaction between groups and sex

<b>Experimental</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>14.8095</b>	<b>1.36452</b>	<b>21</b>
	<b>M</b>	<b>15.0000</b>	<b>1.48324</b>	<b>11</b>
	<b>Total</b>	<b>14.8750</b>	<b>1.38541</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>14.0909</b>	<b>1.83609</b>	<b>55</b>
	<b>M</b>	<b>14.1176</b>	<b>1.79869</b>	<b>17</b>
	<b>Total</b>	<b>14.0972</b>	<b>1.81473</b>	<b>72</b>

**Table 3: Descriptive Statistics: Dependent Variable, Rater one**

As the table illustrates, the mean score of the control group is 13.4 and the mean score of the experimental group is 14.8. in order to investigate whether this difference is significant, a two way ANOVA is conducted in the following table.

<b>Source</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig.</b>	<b>Partial Eta Squared</b>	<b>Observed Power</b>
<b>Corrected Model</b>	<b>4.937</b>	<b>.004</b>	<b>.179</b>	<b>.896</b>
<b>Intercept</b>	<b>3314.128</b>	<b>.000</b>	<b>.980</b>	<b>1.000</b>
<b>Group</b>	<b>14.198</b>	<b>.000</b>	<b>.173</b>	<b>.960</b>
<b>Sex</b>	<b>.969</b>	<b>.329</b>	<b>.014</b>	<b>.163</b>
<b>Group sex</b>	<b>1.894</b>	<b>.173</b>	<b>.027</b>	<b>.274</b>

**Table 4:two way ANOVA: Rater one scores for the two groups (alpha <=.05)**

The F observed indicates that the difference between the mean scores is significant at the probability level 0.05. Therefore it can be inferred that peer assessment in the experimental group is effective. The table also shows the interaction between groups and sex has not been significant at the probability level 0.05. So sex plays no role in the effectiveness of the peer assessment.

The next table illustrates the scores of the second rater in this study.



As the table shows the mean of the control group is 67.7 and the mean of the experimental group is 70.5 that shows their higher achievement. However, to investigate if the apparent difference is also statistically significant the following analysis of variance was conducted:

Source	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Observed Power
Corrected Model	1.185	.323	.053	.304
Intercept	4981.057	.000	.987	1.000
Group	1.398	.241	.021	.214
Sex	.115	.735	.002	.063
Group sex	.347	.558	.005	.089

**Table 2: two way ANOVA, control and experimental groups (Oxford Placement Test), alpha= .05**

As the table shows the  $F$  observed concerning the difference between the mean scores of the control and experimental groups on Oxford Placement Test is not statistically significant at the probability level .05. Therefore, it can be concluded that the two groups are homogeneous.

After the treatment, both control and experimental groups were asked to write paragraphs on the same topic. The following table shows the descriptive statistics of the first rater as follows:

Group	Sex	Mean	Std. Deviation	Number
Control	F	13.6471	1.96380	34
	M	12.5000	1.04881	6
	Total	13.4750	1.89111	40

questionnaire was developed to see the students view in the experimental group concerning peer group review.

### Results

A total of 68 subjects participated in this study. Results of the five item questionnaire revealed that the average age of the participants was 23.55 years with the range of 19 to 28. The mean grade point average was 2.89 on a 4 point scale with the range of 2.53 to 3.67.

The questionnaire also revealed that fifteen participants were male and 53 were female. Ninety percent of the experimental group reported that they had no formal education on paragraph writing in high school or college. The rest stated that they had some experience in paragraph writing but no formal education.

At first, in order to investigate the degree of the homogeneity of the participants in the two groups regarding language proficiency of Oxford Placement Test was administrated. Table one shows the results:

Group	Sex	Mean	Std Deviation	Number
Control	F	67.6765	5.81909	34
	M	68.1667	6.52431	6
	Total	67.7500	5.84303	40
Experimental	F	71.1579	7.71912	21
	M	69.3333	6.52431	11
	Total	70.5714	7.30007	32
Total	F	68.9245	6.70490	55
	M	68.8667	6.34560	17
	Total	68.9118	6.58069	72

Table 1 :Dependable Variable: Oxford Placement Test

Another possible drawback in the process of peer group assessment is that students sometimes focus too heavily on “surface concerns” (Leiki, 1990), neglecting the macro structure or rhetorical schemata. In order to cope with this problem, the researcher provided the students with a checklist in which factors concerning both macro and micro-structure are included. Students were supposed to appraise their peer writings based on this checklist.

It was, moreover, possible that peer assessments result in counter-productive feedback that leads student writers away from academic expectations. That is, it is probable that the interactions of the groups are at times unpleasant, with the students being overly critical of each other’s writing (Nelson and Murphy, 1992). In fact, the nature of responding to peers’ drafts sometimes generates a sense of discomfort and uneasiness among the participants. Generally speaking, the students could become rather defensive when their works are criticized, especially by their peers (Amores, 1997). In order to minimize this psychological barrier, some steps were taken the first of which was to make a friendly atmosphere in the classroom so that all subjects feel at home and consider the class as a place for group cooperation and collective improvement rather than for competition and personal progress. The second step was let students choose their peer group in hope that participants in peer groups had mostly intimate relationships with each other. During the group discussions, the teacher tried to check and intensify the friendly atmosphere of the groups and the whole class. At the end of the treatment a

All together there were 10 sessions of Peer response L2 paragraph writing.

There are four legitimate and recurring constrains and flaws regarding the use of peer response activities in the teaching of L2 writing for each of which the researcher took steps to neutralize their potential negative effect on the study.

First of all, in peer assessment tasks, students often feel uncertain as to whether their peers' comments are correct and their uncertainty may lead to lack of enthusiasm toward this task. In order to overcome this drawback, the researcher tried to assure the subjects that each of them had satisfactory knowledge of English as to be considered a dependable partner in peer groups and in cases a student hesitated the accuracy of the peer comment, he or she is allowed to check it with the teacher.

The second fault that may be found with peer assessment is the superficial comments due to time constraints or some students may come to class underprepared, thus seriously hindering the mutual exchange among peers and demonstrating a lack of respect for others. To resolve this problem, the teacher controlled the subjects' activities during the time allotted for each of the class activities, so they were not allowed to continue writing their paragraph in the second half an hour that was specified to peer review. The teacher also reminded the subjects of the fact that their teacher would meticulously study their comments on each other's paragraphs and that would make part of their total grade in their writing course.

based on the findings of a peer response study in an L2 composition class conducted by Liu (1998). He concluded that a group of three works best among various group formations, such as groups of four, five, or six. In order to facilitate communication among members of groups and help form group dynamics, the researcher decided to ask students to form their own peer assessment groups. Hence, those who knew each other well, and had similar backgrounds, attitudes, or viewpoint were likely to members of the same group. The first five sessions of the course were devoted to the teaching of the components of a good coherent paragraph and doing some exercises to strengthen the students' basic writing requirements. The researcher, also, trained his students in how to give positive, useful feedback in oral and written form and gave them practice in evaluating written work. This was, first, because untrained students tend to focus on micro-structure of surface errors rather than on micro-structure or organization and style (Stanley 1992; Zhu 1995; McGroarty and Zhu 1997), and, second, that feedback formulated in a negative way can be more discouraging than helpful (Nelson and Murphy, 1992). Members of each peer group were supposed to, first, write their own personal paragraphs in about half an hour; the second half an hour was supposed to be spent on reading each others' paragraphs and appraising them orally and writing down their viewpoints concerning the micro and macro- structure of their peers' paragraph. In cases they needed help the teacher answered their questions in such a way not to interfere the peer discussion that was the main concern of the study.

- (1) Did the peer group assessment have any significant effect on improving the writing ability of Iranian EFL students in comparison to traditional teacher assessment?
- (2) Did sex play any significant role in peer group assessment?

### **Sample**

The subjects of this study were 68 Iranian EFL students who had registered for the L2 paragraph writing course at the department of Foreign Languages, Isfahan University. They had been involved in learning English for at least 7 years; six years in high school with four hours of English per week, and one year of college with English as their major course of study. It was the first time they had taken an L2 writing course. They took part in two writing classes. The experimental group consisted of 28 students and 40 students comprised the control group.

### **Procedure**

As it is very difficult to randomly assign subjects, a quasi-experimental design was adopted by the researcher. In order to have two homogeneous groups, Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was conducted at the very beginning of the course. In this way, the two classes were homogenized. The experimental group was divided into 10 groups having closed membership rather than open ended one, in a closed membership group, members are constrained to attend for a specified time whereas in open ended groups, members come and go as they see fit (Brown, 1991). Each group consisted of three students

1998).

On the other hand, some other researchers have found some faults with peer assessment. Mendoca and Johnson (1994) suggest that student writers have selective account of peer comments when they revise their writing and prefer to depend more on their own knowledge. They also found that the students may not always trust their peers, but the same comment from their teacher will be taken into account when they revise. Mangelsdorf (1992) reports that peer assessments were always considered negatively by Asian students, and raises the question of the effect of teacher-centered cultures on the way students regard peer feedback. Carson and Nelson (1996) state that cultural factors, such as such as harmony-maintenance strategies, guide Chinese students when they participate in peer evaluation. Even in Western cultures, Freedman et al. (1986), for instance, discovered that even peer evaluation is planned and controlled by the teacher, there may be social implications behind the responses which are determined by the way students maintain social relations. They state that peer feedback often turns out to be an exercise in futility because students are more busy figuring out easy ways to complete the evaluation sheets than evaluating the text. So, learners may pay just lip-service to the task ( Mangelsdork, 1992).

### **The research project**

The research project of this article was designed to answer the following questions:

learned (Hirvela, 1999).

Peer assessment, moreover, have many social advantages. For instance, they enhance students' communicative power by encouraging students to express and negotiate their ideas. It, also, helps students gain confidence and reduce apprehension by allowing them to see peers' strengths and weaknesses in writing (Leki, 1990). In peer response, students experience good opportunities to establish collegial ties with other students who share the same concerns and backgrounds as they do.

Regarding the linguistic benefits, the collaborative setting in which peer feed back takes place enhance meta-linguistic knowledge of reading and writing (Gere, 1987). It provides opportunities for learners to go beyond sentence-level discourse, practice turn-taking strategies appropriate for the target language, engage in unplanned speech and receive exposure to socio-linguistic contexts otherwise unavailable to them.

On practical levels, Peer correction is flexible, as they can take place at various stages of the writing process- prewriting, discovery, between- draft revision, and editing (Connor and Asenavage, 1994). It, also, fit well with the increased emphasis on process in composition teaching. Moreover, peer response can reduce the teacher's workload and can impart to the teacher important information about individual students' reading and writing abilities (Mittan, 1989). Furthermore, peer response activities in which the significant role of the reader is concentrated on by the teacher can be highly time-efficient (Liu,



can be done with the help of someone else (Jun Liu and Jette G. Hansen, 2002). In addition, peer response activities “foster a myriad of communicative behaviors” that benefits all members of a group (Villamil and Guerrero, 1996).

Over the past 20 years, researchers (e.g., Doughty and Pica, 1986 Pica et al. 1989; Varonis and Gass, 1983) have recognized that there are a number of psychological rationales for using group work. The findings of the research on interaction and second language acquisition provide clear evidence that engaging learners in group activities increases opportunities for students to negotiate meaning and may lead to increased comprehension, faster acquisition, increased error correction, and increased range of language functions utilized.

As far as cognitive domain is concerned, peer response activities in teaching L2 writing can force L2 learners to exercise their thinking as opposed to passively receiving information from the teacher (Mittan, 1989). Students that are engaged in the peer response process can take an active role in their learning, build audience awareness, and build critical skills. They can “reconceptualize their ideas in light of their peers’ reactions” (Menddoca and Johnson, 1994). In peer assessment, students can engage in unrehearsed, low risk, exploratory talk that is less feasible in whole-class and teacher-student interaction (Ferris and Hedgcock, 1998). Instead of working independently on their own writing, students are continually talking about their writing, reinforcing knowledge they have already acquired but feel uncertain about, and filling in gaps in their understanding of what they have

## **Background**

The research findings in this area, L2 peer responding, have almost always pointed out that it has been useful and effective. Schlumberger (1992) views peer response as an important component of L2 writing instruction as it supports process writing with a focus on drafting and revision and enables students to get multiple feedback from teacher peer and self across various drafts. Additionally, it builds audience awareness; helps make reading-writing connections; and builds content, linguistic, and rhetorical schemata through multiple exposure to a text. Hireva (1999) has found that collaborative writing groups can lead to decision making, “allowing learners to compare their notes on what they have learned and how to use it effectively” and providing learners with “increased opportunities to review and apply their growing knowledge of L2 writing through dialogue and interaction with their peers in the writing group.” Moreover, results of the research (e.g., Guerrero and Villamail, 1994; DiCamilla and Anton, 1997; Donato, 1994; Villamail and Guerrero, 1996) indicate that collecting “scaffolding” occurs in group work, wherein “the speakers are at the same time individually novices and collectively experts, sources new orientations for each other, and guides through this complex linguistic problem solving.” The term “scaffolding” is used here to describe the supportive conditions that occur within the ZPD. And ZPD (Zone of Proximal Development) refers to the space between person’s actual level of development (that is, what can be done independently) and the potential level of development- i.e., what

## **Introduction**

For many years, the unique advantages that EFL/ESL learners can offer to each other

were ignored or underestimated in L2 writing classroom. There has been increasing interest in recent years, however, in tapping the potential of learners as teachers and tutors in L2 writing processes. Over the past fifteen years there has been much of the value of group work. The learner-centered methodology of the communicative language teaching approach and the increasing interest in the peer collaboration have helped make peer response activities commonplace in the L2 writing classroom. Liu and Hansen (2002) believe that peer response activities, in which students work together to provide feedback on one another's writing in both written and oral formats through active engagement with each other's writing progress over multiple drafts, have become a common feature of L2 writing instruction. In this article, "peer group assessment" is used as an umbrella term to designate what is usually referred to as "peer response," "peer feedback," "Peer review," or "peer editing" in teaching L2 writing. Although the term seems to be easy to understand, it is of help to define it at the beginning. Peer group assessment signifies the use of learners as sources of information and interactions for each other so that the learners assume roles and responsibilities mostly taken by a formally trained teacher and appraising each other's drafts in both written and oral formats in the process of writing.

## **An Investigation into the Effect of Peer Group Responses on EFL Writing Achievement**

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### **Abstract**

The objective of the present paper is to shed some light on peer feedback in EFL writing courses. In recent years, with regard to teaching writing, there has been a total shift of approach, from product-orientation to process-orientation. A key component of the latter is peer assessment in which learners read each other's compositions and provide feedback to the writer, based on the teacher's guidelines. It is widely assumed that this may help them improve their writing much better and even faster than teacher's feedback. Attempt has also been made to discuss the advantages and probable disadvantages of this technique also known as peer review, peer editing, and peer evaluation.

**Key words:** assessment, evaluation, feedback

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