Korean College Students’ Reflections on Peer Reviews and Variables Involved in the Review Process∗

Given Lee
(Pai Chai University)


This study describes how Korean college students perceive reviewing their peers’ drafts over the course of one semester and what variables might affect their review process. Twenty-six students enrolled in the teacher researcher’s two writing courses participated in this study. The data came from the students’ reflections on their peer reviews and the researcher’s observations/descriptions of the review process, and informal interviews with several students. The findings indicated that the students in this study valued peer reviews, but they were reluctant to write comments on peers’ drafts, especially at the beginning of the semester. However, toward the end of the semester, they felt more comfortable in providing written comments on peers’ drafts, particularly when they developed positive relationships with their peers. Suggestions for effective peer activity have also been provided.

**Key words**: college students, EFL, written feedback, composition class, peer review

1. INTRODUCTION

The process approach to writing instruction in English as a second or foreign language (ESL or EFL) was borrowed from first language (L1) theories and approaches. Process writing is a popular composition teaching method that emphasizes the process of discovering meaning (Flower & Hayes, 1981). From a process perspective, writing is not seen as a one-time activity; rather, it is a “recursive process through which meaning is created” (Zamel, 1982, p. 105). Through the steps of prewriting, drafting, evaluating, and revising (Zhang, 1995), students can expand and refine an initial idea (Shaughnessy, 1977).

∗ This work is supported by the National Research Foundation of Korea (2014S1A5A2A01014416). The author thanks Christian Prinsloo for his insightful comments on the project.

© 2016 The Korea Association of Teachers of English (KATE)

This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0, which permits anyone to copy, redistribute, remix, transmit and adapt the work provided the original work and source is appropriately cited.
In the composition classroom, feedback, whether it is teacher feedback or peer feedback, is considered an incentive to motivate students to revise their draft and improve it (I. Lee, 1997).

Traditionally, research on feedback focused on teacher feedback. However, influenced by a social constructivist view of writing (Anson, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978), research on peer review/peer response has recently drawn the attention of many writing researchers and instructors in many ESL or EFL contexts (Berg, 1999; Carson & Nelson, 1996; Connor & Asenavage, 1994; Jacobs, Curtis, Braine, & Huang, 1998; Lam, 2010; I. Lee, 1997; Mangelsdorf & Schlumberger, 1992; Min, 2005; Nelson & Carson, 1998; Nelson & Murphy, 1993; Paulus, 1999; Rollison, 2005; Stanley, 1992; Tsui & Ng, 2000; Yang, Badger, & Yu, 2006; Zhang, 1995, 1999). Although there is scholarship that is critical of peer review (e.g., see Connor & Asenavage, 1994), many researchers have viewed the value of peer review and emphasized the importance of incorporating peer review in the writing classroom.

More recently, there has been a growing interest in teaching English writing in many Korean universities, and in using peer review as one of the main classroom activities. An increasing number of Korean writing instructors and researchers have investigated the effects of peer review through different methodologies and instructional modes, such as written, oral, and online peer feedback (Choi, 2013; Moon, 2000; So & Lee, 2014) and/or students’ perception of peer feedback (S. Cho, 2011; Y. Cho, 2005; Suh, 2005). However, as S. Cho (2011) noted, research on peer review has focused more on students’ reaction to the feedback they receive from peers than on their own perception of the review process. In addition, few studies have actually traced and described how students perceive their peers’ reviewing over the course of the semester in a particular classroom or what variables might influence review activities. This study addresses these shortcomings. Using an action research approach (Johnson, 2005), this study aims to (1) examine students’ perception of providing written comments on peers’ drafts, and (2) identifies the situational variables involved in the review process.

In this paper, peer review is defined as exclusively written comments that students provide on their peers’ drafts based on an instructor’s guidelines, as many writing scholars have done (I. Lee, 1997; Tsui & Ng, 2000). Written comments are used as the major component of peer review activities for two reasons. First, written comments might allow students to have a better understanding of reader-writer relationships. While reading others’ drafts, students would also learn how to improve their own writing. Second, through the process, students might overcome their anxiety of doing peer review. Unlike L1 students, many EFL students seem to have difficulty providing oral comments in English on the spot, especially under time pressure (G. Lee, 2009; Min, 2005). However, when they are given more process time, such as reading peers’ drafts based on sets of provided questions and giving their opinions in written form, they appear to feel more comfortable.
2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the late 1980s, an increasing number of ESL writing instructors and researchers have showed their interest in either teacher feedback or peer feedback. By comparing actual drafts before and after revisions, many researchers have investigated the effects of teacher and/or peer feedback (Berg, 1999; Choi, 2013; Connor & Asenavage, 1994; I. Lee, 1997; Min, 2005; Paulus, 1999; Tsui & Ng, 2000; Yang et al., 2006). Although some studies have questioned the effectiveness of peer work (Connor & Asenavage, 1994; Paulus, 1999), most studies have showed that peer review is a useful device to improve drafts, foster audience awareness and ownership of the text, and support autonomous and collaborative learning (I. Lee, 1997; Tsui & Ng, 2000). In particular, when adequate training is provided, improvements seem greater (Lam, 2010; Min, 2005). For example, Min (2005) frequently observed that EFL college students in Taiwan were not able to use peers’ written comments in revision when the comments are vague and when writers’ intentions were misinterpreted. In order to resolve the problem, the author offered step-by-step training sessions about how to write specific comments through instructor explanations and modeling, teacher-student conferences, and peer review activities. The study showed that the number of comments increased and the quality of comments also improved.

Other researchers have looked at ESL students’ preference toward teacher or peer feedback. For example, by using questionnaires, Leki (1991) and Zhang (1995) asked students which type of feedback they would prefer to receive. The students in their study predominantly prefer teacher feedback to peer feedback. Nelson and Murphy (1993) said that this tendency is more common among L2 than L1 students because of their lack of trust in the comments made by peers whose English level is more or less the same as theirs. Additionally, they claimed that Chinese students in the study were hesitant to make critical comments on peers’ draft due to cultural reasons. However, Jacobs et al. (1998) argued that forcing students to choose between teacher feedback and peer feedback is misguided because these two types of feedback are not mutually exclusive. Also, questionnaires can be effective tools in quickly collecting data about students’ beliefs, perceptions, or attitudes (Johnson, 2005), but they may not reflect the complex nature of peer review activities.

Reading peers’ drafts and making comments on them is not only an intellectual activity but also an emotional, social, interpersonal, and institutional one (Carson & Nelson, 1996; Hyland, 2009). In particular, although doing peer review as L2 learners is a daunting process that involves many factors, such as students’ prior knowledge, L2 proficiency, and their affective aspects (Polio, 2012), many L2 studies on peer review have focused on the cognitive aspects of peer review activities (Choi, 2013; Min, 2005), neglecting the other aforementioned crucial aspects (Guerrero & Villamil, 1994; Lee & Shallert, 2008a, 2008b).
There are only a few studies investigating Korean EFL college students’ perceptions of doing peer review in a particular composition class for an entire semester. For example, S. Cho (2011) documented three Korean college students’ perceptions of giving feedback on their peers’ drafts, the types of feedback, and their revisions. She argued that giving feedback on peers’ drafts can help students improve their writing skills. Also, Choi (2013) compared the effects of different types of feedback, teacher, peer, and self-editing. The author assigned 75 college students to experimental and control groups. The experimental group received teacher and peer feedback, while the control group received teacher feedback and self-editing. Comparisons of the students’ improvement in the two groups revealed that the students in the former outperformed those in the latter. A regression analysis demonstrated that the students’ L2 knowledge and their composition skills are related to the level of writing anxiety. Although these two studies provided invaluable insights into Korean EFL college students’ peer review process, the focus is not on students’ in-depth reflections of doing peer review but on the effects of peer work. In addition, the participants in S. Cho’s study (2011) were only three students, and the experimental design used in Choi’s study may not capture the complex process of peer review activities. In order to fully describe the complex nature of how students perceive the entire process of peer reviews, many researchers have noted that more research should be conducted on students’ perceptions of peer reviews for an extensive period of time and various situational variables in the process, including classroom activities and interpersonal relationships (Crookes, Davis, & Caulk, 1994; Hyland, 2009).

To fill this gap, this study examined 26 Korean college students’ perception of review activities and contextual variables involved in the review process. Specifically, two research questions were formulated:

1. What was the students’ perception on the peer review process over the course of the semester?
2. What variables did the students believe might have influenced the process of peer review?

3. METHODS

Action research is defined as “any systematic inquiry into one’s own practice” (Johnson, 2005, p. xi), which allows teachers to study their own classroom, teaching methods, class materials, students, and assessments in order to improve the quality of their own practice (Mertler, 2008). As an experienced writing instructor, I have been interested in more effective implementation of peer review activities. In my view, students learn particular
knowledge and skills not only from a teacher but from other sources, including peers, instructions, and class/course materials and activities. My hope is that employment of the action research method in studying the peer review process will allow me to observe every step of the students’ reviewing process closely and provide authentic descriptions of how they perceive making comments on peers’ drafts and what situational variables were involved in the process. Additionally, the thick descriptions will benefit other EFL instructors in developing better insight into teaching English writing skills and implementing peer review activity.

3.1. Setting and Participants

The study was undertaken over the course of one semester (15 weeks) in two intermediate-level college composition classes at a Korean university. The course was an optionally required course. All instructors at the program taught English writing from the process approach (Flower & Hayes, 1981). They used various types of feedback techniques, such as teacher feedback, peer feedback, and/or conferencing as essential components of their courses. University policy dictates that all the activities in the writing courses be conducted in English.

Out of 29 students from the two classes, 26 students participated in this study (13 male and 13 female students). Three students were excluded from this study because two were foreign students whose English learning experience was not the same as other Korean students in the class and one was a Korean student who only wrote one reflection for the term. The participants’ age ranged from early 20s to late 20s, and they came from various disciplines. Four students had studied in English-speaking schools from six months to two years, and the remaining students learned English domestically through Korean schooling for over 10 years. Those who attained a TEPS score between 700 and 800 were eligible to enroll in the course. Most of the students wrote that they had no experience learning English academic writing, nor were they familiar with peer review activities.

3.2. Classroom Procedure

The course was 15 weeks long, and the class met twice a week for 75 minutes each. Nolen and Vander Putten (2007) argued that action research could be compromised by interference of the researcher. In order to minimize the interference of the researcher as a tool, I refrained from altering my regular classroom procedure. In addition to teaching

---

1 The TEPS is an English proficiency test developed by Seoul National University in 1991, and it has been used in many institutions and organizations in Korea to evaluate test takers’ English skills.
the four required formal writing assignments (FWA) per semester (i.e., three paragraphs and one essay), I included five informal writing assignments (IWA) in the course to provide more free writing opportunities for my students as well as three quizzes on grammar and other academic writing skills. After each FWA, the students had a peer review (PR) activity. Table 1 provides a description of the four FWAs, five IWAs, and four PRs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Writing</th>
<th>Topics Covered in the Course</th>
<th>Weight (%)</th>
<th>Review Time</th>
<th>Review Place</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IWA1</td>
<td>Reflection on English writing experience</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWA1</td>
<td>Descriptive paragraph (DP)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR1</td>
<td>Peer review on the DP</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>50 mins</td>
<td>Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IWA2</td>
<td>Reflection on the DP peer review</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWA2</td>
<td>Cause/Effect paragraph (CEP)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR2</td>
<td>Peer review on the CEP</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>40 mins</td>
<td>Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IWA3</td>
<td>Summarizing a news article</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWA3</td>
<td>Summary and solution paragraph (SSP)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR3</td>
<td>Peer review on the SSP</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>50 mins</td>
<td>Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IWA4</td>
<td>Reflection on the three peer reviews</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWA4</td>
<td>Argumentative essay based on the SSP</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR4</td>
<td>Peer review on the essay</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2 days</td>
<td>Home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IWA5</td>
<td>Reflection on the four peer reviews</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. IWA = informal writing assignment; FWA = formal writing assignment; DP = descriptive paragraph; PR = peer review; CEP = cause and effect paragraph; SSP = summary and solution paragraph

After producing each formal writing assignment, the students worked in pairs or in groups of threes to review peers’ drafts. The first three reviews of paragraphs of 250-350 words each were done in class. The final review of a 1000 word essay was done as a take-home assignment. As an incentive for participation, each peer review of every paragraph was worth 2% of the final grade, and the essay peer review 4% of the final grade. In order to facilitate the review process, I provided a review worksheet containing a list of guided questions on format, mechanics, content, organization, grammar, and other academic writing skills, as well as critiques of the draft and suggestions for improvements. One example of the review worksheet with guided questions appears in the Appendix.

3.3. The Peer Review Procedure

After completing peer review assignments 1, 3, and 4, the students were asked to write reflections on their review experience and upload it on the university online system. This occurred three times during the semester: IWA2, IWA4, and IWA5. These, in addition to
IWA1, became the primary data for the current study (See Table 1).

Before each peer review, there was an approximately 20-minute mini training session about how to respond to peers’ drafts. The students were asked to read one or two paragraphs or essays written by my student in the previous semester and to go through the sets of provided questions on the review worksheet. After the training session, the students were told to review peers’ drafts either in class or at home. The process of writing, reviewing, and reflecting on peer review is outlined in Figure 1 below.

**FIGURE 1
The Writing, Reviewing, and Reflecting Cycle**

```
Instruction on Academic Writing
↓
First Draft
↓
Training and Peer Review
↓
Reflection on Peer Review
↓
Second Draft
↓
Teacher Oral and/or Written Comments
↓
Final Draft
```

The first review partners were randomly chosen. After writing the DP, the students were asked to send their draft to their partner several hours before the class. In the classroom, the students worked on the peer review based on the worksheet I provided. For the second CEP, the students learned how to integrate direct quotations into a text, one important component of academic writing. They were assigned to interview one of the classmates on their regular or habitual activities, such as swimming or smoking. The interview was conducted in class for about 30 minutes with the interview questions created as part of the instruction. Then, the students were asked to write a cause-and-effect paragraph. The interviewer and the interviewee became review pairs/groups. For the third SSP, the students were told to give a summary of one current English news article of their choice and post it to the online system, which became the third IWA. Then, the students were asked to read one of the postings and check whether the summary was done well. The student who read the posting became review pairs/groups. The final essay writing assignment was an extension of the third SSP. Staying on the same topic and with the same review pairs, the students had to collect more articles and write an argumentative essay.
After creating a rough draft, they sent it to their pairs, and the students reviewed the essay for two days and sent their review sheet to their partner.

3.4. Data Collection and Analysis

The data for this study included (1) the students’ reflections on their peer review activities, (2) a teacher researcher’s observations/descriptions of the peer review process, and (3) informal interviews with several students.

For collection and analysis of the data, I employed a qualitative content analysis approach in a natural setting, and the patterns and themes were “emergent rather than tightly prefigured” (Cresswell, 2003, p. 181). After the peer review, I immediately assigned my students to write their reflection on their peer review experience, while they still had a clear memory about their review activity. In order to collect each student’s honest opinions about his or her review experience, the instructor made the uploaded reflection only accessible to the instructor. As soon as they uploaded their reflection to the university website, I read each student’s reflection on his or her peer review several times and tried to identify the meaning of the student’s peer review experience. How did the student perceive the peer review process? What problems did the student face? What factors did each student believe might have constrained or facilitated the process in each peer review session? Was there any change about the student’s perception of the review process over the course of the semester? While reading the students’ reflection, I discovered repeated expressions that became the posteriori themes of the qualitative content analysis. The expressions that developed into themes include the following: “challenging,” “anxious,” “helped me revise my drafts,” “poor English ability,” “get to know my partner better,” “un/familiarity with peer review practice,” “time” or “useful/not useful.” Then I also counted the number of students for each theme. When I found a particularly troublesome or interesting reflection, I either visited the notes I had written during class on the review process or interviewed the students involved. For example, when a student wrote the review was “overwhelming without any specific explanations,” I followed up with the student by asking for clarification. These informal follow-up interviews were conducted in class and in my office and took on the format of a natural conversation of approximately five through ten minutes. Such informal interviews were conducted with seven students during the semester.

In the following section, I will report on the students’ perceptions of their peer review experiences and the factors that they believed had influenced the review process over the course of the semester.
4. RESULTS

The peer review process was an anxiety-provoking, stressful activity, particularly at the beginning of the semester. However, most students in this study mentioned that the peer review process that they had worked on in pairs or groups was a “positive, meaningful activity.” The activity helped them to gain confidence in providing comments on peers’ drafts, foster audience awareness, and be aware of reader-writer relationships and ownership of the text. The numeric number within the parenthesis in each table represents the number of students who responded to the category.

4.1. The First Peer Review Experience

As seen in Table 2, except for one student, 25 students commented that the first peer review was a “positive,” “interesting,” “essential,” “valuable,” “refreshing and new,” or “useful/helpful process.” However, they also noted that their first peer review was an emotionally charged, intellectually overloaded, and anxiety-provoking experience.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IWA1</td>
<td>Peer review experience</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Challenging yet positive</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N = 26)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Regretful</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Levels of anxiety</td>
<td>Extremely high</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High</td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: IWA = informal writing assignment

Regardless of their English and writing ability, the students expressed their experience as a “too difficult,” “anxious,” “horrified,” “embarrassing,” “cautious,” or “big challenging” one. Specifically, they were extremely concerned about the quality of their comments and/or their peers’ reaction to their comments. For example, 25 students expressed similar feelings about their first peer review experience, as reflected upon by the following student:

Though I went through many difficulties in doing the first peer review, it was very useful experience. Because of this activity I realized that writing is not a one-time event, and through many different steps, writing, reviewing, and revising, I can improve my writing. (The first reflection)
Table 3 showed that multiple factors appeared to constrain the process of the first peer review.

TABLE 3  
Factors that Affect the Process of the First Peer Review

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IW A1</td>
<td>Review experience</td>
<td>First time</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N = 26)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Several</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Guided questions</td>
<td>Clear, helpful</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Clear yet difficult</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>English ability</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Knowledge and skills</td>
<td>Insufficient</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No comment</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Insufficient</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No comments</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. IW A = informal writing assignment

Such factors included students’ lack of prior experience in peer review, English ability, and knowledge and skills about writing comments on peers’ drafts, their unfamiliarity with the guided questions, and the allocated time. These factors seemed to affect the peer review process individually or together. Because of their lack of experience in peer review and their unfamiliarity with the guided questions, several students, especially those with weak English ability and limited knowledge about writing comments, stated that the assigned time for the review was insufficient. One student with relatively low English ability and lacking review experience commented:

At first, I did not know what to write. Reading the questions on the worksheet and understanding them took a lot of time... My English was not that good, and I did not know how to write my comments in English... I felt that I needed much more time. (The first reflection)

In sum, most students believed that the first peer review was a helpful device in understanding academic writing skills, but they viewed the review as a challenging experience due to various factors, such as their unfamiliarity with the peer review procedures and the guided questions, and also the students’ limited English and academic writing skills.

4.2. The Second and Third Peer Review Experiences

After three paragraph reviews, most students seemed to have more positive experiences and less anxiety about writing comments on peers’ drafts than the first review (See Table 4).
TABLE 4

The Students’ Response to the Second and Third Peer Review Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IWA4</td>
<td>Peer review experience</td>
<td>Confident</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(N = 26)</td>
<td>Positive yet difficult</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Still difficult/uncomfortable</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Levels of anxiety</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No comments</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: IWA = informal writing assignment

One student, who first completed the review within 30 minutes, while the others spent more than 40 minutes on the third review, commented as follows:

As I did the second peer review, I felt more relaxed than the first one, pointing out minor errors in grammar and mechanics. However, when I had the third one, I did not have any problem with the review. I checked format and mechanics quickly, and then I wrote many comments about organization and content… The process broadened my view on English academic writing. Now, I feel confident in doing peer review, and there is no area that is especially uncomfortable for me. (The second reflection)

However, four students noted that even though they learned much through the review process, they still did not seem to perceive reviewing someone’s work positively. They viewed it as a “stressful,” “difficult,” or “uncomfortable” process. For instance, three students were still worried about the quality of their comments. One of them expressed her experience as follows:

The review process helped me a little… However, I have doubts on whether the process can actually advance my [writing], as well as my peers’ writing skills. I found my peers’ comments were not that effective and crucial; most of them were vague. My peers might have the same feeling about my comments. I am not sure about effectiveness of the process. (The second reflection)

Another student was concerned about how much feedback she had to provide on her peer’s draft. She explained her stress:

Striking a balance between my comments and my peer’s writing was difficulty for me. I was worried about how much feedback I should give. If I correct all her mistakes, I give too much input in her work… However, I did not have time, so I just wrote my feedback based on the guided questions. (The second reflection)
Even though I explained to the students that the purpose of peer review was not to correct all the errors in peers’ drafts, she seemed to be obsessed with more details like error correction. After reading her reflection, when she was asked to describe what it meant “striking a balance between my comments and my peers’ writing,” she explained that she was not sure to what extent she had to correct her peer’s draft. When she read her peer’s draft at home, she found many grammatical and content errors and wondered if she had to correct them.

It seems that the students’ increased level of comfort with the peer review process not only depended on familiarity with the peer review process itself, but also on other factors, such as an increased level of comfort with peers, guided questions, writing topics, classroom instructions, materials and activities, and perceived English proficiency over the course of the semester. In particular, when the topic of the paragraph was closely related to their personal lives, they reported that the review was easy and joyful. For example, as previously noted, the second peer review was done after the students wrote the CEP based on the interview data that they had collected from their peers in the classroom.

As shown in Table 5 below, most students indicated that the review was “relatively easier than others” because they were familiar with the content. Also, two students wrote that they became closer with their review partners through the interview process, which helped them release the anxiety and burden of what their peers would think about their drafts. As the writing process progressed, fewer students considered peer review to be difficult because of their poor English proficiency, lack of previous reviewing experience, or limited knowledge on providing feedback.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment Factors</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Familiarity</td>
<td>Familiar</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unfamiliar</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparedness</td>
<td>Prepared</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not prepared</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English ability</td>
<td>Better</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge and skills</td>
<td>Increased</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No comments</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Insufficient</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No comments</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: IWA = informal writing assignment

Only two students (i.e., one male senior and one female freshman), who did not thoroughly prepare for peer review activities before the class reflected that the process was “stressful” and that the time was insufficient:
The third peer review was about the summary and solution paragraph. It was the most difficult review for me. I should’ve read my peer’s draft before the class… But I didn’t. So I could not check whether my peer did a good summary or not… I could not provide good comments on the paper. I felt sorry about it. (The second reflection)

In the review session, the male student showed up ten minutes late for the class, and he said that he did not prepare for the review because of his job interview. The female student did not have time to read her peer’s summary carefully before the class because she was involved in many club activities.

4.3. The Last Essay Peer Review Experience

Through several reviews for the term, most students perceived that they had gained confidence in reviewing peers’ drafts and writing their own papers. They thought the review activities were beneficial, valuable, and meaningful ones; for example:

At first, I only pointed out simple errors in grammar, mechanics, and format. I was passive. I was also afraid of being judgmental on others’ essays; however, now I believe I gained confidence in reviewing. I realized providing feedback can help my peers improve writing. Also, it helped develop my own writing skills. Therefore, the peer review activities that we have had in this class were a great, meaningful experience for me. (The third reflection)

However, as seen in Table 6, one student with relatively fluent English ability did not consider peer reviews positively, even after several practice sessions.

### TABLE 6
The Students’ Response to the Essay Peer Review Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IWA5</td>
<td>Peer review experience</td>
<td>Confident</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Positive yet difficult</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Still difficult/uncomfortable</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Levels of anxiety</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No comments</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. IWA = informal writing assignment

In her last reflection, she noted that peers’ comments may not be useful in improving her writing skills as well as her peers’ because of her lack of trust in the comments.
Honestly speaking, I am still not confident in giving useful comments to my peer’s draft, except for pointing out obvious mistakes. It is a hard task to me. It’s maybe because of my lack of English ability… I experience some trouble when I have to write my opinions on the draft based on the guided questions, such as “What is the most convincing in the paragraph?” or “Identify at least one area where you would like to see additional support.” When I see these types of questions, I do not know what to write… When I saw my peers’ comments on my draft, most them were not useful… I think the peer review activity we had had in class is not helpful in improving my writing, also maybe my peer’s writing, because we are not experts. (The third reflection)

As previously noted, the students believed that multiple factors facilitated the process of peer review for the term. In addition to exposure to multiple-peer reviews, they illustrated that instructions on academic writing skills, class activities and materials, conferences, and actual writing practices all had affected review activities (See Table 7). For example, one student commented:

For the first two peer reviews, I was so afraid of making comments on my peer’s drafts. However, as I have more peer reviews, class lessons, quizzes, conferences, and other writing and reading practices, I have continuously developed my knowledge and skills about English academic writing… Now, I feel more confident in reviewing my classmate’s writing… During the last essay review, I could easily and quickly check on errors in format, mechanics, and grammar and focus more on logic and content. I feel I’ve learned a lot in the course. (The third reflection)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IWAS (N = 26)</td>
<td>Class activities and materials</td>
<td>Helped</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No comments</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interpersonal relationship</td>
<td>Prepared</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not prepared</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Length of the essay</td>
<td>Better</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Academic writing ability</td>
<td>Increased</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No comments</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. IWAS = informal writing assignment

In addition, after the second review session, two students mentioned that the relationship that they had developed in class helped them release their stress about writing comments on peers’ drafts. However, after the essay review, six students recognized how the
relationships had facilitated the review process. One male student, who did not value the importance of peer review, gave a good summary of how the relationship and interaction between him and his peers improved the review process as well as his writing ability in English.

Through review activities, I found that peer review is not one-way communication. It is a writer and a reader working together-experience to help each other… It is a really helpful experience for me… At first, I did not know what to do. We are just friends, not teachers… I made simple comments on format, punctuation, and grammar. I thought it’s [writing comments on students’ drafts] a teacher’s job. …but now I know the purpose of peer review clearly…. While reading my peer’s paper and providing my opinions on it, I and my partner discuss problematic, unclear parts in the drafts. Through the discussion, I can write my comments more easily. This process has also consolidated my writing skills… I am not afraid of making comments on my classmate’s paper anymore. Because I get to know my peers more, I can provide my opinions more honestly without any anxiety. (The third reflection)

However, since the last peer review was done at home, the students did not complain about lack of time; instead, three students reflected that the review process was stressful because of the length of the essay. Two students thought that going from reviewing a 250-350 word paragraph to a 1000 word essay was too difficult, reminding them of the first peer review activity.

5. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Through the qualitative content analysis of student perceptions on peer review, three main contributions are made to existing scholarship: the importance of (1) using peer review in EFL writing classrooms, (2) close observations of various situational variables that might affect peer review, and (3) creation of materials and class environments to help develop close, trusting relationships.

Firstly, the findings clearly indicate that utilizing peer reviews in the writing class is an essential technique to help students improve their writing and reviewing skills, as other scholars have noted (S. Cho, 2011; Choi, 2013; I. Lee, 1997; Min, 2005; Tsui & Ng, 2000). In particular, Lam (2010) suggested, a careful design of each procedure and scaffolding seems vital in deciding the success or failure of peer review. Although the majority of students in this study initially regarded the peer review process as anxiety-provoking, particularly at the beginning of the semester, they also viewed it as an essential component
in the writing class. Moreover, as the semester unfolded, they seemed to gain more confidence in responding to peers’ drafts. For example, twenty-five students out of twenty-six commented that reviewing peers’ drafts helped them to develop better and clear understandings of English academic writing skills. In addition, several students (two in the first and second review each and three in the final review) recognized for the ownership of the text and writer-reader relationships in their reflection. This means that incorporating peer reviews in writing courses regularly can be an important step to help Korean college students understand academic writing skills and learn a sense of audience awareness and authorship of the text.

Secondly, the result also demonstrates that in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the peer review process, writing teachers and researchers need not only pay attention to the number of exposure to peer review but also to the classroom environment in which peer reviews take place as well as an individual student’s personal issues (Crookes et al., 1994; Hyland, 2009). For example, when the content of the second writing assignment was more closely related to their own life experiences than the first or the third writing assignments, they felt more comfortable reviewing peers’ drafts. In addition, when the students prepared for the lessons carefully and invested more time and effort, they seemed to view peer review activities more positively; however, when they did not have such preparation for the peer reviews, they tended to complain about the review process. Therefore, it seems critical that writing instructors organize class activities and materials in a way to connect with students’ lives more closely and instruct them step-by-step to prepare for peer review.

Finally, the study shows that doing peer review is not just an intellectual activity but also an emotional, social, and interpersonal activity, as Hyland (2009) noted. In particular, it is crucial to create class materials and activities that help students develop close, trusting relationships with peers. In her article, as Rollison (2005) noted, the students felt uneasiness about writing comments on peers’ drafts because of their fear of how peers might react to their comments, especially before they established a close, positive relationship with peers. However, after the students built good relationships and communicated with one another more closely through class activities, particularly through the interview activity done for the second CEP, the students were able to point out peers’ errors on their writings without worrying too much about how peers would think about their comments. As previous studies have claimed (Hyland, 2009; Lee & Schallert, 2008a, 2008b), this study suggests that developing a positive relationship and creating an amicable learning atmosphere can be fundamental for reducing students’ anxiety and for utilizing effective peer reviews.

The purpose of the study is not to generalize the results of the findings; rather, it aims to provide authentic, rich descriptions of the peer-reviewing context in a particular Korean college composition class. The ultimate aim is to improve the quality of writing instruction,
particularly with the use of effective peer-reviewing. Therefore, the results of this study may not necessarily be generalized to other contexts where instructors may not use the process approach to writing due to a large class size. The data for this study come from the students’ reflections on their peer review activities rather than from the peer feedback itself or the actual revised drafts. Further study can clarify whether the students’ peer feedback is actually incorporated into revised drafts and to what extent it has been included in revision.

In conclusion, action research may be criticized for allowing the teacher/researcher’s interpretations to become relatively colored because of personal involvement in the research. However, the degree of subjectivity that action research allows and requires is also its strength. It contributes to authentic descriptions of the subject matter. Nevertheless, as previously noted, in order to strike a balance between subjectivity and objectivity, the researcher implemented the syllabus through regular classroom procedures. Consequently, the action research approach used from this study enabled the researcher to address the research goals set out in the introduction.

REFERENCES


APPENDIX

Cause and Effect Peer Review Worksheet

Your name: _______ Author’s name of the paragraph you are reviewing: _______

Peer editing is an interactive process of reading and commenting on a classmate’s writing. You will exchange drafts with a classmate, read each other’s work, and make detailed suggestions for improvement. Use this worksheet and answer each question. Write your comments on the worksheet and/or on your classmate’s paper. This peer editing assignment is worth 2% of your final grade. To earn full points, you must give detailed responses to the
questions below. Remember:

a. Your job is to help your classmate write clearly. Focus mostly on content and organization.
b. If you notice grammar or spelling errors, highlight them. You do not have to correct every single error you see.
c. Don’t cross out any writing. Instead, underline, draw arrows, and circle parts.
d. Make your first comment a positive one. Find something good to say.
e. Use a colored pencil or pen.

Organization:

1. The topic sentence:
   What is the topic? What is the controlling idea? Copy here.
   What is the overall impression of the topic sentence?

2. Supporting sentences:
   How many supporting points are there in the paragraph? Write the numbers.
   Numbers: ______________
   Does the author focus on one aspect only (i.e., causes or effects)?
   Unity—Do all of the supporting sentences clearly fit within the narrow focus identified in the topic? Cross out any sentences that do not fit.
   Coherence—Is the flow of the ideas in the supporting sentences clear?
   Does the author use sufficient details to support the main point?
   Are transitions used effectively? Write them all.

3. The concluding sentence:
   Is the conclusion effective? Explain why or why not

Content:
   Is the title concise and clear?
   What is the most convincing point in the body? Why?

Grammar and Sentence Structure:
   Does the author use proper grammar? If not, underline noticeable errors.
   Does the author use various types of sentences? Explain.

Academic Writing Style and Word Choice:
   Does the author use academic writing style? If not, highlight the parts.
   Does the author use words effectively? If not, circle them.

Format:
   Does the author use proper format? If not, highlight errors.

Mechanics:
   Does the author use proper capitalization, spelling, and punctuation?
Evaluation and Suggestions:

What two things did the author do well? List and explain.
What one area did the author need to improve upon? Explain.

Applicable levels: Tertiary

Given Lee
Ju Si-Gyeong College
Pai Chai University
155-40 Baejae-ro, Seo-gu
Daejeon 35345, South Korea
Phone: 042-520-5359
Email: givenlee@pcu.ac.kr

Received on December 1, 2015
Reviewed on January 15, 2016
Revised version received on February 15, 2016