

Effect of Peer Review and Tutor Conferencing on English as a Second Language Learners' Writing Performance

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ABSTRACT

After years of research on the effect of feedback provided by peers or teachers on learners' writing performance, there is still a need for further investigation in this area. In the present study, a group of learners were observed in the process of an English as a Second Language (ESL) writing course in order to investigate the effect of peer reviewing and tutor conferencing on learners' writing performance in their narratives. For this end, an interrupted time-series design (O-X-O-X-O) was employed. It involved an observation of the samples followed by the first treatment; that is, peer feedback followed by a second observation. Then, a second treatment, or tutor conferencing, preceded another observation. Next, two raters were trained to use the Wong Scale (Wong, 1989) to score the stories written by the samples. The scores were tested for their inter-rater reliability, and an acceptable Cronbach's Alpha was observed. The results of Repeated Measures ANOVA tests indicated even though peer-reviewing had no significant effect on the improvement of the scores in their narratives, the influence of tutor conferencing was observed to be significant.

Keywords: ESL writing, peer review, tutor conference, feedback

INTRODUCTION

Proponents of the Process School consider writing a process in which the student writer plays a central and active role (Raimes, 1983). He is involved in self-discovery learning to manage the appropriate linguistic tools, while the teacher facilitates learning by interfering in the process as little as possible in a co-operative environment (Atkinson, 2003). She seeks to develop in her learners an awareness of their own writing processes through activities like drafting, revising and editing (Hyland, 2003). Writing courses in this approach are viewed as communities of learners in which a primary value is granted to collaborative learning

(Faigley, 1985). Thus, learners are encouraged to provide and seek feedback among peers and participate in conferences as they proceed in their writing process.

Interest in peer review and teacher conferencing has triggered a wealth of research on their effect on learners' writing performance for several decades (Elbow, 1973; Murray, 1982; Bruffee, 1983; White and Arndt, 1991; Bitchener, 2008). However, after years of study in the area further research still seems necessary (Fujieda, 2009).

In the area of writing instruction, feedback can be defined as any kind of input from a reader who provides information to the writer

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for revision (Keh, 1990). The purpose of giving feedback is to teach skills that assist students in improving their writing and becoming “cognizant of what is expected of them as writers and are able to produce it with minimal errors and maximum clarity” (Williams, 2003, p. 1). As for peer review, it is defined as “an activity in the revising stage of writing in which students receive feedback about their writing from other students, their peers” (Richard and Schmidt, 2002, p. 390). Finally, considering conferencing a negotiated instructional event in which both the learner and the teacher regard individual learner needs, Reid (1993) views teacher conferencing as “a face-to-face conversation between the teacher and the student, usually outside the boundaries of the classroom” (p. 220).

A REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Ever since they were introduced, peer review and teacher conferencing and their effect on learners’ writing performance have been topics of high interest among researchers in the area of writing instruction. This trend of research has resulted in inconsistent findings, some of which will be reviewed in this section.

Research findings have indicated that teacher feedback in the form of overt correction of surface errors does not play a significant role in improving learners’ overall abilities in writing. In fact, when it includes inconsistent marking of errors or vague responses on content, it may even influence their writing ability negatively making them confused, passive or frustrated (Williams, 2003). Likewise, Mentor (2004) reports teacher interventions by writing keywords on the board, providing handouts, individual conferencing, evaluating and lecturing consume a good deal of time and energy with no significant improvement in learners’ writing skill. Radecki and Swales (1988) also find teacher feedback of any kind not helpful. Such findings may be due to the mismatch between the teacher feedback and the learner’s actual needs (Ping, Pin, Wee and Hwee Nah, 2003).

Other research findings, however, indicate that conferencing plays a positive role in the development of learners’ writing skills. Reid (1993) believes conferencing can be of particular value for English as a Second Language (ESL) learners since they are even more inexperienced as compared to Native English Speakers (NESs). As she argues, learners in ESL situations find it challenging to learn to control and to actively participate in interactions, negotiate meaning and clarify the teacher’s responses. In addition, it is argued that conferencing can enhance learners’ writing ability as well as their linguistic accuracy, particularly when it is provided before the students submit their final drafts in a comfortable environment (Ferris, 1995; 2002; Hyland, 1998; Hansen and Liu, 2005). In a study conducted in Malaysia, Vengadasamy (2002) found that teachers’ comments were useful when they were in the form of complete sentences. Meanwhile, teachers’ short comments which were written in-between sentences did not seem to help learners improve their writing. In another study in Malaysia, Mumtaz Naidu (2007) observed that conferencing with a focus on both content and form was positively effective in learners’ writing performance. Finally, in the same context, Shamshad Begham Othman and Faizah Mohamad (2009) reported that teacher’s one-to-one oral feedback significantly improved their students’ essays.

As for the effect of peer review, several researchers have observed learners at any level of language proficiency may benefit from discussion with peers (Freedman, 1992; Nelson and Murphy, 1993; Berg, 1999; Richard-Amato, 2003; Saito and Fujita, 2004; Abbott and Bogas, 2004; Nelson and Carson, 2006). In most writing assignments, the teacher is the sole individual who reads and responds to them. When an individual other than the teacher responds to their written work, learners develop a state of audience awareness and become more sensitive to the target readers (Rosenblatt, 1988; Reid, 1993). Flower *et al.* (1990) observe that through peer review, learners become

cognizant of the fact that a single text may result in different understandings in different readers. Additionally, according to Reid (1993), peer review makes learners more aware of the variety of social and personal contexts that affect writing. Dailge and Egolf (2004) agree on the positive effect of peer review on learners' writing in that it is an activity that spurs active group learning which in turn enhances understanding and lengthens retention. Peer feedback is considered central in learners' ESL writing development (Gass and Selinker, 2001; Duomont, 2002). Additionally, peer response activities can build a classroom community (Ferris, 2003a). Rollinson (2005) and Min (2006) regard peer review as a valuable aid for its cognitive, social and linguistic, affective as well as methodological benefits. Furthermore, some research findings have indicated that feedback provided by peers can be more useful than teacher feedback (Cumming, 1985; Zhang and Jacobs, 1989).

However, there are studies that have indicated insignificant effects of peer review on learners' writing performance (Manglesdorf, 1992; Mendonca and Johnson, 1994; Sengupta, 1998; Fury, 2004; Mooney, 2004). These researchers have found that learners only selectively approach the comments that are mentioned by their peers. They argue that learners in their studies often depended on their own or their teacher's knowledge rather than their peers'. In a study on Asian learners, Manglesdorf (1992) states that because these learners usually come from teacher-centred cultures, they look down on pair-work and peer comments. Research also shows that peer review plays an insignificant role on the learners' performance in their later drafts while the comments provided by the teacher prove to be more effective (Connor and Asenavange, 1994).

From the review of literature, it is evident that there is a lack of consistency in research findings regarding the effect of the aforementioned variables on the Malaysian learners. Hence, the objective of the study was to measure the effect of peer review and tutor conferencing on the learners' writing

performance. According to a scale developed by Wong (1989), the learners' writing skill was analyzed in terms of the following dimensions:

1. Overall effectiveness: This involves the quality of communication with the reader; in other words, whether the writer can communicate effectively with the reader.
2. Content: This relates to the way in which the writer treats the narrative. The quality of the content in a story can be determined by (a) purposeful choice of significant events and details, (b) mature development of the story, and (c) engaging links between the different parts of the story.
3. Language: The focus of this dimension is on the control of sentence structure and grammar, i.e. whether the learner could accurately and appropriately use the language.
4. Vocabulary: This aspect includes the learners' level of vocabulary development. It is identified by varied and accurate word choice.
5. Total: This shows the learners' overall writing performance. It is achieved by adding all the aforementioned aspects of writing skill.

The following hypotheses were tested in light of the reviewed literature:

- H₁. Peer review has a significant effect on the learners' overall effectiveness scores.
- H₂. Peer review has a significant effect on the learners' content scores.
- H₃. Peer review has a significant effect on the learners' language scores.
- H₄. Peer review has a significant effect on the learners' vocabulary scores.
- H₅. Peer review has a significant effect on the learners' total writing performance scores.
- H₆. Tutor conferencing has a significant effect on the learners' overall effectiveness scores.
- H₇. Tutor conferencing has a significant effect on the learners' content scores.
- H₈. Tutor conferencing has a significant effect on the learners' language scores.
- H₉. Tutor conferencing has a significant effect on the learners' vocabulary scores.

H₁₀. Tutor conferencing has a significant effect on the learners' total writing performance scores.

As depicted in *Fig. 1*, peer feedback and tutor conferencing are the two independent variables. The dependent variables of the study included the scores that were given by the two raters to each dimension of the samples' writing performance, i.e. overall effectiveness, content, language, vocabulary, and total. The objective was to investigate if providing the learners with peer review, on the one hand, and tutor conferencing, on the other, affected learners' writing performance.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A quantitative method was employed and the interrupted time-series design (O-X-O-X-O) was used in the present study (Marczyk, DeMatteo and Festinger, 2005). In this design, after the participants were observed, they were given a treatment, which was followed by another observation. Another treatment was given before the final observation. A comparison between the first observation and the second observation would show the effect of the first treatment, while the second observation and the third observation could be compared to measure the

effect of the second treatment. The participants and the instrument used as well as the raters and the tutor involved in the study are described in this section.

SAMPLE PARTICIPANTS

Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) students (N= 30) from the Faculty of Educational Studies in Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), a research university in Selangor, Malaysia, served as the intact group participants of the study. These learners attended the course of 'Teaching of Writing Skills' as a part of their bachelor programme. As for the sample size of the study, according to Creswell (2002), a size of 30 would roughly be sufficient in educational research. Furthermore, a larger sample size would impose financial problems on the researchers since they needed two experienced raters to score three drafts written by each student.

INSTRUMENT

The Qualitative Writing Scale, also known as the Wong Scale, is an analytic instrument composed of four dimensions which include overall effectiveness, content, language, and vocabulary (Wong, 1989). Wong tested her scale for its validity in the Malaysian context and also

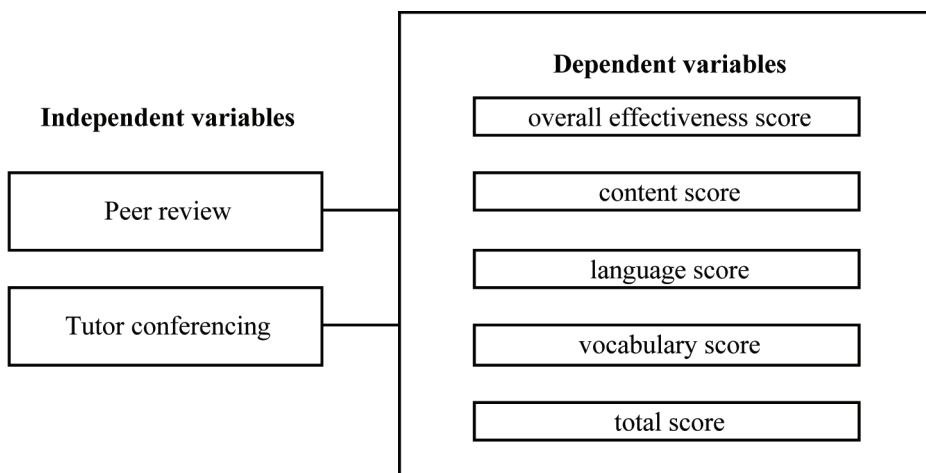


Fig. 1: Independent and dependent variables

observed acceptable reliability scores produced by the instrument. It categorizes narratives into three levels and six band scores of *Good* (5-6), *Fair* (3-4), and *Weak* (1-2). The weight given to the dimension of *language* is twice as much as the other three dimensions; therefore, the maximum total score for a narrative is 30, which is calculated as follows:

$$6 \text{ (overall effectiveness)} + 6 \text{ (content)} \\ + 6 \times 2 \text{ (language)} + 6 \text{ (vocabulary)}$$

As an example, if a rater assigns 4 for 'overall effectiveness', 3 for 'content', 5 for 'language', and 4 for 'vocabulary' of a story, the total score can be calculated, thus:

$$4 + 3 + (5 \times 2) + 4 = 21$$

A score of 21 upon 30 indicates a fair ability in the part of the student writer who wrote the story.

RATERS

Two experienced raters helped in marking the stories written by the participants. These raters had been involved in correcting essay tests in university placement tests for over five years. During their training, they assigned mostly consistent scores for the participants' stories. The maximum amount of discrepancy that was observed between their scores was only 1 on Wong's 6-point scale. In this regard, Breland, Bridgeman and Fowles (1999, p. 8) argue that scores must be at least 2 points apart on a 6-point scale before they are considered discrepant. In addition, after they had scored the stories, the results of the inter-rater reliability test showed acceptable levels of consistency, as it will be discussed later in the results section. Therefore, adding a third rater to the team was not necessary.

TUTOR

The tutor in this research was a post-graduate teaching assistant who functioned as a mediator and a facilitator. He had a 30-minute one-to-one discussion with the students on their papers.

TREATMENT

At the beginning of the semester, the learners were instructed to write a story of 1500 words for young adult ESL learners. The students were free to choose the themes of their stories, but they were encouraged to go for themes that would engage their target audience. They spent the first four weeks of the semester on this first draft. Subsequently, they reviewed at least one of their peers' story and apart from having their own stories reviewed. They read their friends' stories and provided them with oral and written feedback. The feedback included comments on the content and the form of the stories. Some time was set aside to do initial peer review activities in class. Before they started peer response activity, students were taught to give their peers observational rather than evaluative feedback. That is, instead of direct criticism and evaluation of their friends' stories, they would describe how certain events in the story made them feel or think.

Based on the comments provided, the students revised the first drafts of their narratives. By the end of the seventh week, the second drafts of the stories were collected. Following this step, the narratives were read thoroughly by the course tutor who gave the student writers written comments in addition to listening to their stories and providing them with oral feedback during the one-to-one tutor conferencing sessions. The focus of the conferencing was both on the form and the content of the pieces. The tutor followed the guidelines below in the conferencing sessions:

1. Encourage the learners to be active during the conferences. Actively listen to their questions first.
2. Show sincere interest in the stories.
3. In addition to orally stating your comments and responses to the assignment, you may leave written comments in the assignment for future reference.
4. You are not supposed to edit the learners' stories; instead, encourage them to do it themselves.
5. Begin your comments with encouraging expressions. When giving your comments,

keep your critical views for the middle of the meeting but ensure to end it by giving positive comments.

6. Provide criticisms with tact by using expressions like, "Here is a nice story, but you can improve it by... ." If you think the learner has not clarified a point, avoid comments like, "This is vague!"; rather, give comments like, "You may have a good reason to have left this part a bit ambiguous, but I feel your reader here would like to know what makes you think/say this way."

The conferencing sessions ended by week 11, and the final drafts were submitted to be marked and ranked by the end of the twelfth week.

RATER TRAINING

The two raters were trained to use the scale in two ninety-minute meetings (See the second phase of *Fig. 2*). The rater training meetings were held in two consecutive days. In the first meeting, the researchers purposively selected six stories that, according to the Wong Scale, roughly indicated the different performance levels of the participants. The stories were photocopied and given to the raters, who used the scale to correct them. A table leader, the second author, cross-checked the scores for discrepancies. Any case of disagreement was discussed until the raters reached an agreement. This would help the raters to better understand the instrument. It would also reduce probable disagreement between the raters in the later stages of the scoring.

On the second day, six more similar sample papers with roughly six performance levels were corrected by each rater individually. Then, the table leader and raters worked together to compare the scores given by each rater to the same samples to check for the consistency of the two sets of scores. As it was discussed earlier, the level of agreement among the resulting scores showed the raters were ready for individual scoring the samples. Out of the 12 corrected samples in the rater training period, six were selected as benchmark or anchor papers.

These samples represented the varying levels of performance. The raters could refer to these anchor papers whenever in doubt during the correction of the samples.

DATA ANALYSIS

SPSS (Version 15.0) was applied for the inter-rater reliability test and for comparing the significance of variance between the scores. Due to the generally high degree of inter-rater reliability, the means of the scores given by each rater were calculated which were assumed as the best possible indicators of the level of these samples. Since it was intended to measure the significance of difference in the writing performance of the same group of learners in three different time intervals, Repeated Measures ANOVA was chosen as the appropriate statistical method. *Fig. 2* summarizes the framework of the study.

RESULTS

The scores given by the two raters were tested for their inter-rater reliability prior to analysis. As it was mentioned in the description of the instrument, the Wong Scale consists of four scores for each dimension of writing. Therefore, the four different scores that the two raters had given to the overall effectiveness, content, language, and vocabulary of the sample stories, in addition to their total scores were tested for their inter-rater reliability.

Table 1 presents a summary of the inter-rater reliability test results. Reliability coefficients are interpreted in different ways, but a coefficient of below .50 is generally regarded as low, .50 to .75 as moderate and .75 to .90 as high (Farhadi, Jafarpur and Birjandi, 2001). The Cronbach Alpha scores for most of the scores were more than .75 suggesting high inter-rater reliability between the two raters. As the table indicates, only a third of these scores showed moderate reliability. Hence, it was not necessary to include a third rater. The final scores that were analysed were the means of the marks given by the two raters.

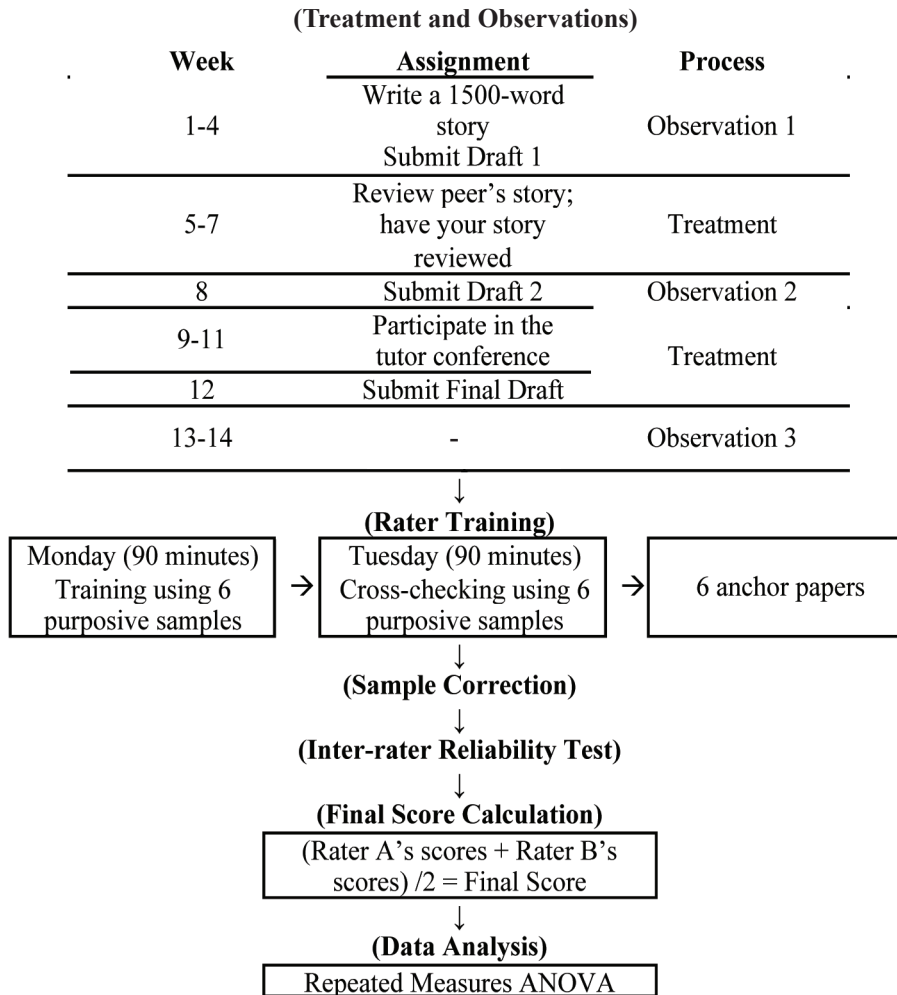


Fig. 2: Research framework

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics results of the study. As it can be observed in this table, there was an overall increase in the scores which indicated both treatments played positive roles on the learners. However, to verify the significance of the difference, it was necessary to analyse the data using the Repeated Measures ANOVA. The results are summarized and discussed below. The hypotheses of the study together with the significant values (p), decisions and conclusions are reported in the following section. The level of significance was set at ($\alpha = .05$) for the statistical calculations.

HO₁. Peer review has no significant effect on the learners' overall effectiveness scores

According to the results of the Pairwise Comparisons test between the first and the second observations, the significant value ($p = .33$) is larger than ($\alpha = .05$); therefore, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected. It can be concluded that peer review plays no significant role on the learners' overall effectiveness scores.

TABLE 1
Cronbach's Alpha for the four dimensions scores and the total scores
of the three observations

Dimension	Observation		
	1 (Draft 1)	2 (Draft2)	3 (Draft 3)
Overall effectiveness	.88	.73	.84
Content	.85	.63	.74
Language	.81	.76	.86
Vocabulary	.86	.62	.75
Total	.89	.81	.84

TABLE 2
Descriptive statistics results

Dimension	Observation					
	1 (Draft 1)		2 (Draft2)		3 (Draft 3)	
	Mean	Standard error	Mean	Standard error	Mean	Standard error
Overall effectiveness	3.65	.18	3.75	.18	4.16	.17
Content	3.77	.17	4.02	.16	4.47	.15
Language	3.55	.15	3.6	.14	4.23	.17
Vocabulary	3.75	.15	3.88	.15	4.15	.15
Total	18.27	.70	18.80	.68	21.22	.72

HO₂. Peer review has no significant effect on the learners' content scores

According to the results of the Pairwise Comparisons test between the first and the second observations, the significant value ($p = .15$) is larger than ($\alpha = .05$); therefore, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected. It can be concluded that peer review plays no significant role on the content scores of the learners' narratives.

HO₃. Peer review has no significant effect on the learners' language scores

According to the results of the Pairwise Comparisons test between the first and the second observations, the significant value ($p = .25$) is larger than ($\alpha = .05$); therefore, the

null hypothesis cannot be rejected. It can be concluded that peer review plays no significant role on the language scores of the learners' narratives.

HO₄. Peer review has no significant effect on the learners' vocabulary scores

According to the results of the Pairwise Comparisons test between the first and the second observations, the significant value ($p = .598$) is more than ($\alpha = .05$); therefore, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected. It can be concluded that peer review plays no significant role on the vocabulary scores of the learners' narratives.

HO₅. Peer review has no significant effect on the learners' total writing performance scores

According to the results of the Pairwise Comparisons test between the first and the second observations, the significant value ($p = .08$) is more than ($\alpha = .05$); therefore, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected. It can be concluded that peer review plays no significant role on the learners' total writing performance scores.

HO₆. Tutor conferencing has no significant effect on the learners' overall effectiveness scores

The results indicate a test statistics value of ($F = 20.47$) and a significant value of ($p = .000$) which is less than ($\alpha = .05$). The results of the Pairwise Comparisons test between the first and the third observations; on the one hand, and the second and the third observations; on the other, they also indicate a significant value of ($p = .000$) which is less than ($\alpha = .05$). Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected and it can be concluded that tutor conferencing plays a significant role on the overall effectiveness scores of the learners' narratives.

HO₇. Tutor conferencing has no significant effect on the learners' content scores

The results indicate a test statistics value of ($F = 17.82$) and a significant value of ($p = .000$) which is less than ($\alpha = .05$). The results of the Pairwise Comparisons test between the first and the third observations, on the one hand, and the second and the third observations; on the other, they also indicate a significant value of ($p = .000$) for this dimension which is less than ($\alpha = .05$). Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected and it can be concluded that tutor conferencing plays a significant role on the content scores of the learners' narratives.

HO₈. Tutor conferencing has no significant effect on the learners' language scores

The results indicate a test statistics value of ($F = 44.86$) and a significant value of ($p = .000$)

which is less than ($\alpha = .05$). The results of the Pairwise Comparisons test between the first and the third observations, on the one hand, and the second and the third observations, on the other, also indicate a significant value of ($p = .000$) which is less than ($\alpha = .05$). Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected and it can be concluded that tutor conferencing plays a significant role on the language scores of the learners' narratives.

HO₉. Tutor conferencing has no significant effect on the learners' vocabulary scores

The results indicate a test statistics value of ($F = 8.65$) and a significant value of ($p = .001$) which is less than ($\alpha = .05$). The results of the Pairwise Comparisons test between the first and the third observations; on the one hand, and the second and the third observations, and on the other, they also indicate a significant value of ($p = .003$) and ($p = .009$) respectively, which are both less than ($\alpha = .05$). Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected and it can be concluded that tutor conferencing plays a significant role on the vocabulary scores of the learners' narratives.

HO₁₀. Tutor conferencing has no significant effect on the learners' total writing performance scores

The results indicate a test statistics value of ($F = 56.66$) and a significant value of ($p = .000$) which is less than ($\alpha = .05$). The results of the Pairwise Comparisons test between the first and the third observations, on the one hand, and the second and the third observations, on the other, also indicate a significant value of ($p = .000$) which is less than ($\alpha = .05$). This null hypothesis is rejected and it can be concluded that tutor conferencing plays a significant role on the learners' total writing performance scores.

Table 3 summarizes the results of the first five hypotheses which were proposed to test for the significance of the effect of peer review on the five dependent variables of the study. Meanwhile, Table 4 presents the results of hypotheses 6-10 which tested for the effect of tutor conferencing on the dependent variables.

TABLE 3
Results of the effect of peer review on writing performance

Null hypotheses	p >	α	Decision	Conclusion
1. Peer review has no significant effect on the learners' overall effectiveness scores	.33			Peer review plays no significant role on overall effectiveness scores
2. Peer review has no significant effect on the learners' content scores	.15		Since the significant p is more than α , we fail to reject all the null hypotheses	Peer review plays no significant role on content scores
3. Peer review has no significant effect on the learners' language scores	.25	.05		Peer review plays no significant role on language scores
4. Peer review has no significant effect on the learners' vocabulary scores	.59			Peer review plays no significant role on vocabulary scores
5. Peer review has no significant effect on the learners' total writing performance scores	.08			Peer review plays no significant role on total writing performance scores

DISCUSSION

The results indicate a significant effect of tutor conferencing and an insignificant effect of peer review on the learners' writing performance. Based on the review of the related literature, the previous research findings on these two variables are quite inconsistent. One possible explanation for the insignificant effect of peer review on students' writing performance in this study can be the cultural differences between the participants in different studies. Fujieda (2009) suggests culturally idiosyncratic norms of learners who take part in ESL writing courses as the culprit, asserting "cultural beliefs and assumptions have a strong impact on learners' behavior and peer feedback management" (p. 114).

Carson and Nelson (1996) conducted a study on the effect of feedback on learner's improvement in their writing skills by considering their cultural background. They investigated Chinese ESL learners' behavior in the process of their peer reviews. They reported that the learners sought to build a sense of camaraderie throughout the activity

since they came from a low contact culture and valued conformity among peers. Therefore, it can be implied that learners from homogeneous cultural backgrounds tend to avoid criticizing peers and to be in agreement by establishing a harmony with them. The insignificant effect of peer review in this research could be due to such cultural differences between the participants who were to a large extent from the Malay ethnic group and those of other research who come from a vast variety of cultural backgrounds. This variable can, therefore, render investigating the effect of peer response or teacher conferencing a challenging process which calls for further research.

Besides peers' cultural backgrounds, Ferris and Hedgecock (2005) point out affective barriers as factors that lead to less successful peer feedback procedures. Meanwhile, Leki (1990) notes that learners can be unkind, sarcastic and too critical in their comments. This can raise their peers' affective filters that lead them to avoid their comments all together. As Ferris and Hedgecock (2005) argue, peer feedback may be "potentially harmful to students because of the novice writers' ineptitude in providing useful

TABLE 4
Results of the effect of tutor conferencing on writing performance

Null hypotheses	Repeated measures ANOVA		Pairwise comparison (p)	
	F	p	Ob 1 and 3	Ob 2 and 3
6. Tutor conferencing has no significant effect on the learners' overall effectiveness scores	20.47	.000	.000	.000
	Decision and conclusion) The null hypothesis is rejected. Tutor conferencing plays a significant role in the overall effectiveness scores of the learners' narratives.			
7. Tutor conferencing has no significant effect on the learners' content scores	17.82	.000	.000	.000
	Decision and conclusion) The null hypothesis is rejected. Tutor conferencing plays a significant role in the content scores of the learners' narratives.			
8. Tutor conferencing has no significant effect on the learners' language scores	44.86	.000	.000	.000
	Decision and conclusion) The null hypothesis is rejected. Tutor conferencing plays a significant role in the language scores of the learners' narratives.			
9. Tutor conferencing has no significant effect on the learners' vocabulary scores	8.65	.001	.003	.009
	Decision and conclusion) The null hypothesis is rejected. Tutor conferencing plays a significant role in the vocabulary scores of the learners' narratives.			
10. Tutor conferencing has no significant effect on the learners' total writing performance scores	56.66	.000	.000	.000
	Decision and conclusion) The null hypothesis is rejected. Tutor conferencing plays a significant role in the total writing performance scores of the learners' narratives.			

Key: F (test statistics); p (significant value); Ob (observation)

responses and because of L2 students' lukewarm, if not downright hostile, feelings toward peer feedback" (p. 224).

As it is also evident from the results, the students' writing capabilities were varied. This suggests that most of them might have lacked the required oral communicational skills to provide effective feedback. Learners may provide their peers with ambiguous and unhelpful feedback (Ferris, 2003b). They may be unable to comprehend their peer's accent in their oral comments (Leki, 1990). In this line, Liu and Hansen (2002) warn that learners may lack sufficient rhetorical schemata to help

them provide their peers with useful feedback concerning the structure or content of their written works. This could be another reason why peer review in this study did not affect the students' writing scores significantly although this was not the case in other similar studies reviewed earlier. Systematizing the peer review activity by introducing a checklist according to which students could provide comments on their classmates' stories might have led to different results.

The findings support the positive effect of teacher intervention in the process of learners' writing. The results seem to suggest that

teacher's overt intervention can be particularly beneficial in the case of ESL or even more importantly English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting where learners have relatively little access to authentic language in contrast with situations where learners are in a native English speaking environment. These findings support the results of studies of learners' opinions on teacher feedback, which indicate that students regard their teacher's comments as necessary and helpful (Zhang, 1995; Ferris and Hedgecock, 2005).

The variable of learning style preferences that also varies from learner to learner could also have affected the learners in their performance. For example, some students may be too dependent on the other learners and/or the tutor and thus may reject the idea to perform peer interaction or tutor conferencing when asked to do so. This variable is undeniably worth looking into in future research by using different individuals like ESL language teachers and learners as well as curriculum designers and material developers. Finally, a more structured and systematized peer review activity could have helped the students in providing less vague and more meaningful comments to each other.

CONCLUSIONS

The study sought to investigate the effect of peer feedback and tutor conferencing on learners' writing performance. According to the finding, peer feedback played no significant role in students' writing performance. However, as the results suggest, they benefited from tutor conferencing. As it was discussed, such findings may be due to the cultural background of the participants in the study. Since they come from a teacher-centred background, these learners value the feedback they receive from their lecturers and tutors more than the comments they get from their peers. Therefore, further research seems necessary to investigate these learners' response to the comments provided by their peers as compared to their response to the tutor comments. There is also a need to replicate the same research with a slightly larger sample

size. The relatively small sample size of the study could have resulted in Type I error that entails failing to reject a null hypothesis that is, in fact, false.

As the findings of this study suggest, a positive attitude in the part of the writing tutor or teacher can positively affect learners' improvement in their writing performance. The results also emphasize ESL teachers' intervention in the writing process of their student writers. In addition, the poor results obtained from the peer review highlight the importance of a systematic modelling and treatment of this activity in order to avoid probable ambiguities. Otherwise, the learners' may not grasp a clear understanding of the process, and as a result the activity may not work as effectively as it should.

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