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Edmodo

A Thesis Submitted to

The Department of Applied Linguistics

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for

the degree of Master of Arts

by Hasnaa Hisham Morsy

Under the supervision of Prof. Amira Agameya

May 2017

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Writing Content and Language via Edmodo**

A Thesis Submitted by

Hasnaa Hisham Morsy Shaalan

Submitted to the Department of Applied Linguistics

May 2017

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
The degree of Masters of Arts in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

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Abstract

The present study investigated the nature of online peer feedback and the extent of incorporating peer revisions. In particular, it examined the comments and changes in relation to the guidance sheet and in terms of the writing features of idea development, organization, vocabulary and style, structure and mechanics. The study had an exploratory design leaning towards the applied end of research. The data were collected from a large class of 77 students both female and male in an Egyptian national university. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the frequency of the comments and revisions. A qualitative approach was employed to identify the patterns of online peer feedback. The results of the study showed that the participants were able to produce feedback that addressed varied writing features. They also revealed that idea development was the most targeted writing aspect in both comments and revisions which was in accordance with the guidance sheet. In general, there was an equal distribution of comments focusing on content (idea development and organization) and language (vocabulary and style, structure and mechanics). Revisions in the language, on the other hand, outweighed those in the content area. This implies that students have a tendency on respond to language issues even when they are not the focus of the sheet nor the peer feedback. The study offered a number of pedagogical implications for the implementation of online peer feedback in L2 classroom in general and ESP, large classes in particular.

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List of Abbreviations

CMC: Computer-mediated-communication

EFL: English as a foreign language

ESL: English as a second language

ESP: English for specific purposes

L2: Second language

S: Student

SNS: Social networking site

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Writing is one of the most complex skills to master in learning any language whether it is the first or second language of the learner. It is a multi-faceted task that requires the learner's knowledge of all primary language aspects: lexis, grammar, semantics and pragmatics (Hayes, 1989). Moreover, there are different genres of writing such as academic, creative, business, technical and fictional writing and within each of these genres there are various sub-genres. Each genre and sub-genre has its own set of rules and conventions that the learners need to acquire to produce acceptable pieces of writing. Within any genre, writing is usually a multi-step, recursive process that involves generating of ideas, outlining, writing and revising. These numerous components contribute to the complexity of writing as a skill for L1 learners and this complexity is further increased for L2 learners whose L2 writing challenges may start with elements as basic as a different orthography or as advanced as different patterns of sentence and paragraph organization. For L2 learners, Kroll (1990) stresses that the challenges of such a complex task as writing are aggravated by the difficulties commonly faced in learning a second language. It is important to realize writing is not only about the correct word choice and sentence structure in an L2; it is an intricate web of the writer, their content, form and readers. It is the responsibility of the writer to provide those readers with the context of the text and make up for the lack of visual and vocal signals they conveniently find in listening to help them understand (Elbow, 1985).

With all these elements and effort going into the writing task, L2 learners find themselves with a lot on their plate. Fortunately writing is a medium that offers the opportunity to provide

extensive commentary and feedback and thus L2 learners do not have to struggle alone with its demands. Since revision is a cornerstone of good writing (Rollinson, 2005), feedback has occupied a place at the heart of the writing process. Feedback plays a crucial role in assisting teachers in modelling compositions and helping students develop their writing. What makes feedback even more useful and functional is the versatility of its types, forms and mediums. Feedback can be given by teachers, peers or the writers themselves. The modes of feedback delivery include oral, face-to-face, written, audio or online means, or a combination of any of these channels. Feedback can also devote its focus to diverse writing issues that range from mechanical concerns of language and accuracy to the more sophisticated matters of meaning and development. Although there have been contentious views on the efficacy of feedback especially the validity of error correction (e.g., Ferris, 1999; Kepner, 1991; Truscott, 1996), numerous subsequent researchers and studies consolidated the argument for students' need for the guidance, modelling, support and even correction that feedback offers (Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Sachs & Polio, 2007; Sheen, 2007). Feedback is now believed to improve both the accuracy and fluency of L2 writers (Chandler, 2003). Different types of feedback elicited from diverse sources can help avoid the shortcomings of using a single feedback mode. One of these types is peer feedback.

The socio-cultural theory of learning that was built on the work of Vygotsky (1978) views learning in general as a social activity at its essence. Interaction with people in the surrounding environment and collaboration with peers are cited as the most significant requirements for learning to happen. Following Vygotsky's tenet of child-parent scaffolding, Donato (1994) introduced the concept of "mutual scaffolding" where the assistance needed for learning and development arises in the inter-psychological space between two peers regardless of

their linguistic abilities. L2 learners can help each other improve the different aspects of writing such as content, organization, vocabulary and style, structure, and mechanics. This improvement stems from learning to critically read their peer's writing and subsequently from applying this skill to their own writing. Peer feedback can help students internalize the criteria according to which writing is evaluated. They then come to develop a sense of what is needed to transmit their message to their readers.

Peer feedback can better L2 learners' writing and enable teachers to improve the quality of the learning experience they give to their students as well. It can decrease some of the tremendous load of reading students' first drafts and responding to them that teachers shoulder in large classes. It is worth noting that a large ESL class in Egypt is not the same as a large class in the US for example, where classes of 35 students are seen as "large and unwieldy" (Harklau, 1994, p. 250). In Egypt, ESL classes in a public university can range from 50 to more than 200 or even 500 students. In this type of large class, asking students to write multiple drafts is unfathomable and giving feedback on students' writing becomes a luxury that the teacher usually cannot afford. This huge load discourages teachers from assigning students enough writing tasks and giving them adequate feedback which ultimately affects the development and quality of their writing. Therefore, using peer feedback can encourage teachers to assign writing tasks and read their students' already revised drafts since it has the potential of reducing the teacher's load. What is more encouraging is that thanks to technology the whole process of exchanging peer feedback does not have to occur in the classroom. Teachers can save class time by directing students to post their first drafts on any of the many free websites that abound online. Students can spend as much time as they need giving, responding to and discussing feedback with their peers without the constraints of class time or the number of pages available.

Peer feedback on writing remains a controversial subject, with researchers often reporting contradictory results. Many studies have presented results in favor of using peer feedback in the language classroom, citing its positive contribution to enhancing writing quality, students' autonomy, sense of audience, understanding of evaluation criteria (Jahin, 2012; Mendonça & Johnson, 1994; Topping, 1998; Villamil & De Guerrero, 2006) and stressing that "it is through giving feedback that learners' metalinguistic awareness is most tellingly sharpened and refined" (Little, Ushioda, Appel, Moran, O'Rourke & Schwienhorst, 1999, p. 52). Other studies, however, concluded that its effect is often not notable (Carson & Nelson, 1996; Connor & Asenavage, 1994; Nelson & Murphy, 1993).

These different studies often concentrate on the effect of receiving peer feedback on writing. The methodology used usually depends on comparing the final written product with the initial draft in order to measure the amount of improvement. Few studies analyzed peer feedback itself such as Liu and Sadler (2003) and Mendonca and Johnson's (1994) study which targeted how students negotiated feedback in the peer dyads. However, there has not been enough focus on the writing aspects themselves and how both student writers and reviewers approach them. What is needed now is a better understanding of the components of peer feedback itself. The present study focuses on the nature of peer feedback on writing. Its methodology was executed by examining the aspects of writing: content, organization, vocabulary and style, structure, and mechanics by looking at how and how often students give feedback on and respond to received feedback in each aspect. Consequently, the study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of which aspects of writing students exhibit more readiness and ability to comment on and which aspects they are more inclined to revise in light of their peers' feedback. This analysis is expected to help understand where peer feedback is more productive and where students need

more training and guidance. This study, accordingly, aims to make recommendations for using peer feedback in the L2 classroom. These recommendations are expected to help teachers make enlightened decisions when they plan to make full use of peer feedback as a technique.

1.2.1 Peer feedback

The last few decades witnessed increased interest in peer feedback and its possible effects on L2 learning in general and L2 writing in particular. Studies examining different forms of feedback, oral and written, and various media through which peers can exchange feedback such as oral discussions and online tools abound. Another focus of research has been comparing peer feedback to other types of feedback, namely teacher and self-feedback. Although teacher feedback is substantial to students, depending on it alone is not enough. There are issues in students' writing that teacher feedback is not the best answer to. Sommers (1982) points out that when responding to their teacher's feedback, students make the changes that they *think* the teacher wants and not what students themselves believe they need to make. For most students, the teacher is an all-knowing, unquestionable authority figure (Hyland, 2000; Littlewood, 2001). The result is that students tend to view their teacher's suggestions in feedback as orders that they need to carry out as they are without re-thinking or negotiating them (Brannon & Knoblauch, 1982). Then teacher's comments may discourage students by making them abstain from experimenting because they are afraid to make mistakes (Hafez, 1994) or contradict the authority of the teacher. Peer feedback can address this issue because students do not have authority over each other and the idea of questioning, discussing and negotiating their peers' comments is not as intimidating.

Having students in pairs review and provide comments on each other's written work has other advantages. Raimes (1983) explains that when students write their compositions, they

usually do not see them as reading materials for real readers. When they put in mind while writing that their paragraphs or essays are not just words stuffed on paper to get a grade, it will help them view themselves as writers and their written work as vehicles for communication and meaning. This helps students see their compositions as valuable works in themselves and not just futile exercises for grammar (Davies & Omberg, 1987). Moreover, for Hyland (1990) peer feedback compensates for the lack of teacher-student interaction with student-student interaction. Swain (1985) explains that when students engage with their teachers and peers by responding to their questions, asking their own questions and providing comments, they become active negotiators of comprehensible input and producers of comprehensible output (as cited in Tsui, 1996). This comprehensible input is a necessary requirement for acquisition to happen according to Krashen's input hypothesis (1982). In his interaction hypothesis, Long (1981) argues that input that is modified during interaction, which was later labelled "interactionally modified input" by Pica, Doughty and Young in 1986, is the most effective form of comprehensible input. This interaction can involve negotiation of meaning through asking questions, requesting clarification when the input is not understandable or seeking assistance (Pica, 1996). Long and Porter (1985) advocate employing group and pair work in ESL classes to assist in making input more comprehensible. When students provide peer feedback to each other, both quantity and quality of students' talk can increase and the frequency of negotiation for meaning is likely to be greater than this found in teacher-provided feedback. Employing negotiation strategies also motivates students to modify their input. Their modified input comes in the form of negotiated responses and feedback to each other in order to facilitate communication.

One of the most remarkable advantages of peer feedback over teacher feedback is that students who give the feedback can gain more than those who receive it by absorbing the criteria

of good writing (Lundstrom & Baker, 2009). When students study the standards according to which writing is judged, they are more likely to understand what it takes to produce writing that lives up to these standards. Furthermore, peer feedback shifts some of the teacher power and places it in the hands of the students who gain a higher sense of responsibility for their learning and it creates more learner-centered language classrooms (Hyland, 2000). Giving feedback and making the students the center of the language class will grant them autonomy as learners and encourage them to be invested in their own learning (Ciftci & Kocoglu, 2012; Hansen & Liu, 2005; Hyland, 2000). These valuable benefits of feedback cannot be attained if students do not receive a form of training in how to give and interpret this feedback. Many studies cite the importance of peer feedback training and will be discussed in detail in the literature review chapter.

1.2.2 The use of technology in exchanging peer feedback

Making use of technology is happening at an ever-increasing rate in all fields and language teaching is no exception where technology can be used to facilitate communication between teacher and students and among students themselves. Students already use technology outside the classroom all the time (Walker & White, 2013), so using technology can make language learning more engaging and motivating to them (Stanley, 2013; Goodwin-Jones, 2008). This is the reason many recent studies have sought to find how to best utilize technology inside and outside the language classroom. Employing online tools can provide the time that the physical classroom usually cannot afford. They represent interactive platforms "that foster extensive practice, learning motivation, authorship, and development of learning strategies" (Sun, 2009, p.99). Edmodo is an educational website whose interface resembles that of the very popular and widely used social networking site Facebook. This resemblance will make using the

website easier even for students who are not familiar with Edmodo itself. It also enables students to exchange their comments synchronously in real time or asynchronously. Each student can publish their writing piece in a separate post and get comments on it. The website is equipped with a reply-to-comment feature which enables users to reply directly to a specific comment on a post, thus enabling students to discuss each of their peer's comments individually. While students are performing their peer review tasks, teachers have access to all their posts and comments throughout the whole process. They can monitor the students' performance and intervene whenever it is necessary to.

This does not imply that the effectiveness of the use of technology and online tools in the ESL or EFL classroom has achieved a consensus among researchers in this area. For example, a study investigating the attitudes of Taiwanese college students towards face-to-face and online feedback concluded that students preferred face-to-face feedback because they found oral discussion to be more interactive (Ho & Savignon, 2007). Despite the advantages of employing both peer feedback and different forms of technology and the growing consensus that it is a pedagogical technique that could lead to improvement in L2 learners' writing skills, there are still some doubts regarding peer feedback's ability, in its traditional or online formats, to produce positive outcomes in all classes (Carson & Nelson, 2006).

The mechanisms of the peer feedback procedure are not the same in every instructional situation or study. Peer feedback can be carried out by groups or pairs of students and comprise one task or a variety of tasks. Students can be left to choose what to comment on by themselves or the teacher can provide them with some sort of guidance. This guidance can come in the form of a checklist, a feedback sheet or a grading rubric. A feedback sheet can help elicit written

responses from the students and also play a role in deciding the course of the peer feedback and revisions in relation to the writing features they address.

Language classrooms in Egyptian public universities do not meet one of the standards of peer-feedback-tolerant classrooms set by Carson and Nelson (1994) who claimed that students' being used to activities and practices that require group and pair work determines whether the implementation of peer feedback would succeed. Group and pair work is not a commonly used, familiar component of the kind of language instruction most of these students receive. On the other hand, these classes cannot be labelled collectivist, a term Carson and Nelson use to describe classes where the goals of the group as a collective are put above those of the individual and where group and pair work activities like peer feedback are not positively received by the students. With the Egyptian public university class falling in-between, finding out how students in large classes will handle peer feedback through an online tool and which writing aspects are going to be most affected by it are worth researching. Another issue is investigating any potentially helpful tool in managing the peer feedback procedure such as a guidance sheet and looking into its impact on the behavior of the peer feedback and revisions.

1.3 Rationale, research problem and research questions

This study investigated the online peer comments in relation to the writing aspects they addressed. It also examined the kind of impact the peer feedback guidance sheet had on peer feedback and changes. The other issue it explored was the rate of using online peer feedback in revisions and their types.

1.3.1 Statement of the research problem

Egyptian public universities have a reputation for having large classes. In these classes, the students' chances of receiving adequate feedback on writing from the teacher alone are slim.

Teachers find themselves buried under piles of unrevised written submissions on which they are required to provide feedback on a wide set of writing issues from scratch without any help. Hence, exploring a supplementary tool that not only aids the teacher but also offers the possibility of enhancing L2 learners' writing promises to be of great benefit in the ESL class. Investigating an online medium that facilitates exchanging peer feedback such as Edmodo can maximize this benefit. It can create a virtual space for interaction that is not limited by time, space or number of students. Edmodo is a free, user-friendly website whose assets are not utilized in public universities. Both peer feedback and online tools such as Edmodo hold the potential to transform the teaching of writing in the ESL classroom in large classes in public universities, yet they are both rarely made use of. Hence, a study that attempts to delve into what is considered a new territory in these universities is much needed. It can make exploring these untapped resources for skeptical or not so tech-savvy teachers less intimidating.

1.3.2 Purpose of the study

The ongoing controversy regarding the benefit of peer feedback and the potential improvement it can lead to, especially in the area of L2 writing, springs from the disagreement about whether L2 learners can produce feedback and actually utilize this feedback in revisions. For this reason, the first goal of the present study is to investigate how much of the commentary provided is translated into revision and rewriting by Egyptian L2 learners. In order to gain a deeper insight into this process, the study explored which aspects of the language Egyptian L2 learners comment on and which aspects they revise based on their peer's comments. It also explored the impact of the guidance sheet on the feedback production and incorporation. The rate of this incorporation and the types of revisions were investigated as well. Since the majority of peer feedback studies focuses on the end result of utilizing feedback and the final written

product, the study addressed the under-investigated issue of the process itself and the aspects of language most/least commented on and responded to.

1.3.3 Study rationale

Although research on using peer feedback in ESL contexts has abounded recently, similar research studies in Egypt are scarce and studies investigating online peer feedback are rare or almost non-existent. Despite the mixed results that peer feedback studies have yielded, there is a growing consensus over the potential benefits of the technique in ESL contexts when administered properly. However, most Egyptian language classrooms are still reluctant to make use of the technique. This study examined the process of online peer feedback on writing by L2 learners and therefore hopes to enable educators to make informed decisions about employing the peer feedback technique and using online tools. In a country with usually overly crowded language classrooms like Egypt, exploring other options that can develop integral elements of any modern language classroom such as interaction and learner-centeredness and can make up for the teacher's inadvertently inadequate feedback is worth studying.

1.3.4 Research questions

What students tend to focus on when they give feedback to their peers and what they are most ready to revise according to this feedback have not been given enough attention in the literature. Furthermore, using online tools in L2 classes in Egyptian public universities and particularly in peer feedback has rarely been researched or used. Hence, when using online peer feedback in ESL classes, the need arises to attempt to find answers to the following research questions:

1- What are the writing aspects that L2 learners comment on when they give online peer feedback?

- What is the degree of agreement between the weights of different writing features in the guidance sheet and the peer feedback?

2- To what extent do L2 learners incorporate online peer feedback in their writing?

- What are the types of revisions initiated by online peer comments?

1.5 Definitions and abbreviations

1.5.1 Definition of terms and constructs

Peer feedback: It is giving students some of the responsibilities and the roles that the teacher normally assumes by using them as sources of information and encouraging interaction among themselves through enabling them to provide comments on and critique each other's drafts (Hansen & Liu, 2005).

Online peer feedback: It is the act of carrying out the peer feedback process through a technological device such as a computer or a mobile phone. The online tool can be a website or a mobile application.

Guidance sheet: It is a sheet that includes prompting questions in the form of complete questions, question stems and/or sentence openers which offer the reviewers suggestions, cues and hints that support and guide them during the peer feedback process (Gan & Hattie, 2014).

Student writers: They are the students who will produce compositions in response to a writing prompt.

Student reviewers: They are the students who will provide peer feedback to the compositions produced by the student writers.

Writing features: the following definitions are adapted from Shahedah (2011):

- Content: adequacy and relevance of ideas developed and details provided.

- Organization: logical sequencing, organization of ideas and the use of transition devices

- Grammar: correct sentence structure, accuracy in the use of language in terms of subject-verb agreement, pronouns, prepositions and articles.

- Vocabulary and style: choosing the suitable register and effective deliverance of meaning.

- Mechanics of writing: observing the rules of spelling and punctuation.

1.5.2 Operational definitions of terms and constructs

In the present study, the extent to which online peer feedback is used was quantified by comparing the number of instances in which the student made a revision based on a peer comment and the number of instances in which there was a peer comment but no revision was made.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In order to answer the research questions, a review of the literature will help contextualize online peer feedback within its theoretical and applied backgrounds. The first section of this review explicates the role feedback plays in L2 writing and the potential of peer feedback especially in large classes. This is followed by a section laying out the theoretical concepts upon which peer feedback is built. The third section reviews a range of studies that exhibit the benefits of peer feedback. An extension of this section covers the role of training in peer feedback implementation. The fourth section explores the use of technology in employing peer feedback and then focuses on the use of social networking sites and the educational social networking site Edmodo.

2.2 Writing and feedback

Listening, speaking and reading pose different types and varying degrees of challenges to language learners and writing is not different than the rest of the language skills in this respect, if not more demanding. This can explain why the study of writing is recognized as an important branch of research in English language teaching (Faigley, 1986). Zamel (1982) argues that writing places more demands on the learners because of the complexity of its nature. She refers to the many intertwining factors going into the creation of a written product. She lists language, rhetorical style, outlining, writing, post-writing stages which include revision and more writing, and awareness of audience among the several components of the writing process. The multiple layers of the writing process operate in a recursive rather than linear manner (Perl, 1979; Sommers, 1980), which makes writing a complex skill to acquire for both L1 and L2 writers. L2

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learners working on their writing skills encounter differences between L1 and L2 writing on the linguistic, rhetorical and strategic levels (Silva, 1993). These differences in how writers tackle the writing task in L1 and L2 create difficulties for L2 learners (Hu, 2014). Hence, L2 writing tasks often instigate feelings of frustration and helplessness in them (Elbow, 1998). This helplessness tends to manifest itself in the form of writing anxiety which is so common and potentially harmful (Cheng, Horwitz, & Schallert, 1999) that it has become one of the commonly researched areas in the study of L2 writing (Mabrito, 1991). Learning writing in general requires a lot of effort from L2 learners but academic writing requires a higher level of effort (Phakiti & Li, 2011). Therefore, investigating how best to help l2 writers overcome these obstacles is of major importance. The following review of the literature will present an overview of the writing process and the role of feedback in it, and then it will move to explore the arguments for the use of peer feedback and conducting it through a technological tool, namely Edmodo.

Due to the unique, complex nature of writing (Nelson & Schunn, 2009), a large body of research has been dedicated to developing writing theory and pedagogy. Since the late 1960s and early 1970s, the presence of the process approach to writing has been a constant in the academic and pedagogical scenes. The reason behind this dominance can be that writing naturally lends itself to the workings of a process (Villanueva, 2003). Prior to the rise of the process movement, Matsuda (2003) explains that writing instruction was centered on the final written product and heavily emphasized issues of language correctness and accuracy, and hence there was no place for nor use of feedback. As a reaction to this excessive attention to language use and the end result in compositions, the process movement called for more focus on developing ideas and building compositions out of a series of activities (Elbow, 1998; Faigley, 1986). Elbow, whose focus was on helping native speakers, categorized these interwoven activities into two types:

creating and critiquing. Writing, then, is no longer viewed as a one-shot, product-based activity that focuses solely on the final result but grows organically out of a continuous cycle of producing, revisiting, revising and rewriting (Ferry, 2009). Therefore, revising and rewriting have come to constitute an essential part of the process of writing (Elbow, 1973; Keh, 1990; Zamel, 1982). Sommers (1982) proposes that it is feedback that motivates writers to further develop their next draft. Feedback is fundamental in enabling the writer to see and evaluate the extent to which he or she is successful at delivering the intended meaning (Arndt, 1993). For Arndt, the function of feedback is to "inform the writing process, permeating, shaping, and moulding it" (p. 91). In the same vein, Sommers assigns feedback the role of an eye-opener which draws the attention of the writer to what they may have missed.

The importance of including feedback in the L2 writing process has been cemented by a great deal of research (Leki, 1991; Saito, 1994; Williams, 2003; Zamel, 1981). Teachers wishing to employ this approach, however, will face a basic challenge: more teacher load. Even without the incorporation of feedback in the teaching of writing, Silva (1993) states that L2 teachers are already required to devote a lot of time to help students with the relevant linguistic, rhetorical and sociocultural areas. When it comes to the time teachers spend reviewing a single paper, Sommers (1982) reports an estimate of 20 to 40 minutes. In a class of 60 or 80 students or more, this will render teachers' attempts at providing adequate feedback to their students almost impossible (Ferry, 2009). The solution lies in either reducing the size of the class or finding another complementary source of feedback. Reducing the class size is usually an institutional matter that is out of the control of the teacher. Therefore, Ferry (2009) suggests an already tried solution: peer feedback. The following will give an overview of the literature of the use of peer feedback in ESL writing and why it can be a viable route.

2.3 Theoretical background of peer feedback

Peer feedback is grounded in theoretical principles relating to social interaction and cognitive development (Villamil & De Guerrero, 2006). Using peer feedback in teaching writing in both L1 and L2 is rooted in the theoretical tenets of social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978) and collaborative learning (Bruffee, 1984). Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theorizes that the only way novices (i.e. new learners) can acquire information is through the space or *zone* between these learners where they have the chance to practice and carry out tasks on their own without the direct presence or "help" of an expert, e.g. a teacher or parent (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994). According to these principles, learning is consolidated by presenting the students with problem-solving tasks which engage them in collaborative endeavors (Chen & Bryer, 2012; Hanson & Sinclair, 2008) and stimulate their critical thinking abilities (Berlin, 1988). Putting students in a situation where they need to work together makes them more self-reliant and involved (Alonso, Lopez, Manrique, & Vines, 2005). This collaboration is essential to students because learning and knowledge emerge out of the interaction of minds (Fitzgerald, 2012). Effective learning occurs when the target knowledge is brought out in the shared space among learners so that it can be "tested, examined, challenged, and improved before (students) internalize it" (Schulman, 1999, p. 11). Donato (1994) concluded from his study that through this collaborative interaction, peers have the ability to provide what he called "mutual scaffolding" and "guided support" to each other (p. 51). Applying the same principle to peer review in L2 writing, De Guerrero & Villamil (2000) found that two ESL students of roughly the same proficiency level, acting as a writer and a reader, were capable of exchanging mutual support. The two students participated in creating "a true learning experience" for each other (p. 65). Peers reading each other's work and commenting on it to indicate the areas done well and the

areas which need more work is a form of collaborative learning and mutual scaffolding (Bruffee, 1984; Liang, 2010). These findings are supported by Arndt's (1993) description of writing as "an interactive, social process of construction of meaning between writer and reader" and not a "solo-performance" (p. 90).

Engaging students in collaborative learning experiences impacts everything else in the classroom. Bruffee's seminal article (1973) initiated a wide discussion about the role of students in the language classroom. He commended that teachers should organize the community of students, train them, prepare the stage and then go backstage to supervise and offer help when needed. Collaborative learning requires that students see their teacher differently and that teachers see themselves differently as well. This shift of perspective regarding the role of the teacher in the ESL and EFL classroom is necessary for effective collaborative learning, the progress of "demythologizing" the teacher. It is important to note that teachers as well are loaded with a legacy of traditional teaching approaches, conventional patterns of "dominance and passivity" and student-marginalizing concepts, strategies, environment and educational institutions.

Hence, in the writing class, for instance, the central focus is no longer on what the teacher wants students to write but on the learning of writing itself. The process approach has also left its mark on the dynamics of the classroom. According to Trimbur (1994), the process approach necessitates that teachers surrender some of their authority and give more power to students. Students should be at the heart of the writing process and teachers need to encourage them to unleash their expressive voices in their compositions. Trimbur states that students should represent themselves and compose "in relation to others" (p. 113). Experienced writers revealed that when they write they envision a reader and address them (Ede & Lunsford, 1984; Sommers,

1980). The ability to communicate meaning through a written text to readers cannot be transferred to students through verbal instruction as noted by McComiskey (2000). He mentions that it is a skill that gets developed when writers and readers interact through the text. The classroom, then, needs to transform into a shared space where writers and readers come together to negotiate meaning and understanding, freed from the "authoritative discourses of expertise" of the teacher (Trimbur, 1994, p. 114). If having readers is one of the factors which urges writers to work on refining their compositions and making them more accessible, then the next logical step is to provide student writers, whether in L1 or L2, with some real readers. Sommers (1980) corroborates this by proposing that students do not actively engage with their teacher as a reader and only perceive their writing passively through the lens of the teacher. Again, the solution lies in finding an alternative. This alternative is right there in the classroom: peers. Peers are real readers, who can assist each other in locating the dissonance in writing that results from the incongruity between what the writer intended and what the reader comprehended (Berg, 1999). Because of this potential role of peer feedback in L2 writing, for decades many scholars focused their research on investigating it.

2.4 Peer feedback in L2 writing

Since research interests were initiated in the area of peer feedback or peer review in ESL in the late 70s, it has drawn either very enthusiastic support or quite vehement opposition. For more than three decades, studies have been conducted in order to investigate the role peer feedback in L2 and its possible effects on ESL learners' writing. Despite the mixed results that some of these studies yielded, scholars concluded that peer feedback is a pedagogical technique that could improve learners' writing skills and linguistic abilities under certain conditions (Ferris, 2003; Hyland, 2003; Liu & Hansen, 2002). To better understand the potential impact of peer feedback

and the conditions under which it is most effective, an overview of the literature on the subject is needed.

Studies investigating peer feedback have examined a variety of issues. Some researchers gauged the effect of peer feedback on the revised compositions by students (Attan, & Khalidi, 2015; Chaudron, 1984; Connor & Asenavage,1994; Liang, 2010; Liu & Sadler, 2003; Tuzi, 2004) and others focused on the types and quality of the revisions based on this feedback (Berg, 1999; Paulus, 1999). Another angle that other studies have adopted is the medium via which peer review is carried out. These studies compared oral, face-to-face and online peer feedback (Hewitt, 2000; Ho & Savignon, 2007; Sullivan & Pratt, 1996). Other researchers have made the interaction and negotiation strategies peers use during the procedure the center of their interest (Honeycutt, 2001; Lockhart & Ng, 1995; Mendonca & Johnson, 1994). A larger proportion of studies concentrated on reporting students' perceptions of and attitudes toward peer feedback (O'Donnell, 2014). The degrees of success of peer feedback in many of these studies are inconsistent.

Some research has expressed doubts about the efficacy of incorporating peer feedback in ESL writing classes. For example, Connor and Asenavage (1994) compared the proportion of revisions made in response to peer comments to those based on teacher feedback. They reported that only 5% of the revisions the students made came as a direct result of their peers' feedback. Johnson (2012) found that the majority of students did not follow the suggestions given by their peers. In general, not all students use peer feedback in their revision to the same degree (Tsui & Ng, 2000). Abstaining from using peer feedback can stem from students' concerns about whether their peers are able to evaluate their work (Sukumaran & Dass, 2014). Students also believed that teacher feedback was more credible (Zhang, 1995). The results of Zhang's study showed that

receiving peer feedback was less appealing to the students than getting teacher feedback. Another problematic issue is that not all students found giving feedback appealing or accessible (Dippold, 2009). Bruffee (1973) ascribes this resistance to the use of peer feedback to the students' educational background which rarely prepares them for collaborative work. He also mentions that sometimes the source of this resistance is the teachers themselves who lack the ability to set up peer feedback activities successfully. However, the reasons Bruffee provides are not the only factors in play here. Students may be confused about the nature of a "mistake" and their ability to identify whether it is a mistake or not, particularly when they comment on language issues (Gedera, 2012). Although Guardado and Shi (2007) found that students had the ability to provide effective feedback to their peers, their study revealed that some students failed to clarify meaning and the student writers had some unanswered questions. The good news is that these problems are not immune to repairing.

2.4.1 The benefits of peer feedback

The research reviewed above reflects some of the uncertainty about the impact of peer feedback on L2 writing; on the other hand, there is also an ever-growing body of research which attests to the numerous positive effects of peer feedback. The need for peer feedback originates in part from the recognized principle that people learn by doing (McNeely, 2005). Teachers cannot expect novice students to be able to solve problems by simply repeating the principles to them (Chi, Bassok, Lewis, Reimann, & Glaser, 1989). They need to operate and apply these principles and this knowledge in a situation which requires them to. Bruffee (1984) contends that "knowledge is maintained and established by communities of knowledgeable peers" (p. 646); therefore, peers should constitute a major component of the context where students are to practice the target knowledge, which is the principles of L2 writing in this case.

There are many areas in which research has shown peer feedback to positively affect the process of learning L2 writing. Nystrand (1984), for example, studied peer feedback and found that the peer feedback activity altered the students' perception of the revision task. He reported that students who worked in groups to review their writing viewed the revision process as something more than mere editing. They saw it as a process of "reconceptualization" (p. 5). After practicing peer review for some time during the course, the students began to see their classmates less as judges of their work and more as "collaborators in a process of communication" (p. 6). Another advantage of peer feedback is illustrated by Chaudron (1984) who concluded that peer feedback is closer to the student's level of development than the more advanced teacher feedback. This makes peer feedback more helpful and informative. He added that students learn more by reading each other's drafts. Chaudron also cited Partridge's study (1981) which compared teacher and peer feedback as well. She reported that teacher feedback led to more improvement but suggested that peer feedback is more beneficial in the long run because it can increase the students' audience awareness and confidence in their ability to evaluate writing. Chaudron (1983), on the other hand, concluded that there is no significant difference between the quality of the revisions the students made in their compositions based on peer and teacher feedback. Peer feedback, then, does not put students at a disadvantage when compared to teacher feedback.

One of the most cited benefits of employing peer feedback is fostering audience awareness (Berg, 1999; Chaudron, 1984; Tsui & Ng, 2000). The importance of stimulating sensitivity to audience in writing students lies in helping students see their compositions as valuable works in themselves and not just futile exercises for grammar (Davies & Omberg, 1987). The ultimate goal of writers is to create "reciprocity" with their readers and transform their texts into a haven

for shared understanding and common grounds (Fitzgerald, 2012). Ede and Lunsford (1984) add that being aware of the "audience's attitudes, beliefs, and expectations" constitutes a fundamental part of the composing operation (p. 156). They suggest that one way of enhancing this awareness is by involving a sample of this audience in the writing process and interacting with input from outsiders. Elbow (1998) emphasizes that peer feedback encourages the writers to think about their audience and why they are writing their composition.

Other studies shed light on some skills that peer feedback fosters in students. Students, for example, learn by correcting their peers' papers (Putz, 1970). Peer feedback equips students with the skills they need to revise and edit their own writing (Witbeck, 1976) and hence, its positive impact in this area can be channeled into cultivating self-assessment (Orsmond, Merry, & Reiling, 2002). On the other hand, Witbeck (1976) argues that this process enables students to realize that making errors is a natural part of the learning process and not individual deficiencies that they suffer from. Hyland (2000) refers to the effect of this realization on student writing anxiety. When EFL students see that their peers face the same obstacles that they face, it lowers their writing apprehension, increases their confidence and encourages them to write more. Furthermore, carrying the responsibilities of peer feedback can help increase students' motivation and self-confidence (Lin & Chien, 2009) and promote more positive attitudes towards writing (Nystrand, 1984). Tahir (2012) revealed that the student participants in her study reported feeling more relaxed and less pressured when receiving peer feedback. Peer feedback can also make students more open to criticism (Davies & Omberg, 1987). These studies highlight the possible affective advantages of peer feedback.

As referred to earlier, peer feedback has been found to influence students' perceptions and skills. Witbeck (1976) refers to the impact of peer feedback on students' perception of the review

activity. He explains that when students are left by themselves to handle errors marked by the teacher, they usually see the revision process as merely an assignment that they need to get rid of. However, reshaping and rewriting their compositions according to continuous feedback from a closer, real reader, their peer, prompts them to approach the revision process differently. When it comes to cultivating skills, peer evaluation urges students to develop their critical thinking, and hence, improve the quality of their learning (Lin & Chien 2009; Lundstrom & Baker, 2009; Orsmond, Merry, & Reiling, 2000). Topping (1998) explains that peer feedback helps students become discerning readers who are able to distinguish between good and poor writing and what constitutes both. This practice helps students internalize these criteria and subsequently apply them to their own work. He includes learning to justify the writer's standing as one of the skills that peer feedback nurtures. Alonso, Lopez, Manrique and Vines (2005) support Topping's proposition by emphasizing that for a subject to be learnt, it has to be used because practice is what cements learning. Understanding the concept only does not guarantee the students' ability to apply it. Practice is the way to automating the skills and abilities. They underline the importance of motivating students to move from the learner stage to the expert stage. Therefore, raising students' awareness of the criteria according to which their writing is evaluated and engaging them in the making of these criteria are vital (Liu & Carless, 2006). Moreover, peer feedback can also increase student autonomy and sense of responsibility (Ciftci & Kocoglu, 2012; Falchikov, 1986).

Enriching the learning experience, bringing the otherwise abstract, intangible concept of audience to life and heightening students' confidence and positive attitudes are not the only merits of peer feedback reported in the literature. The interactive nature of the process has been cited as a source of learner development as well. Hewett (2000) postulates that writing can be

potentially developed by interactive talk. Bruffee (1984) assumes that thought is created and shaped by social talk and interaction. People learn to think a certain way because they are copying the way they learnt to talk. Talking publicly with others inspires us to speak and this speaking inspires our writing. Consequently, engaging students in conversations about their writing is key to the shaping and refining of this writing. The other important characteristic of student errors is that they cannot be eradicated without some kind of "two-way discussion" (Witbeck, 1976, p. 321). Witbeck (1976) states that peer feedback creates opportunities to increase student-student interaction and communication. It provides a context where this communication in English as an L2 is meaningful for all the participants (Guardado & Shi, 2007; Krashen, 1982). During this communication, the receivers of peer feedback are not the only ones who benefit. Lundstrom and Baker (2009) found that the givers who had lower proficiency levels benefited more than the receivers who had higher proficiency levels. Their results also demonstrated that slightly more gains were made on the global than the local aspects of writing. Another study conducted by H. Cho and K. Cho (2011) confirmed that peer reviewers improved the quality of writing after carrying out peer review tasks. According to Sommers (1980), experienced writers make more global-level revisions than novice writers. Following her proposition, peer feedback can guide students to make more advanced types of revisions which target improving the essence of the writing rather than only its surface.

2.4.2 Role of guiding feedback

A common strategy used in peer feedback application to provide scaffolding for the students performing the task is guided feedback (Gan & Hattie, 2014). This guidance can have a variety of formats such as a checklist, a detailed sheet or a grading rubric (Xie & Mu, 2015). Guidance sheets in particular consist of prompting questions that urge students to produce more

extensive, meaningful comments on the reviewed compositions (Gielen, Peeters, Dochy, Onghena & Struyven, 2010). Gan and Hattie (2014) examined the effect of prompting sheets on the use of criteria and feedback specificity and level. Min (2006) found that including a detailed guidance sheet as a part of the training routine in peer feedback led to a great increase in the level of incorporating peer feedback in revisions.

2.4.3 Studies investigating peer feedback

The majority of the studies cited above report their findings regarding the advantages of peer feedback. Other studies focused on investigating the extent to which ESL students used peer feedback in their revised drafts. It is worth noting that results about the rate of peer feedback implementation in the literature are varied. Mendonca and Johnson (1994), for instance, indicate that 53% of the revisions made by students were due to the incorporation of peer feedback. In contrast, Min (2006) reported that students utilized 77% of the comments provided by their peers. The revisions based on this peer feedback constituted 90% of the overall number of revisions made in the final drafts. Nelson and Murphy (1993) conducted their study during a 10-week ESL writing course. They had participants write multiple drafts and receive peer feedback on each draft. They illustrated that students did use peer feedback in revising their drafts, yet the degrees to which the same students incorporated peer comments in the different drafts were inconsistent. A similar conclusion was reached by Tsui and Ng (2000). Venturing into another direction, Diab (2011) compared the revisions students made based on receiving peer feedback to changes generated by self-editing. The findings demonstrated that self-editing led to the

production of a higher quantity of revisions; however, it is peer feedback that helped students make better revisions. In another study comparing teacher and peer feedback, Topping (1998) asserted that the effects of peer feedback on student achievement in writing are as good as or even better than teacher feedback effects.

The students' attitudes towards the use of peer feedback in writing are no less conflicting. A plethora of studies report students' positive reception of peer feedback (Lin & Chien, 2009; Min 2006; Smith, Cooper, & Lancaster, 2002; Sukumaran & Dass, 2014). Students who participated in Chaudron's study (1984), for example, expressed an appreciation of the process. Ciftci and Kocoglu (2012), who conducted another study to gauge the effect of peer feedback on the writing performance of Turkish students, mentioned that the students showed no inhibition about giving or receiving feedback in a questionnaire after the procedure. Vasu, Ling and Nimehchisalem (2016) indicated that their Malaysian students found that teacher, peer and self-feedback were all useful, although peer feedback was their least favorite. On the other hand, other studies have reported a doubt and uneasiness concerning the relative benefit and positive effect of peer feedback, rather than negative attitude towards peer feedback. Zhang (1995) shows that students have more trust in the feedback they receive from teachers. Not all students found giving feedback appealing or accessible (Dippold, 2009). Nelson and Murphy (1993) point out that the peer review process requires certain conditions under which it can yield positive results. This can explain the relative inconsistency in the findings reported in the literature. Therefore, it is extremely pivotal to secure the conditions which promise the optimal performance of peer feedback. The most important of these conditions is peer feedback training.

2.4.4 Peer feedback training

Providing students with a clear idea about what the peer review process entails and their responsibilities as well as those of their peers is a determining factor in how the procedure unfolds and the results it yields. A considerable amount of research has focused on the role of training in improving the experience of peer feedback for students (Cheng & Warren 1997; Hansen & Liu, 2005). Stanley (1992) illustrates that much of the uncertainty about the impact of peer feedback usually stems from concerns about students' misguided focus in commenting or rewriting. Her study revealed that equipping students with extensive coaching and training steered them towards producing more effective peer feedback. The students were more involved in the review activities communicating more and providing clearer suggestions for their peers. Berg (1999) supports the same conclusion and pinpoints other advantages of peer feedback training. She found that it helps students generate more meaning-focused changes and produce better writing in the second drafts. It helps students grasp the concept of intended and understood meaning and attend more to meaning. It also enables students to direct the attention of their peers to a variety of writing issues ranging from word choice and structure to organization of ideas and development of content. Similarly, Berg argues that teachers cannot expect the majority of students to naturally possess the skills necessary to give constructive feedback to their peers' writing and for their peers to make effective revisions based on that feedback. This is an experience they have never had before, so such expectations are unrealistic. Min (2006) reported that prior to peer feedback training, 68% of the revisions were made in response to peer comments. After receiving training on how to give peer feedback, the changes subsequent to peer review rose to 90% of the overall number of revisions made. He also found that the quality of revisions based on peer feedback after the training was significantly higher. Before training,

revisions were made at the word level, but after training, students' attention was drawn to content development and organization as well. Min concludes that training shapes and hones the focus of the student reviewers. It guides them in terms of where to look, what to look for and how to comment.

The contributions of such research do not stop at highlighting the benefits of including training in the peer review process; many studies provide valuable guidelines on how to effectively train peer reviewers and student writers. Disentangling the peer feedback process which is likely to seem complex to some degree is of great help to the students. Williams (1992) cites the establishing of straightforward, comprehensible guidelines as the condition upon which the success of the process rests. Ferry (2009) underlines the value of setting goals for the activity and the students and opening a discussion about its importance. Similarly, Nystrand (1984) states the instructors should provide the students with the rationale for selecting to implement peer review and inform them about the anxiety that they might experience. Helping students realize that initially feeling the weight of the task is not uncommon lowers their apprehension. Making these clarifications plays a role in avoiding misunderstanding on behalf of the students (Alonso, Lopez, Manrique, &Vines, 2005). In addition, having specific clear criteria that peers can follow to produce their feedback can guarantee a degree of consistency in the way both teachers and peers evaluate the same paper (Falchikov, 2001; Newkirk,1984). Liu and Carless (2006) recommend making peer feedback a part of the course's regular processes and engaging students in setting the criteria of the process. Like Ferry and Nystrand, Liu and Carless stress the importance of making sure the students do not feel the activity is imposed on them. They need to be aware of the possible gains they can make in order to win their cooperation. Moreover, the preparation process involves training students on how to ask questions (Topping, 1998). Berg

(1999) endorses the use of a peer review sheet. This sheet supplies the student reviewers with questions that guide them towards what to look at before they embark on discussing the text with its writer. It can also highlight writing issues to examine in the text. She advocates training students to use specific words, address precise points and avoid sounding unclear and dictating their opinions as facts.

Peer feedback training has been shown to positively influence the outcomes of peer review. Ignoring in in the preparatory stages of peer feedback can result in the production of misguided, unfocused feedback (Stanley, 1992). Dippold (2009) warns that lack of training leads to students' disapproval of the procedure since they were not equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills. These skills include knowing what and how to comment and how to respond to these comments. Therefore, Sukumaran and Dass (2014) assert that making students a part of the process of developing the task of feedback from the beginning creates one of the elements which prompts them to adopt positive attitudes towards peer feedback. However, coaching students in managing the feedback process does eliminate all the obstacles that teachers may face in the classroom. Issues of time and space constraints can pose challenges for ESL teachers. This is when technology step onto the scene and provides some solutions to overcome the difficulties that can arise when applying peer feedback. The next section of this literature review unveils what technology has to offer in optimizing the peer feedback process.

2.5 Peer feedback outside the classroom: Using technology

Peer feedback requires certain conditions to boost its chances of success. One of these conditions is securing enough time for students to digest the mechanisms of the process. In this connection, Rollinson (2005) states the inevitable fact that peer feedback is a time-consuming procedure. It is comprised of multiple stages of reading, reviewing, responding, and rewriting

and the possible repetition of these stages more than once. There is also a need to preserve records of all these steps for both teacher and students to revisit. The challenges of employing peer feedback are further compounded in large classes where teacher-student and student-student interaction and communication are seriously hindered (Alshahrani & Al-Shehri, 2012; Sukumaran & Dass, 2014). Therefore, many studies have explored using technology, especially the internet, to employ peer feedback in the ESL class and delineated the benefits of its use. Braine (2001) mentions that computer-mediated tools are a medium for a more student-centered classroom, since the teacher does not dominate the discussion and monopolizes directing questions. As a result, using the internet in the language classroom makes students more excited and motivates them to explore and discover (Young, 2003). Sukumaran and Dass (2014) highlight that it frees the classroom from the restrictions of time and place and consequently can help teachers in large classes expand their students' opportunities to communicate. Students, additionally, can feel less intimidated and less threatened in an online environment due to the promise of equal participation (Guardado & Shi, 2007). In a study comparing ESL writing in face-to-face and computer-assisted environments, Sullivan and Pratt (1996) found that 50% of the students took part in the traditional oral classroom discussions. The percentage of student participation leapt to an impressive 100% in the online discussions. Dippold (2009) adds that computer-mediated communication (CMC) gives students the privilege of having a wider audience and facilitates the exchange of feedback because it spares both teachers and students the trouble of carrying around stacks of papers at every stage of the review. Now that students do not have to worry about sifting through piles of peer feedback sheets, using technology offers a wider platform for writing and encourages students to write more (Ciftci & Kocoglu, 2012). The online platform also has the option of recording comments permanently and allows for the

opportunity to track the comment and subsequent revision (Breuch & Racine, 2000; Min, 2006). Using CMC is credited with promoting a sense of community among the students in ESL classes as well (Strenski, Feagin, & Singer, 2005).

Online tools enable the teacher to expand learning beyond the walls of the classroom which is naturally limited by place and time. One of the accomplishments of online communication is achieving self-paced learning where the learners enjoy the gift of working on their tasks when they want and take as much time as they would need (Alonso, Lopez, Manrique, & Vines, 2005; Gedera, 2012). Online environments also pave the way for free communication among students (Young, 2003). Ho and Savignon (2007) added that students viewed flexibility as another major advantage of computer-mediated peer feedback. The asynchronous nature of online peer feedback provided students with enough time to read the whole assignment and comment on it "at their own pace" (p. 283). They also found the time to carefully think about their comments and write them out properly. In addition, students reported that re-writing and editing their peers' comments was easy and fast online. Students further indicated feeling less pressure and embarrassment and more comfort giving their online comments to their peers. One student commented that "while giving feedback [on the computer], I feel free to say anything I wanted to say without worrying about my peer's reaction." (p. 284). In addition to all these facilitating aspects of the online environment for students, it was found to give teachers the chance to monitor what is happening and intervene when it is necessary and provide guidance when it is needed (Gedera, 2012; Rollinson, 2005; Tuzi, 2004)

Using technology and computers in teaching writing and implementing peer feedback plays a role that goes beyond facilitating the process, however. Hewitt (2000) contends that "medium shapes the talk" (p. 266). She argues that the medium students use to exchange

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feedback sculpts and affects the focus of this feedback. In her study, she found that face-to-face peer feedback revolved around abstract and global issues, whereas CMC peer feedback concentrated on substantial writing issues. Breuch and Racine (2000) share Hewitt's thoughts on the role of medium in the peer feedback process. They said that through online tools students can take as much time as they need to revisit their texts or feedback and reflect, so there is no pressure to respond immediately. They also referred to the effects of online platforms on the quality of peer feedback provided since students had more chances to generate well-thought-out comments. They explained that this increased the value of the feedback the writers received. Similarly, Sullivan and Pratt (1996) reported that the quality of writing on computers was higher than that of writing done in the classroom. They described the comments given by students to each other during peer feedback sessions as being more focused, although they were less in quantity than the ones given in class. In contrast, Tuzi (2004) found that more feedback was provided by students online, yet students in his study preferred oral feedback. He speculated that perhaps the reason for this preference was the familiarity of the oral medium to students. However, he maintained that e-feedback had a greater impact on their revisions and hence it was more effective. Tuzi asserts that online communication leads to the production of more specific feedback and more revisions at the levels of clause, sentence and paragraph. It also encourages the generation of new ideas and including them in the composition. Strenski, Feagin, and Singer (2005) investigated students' exchange of peer review through email and found that feedback provided through email was more effective and of a better quality than the review given in class. Students responded in full sentences and thus there was a tendency to focus less on surface and grammatical issues. Moreover, Breuch and Racine elucidate that through the written online environment, the reviewers who take up the role of the readers, are pushed to act as writers as

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well when responding and writing their comments and feedback. The text-based nature of online communication, as a result, urges students to practice more writing. In another study, Sukumaran and Dass (2014) found that more than 50% of the students said that using an online tool for exchanging peer feedback saved time and was more practical because they did not have to spend money on printing their peers' compositions.

2.5.1 Social networking sites: Peer feedback via Edmodo

Web 2.0 technologies hold great potential for teachers who wish to expand the learning of their students outside the boundaries of the classroom (Al-Kathiri, 2015). Web 2.0 technologies, also called social media, refer to "the social use of the Web which allows people to collaborate, to get actively involved in creating content, to generate knowledge and to share information online" (Grosseck, 2009, p. 478). Web 2.0 tools transform the role of internet users from only consumers of content to creators of this content as well (Bennett, Bishop, Dalgarno, Waycott, & Kennedy, 2012), which bolsters students' chances of collaboration and active participation. The freshmen students at universities now were born around the time Web 2.0 technologies were first launched. Today's students did not have to adapt to new technologies, they were born into them (Rosen, 2010). Because this generation has grown up using this type of technology, it has formed an essential part of the lives of this generation (Wodzicki, Schwämmlein, & Moskaliuk, 2012). When it comes to education, Rosen (2010) ascertains that this generation learns differently. This idea is echoed by Barnes, Marateo and Ferris (2007) who indicate that it may appear that the members of this generation are always so bored and disinterested in classes because they do not want to learn. Yet, refusing to learn is not the real issue here. The iGeneration, as Rosen describes them, want to learn but they want to learn differently. Carlson (2005) explains that the Millennials or the Net Generation are impatient with

the restraints of the time and space of the traditional class. They prefer to have control over the when, where and pace of their learning. They also want flexibility and are repelled by things which tether them to a fixed place. They desire to "customize" their choices (p. 3) and appreciate mobility and portability.

Social networking sites (SNSs) are key players in shaping how this generation learns and at the same time are reactions to young learners' tech-oriented tendencies. Wodzicki, Schwämmlein and Moskaliuk (2012) attribute the change in how students nowadays learn in part to the dominating existence and use of these Web 2.0 or social networking applications. They argue that social networking sites give students the opportunity to connect in formal and informal learning. Young learners grew up using multi-tasking and communicating electronically, with the result that it comes more naturally to them than older generations (Rosen, 2010). It follows that social networking sites can be put to fruitful use in the current ESL class.

Recent research has corroborated the possible positive contributions of social networking sites in the language class. Chen and Bryer (2012) argue that SNSs can stimulate more discussion, engagement and connection among students. They also explain that SNSs can connect formal and informal learning, hence enabling students to connect in "new and meaningful ways" (p. 88). In addition, SNSs promote learner-centered instruction and self-directed learning (Wodzicki, Schwämmlein, & Moskaliuk, 2012). Yunus, Salehi and Chenzi (2012) found that using SNSs increases students' motivation, confidence, knowledge and sense of learning community. Alshahrani and Al-Shehri (2012) encourage educators to use SNSs because they are channels that the students are already used to and familiar with. The students who participated in their study indicated that they preferred the use of SNSs such Facebook to more formal platforms such as Blackboard because of their simplicity and interactivity. The

conversational, ongoing interactive nature of the comments and replies on SNSs also create an interdependent cycle of writing, re-examining and rewriting (Lin & Chien, 2009).

Although a worldwide popular SNS such as Facebook is believed to be the source of inspiration for a plethora of similar SNSs, Facebook is not inherently designed for educational purposes. Recent years have witnessed the emergence and rise of websites and online applications which incorporated many of the interactive features of Facebook in more educationally oriented formats, such as Edmodo (Holland & Muilenburg, 2011). Al-Kathiri (2015) stresses that Edmodo is safer and more learner-friendly than Facebook. It gives teachers the security and privacy they need because only their students will be able to access their groups. On the educational side, Mokhtar (2016) highlights how using Edmodo enables the students to gain learning experiences even outside the walls of the classroom. He adds that it facilitates collaboration and interaction. Eckley (2014) states that applications like Edmodo play a role in creating a sense of a learning community among the students and promoting team building. Edmodo also allows learners to control the pace of their learning (Witherspoon, 2011). Edmodo and other SNSs promise to effect positive impact on the affective aspect of learning writing. Gardner (2013) reveals that students worry more about how their peers are going to feel about their feedback in face-to-face communication. Al-Kathiri refers to Edmodo's role in alleviating the pressure of public speaking in class and motivating students to participate more in discussions, boost their confidence, and take more control of and direct their own learning. She makes a special reference to how Edmodo can create a feedback-supporting environment. Whenever a student publishes a post including their composition, for example, they would start immediately to receive comments from other students and/or their teachers. For these reasons, Edmodo can serve as a user-friendly, interactive medium that facilitates the exchange of peer

feedback and at the same maintains an educational atmosphere and harbors a sense of learning community.

2.6 Conclusion

In view of the research reviewed above, despite being a contentious issue, peer feedback seems to be a potentially productive procedure promising to assist ESL students in bettering their writing skills. The majority of research studying peer feedback, however, focuses on regular ESL classes with small or moderate sizes (see, Berg 1999; Connor & Asenavage, 1994; Chaudron, 1984; Diab, 2011; Guardado & Shi, 2007; Honeycutt, 2001; Nelson & Murphy, 1993; Nelson & Schunn, 2009; Tahir, 2012). The number of students in these studies ranged between 4 and 24 participants per class. Studies working with larger numbers of participants usually examined the attitudes and perceptions of students towards peer feedback rather than the peer feedback itself. Zhang (1995), for example, had a considerable sample size of 81 students but her study looked into the affective effects of peer feedback. It appears that the effectiveness of peer feedback is rarely investigated in the setting of large classes although this is the type of class which desperately needs the help of such a technique. It is widely acknowledged that giving feedback to students is one of the most challenging and time-consuming tasks of the teacher (Ferris, 2007). Therefore, utilizing peer feedback in such classes could lessen teachers' load (Vasu, Ling, & Nimehchisalem, 2016). It can also give them a chance to devote more time to concentrating on other aspects of the teaching of writing (Tahir, 2012). Peer feedback is one of the alternative complementary techniques teachers can resort to enable themselves to handle their work load. In addition, most peer feedback studies examining its effects on writing are conducted in ESL writing course. ESP and general English courses are also widespread and they usually include the teaching of writing, and yet studying peer feedback in such a context is also quite

uncommon. Thus, this is another gap in the literature exploring peer feedback. It is worth mentioning that ESP courses are usually taken by already professional individuals in their workplace. In the Egyptian context, students who major in non-English subjects such as media enroll in ESP courses which are supposed to simultaneously work on improving their English language skills and familiarize them with the specific language variety and terminology that they need in their field of study. These conglomeration of objectives compounds the amount of tasks the teacher has to manage and increases the need for additional sources of learning and feedback for the students, especially in a complex skill like writing. This stresses the necessity of conducting research in this area.

The advantages of peer feedback have been well-documented in the literature as indicated in a previous section in this review. Yet, it is also true that not all peer feedback studies yield consistent results (Guardado & Shi, 2007). One of the key factors that can influence the path and outcomes of the peer feedback technique is the context and culture, according to Carson and Nelson (1994) and Nelson and Carson (2006). The context and culture shape the expectations of students, the focus of the responses, the nature of the relationships among participants and the way the feedback is integrated (K. Hyland & F. Hyland, 2006). Therefore, seeking to understand how the process of peer feedback unfolds in the Egyptian context, where peer feedback is under-used and under-investigated, can encourage other researchers and educators to explore this technique and hopefully learn how to assimilate it into their teaching.

Another important element that this study plans to consider is the use of technology and SNSs. In large classes, students usually complain about the lack of opportunities to practice English and interact with the teacher and other students (Alshahrani & Al-Shehri, 2012). At the same time, social media websites are widely used by both students and instructors for personal

purposes but when it comes to educational ends, the percentage of use drops by both parties (Chen & Bryer, 2012). It seems that social media websites or SNSs can offer a feasible solution for this problem that is prevalent in large classes. Like the setting of this study, there are many ESL and ESP classes around the world where the number of students is large and overwhelming and the technological resources inside the classroom are scarce. This study seeks to investigate how to overcome both obstacles by examining an alternative route: online peer feedback.

Another under-investigated issue in the literature is the impact of using a guidance sheet on practicing peer feedback. Studies such as Min (2006) employed a guidance sheet as a tool of peer feedback training and their focus was on the effect of the training on the quantity and quality of the peer comments. Very few studies have attempted to investigate the guidance sheet or the rubric itself. Wang (2014) is an exception to this. He explored students' perception of rubric-based peer feedback. The missing angle in the literature is looking into the impact the peer guidance sheet has on the focus of the peer comments themselves. Therefore, the present study seeks to answer this question in a large general ESP class where online peer feedback on L2 writing is used for the first time.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This study investigated the writing features that online peer feedback addresses, in addition to the writing aspects that revisions based on this online peer feedback included. This study also examined the extent to which online peer feedback is incorporated in students' revisions. First, the chapter begins with a description of the research design, followed by a delineation of the research setting and the participants. The following section is devoted to outline the instruments used for data collection and the techniques of data collection and analysis.

3.1 Research design

The present study is an exploratory examination that leans towards the applied end of the research continuum. It seeks to form a clearer picture about the implementation of the online peer feedback technique in a large-class, ESP context. It adopts a mixed-methods design making use of both qualitative and quantitative methods. The quantitative approach was used to measure the amount of peer feedback comments produced and the revisions based on them. The qualitative approach was used to describe how students produced and responded to feedback. The students worked in pairs throughout the whole process of peer feedback rather than groups in order to avoid complicating the task for them. This arrangement was recommended by Nelson and Carson (2006).

3.2 Research setting and participants

The sample in this study was comprised of 77 freshmen students enrolled in an English course at the Faculty of Mass Communication, Cairo University in Egypt. It is a mandatory

requirement for all enrolled students at the faculty to take this course which was an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course that integrated the four skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking. The course objectives placed greater emphasis on primarily reading and then writing. Since it was an ESP course, the course themes were media-based. The major themes of the semester when the data were collected were films, TV and radio, advertising, and marketing. This course was chosen because it covered the writing elements that this study sought to examine in relation to online peer feedback. The students received 90 minutes of instruction twice every week. This group of students were selected to constitute the participants in this study because the researcher had access to the class through the instructor who was teaching them; therefore, the sampling was convenient. The participants were both female and male and their ages ranged between 18 and 20. All participants shared the same first language, Arabic.

Prior to carrying out the online peer feedback practice, a questionnaire (Appendix A) was administered to the students to collect data pertaining to their educational backgrounds. Their responses to the questionnaire revealed that 87.3% graduated from Arabic schools and the rest graduated from language schools. None of the students graduated from an international school. In both types of schools, students study English for at least 12 years. What distinguishes language schools is that students are supposed to study the rest of the subjects such as math and science in English as well. The responses also indicated that on the General Secondary School English exam, which is scored out of 50, 51.8% scored between 50 and 48, 38.5% scored between 47 and 45 and 9.9% scored less than 45. This shows that 90.3% of the students had a score higher than 45 on their English exam. After finishing secondary school, those students are admitted into the faculty based on their scores on the General Secondary School Exams, which are a set of standardized exams students take to exit secondary school in Egypt. These exams

function as university entrance exams. The students who were admitted into the Faculty of Mass Communication in 2016, and from whom this sample was taken, scored 96.8 % or above. Based on their English and general secondary school scores, it can be deduced that the participants shared the same educational background since they have obtained relatively similar scores on both exams. The questionnaire also revealed that 95.3% of the participants had never had any form of peer feedback before. The less than 5% who said that they had used peer feedback before did not mention writing as one of the skills that they gave or received peer feedback on. The participants then were randomly assigned to their pairs.

The participants worked in pairs of two students. Shahedah (2010) and Allaei and Connor (1990) propose having students work together in groups of three or four students to solicit more reliable feedback and avoid replicating the tutor and tutee roles of the traditional teacher-student interactions. However, Nelson and Carson (2006) recommend setting up pairs instead of groups because "group dynamics can complicate the task of providing feedback to each other on drafts" (p. 54). Due to the large number of students in the class, ensuring the smoothness and simplicity of the peer feedback exchanges was given a higher priority.

An Institutional Review Board approval to conduct the study was granted on the 15th of March 2017 and a copy of the approval letter is available in Appendix (B). All the students were informed that the data were being collected for research purposes and they signed a consent form to receive a confirmation that the confidentiality of their personal information and data was insured and to assure them that their participation in the study was voluntary.

3.2 Instruments

3.2.1 The writing prompt

Participants were expected to provide peer feedback to the writing produced by their classmates. Therefore, a writing prompt (Appendix C) was used to elicit essays from the participants. Generating an essay prompt that requires the students to write about more than one single idea carved out an opportunity for comparing the students' focus on content and language in giving and responding to online feedback. Since this was an ESP course, the prompt asked students to watch a film and then write a film review discussing its plot, characters, setting, cinematography, ending and other related elements in no more than 30 lines. The specifications for the writing prompt were determined by the instructor of the class. The sub-ideas stated in the prompt, which allow for a multi-paragraph essay, were meant to create room for the development of more than one idea. Film review writing combines both a media-relevant theme and a multi-paragraph format. The topic of film reviewing typically entails the writer's commentary on the various elements involved in film making and supporting this commentary with examples and evidence. It also instigates stand taking and opinion articulation. These aspects build a fertile environment for idea development. The multi-paragraph format also gives students a chance to practice their writing organizational skills. These important components of writing were intended to give student reviewers plenty of opportunities to comment on diverse elements of the writing pieces and several areas to discuss and negotiate with the student writers in addition to the usual issues of grammar and spelling. The prompt topic was also relevant to the participants' major and writing interests. Furthermore, writing a film review is usually a basic part of their course requirements and hence, it is an authentic part of their study course. I wished to examine

integrating the online peer feedback technique within the regular workings of the class as Liu and Carless (2006) recommended.

3.2.2 Edmodo: Online tool

Edmodo is social networking site designed for educational purposes. It allows students to create their personal profiles, join groups, publish posts and receive and reply to comments on these posts. Users can see each other's posts and exchange comments both synchronously and asynchronously giving students more flexibility in terms of the time and manner they can adopt when posting their compositions, and giving and responding to feedback. Another advantage that Edmodo offers is its versatility. Edmodo has both a website and a mobile application making it easier to access its groups through either a computer or a mobile phone.

3.2.3 Guidance sheet

The guidance sheet (Appendix D) included in the procedure to lead students to provide more detailed feedback was comprised of 22 questions. More than two thirds of these questions were designed to elicit peer comments on idea development and organization issues. The prompting questions targeted specific aspects such as introductions, thesis statements, topic sentences and conclusions. They provided students with cues about which aspects to check and how to evaluate them. The rest of the questions addressed issues of vocabulary and style, structure and mechanics. At the top of the sheet, there were instructions about how to use it. These instructions also aimed to make the students aware of the guiding nature of the sheet emphasizing that they should not confine their feedback to the scope of the sheet and urged them to ask their own questions as well. Searching for evidence to support the validity of their comments was also promoted. It was explained that this evidence could be in the form of references to the textbook, the teacher's instruction or any external source such as websites.

Some of the questions on the sheet were adapted from Berg (1999) and some were developed specially for this study to offer the students questions which were tailored to the requirements of their writing assignment.

When developing the questions on this sheet, common mistakes that students make in this type of writing assignment were taken into consideration. Since this is a film review writing task, students have a tendency to list the names of the film makers instead of creating a proper introduction that lays the foundation for the rest of the essay. To address this problem, one of the questions was designed to prompt the students to focus on whether the writers developed an introduction or just mentioned the names of the film crew. The question was "*Does the writer give an introduction or mention directly the names of the film makers? If there is an introduction, does it grab the reader's attention? Does it set the tone of the essay?".* The following question targeted the thesis statement and whether it reflected the writer's opinion about the film because articulating the writer's stand one of the requirements of the assignment. The questions concentrating on issues of organization focused on whether each paragraph tackled a unified idea or set of ideas and whether the writer used transition words and phrases to make the progression from one idea to the other logical and smooth.

The questions on vocabulary and style, structure and mechanics were quite general, asking the students whether they had any comments on word choice, grammar, spelling and punctuation. Only two grammatical problems were specified, namely run-on sentences and fragments because these are among what was considered new information for the students.

3.2.4 Coding and content analysis

To find out the writing features that peers targeted when they provided feedback, the comments they posted on Edmodo were compiled and analyzed. Shahedah (2011) identifies five writing features: content, organization, vocabulary, grammar and mechanics of writing. The genre of film review writing also possesses its own stylistic properties that the students were instructed on during their classes. Therefore, style was added to the writing aspect of vocabulary and content was replaced by the more specific term of idea development. This made the writing aspects examined in this study: idea development, organization, vocabulary and style, structure and mechanics. The comments were examined to be divided into idea units (Hewitt, 2000; Nelson & Schunn, 2009). Each comment or segment of comment focusing on one of the writing features was considered a separate idea unit and then coded according to the five writing features named above.

To determine the extent to which online peer feedback was implemented in the participants' revised drafts, all changes based on the peer comments were counted and categorized (Sommers, 1980). The purpose of categorizing the changes was to find out the writing features in which the participants made their revisions.

3.3 Data collection procedures

3.3.1 Peer feedback training

The participants were trained in how to give peer feedback and use Edmodo. The training took place over the course of four sessions. The initial training stage was the 'propaganda stage', as Rollinson (2005) labels it. Trying to give the students justifications for including this activity within the course work to convince them of its possible positive impact on their revisions instead of just imposing it on them can smooth the application of the process especially when the

students are used to it (Liu & Carless, 2006). The instructor initiated discussions with the students about the potential advantages of using the online peer feedback technique. Following this stage was the modelling phase where participants were shown samples of peer feedback written by other students (Hansen & Liu, 2005). The instructors drew the students' attention to the five writing features they needed to attend to and the common writing issues that they would need to address in their feedback. She also explained the etiquette of phrasing feedback and placed special emphasis on the concept of providing 'warm feedback' first and then following it with 'cool feedback'. In the context of this training, warm feedback referred to supportive comments that pointed out positive elements in the essay. The cool feedback consisted of the issues which needed to be improved or modified. In addition, the instructor stressed the importance of refraining from 'correcting' their peers' writing and concentrating instead on giving comments in the form of suggestions. The participants were also urged to avoid the use of the words 'wrong' and 'incorrect' to steer clear from offending the student writers.

Simultaneously, the instructor created a group for her class on Edmodo and provided students with the code that led them directly to join it. To proceed with the training in a gradual manner, she first posted on the Edmodo group individual sentences written by previous students who took the same course before and asked the students to provide feedback on them. To create opportunities for generating commentary on content and language and familiarizing the participants with the type of composition they were to work on, samples of film reviews composed by previous students were then published on the group. The participants' task entailed providing feedback on these texts while observing the rules of writing peer feedback and addressing the five writing features specified to them beforehand. A few students interacted with the samples and provided some or little feedback on them.

For the next step, the instructors divided the participants into pairs and then it was their turn to produce a piece of writing and receive feedback on it. At the same time, they offered feedback on the texts composed by their peers. The prompt for this writing task asked students to write a paragraph about their favorite film and discuss at least three reasons for their choice. This step was included to get the students to practice both giving feedback and responding to it in the form of revisions. Again the proportion of the students who provided peer comments was very low and almost none of them revised their paragraphs based on these comments. This was the last step of the training and following it the questionnaire was administered to the participants. This questionnaire helped collect some data about the participants that were relevant to the purposes of this study and they were used to give a more in-depth description of the participants in Section 3.2.

3.3.2 Responding to the writing prompt

When the training period was over, each participant was asked to choose a film, watch it and then compose a first draft of their review. It is worth mentioning that by then the students had studied a unit on film making and film reviewing and received instruction in how to write a film review. Then, the instructor created a new Edmodo group to spare the students any confusion between the previous compositions and the ones needed for the new task and asked the participants to join it.

3.3.3 Exchanging peer feedback

To initiate the peer feedback process, the participants were given a guidance sheet to help them better direct their comments, focus on the targeted issues and equip them with effective feedback strategies. These strategies included making suggestions, asking questions, underlining mistakes, re-stating what their peers have written (Mendonca & Johnson, 1994). The following

steps of giving efficient feedback are adapted from Nelson and Schunn's article (2009), which detail a set of the characteristics of successful feedback. First, there is the identification and localization of the problem. This dictates pinpointing where the problem is exactly and highlighting its source. The second step is explaining the comment. If the writer does not understand the purpose behind the suggestion or feedback, he or she is more likely to ignore this comment. If an explanation is proffered, now they have the chance to see why it could improve their writing. The third step is offering a solution; making suggestions is more preferable and effective than making direct corrections. Nelson and Schunn heavily emphasize the quality of specificity. Giving specific comments is expected to help students make better revisions and is found to be more effective and helpful than general responses. They also advocate the use of mitigating language, which filters criticism so it does not sound offensive, over the use of praise. According to them, the use of praise only usually does not prompt any changes. Instead, mitigating language is more influential.

Each participant composed the first draft of their film review and posted it on the group. With the help of the peer feedback guidance sheet (Appendix D), the participants began to give feedback to the essay of their assigned partner. The data collection was carried out over the course of a week. Faigley and Witte (1981) identify two types of changes: content-altering changes and text-editing changes. Berg (1999) and Sommers (1980) stress the prioritization of the meaning-focused comments and changes. Therefore, the first four days were devoted to commenting on the development and organization of the composition and running two-way discussions of the feedback through the comments section Edmodo makes available on all posts. The student writers made their revisions and undertook their rewritings. Tackling language

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issues was done during the remaining three days. The final stage was completed when each student posted their revised draft in a comment on their original post.

3.4 Data analysis techniques

To answer the research question about the writing features that the online peer comments approached, all the comments that the participants acting as reviewers produced were collected and categorized according to the previously identified five writing features. The frequency of comments addressing each writing aspect was quantitatively analyzed and compared to the frequency of the comments dealing with the rest of the writing aspects. The comments were also qualitatively analyzed in order to highlight the specific issues and themes that they discussed any common characteristics of these comments. To answer the second research question, the rate of implementing the online peer feedback was determined by comparing the ratio of the peer responses translated into revisions to the ratio of the unused responses. A quantitative analysis of the frequency of the revisions made in each of the writing features has provided answers to the sub-question about the writing features of revisions made.

CHAPTER 4
RESULTS

This chapter presents the study's results that looked into the use of peer feedback in writing classes. To answer the first research question, a quantitative analysis of comments provided by peers is followed by a qualitative analysis of peer feedback. The following section focuses on comparing the extent of compatibility between the writing features in the guidance sheet and the peer responses. The final section in the first part of the data analysis tackles the functions of the peer comments offered by the participants. The qualitative sections in this analysis quote examples of the participants' output verbatim without interfering in any way to correct any mistakes in them. The participants' quotes are also italicized. To answer the second research question, a quantitative analysis was carried out to determine the extent of online peer feedback incorporation in the revised drafts. It was also used to identify the writing features of the revisions.

4.1 Online peer feedback comments

This section of the data analysis seeks to sort the language areas addressed in the participants' online peer feedback. For this purpose, a quantitative analysis of the peer feedback comments is presented. All 77 participating student writers posted the drafts of their film reviews on Edmodo and received peer feedback on them. The comments were analyzed according to two dimensions: the topic or writing feature covered (idea development, organization, vocabulary and style, structure or mechanics) and evaluation (positive or negative). Each comment was classified into separate idea units (Cho & Cho, 2011; Hewitt, 2000). The excerpt below is an example of one of the peer comments provided on the first draft by Student 15 (*S15*):

Peer comments for S15: *you did not give an introduction; you just mentioned the film makers' names, and did not use a thesis statement to grab the reader's attention. I suggest you write about the main idea of the plot in the introduction as well*

This comment attended to two issues in the first paragraph in the essay: the lack of a true introduction that lays the foreground to the rest of the essay and the absence of a thesis statement. This comment then was categorized into two idea units, the first belonging to the idea development category and the second belonging to the organization category.

Each idea unit was thus assigned two labels: a target writing feature and a type of evaluation. Comments which did not tackle any language element were not included in this section of the analysis. The following analysis starts with the positive comments and then proceeds to the negative comments.

4.1.1 Positive comments

As the students were encouraged to highlight what they liked in the essay and what the writer did well, they produced positive comments. Figure 1 below demonstrates the number of positive comments provided in the online peer feedback and the categories of writing features they fell under. The reviewers' positive comments centered mostly on issues of idea development. Organization comments came second but still they were four times less frequent than the responses targeting idea development. On the other end of the spectrum, there were the areas of vocabulary and style and mechanics which received an equal share of very low attention from the student reviewers' positive reactions. The reviewers also did not tend to focus on structure when they produced positive comments. The number of positive comments produced by each student is displayed in Appendix E.
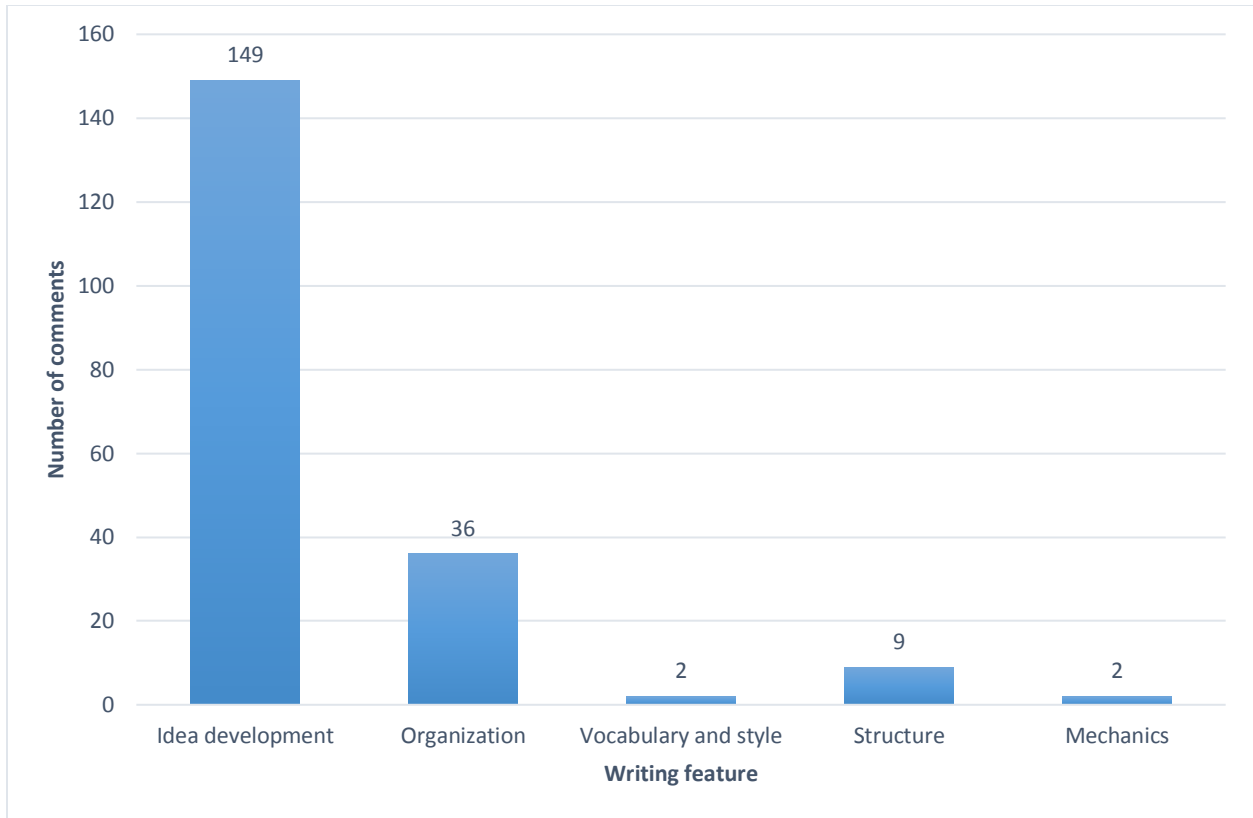
Figure 1. Each Writing Feature Represented by the Number of Positive Comments it Received in the Peer Feedback

An order of the writing features ranked from the highest frequency to the lowest one according to their percentages is shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Order of the Positive Comments according to their Writing Features Shown in Percentages

Writing feature	Percentage
Idea development	75.25%
Organization	18.18%
Structure	4.54%
Vocabulary and style	1.01%
Mechanics	1.01%

The means of the responses, which are the average numbers of the responses, to each of the five language aspects showcase the gap between the positive comments tackling idea development and the rest of the features, as shown in Table 2 below. However, the standard deviation for the idea development comments is also the highest which means that there was some inconsistency in the amount of comments supplied by the individual reviewers.

Table 2. Mean and Standard Deviation of the Number of Positive Comments

	Idea development	Organization	Vocabulary & style	Structure	Mechanics
Mean	1.96	0.47	0.03	0.12	0.03
St. Dev.	1.97	1.32	0.16	0.43	0.16

The prolific positive output about idea development, in comparison with the rest of the aspects, is not surprising. The guidance sheet favored the elements of idea development and its multiple questions could have given students ideas about which elements to comment on. The textual examination of the comments revealed how most of the students copied some phrases or complete statements verbatim from the feedback-eliciting questions. The following are two questions on the sheet, "*Does the thesis statement name the topic, show the writer's position or feelings on the film, and set out the main points of the review?*" and "*Is the essay significant and meaningful—a thoughtful, interesting, and informative presentation of relevant facts, opinions, or ideas?*". These are two positive comments which are directly based on these questions, "*i think that the thesis statement sets down the main points of the review , as the writer says"this review will show points like the plot , setting , characters , lighting ,customs , art design ,music*

and camera movement" and "*i thing that the essay is meaningful and interesting because i really knew a lot of things about the film although, i don't watch it.*". It seems that the questions may have made it easier for the students to write positive comments because they received aid in phrasing them. As for the other writing aspects, the students may have found it more difficult to find elements to positively highlight or were simply reluctant to write comments on their own since the sheet provided little help in this respect. Another possible explanation for the lack of positive comments on vocabulary, structure and mechanics could stem from the fossilized connection in the students' minds between these aspects and negative feedback that points out their mistakes and weaknesses. Any of these reasons could account for these results or the students simply lacked the linguistic ability and metalinguistic knowledge required to positively evaluate these writing aspects.

4.1.1.1 Qualitative analysis of the content of the positive comments

Idea development

There are certain recurrent themes found in the reviewers' positive feedback. A majority of the positive comments refer to the development of the introduction and the provision of supporting details and examples (e.g. peer comment for S5: *The introduction was great as you mentioned the names of the stars and the team, and you gave us a brief overview of the film that attracted the attention of the reader*). Also common but to a lesser extent was reference to specific body paragraphs and their content (e.g. peer comment for S74: *I admired your write about "Anne hateway" .l really love this great actress and her professional performance. You mentioned one of her award that she is the first Oscar winner for just 30 minutes of performing*) and expression of opinion about the film.

Organization

Reviewers praised the inclusion of a thesis statement and topic sentences (e.g. peer comment for S3: *some body paragraphs have a topic sentence that clearly explain what the paragraphs will discuss. it is good.*). Depending on linking words in moving from one idea to the next was also acknowledged by some of the peer reviewers (e.g. peer comment for S30: *You used in your paragraph transition words and phrases to facilitate a smooth and logical progression from one sentence and paragraph to the next good*). Some reviewers commended the way the information in the essay was arranged (e.g. peer comment for S70: *Your review is divided into negative and positive which is a very good thing to be mentioned.*) or how the writer achieved unity in the essay (e.g. peer comment for S8: *It is clear that you have unity paragraph that every paragraph discusses one issue*).

Vocabulary and style, structure, and mechanics

The rare positive peer responses to issues of vocabulary and style, structure and mechanics were delivered through general expressions of positive evaluation, which were characterized by the use of generic adjectives such as *good* and *perfect*. In only one instance did the reviewer mention a specific positive aspect related to structure in the essay they reviewed (e.g. peer comment for S1: *there is no run-on sentences.*). Some other examples of positive reactions to language issues are displayed below.

Peer comment for S5: *Your choice of words was concise and precise as you employ words in their positions.*

Peer comment for S26: *I think the rules and vocabulary are good*

Peer comment for S5: *The grammar was good, it was apparent that you was careful not to fall into many mistakes.*

Peer comment for S18: *I think the grammar and vocabulary are good*

Peer comment for S1: *the punctuation of the review is good*

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Feedback strategies: Justification, explanation, agreement and copying

A close examination of the reviewers' positive responses revealed a number of feedback strategies. Several comments provided a justification for the positive evaluation of the student writer's composition (*peer comments for S8, S10, S20, S48*). Other comments expressed agreement in opinion between the reviewer and the writer (*peer comment for S54*). Some reviewers were more specific in explaining the point they approved of (*peer comment for S61*), while others wrote general statements (*peer comment for S3*). Copying statements verbatim from the peer feedback guidance sheet or slightly adapting them was common (*Peer comment for S7, S43*).

> Peer comment for S8: *you start with a good introduction, which includes the cast, the director, the screenplay writer, the type of the film and also tells us what you tackle in your essay. the part which I like in the essay is the plot, as you talk about it in detail.*

> Peer comment for S10: *About art design, You've shown it in a very good position because you took examples from the film.*

> Peer comment for S20: *the content is very interesting when I read it, I found that I wanna to watch the film.*

> Peer comment for S48: *The conclusion is very good, because you do not spoil the end of the film*

> Peer comment for S54: *I agree with you about your opinion about the director and your criticism of script.*

> Peer comment for S61: *it was very good because of explaining the character of Hassan, performed by Ahmed Helmi (specific examples)*

> Peer comment for S3: *The conclusion is good.*

> Peer comment for S7: *I liked your introduction, and I think it can attract the reader's attention, and it set the tone of the essay, your thesis statement is so good, and it set out the main points of the review,*

> Peer comment for S43 *:You make good topic sentences which develop the main points of the paragraph, your essay is meaningful and it also interesting*

4.1.2 Categories of negative comments

A frequency analysis of the negative comments was carried out to rank the writing features according to the degree of focus they received from the student reviewers when they used the guidance sheet (Figure 2). The analysis excluded comments that were repeated by the same reviewer, mainly those discussing the same issue. The number of negative comments under each category produced by each of the 77 student reviewers is available in Appendix F.
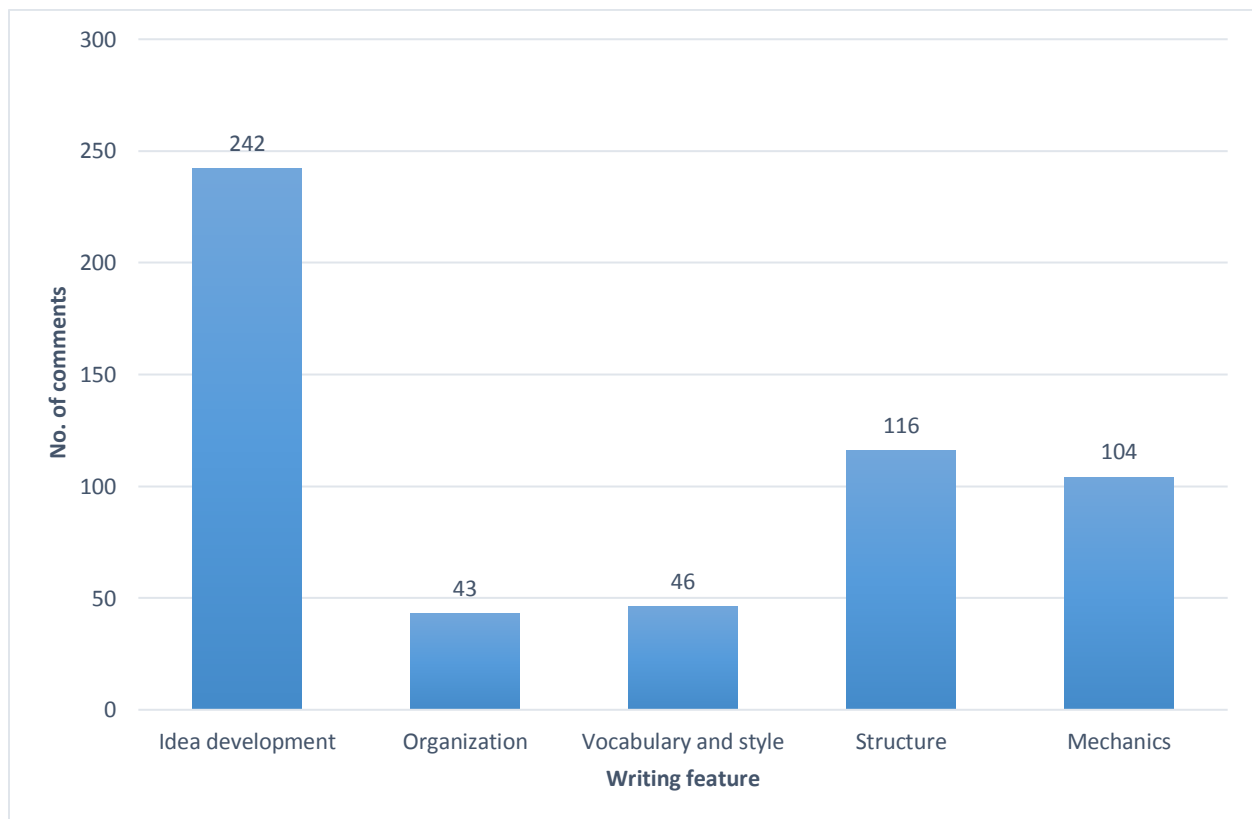
Figure 2. Each Writing Feature Represented by the Number of Negative Comments it Received in Peer Feedback

The descriptive analysis of the data is presented in Table 3 below. It shows the means and standard deviations of the negative comments the student reviewers offered in each of the five language areas. The mean of idea development is higher than those of the rest of the negative

responses. It (*M*= 3.14) is more than double the mean of the first runner-up which is structure (*M*= 1.51). The mean gap between the first runner-up, structure, and the second runner-up, mechanics, whose mean is 1.35, is quite small. The two writing features which recevied the least attention from the student reviewers are vocabulary and style (*M*= 0.60) and organization (*M*= 0.56). What is intersting here is that idea development and organization, which comprise the two components of the content-oriented writing aspects, occupied the highest and lowest ranks respectively in the quanitity of the online peer feedback by the participants.

The peer comments on the writing areas of mechnics and structure hold the largest standard deviation (*SD*= 2.91) and (*SD*= 2.90). This means that these areas witnessed more variarion in the numbers of peer comments provided by individual student reviewers than the comments on the other writing features. The number of peer responses to idea development issues generated by each reviewer had less standard deviation (2.47) although they consititued the highest amount of online peer comments in the data. The lowest standard deviations were again given in the areas of vocabulary and style and organization.

Table 3. Mean and Standard Deviation of the Number of Negative Comments

	Idea development	Organization	Vocabulary & style	Structure	Mechanics	Total
Mean	3.14	0.56	0.60	1.51	1.35	7.16
St. Dev.	2.47	0.90	0.98	2.90	2.91	10.16

A representation of the percentages of the negative comments in the online peer feedback showing their order from the highest to the lowest is displayed in Table 4.

Table 4. Order of the Negative Comments according to their Writing Features Shown in Percentages

Writing feature	Percentage
Idea development	43.92%
Structure	21.05%
Mechanics	18.78%
Vocabulary and style	8.34%
Organization	7.80%

4.1.2.1 Qualitative analysis of the content of the negative peer comments

After categorizing the reviewers' negative feedback into the five main features of idea development, organization, vocabulary and style, structure and mechanics, qualitative analysis of the online peer responses illustrated the occurrence of some recurring themes under each of them.

Idea development

Many of the reviewers focused on the introduction and the ideas it included. Some comments pointed out that the introduction was not interesting (e.g. peer comment for S1: *it (the introduction) didn't grab my attention because the writer didn't say anything about the story of the film at the paragraph of introduction.*), while others indicated that the introduction was inadequate or did not establish enough background for the topic (e.g. peer comment for S15: *you did not give an introduction; you just mentioned the film makers' names)*. Whether the thesis

statement was well-developed in the sense that it provided a map of the essay and reflected the writer's opinion was a focus of several reviewers (e.g. peer comment for S18: *Your thesis statement doesn't show your feelings on the film*). Addressing the content and length of the conclusion comprised a considerable portion of the feedback on idea development (e.g. peer comment for S4: *the conclusion is very small, you should say that you recommend this movie or not.*).

Another frequently mentioned issue was the lack of supporting examples, details and development of ideas pertaining to the rest of the composition's components (e.g. peer comment for S5: *In terms of support, i think that you should have provided us with more information and details to support your opinion more, and increase our conviction.*). On the other hand, providing too much information such as giving away the ending of the film was also a problematic issue stated in some of the responses. Some reviewers asked for further explanation of a concept or clarification of a sentence or an idea that they did not understand (e.g. peer comment for S18: *I didn't understand the plot of the film*). Since the writing task was a film review that should reflect the writer's evaluation of the film, several reviewers made special references to the absence and/or unclarity of the writer's position on any of the discussed elements. If the writer took a stance but without basing it on some grounds, some comments were designed to draw the writer's attention to the lack of evidence substantiating their opinion (e.g. peer comments for S14: *You did not put support sentence in the paragraph of the characters to show why the actors are convincing,* and for S15: *I think you tackled them (costumes and art design) in an interesting way, but rather descriptively. I think you should critisize them, mentioning if you like them or not and why.*). Rating the overall film was also a

major concern in the feedback (e.g. peer comment for S69: *you should write the Rate of the movie and Movie time.*).

Organization

The reviewers' feedback on problems of organization mainly revolved around the absence of a thesis statement and/or a topic sentence whose function is to equip the reader with an outline of the whole essay (e.g. peer comment for S14: *Also, you should not start the paragraph like this: (setting: it is..). Instead, start each paragraph with a topic sentence that explains what the paragraph will discuss.*). When the writer presented their composition in one block without dividing it into paragraphs, their reviewer explained that the essay needed to have a multi-paragraph format (e.g. peer comment for S36: *It would be easier if you wrote this review in paragraphs*). Some participants even proposed that a certain idea should be introduced in a separate paragraph, instead of combining more than one idea in the same paragraph (e.g. peer comment for S68: *You write the sound track and camera movement in the same paragraph. you should write camera movement in paragraph then the sound track in anther paragraph*). In addition, some comments suggested the relocation of a certain element or sentence to a different paragraph (e.g. peer comment for S2: *i don't like that, you mention new information in conclusion*).

Using connectors and maintaining smooth transitions between ideas and sentences formed the focus of some of the peer comments (e.g. peer comment for S4: *you should transition words and phrases to facilitate a smooth and logical progression like so, moreover, firstly, secondly*). A small number of reviewers targeted the lack of coherence and suggested ways to achieve it (e.g. peer comment for S56: *I think You should use commas or conjunctions instead of reapting "this film..., this film" many times.*).

Vocabulary and style

Vocabulary and style problems were among the less frequently reviewed aspects of the compositions. As a result, the range of the themes reviewers covered was narrow. The negative peer responses concentrated on very specific issues such as the use of the first person pronoun *I* and contractions as features of informal writing (e.g. peer comment for S13: *The review should be written in an academic way and the writer said *I ..... * more than one time*). The other common observation was related to the use of the present tense as a stylistic preference in film review writing (e.g. peer comment for S45: *I think we should write the review of the film in present tense or if we must write in past we may use present perfect tense, but we shouldn't use past tense in the film review*). A few reviewers recommended the use of more specific adjectives rather than generic ones (e.g. peer comment for S20: *I think you should write more specific adjective to describe*). The rest of the comments concerned themselves with specific instances of word choice where the reviewer proposed the use of a more "suitable" word in the context (e.g. peer comment for S63: *The word introduced in 2014 is not that suitable world to express the meaning but instead, you could use released in 2014 or launched in 2014.*).

Structure

In the three previous categories, the students sometimes used specialized terminology such as thesis statement, topic sentence(s), introduction, conclusion, transitions, coherence and academic writing in their attempts to diagnose the problem they thought they had spotted in the compositions. Reference to such terms in the feedback pertaining to matters of structure was limited to relative pronouns, run-on sentences, the passive and articles, despite the much broader range of issues actually addressed in the comments. These issues include subject-verb agreement, prepositions, redundancy of subjects and their pronouns, gerund and infinitive, phrasal verbs,

word type, the difference between *it's* and *its*, plural and singular nouns and subject verb inversion. Below is a sample of comments on structure.

Peer comment for S6: *they were not they was*

Peer comment for S15: *You should separate each independent clause from the next using relative pronouns or proper punctuation. Examples for run-on sentences: (the first sentence in the characters' paragraph/Enaam Salosa she represents/Edward he represents) and this is an example for how the sentence should be:*

(In this paragraph, we are going to tackle the characters. The cast are well-chosen such as Ahmed Helmy (who) embodies..)

Peer comment for S15: *The age (of) ten, the film (is) directed, influenced (by), it is (a) 2010 comedy film*

Peer comment for S28: *I think that " the screenplay was written " because this is in the past and this screenplay was written already*

Peer comment for S43: *there is some mistakes like (it's from the best) i think the right is (it's one of the best).*

Mechanics

As expected, comments in this section focus on problems in spelling and punctuation such as adding a period at the end of the sentence and putting actors' names between brackets or quotation marks. Other minor mechanical issues are mentioned such as not using a space between an article and the word following it and capitalizing the names of people.

Peer comment for S32: *and your spelling (variety not verity).*

Peer comment for S66: *And correct avery to a very*

Peer comment for S46: *Take care of the punctuation. Names' initials must be capital: (Salosa, Om Saeed,..).*

4.1.2.1.1 Comparing the themes of the online peer feedback to the peer feedback guidance sheet

The guidance sheet was designed to initiate the students' peer review process, especially since this was the first time for the participants to practice giving peer feedback on writing. The sheet was also meant to shed light on the potential issues commonly found in this type of writing task and bring the reviewers' attention to how and where to locate these problems. The qualitative analysis conducted in the previous section revealed that the student reviewers depended on the sheet to a great extent when they tackled the issues of idea development. Questions 1 and 2 concentrated on the make-up of the introduction and the development of the thesis statements. Questions 3, 4 and 10 addressed issues related to supporting sentences and the inclusion of concrete examples and details. Questions 9 and 11 had a honed focus on the specific elements of the film review writing task. Question 8 targeted the conclusion and question 13 asked the reviewers whether there were any incomprehensible segments. The themes in these questions were mainly the common themes that the reviewers addressed in their feedback to their peers. When it comes to organization, questions 5 and 6 directed the reviewers to check for the unity of ideas in each paragraph and the creation of coherence through the use of transition words and phrases. These were the only issues that the organization-oriented peer comments addressed.

Since the sheet did not name many issues of vocabulary and style, structure and mechanics to look for, the comments on these three aspects either did not restrict themselves to the points mentioned in the sheet or more commonly were very general and sometimes vague.

4.1.3 Comparing the peer feedback comments against the peer feedback guidance sheet

The objective of this section is gauging the extent of agreement between the amount of focus given to each writing feature by the guidance sheet on one hand and the student reviewers performing the peer feedback task on the other hand. The focus of this section is on the negative comments found in peer feedback. The sheet (Appendix D) had 22 feedback prompting questions which were tailored to elicit peer responses from the students on the five writing features: idea development, organization, vocabulary and style, structure and mechanics. To also compare between the broader aspects of meaning/content and surface/language, these five areas were grouped into two main umbrella categories: content (idea development and organization) and language (vocabulary and style, structure and mechanics). The questions aiming at instigating content-oriented responses from the participants were given more weight than the questions devised to have students generate language-oriented responses as Figure 3 elucidates.
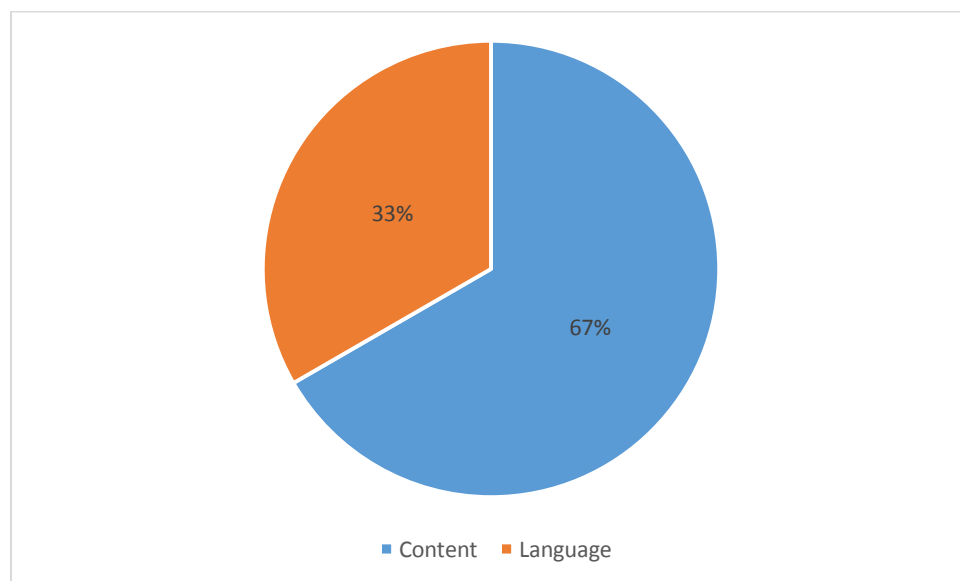
Figure 3. The Weight of The Content and Language Prompting Questions in the Peer Feedback Guidance Sheet Represented by Percentages
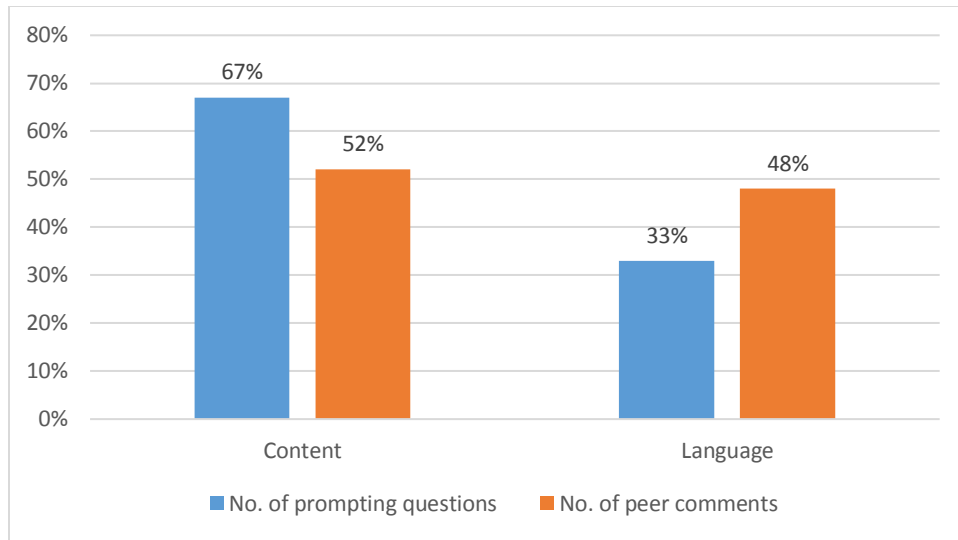
Figure 4. A Comparison between the Percentages of Prompting Questions and Peer Comments of Each Category

In order to determine the degree of correspondence between the feature focus of the guidance sheet questions and the actual comments that the participants produced during the peer feedback task, a similar categorization of the comments into content and language was undertaken. Figure 4, displayed above, illustrates the discrepancy between the weight of the guidance sheet questions on content and language and the corresponding peer comments on each. Although the peer feedback-eliciting questions of content were twice the size of the questions targeting language issues, the reviewers produced almost equal amounts of peer comments for each category.

4.1.4 Patterns of the online peer comments

Peer feedback comments usually deal with concrete issues of content and language. They carry out this task by performing some functions such as identification of the problem, explanation, offering a solution and using mitigating language among other functions (Nelson & Schunn, 2009). The present section of the analysis offers an overview of the common functions performed in the collected samples of the online peer review.

4.1.4.1 Sugarcoating the pill: Praise

As the results of the questionnaire demonstrated, a sweeping majority of 95.3% of the participants had never used peer feedback in their English classes prior to conducting this study. In view of this, it was essential to model to the students a pattern of warm or supportive feedback that is followed by cool feedback and to emphasize the importance of mitigating their negative comments in order to make the student writers more receptive to the student reviewers' comments (Nelson & Schunn, 2009). What is interesting was how the students interpreted what the warm feedback meant. They did refer to positive aspects in the essays of their peers but they also included a lot or praise statements. The textual analysis of the peer feedback showed that 75 student reviewers out of the 77 participants prefaced their comments with general praise responses:

> Peer comment for S9: *Nice work Nermin*
> Peer comment for S59: *Good job! My friend*
> Peer comment for S60: *your review is awesome I like it very much*
> Peer comment for S61: *You've done a great job.*

Or with mitigated negative responses that employed a *praise+ but* pattern:

> Peer comment for S6: *Good job Walaa* ❤ *but there's some mistakes in the review*

Peer comment for S15: *Good Job! You have tackled every aspect of the film, and the plot describtion is great. However, I have some notes*

Peer comment for S8: *good film and good job, Amany, but I think there are somethings need to be modified.*

Peer comment for S42: *Nehad,your film review is good i like it very much but i see you spoile the film*

In the examples above, the comments follow a certain pattern: they start off with an expression of approval followed by the conjunction *but*, which denotes contract, or its equivalent *however*, which announces a turn in the direction of the response. The remaining two student reviewers who did not include general praise comments in their feedback began it directly with a positive comment that focused on the introduction of the essay.

Peer comment for S54: *our introduction of film is good because it shows the story of film and attracts my attention.*

Peer comment for S66: *your introduction is so good becouse you introduce the cast of the film and give me informations about the film*

It is noteworthy that the appearances of the end of the praise-criticism spectrum were very rare or almost non-existent in the reviewers' comments. The only responses which could be identified as criticism were the comments where the reviewer pointed out that the essay had some mistakes. Usually this was preceded by some form of praise that was designed to mitigate the effect of this "criticism".

4.1.4.2 Functions of the feedback

Problem identification

Some reviewers chose to point out to the writer where the mistake was and/or its nature. The following excerpts from the online peer responses highlight how some of the reviewers utilized this function.

> Peer comment for S3: *In paragraph 6, it's not (would known).*
>
> *In paragraph 6, it's not (This lets you really feel the moment during the film is running as if you are living there with them).*
>
> *In the same paragraph, it's not (as in each scene is pictured).*
>
> Peer comment for S10: *check your spelling, grammar in lines (10,15,25,26,33,44,48), and you should write in present tense, and spaces in lines (22, 27).*

Providing explanation

Other reviewers did not stop at underlining where the problem was in the essay but they opted to further help the writer by explaining why a certain issue was a problem or where it stemmed from, as the following samples clarify.

> Peer comment for S1: *sometimes the writer says something is good without saying why, such as :the paragraph of the art design and the paragraph of songs, and at the paragraph of setting the writer says only the place but, she doesn't her mind (if it suitable or not).*
>
> Peer comment for S2: *i don't understand your feeling about this film. you wrote "We prefer this film" in paragraph and wrote "We do not enjoy this film" in other paragraph. i think you should tell your feeling clearly.*
>
> Peer comment for S5: *In terms of support, i think that you should have provided us with more information and details to support your opinion more, and increase our conviction.*

Making suggestions

Instead of identifying the problem in the writing, some reviewers employed their comments as a source of suggestions for the writer that aimed to give them an idea about how to fix the writing glitch(es) that they had. Reviewers made use of more than one structure to present their suggestions. The structures included using questions (*peer comments for S3, 14*) and

introductory phrases to the suggestions such as *I suggest* (*peer comment for S15*). Several

students chose to qualify their direct address of the writer as in *you should* by prefacing it with *I*

think (*peer comment for S7*).   Other reviewers avoided mentioning the writer directly by

employing impersonal structures such as *it is better to* (*peer comment for S50*) or *it would be*

preferable to (*peer comment for S65*).

> Peer comment for S3:*In paragraph 4, you said:" However, SRK's clothes are also good but it's not convenient for a man who is 40s ; as it is modern." can you elaborate it and give an example?*
>
> Peer comment for S7: *I think That you should give us more information about the setting of the film and about the characters.-*
>
> Peer comment for S14: *How about putting many examples in the paragraph of decor and the camera movement.*
>
> Peer comment for S15: *you did not give an introduction; you just mentioned the film makers' names, and did not use a thesis statement to grab the reader's attention. I suggest you write about the main idea of the plot in the introduction as well.*
>
> Peer comment for S40: *You also can mention what you don't like about the movie*
>
> Peer comment for S50: *I think it is better to mention the actor's name in the film*
>
> Peer comment for S65: *in this sentence (The costume of the actress was very naive) i think it would be preferable to use the present such as the rest of the sentences of this review*

Giving direct corrections

In lieu of providing a suggestion about how to improve the composition, some reviewers

directly gave the writer what they believed was the "correct" alternative to what was already

used in the essay. The sweeping majority of these direct corrections were found in the peer

comments on structure issues. Some of the students provided these corrections despite their

teacher's instructions about refraining from posting corrections and sticking to offering only

suggestions.

> Peer comment for S20: *I think you should write.. at the end of the dream,he dies again*
>
> Peer comment for S49: *Finally after watching not finally watching*

Peer comment for S5: *you should correct the word "chose" to "choose".*

Peer comment for S8: *You also have to check the grammar in some sentences like is produce(d), include(s), "affects on" not "effects on", help(s), "does not" not "doesn't", khairat('s) family and salem('s) family*

Peer comment for S25: *I think you can write we discover instead of we discovers in the paragarph of charcters*

4.1.4.3 Additional online peer feedback characteristics

In addition to the recurring themes found in the peer responses to the different writing aspects, the qualitative analysis of the data also uncovered a number of characteristics of the online peer feedback which could influence the writer's implementation of this feedback.

Specificity and vagueness

While many of the peer responses dealt with specific issues in the essays, many other comments were rather general and characterized by a degree of vagueness. These general comments referred to broad problems in grammar or spelling, for instance, without indicating where exactly in the essay they found these problems by referring to the paragraph or line number. Other reviewers made very general suggestions such as "*use relative pronouns*", again without offering any clues about where the use of relative pronouns was needed. Other comments were vague because they did not clarify whether what they mentioned was a positive or a negative element in the text, e.g. "*you do not use general comments*". The following are instances of vague comments in the feedback.

Peer comment for S4: *I think, you need modify punctuation*

Peer comment for S6: *you there's a little mistakes in the meaning and in grammar*

Peer comment for S8: *Thirdly, I guess you talk about the elements briefly, So you should give more details. You should examine your sentences carefully to make sure what they include. I guess you should use transition words and phrases, which help to move from one point to another.*

Peer comment for S16: *you should use relative pronouns. Allow to me to say that your review has some mistakes in grammar*

Peer comment for S25: *you do not use general comments.*

Copying verbatim from the peer feedback guidance sheet

When giving feedback to their peers, some students copied phrases or sentences verbatim from the guidance sheet (e.g. peer comment for S7: *I think it can attract the reader's attention, and it set the tone of the essay, your thesis statement is so good, and it set out the main points of the review*). Fewer commentators tried to adapt these sentences and customize them to reflect the specific text they were reviewing (e.g. peer comment for S1: *i think that the thesis statement sets down the main points of the review , as the writer says"this review will show points like the plot , setting , characters , lighting ,customs , art design ,music and camera movement".*). Sometimes just copying and pasting from the sheet did not lead to informative responses because they were not specific to the essay and sounded vague. For this reason, students were given instructions prior to the beginning of the procedure to not just copy from the sheet and to use their own wording.

Referencing the teacher

Some reviewers used the teacher, or more accurately what the teacher had said in class, as a reference to support the argument for their feedback. The examples below show that some of the reviewers said that their suggestion is based on information the teacher said in class (e.g. peer comments for S37: *Doctor tell us she doe s not want any abbreviation and write in present,* and for S72: *I think as what our doctor said that events should be written in a present form).* During the training period and at the top of the guidance sheet, the students were encouraged to provide evidence to support their comments. This instruction was intended to prompt students to make sure that their feedback was correct and to get them to search for learning sources on their own.

Only one student followed this instruction by providing a link to a website that supported the point they were trying to make. What some of the other students did was use the instructions of the teacher to substantiate their comment.

4.2 Extent of incorporating online peer feedback comments in revisions

The second research question attempts to find out the degree of the incorporation the online peer feedback. To answer this question, only the negative comments were considered because, unlike the positive comments, these comments are the ones which aim at triggering revisions in the final drafts generated by the participants. Each final draft was examined in relation to its peer comments in order to determine how much of this feedback was translated by the student writers into revisions. In each given composition, each individual comment was inspected and then the revised draft was scanned to decide whether the student writer had converted it into revision. The following excerpts show two instances of peer comments and their rendering into actual changes in the revised drafts:

(1)

S15 before peer feedback: *The setting :the choice of time and place wonderful and appropriate in the film because it is in the street of Egypt.*

Peer comment for S15: *you did not give a detailed description of the setting.*

S15 after revision: *The place of the film is suitable because it is between Cairo and Giza and some old places like the pyramids and El Moaaz street to show the nature of Egypt's streets .*

(2)
S15 before peer feedback: *"Maleficent" is a fantasy film was produced in the (United States) and introduced in 2014.*

Peer comment for S63: *The word introduced in 2014 is not that suitable world to express the meaning but instead, you could use released in 2014 or launched in 2014.*

S63 after revision: *"Maleficent" is a fantasy film was produced in the (United States) and released in 2014.*

To answer this question, only the final drafts available on Edmodo were analyzed. Since the students were asked to provide their peer feedback via Edmodo over the course of a week, a number of the students posted their feedback on more than one occasion. In some cases, the student writers published a revised draft based on the first round of peer comments and afterwards, the reviewer sent more comments that the writer did not respond to in the form of a third draft. In addition, some student writers did not post any of their revised drafts on the website. Both cases were excluded from the data to answer the second research question which made the number of analyzed drafts 48. The quantitative analysis of the overall number of online peer comments and writer revisions is presented in Figure 5 below.
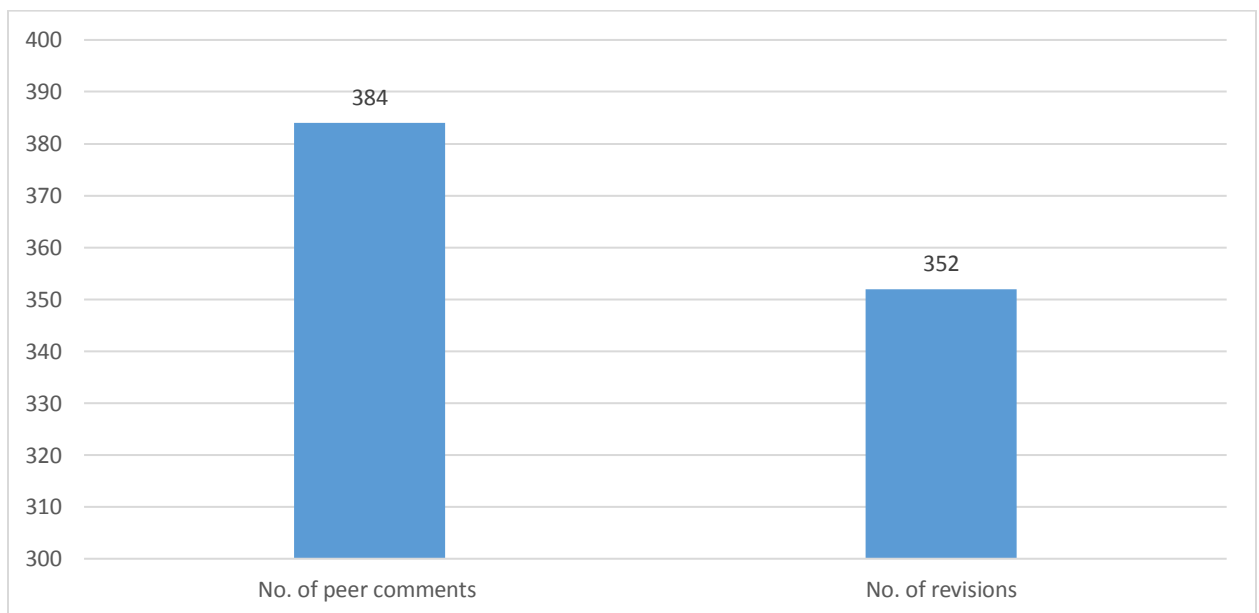
Figure 5. The Numbers of Online Peer Comments and Writer Revisions

It is pivotal to note that sometimes one peer comment led to more than one change in the revised draft. For example, in the essay by *S45* one peer comment about the preference for using the present tense to the past tense in the genre of film review writing prompted 31 changes in the

final version of the essay. This meant that the number of revisions did not equal the number of the peer comments which instigated them. Therefore, I did not depend on the number of the revisions to determine the ratio of the implemented and unused comments. The number of unused comments was deducted manually from the total number of comments via thoroughly examining all the peer comments and manually calculating both used and unused comments. Table 5 below shows the total number of comments along with the proportions of the incorporated comments, which led to revisions, and the unused comments, which did not initiate any revisions.

Table 5. A Breakdown of the Number of Comments and Revisions

	Comments	Revisions
Incorporated	253	352
Unused	131	N/A
Total	384	N/A

Figure 6 below highlights the extent of the incorporation of the online peer comments by the student writers. These percentages are based on only the comments that the student writers translated into revisions and the quantity of these revisions.

34%

66%

■ No. of comments used   ■ No. of comments not used
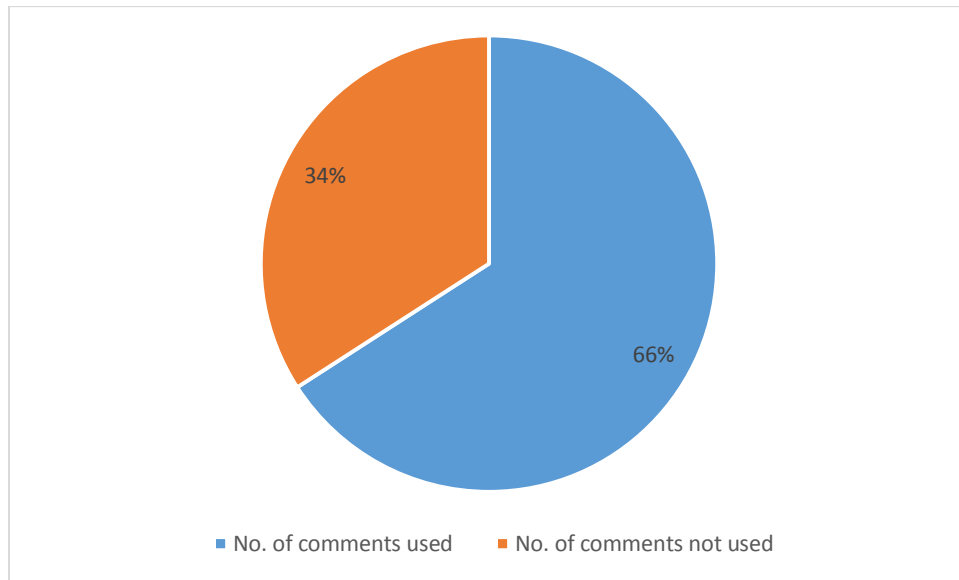
Figure 6. The Percentages of Incorporated Comments and Unused Comments

4.2.1 Extent of incorporating the online peer feedback in each writing feature

A juxtaposition between the number of peer comments and their corresponding revisions in each of the writing features is displayed in Figure 7. The student writers implemented 61% of the comments on idea development issues. Regarding problems in the organization of the essay, the students responded to 85% of the peer comments. What stood out was the amount of revisions made in response to the vocabulary and style comments. 33 peer comments in this area led to almost triple the amount of revisions. As for structure, approximately 70% of the comments resulted in revisions. Finally, a 95% of incorporation shows that the participants usually made use of the comments on the problems of mechanics.
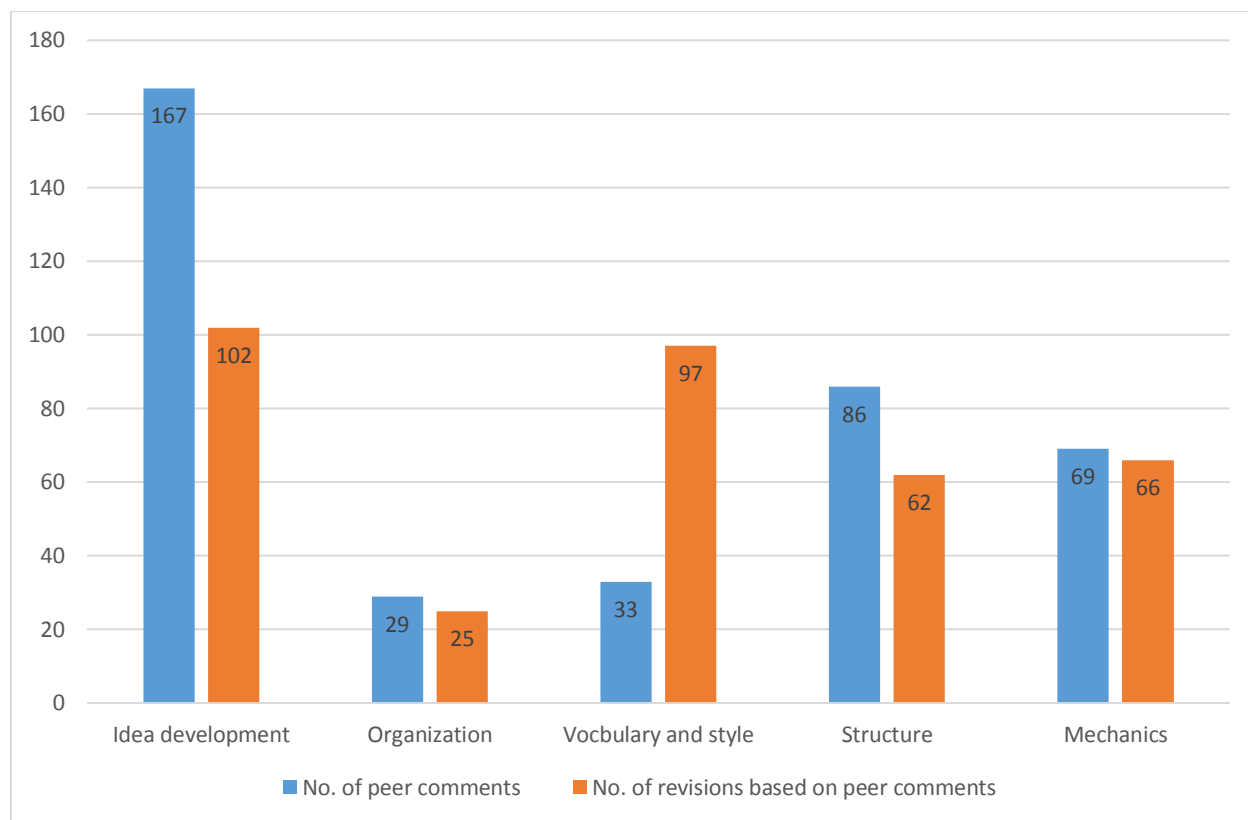
Figure 7. The Extent of Incorporation of the Online Peer Feedback Comments in Each Category of the Writing Features

The percentages of incorporating feedback reflect how many of the peer feedback comments in each writing feature were translated into revisions by the student writer; however, these percentages do not manifest the degrees of focus that the student writers gave to each writing feature. This is what the next section is designed to find out.

4.3 Writing features of the revisions based on online peer feedback

After indicating the extent of the incorporation of the comments, this section looks into the writing features that these revisions included. A quantitative analysis of the frequency of the revisions under each of the five writing features is presented in Figure 8. These results are built on the data sample used to answer the second question which consisted of the revised essays of 48 students. It is noteworthy that the order of the frequency of the peer comments in each of the

five writing features in this data matches their order in the wider data sample used in answering the first question.
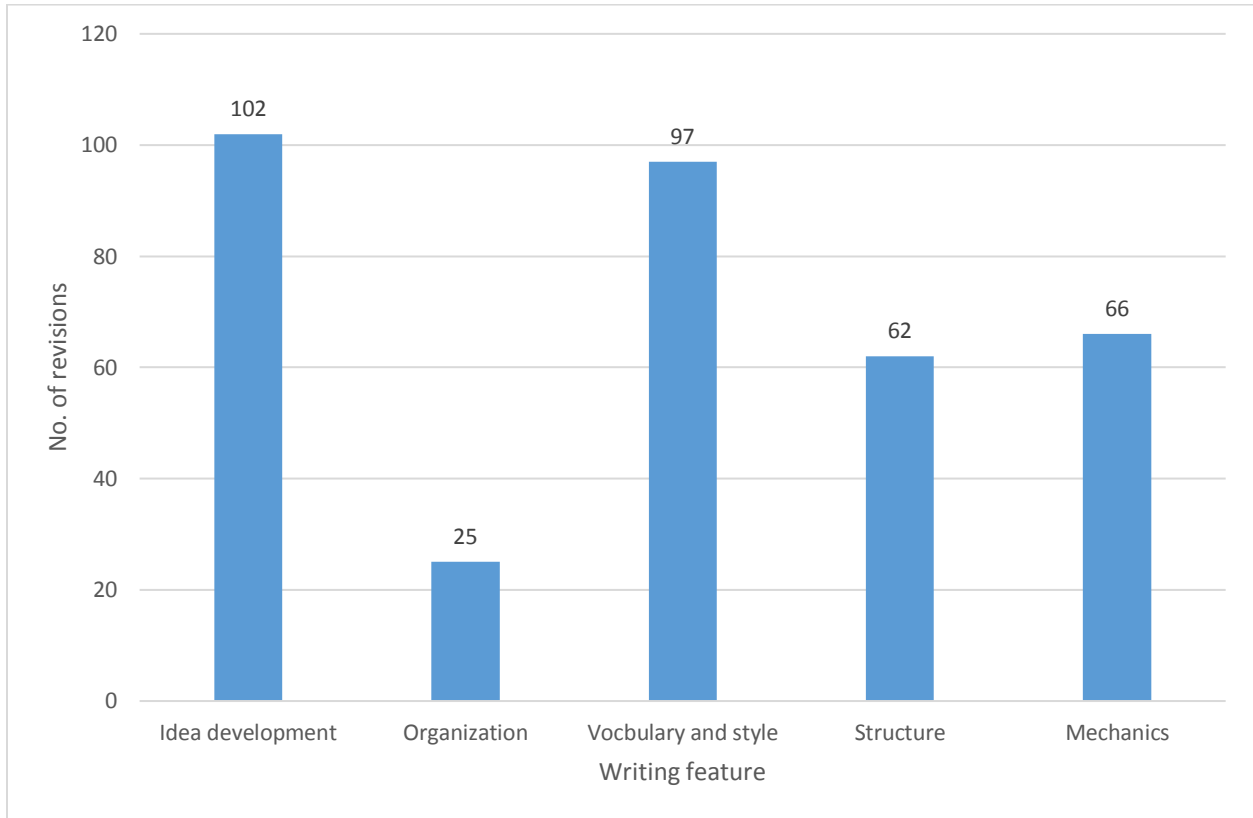
Figure 8. The Numbers of the Revisions based on Peer Comments Categorized according to their Writing Features

The means and standard deviations of the revisions done by the student writers under each writing feature are summarized in Table 6 below. As the results indicate, the revisions made in the area of idea development have the highest frequency (M= 2.13), which mirrors the same rank that it occupied in the frequency of the peer comments. In contrast to its low frequency in the peer comments, the revisions under the category of vocabulary and style came second after the idea development changes. However, its high standard deviation (SD= 5.25) means that there was a wide variation in the numbers of vocabulary and style revisions that each of the 48 student writers made in their final drafts. One writer made as many as 31 changes in the area of

vocabulary and style, while several others did not pay attention to this area in their revisions at all. Certain issues such as using the present tenses rather than the past tenses in film review writing led some writers to make numerous changes in most of the verbs in their drafts. These revisions were always based on only one single peer comment. A feature which consistently received less attention from both reviewers and writers is organization. The almost identical means of peer comments and revisions, which are ($M= 0.50$) and ($M= 0.52$) respectively, underscore the students' lack of focus on issues of organization. The revisions made in the area of structure are slightly less frequent than the structure peer responses which have a mean of 1.41. The area of mechanics also witnessed a slight change in its frequency across the peer comments and revisions frequencies.

Table 6. The Means and Standard Deviations of the Writing Features in the Revisions based on the Online Peer Feedback

	Idea development	Organization	Vocabulary & style	Structure	Mechanics
Mean	2.13	0.52	2.02	1.32	1.40
St. Dev.	2.13	1.69	5.25	3.04	3.05

After presenting the results of the quantitative analysis of the peer comments and the revisions based on them in terms of the five writing features, it would be helpful to make a comparison of the writing features across the guidance sheet, the peer comments and the revisions (Table 7).

Table 7. A Comparison of the Writing features across the Sheet, Comments and Revisions

	Idea development	Organization	Vocabulary & style	Structure	Mechanics
Sheet	59.09%	9.09%	13.63%	13.63%	4.54%
Comments	43.92%	7.80%	8.34%	21.05%	18.78%
Revisions	28.97%	7.1%	27.55%	17.61%	18.75

This comparison shows that idea development was the most common feature in the sheet, peer comments and revisions; however, its frequency decreased from one stage to the next. Examining the other features shows that organization issues were consistently of low frequency across the three domains. Vocabulary and style issues display an interesting pattern as they had a moderate representation on the sheet which decreased to a considerable degree in the peer comments and yet they witnessed a leap in their amount in the revisions. Structure issues did not see any major fluctuations in their representation from one stage to the next. Mechanics issues, on the other hand, had a low weight on the sheet that was exceeded to a large extent in the comments and the revisions sections.

A discussion of the results which were presented in this chapter is carried out in the following chapter. It seeks to offer interpretations of the findings of this study.

CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a discussion of the study results presented in Chapter 4. The first section discusses the results of the research questions. The chapter then provides a number of pedagogical implications, followed by the limitations of this study and suggestions for further research.

5.1 Discussion of the results

The present study set out to investigate online peer feedback on L2 writing in large classes. It sought to answer two research questions. The first question looked into the writing features that the student peer reviewers attended to and the degree of alignment between their feedback and the guidance sheet. The second question explored to what extent the peer feedback was incorporated into the students' revisions. It also investigated the revisions in relation to the writing features. The following is a discussion of the results of these questions.

5.1.1 Online peer comments and their writing features

Examining the writing features addressed in the positive peer feedback showed that an overwhelming 93% of comments dealt with idea development and organization. In contrast, the areas of vocabulary and style, structure and mechanics received very little positive feedback. This shows that the content-oriented guidance sheet influenced the writing features which received more positive comments. Previous research has indicated that peers tend to focus their feedback on surface features, specifically those features they are aware of and that content areas remain difficult for learners to focus on. This study showed that training students has a fruitful

impact on the way the students handle the feedback process and on encouraging them to address the issues of content that they usually avoid.

The qualitative analysis of the positive comments also demonstrated that the students closely followed the guidance sheet's themes. This is in line with what Wang (2014) found out about the role of the prompting questions in guiding the students' peer feedback. Wang explored the perceptions of the students after they used a rubric in giving peer feedback. The students reported having positive perceptions about how the rubric clarified the criteria that they needed to use. It also mapped the peer feedback process for them. Wang still indicates that using a rubric, or a guidance sheet, can also have rather negative effects such as limiting the scope of the peer feedback content to only the categories included on the sheet. The textual analysis of the positive comments revealed that the student reviewers focused largely on the themes in the prompting questions. This confirmed that Wang's concerns about the potential negative impact of using guidance sheets in the practice of peer feedback can be true too.

The analysis of the negative comments yielded somewhat different results. While these comments tended to gravitate towards issues of idea development, other features exhibited different patterns. While organization-oriented responses came second in the frequency of positive comments, they fell to the lowest position in the negative comments. Whereas the influence of the guidance sheet was tangible in increasing the focus given to idea development, it faded in the area of organization. The guidance sheet had two main questions addressing organization issues; nonetheless, many of the students did not respond to them adequately. It seems that more feedback-eliciting questions on organization are needed. What is also required is more student training in terms of how to detect problems in organization and how to make suggestions for improving the organization of the essay to their peers. Vocabulary and style also

received relatively few comments when compared to the other writing features. Structure and mechanics, the other writing features concerning language, received more comments than their relative proportion in the guidance sheet would suggest. This finding shows that students tend to comment on the surface issues of grammar and mechanics.

When the peer comments on idea development are examined alone, it would be easy to see the impact of using the guidance sheet on the frequency of this type of comments. The mean of the idea development comments is more than twice the mean of the structure-focused comments, which were their strongest competitor. This finding corroborates the impact of using a guidance sheet in steering the focus of the online peer feedback. However, it does not support the conclusion presented by Tsui and Ng (2000) about the degree of attention students pay to macro-level and micro-level issues. They reported that students focused more on the micro-level issues because they were less demanding on the cognitive level. The results of the present study, however, showed that the students were able to focus on macro-level issues such as the development of ideas in the essay as a whole. How successful the student writers were in addressing these issues is another question.

These results also seem to partially agree with the observations made by Vorobel and Kim (2014), which is one of the very few studies which investigated the writing aspects addressed in peer feedback. Their study provided only qualitative categorization of the recurrent topics discussed in the peer feedback. These topics were organization, idea development, vocabulary, quoting in L1 and L2 writing and the mechanical issues of quotation marks use and formatting. Vorobel and Kim did not look into the frequency of each of these themes; therefore, the comparison between their results and those of the present study are limited to the themes of peer feedback. The participants in the present study focused primarily on idea development and

then issues of mechanics and vocabulary. The organization of ideas which was a major issue in Vorobel and Kim's study does not hold the same status in the peer review produced by this study's participants. On the other hand, structure issues received considerable attention from those participants although they were not even mentioned in the findings reported in the 2014 study. Vorobel and Kim, who did not mention the use of any form of peer feedback guidance, ascribed their participants' choices to focusing on issues that could hinder the readers' comprehension of any of the ideas presented in the composition. For those students, making sure their ideas were expressed clearly and systematically was a major concern since they came from different L1 and cultural backgrounds.

Focusing on the individual elements of idea development and structure separately, as representatives of the global issues of content vs. surface levels of any text, demonstrates that peer comments on idea development clearly had the greatest weight with 44% of the total amount of responses. Adopting a bird's eye view of the larger categories of content and language reveals another finding. When all the peer comments are grouped in two main categories of content (idea development and organization) and language (vocabulary and style, structure and mechanics), the balance of comments tackling both umbrella categories emerges. Although the content-oriented prompting questions constituted 67% of the guidance sheet's questions and the language-oriented questions comprised 33%, the amount of peer comments they induced were almost the same. This shows that the student reviewers still produced more language-based comments than the sheet intended. It indicates that the students have a tendency to address language or local issues in addition to the content or global issues. These results support those of the study conducted by Attan and Khalidi (2015). This also accords with the earlier findings published by Liu and Sadler (2003), who also employed a peer review sheet whose questions

concentrated on the global issues of writing. Their study revealed that the students made comments on both the global and local aspects of the compositions. However, their findings diverge from the findings of the present study in two ways. First, the local aspects that the participants in this study dealt with were only grammar and spelling. Liu and Sadler speculated that the reason for this could be the proofreading functions available on MS Word which the students used to provide peer feedback. In the present study, the range of the issues of language reviewed via Edmodo was broader as they included vocabulary, style and other issues of mechanics such as punctuation. Second, Liu and Sadler reported that the local comments constituted 72% of the peer feedback while the global comments formed 28% of this feedback. In contrast to this huge difference in the proportions of the local and global comments in favor of the local aspects, there is an almost even distribution of the number of comments across the two domains of content/global aspects and language/local aspects in the present study. The content comments even had a small edge over the language ones.

The qualitative analysis of the negative feedback revealed that the impact of the guidance sheet was not limited to the frequency of the writing categories of the comments. The themes of the prompting questions profoundly shaped the themes of the peer responses. This influence reflects the role the sheet played in informing the students about the criteria used in evaluating writing in English. Students utilizing these criteria in locating the issues in their peers' essays is a benefit of the peer feedback practice that has been well substantiated in the literature (Jahin, 2012; Lundstrom & Baker, 2009; Mendonça & Johnson, 1994; Rothschild & Klingenberg, 1990; Topping, 1998; Villamil & De Guerrero, 2006). Berg (1999) refers to how peer feedback can encourage students to put their knowledge about the aspects of organization and idea development into application. What is also important is that the students did not confine their

comments to what the questions on the sheet targeted. For example, the sheet did not mention anything related conventions of academic writing; however, many of the comments on vocabulary and style addressed issues related to academic writing such as the use of formal and informal language. The students here drew on knowledge provided to them by the teacher or their textbook and used it in reviewing their peers' compositions. This shows that the students can be resourceful in what they depend on when they provide peer feedback.

Almost all students used some form of praise and/or supportive comments to initiate their feedback. This indicates that the students responded well to the training instructions that urged them to provide support to their peers through providing them with positive comments and to avoid offending the student writers. This finding can encourage teachers who are reluctant to employ peer feedback in their language classes due to the fear of the critical tone of the peer comments and the negative attitudes of the students. The proliferation of praise in the peer responses is similar to results reported by Cho, Schunn & Charney (2006), and by Tuzi (2004) who found that L2 students provided much more praise than L2 instructors.

5.1.2 Extent of online peer feedback incorporation

The quantitative analysis of the changes initiated by the online peer review provided some interesting insights about its impact on the revised drafts. Around 66% of the peer feedback was translated into revisions. This finding is among the most significant in this study because it shows that students do listen to their peers and thus peer feedback can urge students to revise their writing. These results are almost identical to the results published by Yang, Badger and Yu (2006) who reported a rate of 67%. This extent is somewhat greater than some of the results reported in the literature. For instance, Leijen (2017) reported an implementation rate of 52%. A similar rate of incorporation was reported by Paulus (1999). Attan and Khalidi (2015), who

worked with a small sample size of 10 students, found that only four of the participants used more than 50% of the comments, whereas the rest of the six students implemented less than 50% of the comments. Upon having a second cycle of peer feedback exchange, the number of students who incorporated more than 50% of the comments rose to seven. Other studies reporting lower rates of up-take include: 41% in Liu and Sadler (2003) and 32% in Mendonca and Johnson (1994). Results reported by Connor and Asenavage (1994) reflect a much lower degree of incorporation. Peer comments accounted for only 5% of the overall revisions. The rest of the revisions resulted from teacher comments (35%) and the writers themselves and/or other sources of feedback (60%).

Of the studies reporting a higher ratio of peer feedback incorporation compared to the present study is Min's (2006). Min's goal was to compare the numbers of peer-initiated revisions before and after peer feedback training. She found that before training only 42% of the peer comments led to revisions and after training, the ratio of incorporation jumped to 77%. Hu and Lam (2010) reported a similar rate of 76%. This is slightly higher than the 74% recorded by Villamil and Guerrero (1998).

Situating the results of the current study within the literature sheds lights on the impact of the peer feedback on revision. To determine this effect, it is important to compare the nature of the instructional contexts from which research data were collected in different studies. One issue that has to be considered is the nature of the course where participants were enrolled. The students in the majority of the aforementioned studies were enrolled in writing courses. The participants in Min's study (2006) were English majors taking an essay writing skills course. The same applied to the participants in the studies of Connor and Asenavage (1994), Paulus (1999) and Liu and Sadler (2003) who were all enrolled in composition courses. These are only

examples and not an exhaustive list. The participants in the study of Hu and Lam (2010), for example, were postgraduate students. In contrast, the participants in the current study were freshmen students enrolled in a general ESP course where writing constituted only a part of its content and focus. They also were not English majors. This shows that even when the students are not English majors and have not received intensive instruction in English writing, they are still able to use any given criteria to critically read the texts of their peers and give feedback on them. It also reveals that they are willing to use this feedback in revising their writing.

The data for this section of the study were collected from 48 students. This sample size is identical to that in Liu and Sadler's study which was the largest among the examined studies. The sample sizes of the rest of the studies ranged between 8 and 38. Evaluating the rate of peer feedback incorporation with these factors in mind shows how worthwhile the peer review practice was in this respect. This is also supported by the fact that the rate in this study was greater to some extent than many of the results reported in the literature. It also did not fall very far behind the studies which yielded higher ratios of peer comment incorporation in the revisions.

5.1.3 Types of revisions

The previous section examined how students incorporated peer feedback in their revisions; the current section explores the writing features that benefited from peer feedback during revisions. Writing features influenced the most by online peer comments were idea development (29%), vocabulary and style (27.5%), structure (17.5%) and mechanics (18.5%). However, organization received the least attention during revisions (7.5%). Language-related features accounted for 63.5 % of the overall revisions while content-bound features made up 36.5%. This shows that there is a difference between the writing features most focused on in the

peer comments and the revisions initiated by these comments. While content and language areas received almost equal amounts of peer responses, the revisions made in the language area had twice the weight of their content counterparts. This demonstrates that the sheet and the peer comments do not fully control the types of revisions and that students are inclined to make language-based revisions.

The results of other studies exploring the types of changes in peer-initiated revisions are not always consistent. In some studies, the participants made more meaning changes which targeted the content of the composition rather than its surface or language while in others the opposite was the case. For instance, Attan and Khalidi (2015) found that 42% of the revisions were content-based while 58% of them were language-based. Liu and Sadler (2003) compared the areas of writing targeted by peer feedback across the traditional face-to-face and technology-enhanced modes. After exchanging traditional peer feedback, revisions of content made up 15% and changes in language comprised 20% of the total amount of peer-influenced revisions. In the technology-enhanced mode, peer response effected 26% of both content and language revisions. Paulus (1999) reported that "meaning changes" constituted 63.3% and Yang et al (2006) also documented more meaning-focused changes as they made up 27% of the revisions resulting from peer responses. They hypothesize that the cause of the low percentage of surface revisions could be attributed to the students' perception of their peers' low linguistic abilities which was detected by a questionnaire administered during the study.

The students in the present study revised a variety of writing aspects when they re-visited their texts in response to their peers' comments. They did not make the same amounts of changes in the five writing features investigated in this study. The area of idea development was prioritized by the guidance sheet and this was reflected in both the peer comments and the

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revisions they triggered. This consistency between the three elements of the guidance sheet, peer comments and writers' revisions was not as visible in the rest of the writing features. The vocabulary and style, structure and mechanics proved to have a presence in the students' comments and revisions that went beyond the dictates of the guidance sheet. We can infer from this that the guidance sheet did exercise a considerable deal of influence on where the emphasis of the peer comments and revisions was placed. It also shed light on the students' ability to produce comments on areas which had lesser weight on the guidance sheet.

5.1.4 Pedagogical implications

The evidence from this study suggests that online peer review can be used as a source of extra, varied feedback on the writing of L2 learners in an ESP class. The study has shown that the students were able to produce feedback that addressed different issues in the compositions and this feedback was successful in triggering revisions in the final drafts. The students exhibited a willingness and an ability to become critical readers of their peers' compositions. The experience of developing critical skills in identifying weaknesses in other people's writing should help these students apply the same skills to their own writing.

The other pedagogical implications are related to the implementation of a guidance sheet. The study showed that using a guidance sheet can have both a positive and a negative impact. The positive impact lies in enabling the teacher to somewhat navigate the emphasis of both the comments and revisions done by the students. This was most evident in the themes or issues the students focused on in the responses and changes which were markedly limited to the issues addressed in the sheet. From here the negative impact emerges as the students can confine themselves to what is on the sheet. A possible solution can be implemented by carrying out the peer feedback over two stages. The first stage will be without the sheet so students can have

more freedom and draw more on their own knowledge and experience when responding to their peers' compositions. A guidance sheet will be used in the second stage to hone the focus of the comments and allow the teacher to guide more. Another issue is the students' mastery of the writing features they are supposed to use. The comments and revisions in the study did not approach the aspect of organization adequately and this could be traced back to the students' lack of competence in this area. If the teacher finds that the students lack the ability to comment on a writing aspect, they could either give it more attention in the feedback training sessions and the guidance sheet or decide to leave this aspect to be handled through the teacher feedback.

The study has also shown that Edmodo was a valid tool for the communication of feedback and carrying out the different stages of the peer feedback process. This is crucial for teachers who have large classes since it buys them additional time that is not limited by the boundaries of the classroom. It also offers a solution to the monitoring problems that teachers face when they try to implement such a technique in a large class. Through Edmodo, the teacher is able to keep an eye on every single interaction that the students have which keeps the teacher aware of the students' performance and the progression of the process. The teacher can then intervene when they realize that the students are not following the procedures correctly or providing any wrong information to their peers.

5.2 Conclusion

The purpose of the current study was to explore the nature of the online peer feedback practice in a large class context. It aimed to inspect the types of comments the students produced in response to the compositions and measure the extent of "guidance" the peer feedback guidance sheet actually provided. The first finding shows that the sheet was successful in guiding the students to give the issues of idea development more focus. This is promising because it

shows teachers that there are possible tools that can help them steer the direction of at least the stage of the peer comments exchange. It also demonstrates that training the students is effective in terms of how they approach the peer feedback process which is highlighted through their use of supportive feedback and praise. It is also reflected in the types of comments and revisions that the students make.

The areas which received less emphasis in the guidance sheet allowed the students some freedom in determining the degree of focus they gave to these writing aspects. In general, the students in this study were able to respond to issues in the various writing features specified on the sheet. The writing aspect in which this ability was least manifested was organization. This could be due to the novelty of the concept of essay organization to those students. Most of the participants graduated from Arabic schools where students are not trained nor required to write more than one-paragraph compositions. The organization requirements of thesis statement, topic sentence, paragraph unity, coherence and cohesion are probably new notions that they did not yet have enough grasp of. Still the bigger picture shows that the average of peer comments produced by each student was 7.16 which indicates that the student reviewers could respond to their peers' writing. In addition, the students demonstrated an ability to provide feedback on issues that were not mentioned in the guidance sheet. Encouraging students during the training to diversify the sources they rely on when they provide comments on writing can yield some positive results.

The second major finding in this study showed that the student reviewers did incorporate more than two thirds of this peer feedback into their revisions. The student writers also made these revisions in all five writing aspects that the guidance sheet targeted. The ratio of revisions in each writing category was not the same. Changes in the area of idea development were the most frequent as the sheet and peer comments anticipated. This did not mean that the student

writers did not make language revisions. On the contrary, the students sometimes made more revisions in these areas than the guidance sheet and peer feedback expected. The study has also found that there is a balance between the peer responses to the issues of content and language but the language revisions were twice as frequent as the content revisions. This resulted from the notable lack of both responses and revisions in the other content component of organization. It also stemmed from the increased number of vocabulary and style changes which exceeded the number of comments that triggered them.

In answer to the questions that Carson and Nelson (2006) posed about the viability of using peer feedback in non-Western cultures, the study also indicates that online peer feedback can be a source of additional feedback in an Egyptian setting. It is apparent that online peer feedback can work regardless of the culture of the students and the educational context.

This research extends our knowledge of how the peer feedback technique functions in a large class in a context where peer review is rarely practiced. The study had 77 students from one ESL class carrying out the peer feedback process over the course of a week outside the walls of the classroom. Thanks to the use of technology, in the form of Edmodo, this sizeable class of 77 students were able to utilize a feedback-productive tool while enabling to the teacher to monitor every exchange without decreasing class time. The teacher could have permanent access to the students' drafts, comments and revisions. This makes inspecting the validity of the peer comments and tracking the evolution of the whole process over time, if the practice was to be repeated, a very accessible option to the teacher.

5.2.2 Limitations

There are a number of limitations in the present study that need to be considered. First, the study investigated only the peer feedback practice and did not have a control group that

depended on teacher feedback or no feedback at all. Comparing the amount and types of comments and revisions resulting from another source of feedback such as the teacher or the students themselves could have provided a baseline to determine the extent of the effect of the online peer feedback practice.

Not identifying the proficiency level of the participants was another limitation. Students at Cairo University, where the data were collected, are admitted according to their scores on the secondary school English exam which is an achievement test and not a language proficiency test. Therefore, their scores could not be used to determine their proficiency levels. Gathering information about the student's language proficiency could have provided the opportunity to relate between the nature and effectiveness of the peer feedback and the language proficiency of both the student reviewer and writer.

The study also did not examine the validity of the peer comments that the reviewers offered. Invalid comments could have led to lower rates of feedback incorporation. Examining the validity of the comments could be also extended to which writing aspect had more invalid comments. This could have shed light on the students' level of competence in each aspect. It could have also explored whether there was a relationship between the frequency of the comments and their validity. In addition, some insights could be gained about how far the teacher could depend on peer comments in ushering the revision process.

A fourth limitation stems from not looking into the attitudes of the students towards the peer feedback practice as well as the use of Edmodo as a medium of communication. The attitudes of the students could provide further explanation for why they produced more or less comments on a certain writing feature and the degree of using these comments in revisions as

well. Investigating students' attitudes prior to and following the administration of the technique could have provided answers about practicing peer feedback had an effect on these attitudes.

The study investigated the peer feedback after the students received only one round. Examining the process over time and seeing whether more familiarity with the technique and its requirements could lead to more improvement in the comments and revisions could help determine the best course for applying the practice. The study also focused only on the practice through the use of technology. Comparing the online medium with other mediums such as oral, face-to-face feedback or written feedback could also be utilized in figuring out which is the best medium for this type of class and students.

This study was exploratory in nature as it attempted to gain some insights about the implementation of a technique that had been almost completely unfamiliar to the students and the design of the course it was integrated into. The objective of the study was to investigate whether online peer feedback would work in a class where writing was under-practiced. The peer feedback process was carried out only once because this was the only available opportunity for the students to compose an essay throughout the semester, so there was not any chance to repeat the process to gauge its effect over time. This is why this study did not employ a pretest/ posttest design. The students did not get to practice the technique enough for its impact to start showing in their future writing.

5.2.3 Suggestions for further research

Further research is needed to answer several questions related to peer feedback. First, it was argued that using group rather than pair dyads in peer feedback could complicate the task for the students; however, other researcher recommended employing group feedback because it can lead to more feedback and perhaps less invalid comments through cross-checking by the

members of the group. More research is needed to compare between the two arrangements to decide which has more advantages. Since the study was exploratory in nature, using an experimental or quasi-experimental design could help assess the impact of peer feedback on the overall writing quality of the students. Another suggestion proposes investigating whether the language proficiency of the peer reviewer and the linguistic quality of the comments have any effect on whether the writer incorporate the comments or not. Research can also look into the use of L1 in providing peer feedback and the nature of its impact, if there was any, on the peer revisions. As seen in this study and others, students do not incorporate all the peer comments they receive; therefore, there is a need to conduct studies that probe further why students ignore peer comments. Peer feedback is a valuable tool that can contribute to different skills and subjects in the language classroom and more research attempting to figure out how to best utilize it in different contexts is needed in order not to simply discard it because there is a lack of understanding its effects and how it works.

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APPENDIX A: QUESTIONNAIRE

The purpose of this survey is to collect information about the background of the participants which is relevant to the research topic. All your responses will be anonymous.

1- What is your gender?

- o Male
- o Female

2- What was your score on the General Secondary English exam (Thanawya Amma)?

- o 48- 50
- o 47- 45
- o Less than 45

3- What is the type of secondary school you graduated from?

- o Arabic school
- o Language school
- o Other

4- Before this term, have you used peer feedback in any of your English classes?

- o Yes
- o No

5- If your answer is yes, please mention the type of the task you used peer feedback in (for example, writing, vocabulary, grammar...etc), how the peer feedback procedure worked and how many times you used it:

6- Before this term, have you ever used technology such as computers, mobile phones or online websites in your English and/or writing classes before?

- o Yes
- o No

7- If your answer is yes, please mention which technology you used and the purpose you used it for:

APPENDIX B: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

CASE #2016-2017-087

THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY IN CAIRO
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

To: Hasnaa Shaalan

Cc: Sara Tarek

From: Atta Gebril, Chair of the IRB

Date: March 15, 2017

Re: Approval of study

This is to inform you that I reviewed your research proposal entitled "Examining Online L2 Peer Feedback on Writing via Edmodo" and determined that it required consultation with the IRB under the "expedited" heading. The proposal used appropriate procedures to minimize risks to human subjects and that adequate provision was made for confidentiality and data anonymity of participants in any published record. I believe you will also make adequate provision for obtaining informed consent of the participants.

This approval letter was issued under the assumption that you have not started data collection for your research project. Any data collected before receiving this letter could not be used since this is a violation of the IRB policy.

Please note that IRB approval does not automatically ensure approval by CAPMAS, an Egyptian government agency responsible for approving some types of off-campus research. CAPMAS issues are handled at AUC by the office of the University Counsellor, Dr. Amr Salama. The IRB is not in a position to offer any opinion on CAPMAS issues, and takes no responsibility for obtaining CAPMAS approval.

This approval is valid for only one year. In case you have not finished data collection within a year, you need to apply for an extension.

Thank you and good luck.

Dr. Atta Gebril
IRB chair, The American University in Cairo
2046 HUSS Building
T: 02-26151919
Email: agebril@aucegypt.edu

APPENDIX C: WRITING PROMPT

-Following the guidelines in unit 5, p. 61, watch a film and then write a review on it in no more than 30 lines.

- Make sure not to tell the story of the film.

- Your review will be evaluated according to:

- Adequate idea development

- Organization

- Vocabulary choice

- Grammar

- Spelling and punctuation

APPENDIX D: PEER FEEDBACK GUIDANCE SHEET

Some of the questions on this sheet were adapted from berg (1999). The following questions will guide you through the peer feedback process. These questions are meant to help you start the feedback process. You should ask your own questions to provide a more helpful feedback to your partner:

The following questions will guide you through the peer feedback process. These questions are meant to help you start the feedback process. You should also ask your own questions to provide more helpful feedback to your partner:

1. *Introduction*: Does the writer give an introduction or mention directly the names of the film makers? If there is an introduction, does it grab the reader's attention? Does it set the tone of the essay?

2. *Thesis statement*: Does the *thesis statement* name the topic, show the writer's position or feelings on the film, and set out the main points of the review?

3. *Support*: Has the writer *supported all general statements with concrete details and examples*?

4. *Topic sentences*: Is each *topic sentence* followed by a series of other sentences that develop the main point through a combination of examples, description, details, or facts that directly relate to the topic sentence?

Each paragraph should focus on a specific topic.

5. *Unity/paragraph development*: Does each *body paragraph* have a topic sentence that clearly explain what the paragraph will discuss?

6. *Coherence*: Has the writer used *transition words and phrases* to facilitate a smooth and logical progression from one sentence or paragraph to the next?

7. *Content*: Is the essay *significant and meaningful*—a thoughtful, interesting, and informative presentation of relevant facts, opinions, or ideas?

8. *Conclusion*: Does the *conclusion* summarize and reaffirm the thesis? Does it leave the reader with a distinct sense of closure?

More detailed questions to help you focus your comments:

9. What are the elements of the film that the review includes? Does the writer review the plot, directing style, actors' performance, soundtrack, cinematography...etc?

10. What can you suggest for the writer to give more details about?

11. What kind of opinion has the writer provided on the elements of the film making?

12. Does the writer give general comments about the film elements such as "the soundtrack is suitable"? If this is the case, can you highlight this part for him/her and ask them to elaborate, use more specific adjectives to describe and provide example?

13. Read the essay carefully. Highlight everything that you don't understand in a comment to the writer.

14. What do you like the best about this essay?

15. Is any part of the review taken from another source without providing citation?

16. What comments do you have on the vocabulary choice, grammar, spelling and punctuation of the review?

- Are there any words which should not be used together?

- Are there any fragments (incomplete sentences)?

- Are there any run-on sentences (sentences not separated by full stops)?

***Try to write your comments in a helpful way and avoid offending your partner.

***Try to provide evidence to support your feedback. For example, you can post in a comment to your partner a link to a dictionary page or a grammar website. You can also refer to a page in the book we study or an example your instructor provided.

***Discuss your partner's comments and ask for any clarification if there is anything in the comments that you do not understand.

APPENDIX E: POSITIVE COMMENTS PRODUCED BY EACH PARTICIPANT

Student writer	Idea development	Organization	Vocab and style	Structure	Mechanics
S1	3	1	0	1	1
S2	5	0	0	0	0
S3	4	3	0	0	0
S4	1	2	0	0	1
S5	3	0	1	1	0
S6	1	0	0	0	0
S7	2	0	0	1	0
S8	2	1	0	0	0
S9	0	0	0	0	0
S10	3	0	0	0	0
S11	0	0	0	0	0
S12	0	0	0	0	0
S13	5	0	0	0	0
S14	2	1	0	0	0
S15	0	0	0	0	0
S16	0	0	0	0	0
S17	3	2	0	0	0
S18	0	10	0	1	0
S19	1	1	0	0	0
S20	6	0	0	1	0
S21	8	0	0	0	0
S22	2	0	0	0	0
S23	4	3	0	0	0
S24	1	0	0	0	0
S25	7	1	0	0	0
S26	2	0	1	3	0
S27	0	0	0	0	0
S28	4	2	0	0	0
S29	2	0	0	0	0
S30	3	2	0	0	0
S31	2	0	0	1	0
S32	0	0	0	0	0

S33	0	0	0	0	0
S34	0	0	0	0	0
S35	0	0	0	0	0
S36	2	2	0	0	0
S37	0	0	0	0	0
S38	4	0	0	0	0
S39	0	0	0	0	0
S40	2	0	0	0	0
S41	0	0	0	0	0
S42	2	0	0	0	0
S43	0	0	0	0	0
S44	2	0	0	0	0
S45	3	0	0	0	0
S46	0	0	0	0	0
S47	3	0	0	0	0
S48	1	0	0	0	0
S49	0	0	0	0	0
S50	6	0	0	0	0
S51	3	1	0	0	0
S52	3	1	0	0	0
S53	1	0	0	0	0
S54	2	0	0	0	0
S55	3	0	0	0	0
S56	0	0	0	0	0
S57	0	0	0	0	0
S58	2	0	0	0	0
S59	5	0	0	0	0
S60	6	0	0	0	0
S61	1	0	0	0	0
S62	2	0	0	0	0
S63	0	0	0	0	0
S64	5	1	0	0	0
S65	3	0	0	0	0
S66	4	0	0	0	0
S67	3	0	0	0	0
S68	0	0	0	0	0
S69	0	0	0	0	0
S70	3	1	0	0	0

S71	0	0	0	0	0
S72	0	0	0	0	0
S73	0	0	0	0	0
S74	1	0	0	0	0
S75	0	1	0	0	0
S76	1	0	0	0	0
S77	0	0	0	0	0

APPENDIX F: NEGATIVE COMMENTS PRODUCED BY EACH PARTICIPANT

Student writer	Idea development	Organization	Vocab and style	Structure	Mechanics
S1	4	1	2	0	0
S2	4	1	0	0	13
S3	6	0	1	4	0
S4	7	2	0	1	1
S5	3	0	0	1	3
S6	4	0	0	5	5
S7	5	0	0	0	0
S8	4	1	1	9	14
S9	8	1	0	0	0
S10	7	1	1	8	15
S11	3	0	0	0	0
S12	0	0	0	1	0
S13	3	0	2	0	0
S14	5	0	0	1	2
S15	10	5	4	20	6
S16	1	0	0	1	0
S17	4	1	0	1	0
S18	7	4	0	0	1
S19	2	0	1	0	0
S20	4	0	4	5	3
S21	5	0	1	0	0
S22	0	0	1	0	0
S23	1	1	0	0	0

S24	6	0	3	1	4
S25	2	0	0	1	0
S26	6	2	0	0	1
S27	0	0	0	0	2
S28	2	0	0	1	0
S29	2	0	0	0	0
S30	0	1	0	1	1
S31	4	2	1	1	0
S32	1	0	0	1	1
S33	1	1	0	0	2
S34	4	2	0	1	0
S35	2	0	0	5	0
S36	2	1	1	1	2
S37	1	0	2	7	2
S38	2	0	0	0	0
S39	0	0	1	0	1
S40	7	0	0	1	0
S41	2	0	0	5	3
S42	3	1	0	1	0
S43	0	0	0	3	0
S44	2	0	2	0	0
S45	3	1	1	0	0
S46	1	0	0	1	6
S47	2	0	1	2	1
S48	1	0	0	0	1
S49	1	1	1	1	0
S50	3	0	0	0	0

S51	1	1	0	1	1
S52	2	0	0	3	1
S53	3	0	0	2	1
S54	3	0	0	1	0
S55	1	0	0	1	0
S56	1	2	0	0	0
S57	2	0	0	0	0
S58	4	1	0	0	0
S59	1	0	0	1	0
S60	2	1	0	0	0
S61	4	0	0	0	0
S62	4	0	0	0	1
S63	0	0	2	1	0
S64	7	1	3	2	0
S65	3	0	1	0	1
S66	4	0	0	0	1
S67	1	0	1	0	0
S68	9	1	0	0	0
S69	3	1	1	0	2
S70	8	1	0	0	0
S71	2	1	2	0	0
S72	0	1	3	6	0
S73	3	0	1	0	0
S74	0	1	0	2	1
S75	10	0	1	1	3
S76	5	1	0	3	0
S77	2	0	0	1	2