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**PEER ASSESSMENT AND THE LINK BETWEEN FEEDBACK GIVEN AND
FEEDBACK USED**

MA thesis

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ABSTRACT

This MA thesis discusses peer feedback and the link between feedback given and feedback used. A growing number of teachers are using formative assessment and its elements in their lessons in Estonia. As it is a relatively new approach, neither students nor teachers feel very comfortable when practising it.

The aim of the present MA thesis is to determine the effectiveness of peer feedback in the EFL academic writing context. The thesis tries to answer the questions whether the feedback peers give to each other is useful, whether students use the feedback they get from their peers, and whether students find peer feedback useful.

The theoretical part of the thesis defines formative assessment, gives an overview of the term and concentrates on feedback and peer assessment as elements of formative assessment. The empirical part focuses on the research on peer assessment. In this chapter the description of the method, the results of the study with discussion are provided. The empirical part of the thesis is based on pieces of feedback by twelve Year 10 students to a personal statement written in an English lesson. Each personal statement got feedback from three peers. The results of the present study show that upper secondary school students are able to give useful feedback, peers are willing to use the feedback, and they see peer feedback as a way of learning and improving.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EFL – English as a Foreign Language

ESL - English as a Second Language

INTRODUCTION

Assessment is a cornerstone of the learning process. The Estonian National Curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools defines assessment as a systematic gathering of information about the student's development, analysis of such information and providing of feedback. Assessment is a basis for further planning of studies (National Curriculum 2014). Therefore, it carries information in it which either motivates learners or discourages them. As learning itself is a process with many components that influence it, one very important component of learning is students' intrinsic motivation to learn. Assessing in this context plays a very important role and has to be used wisely to be the guide in the learning process and motivate learners.

For years the most common way of assessing was summative assessment, which measures achievement and can be compared with criteria and a standard (Taras 2009: 58), and is usually presented in the form of numbers. It is still used widely today (e. g. in national examinations). However, another type of assessment - formative assessment – is becoming increasingly more important. Both types of assessment require gathering relevant information about students' performance and progress, both can strengthen the productiveness of teaching and learning. Summative assessment evaluates a student's learning, comparing it against some standard. According to Garrison and Ehringhaus (2009), summative assessment is given periodically and it gives important information, but it can still help in evaluating only certain aspects of the learning process and, therefore, does not really help to make instructional adjustments during the learning process.

Boston (2002) claims that assessment becomes formative when information gathered in the learning process is used to meet students' needs. The Estonian school system has been making use of formative assessment for some years now. Since 2011, the Estonian National Curriculum emphasises formative assessment as part of the learning process. The main focus

of assessment is slowly changing. Formative assessment focuses on students' needs and everyone's desired learning outcomes. The National Curriculum for Upper Secondary School defines formative assessment as follows:

Formative assessment means assessment taking place during studies, in the course of which the student's knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and behaviour are analysed, feedback is provided on the student's previous results and shortcomings, the student is encouraged and guided in further studies and the future objectives and routes of studying are planned. Formative assessment focuses above all on comparing the student's development with his or her previous accomplishments. Feedback shall describe, at the right time and as precisely as possible, the student's strengths and shortcomings and shall include proposals for further activities that support the student's development (National Curriculum 2014).

Such an approach to assessment requires a different approach to the learning process: how to teach students in order to develop the skills mentioned more effectively and how to measure progress during the learning process.

The main difference between summative and formative assessment is the role of the learner. In the process of formative assessment students are more involved in the learning and assessing process, different methods are being used when learning. In the context of EFL classes, often both assessment types are used. Formative assessment elements like self- and peer assessment are more thoroughly and more frequently used in EFL classes in Estonian schools than for example ten years ago. As it is a relatively new approach, neither students nor teachers feel very comfortable when practising it.

Black and Wiliam (1998b, cited in Boston 2002) claims that assessment includes everything teachers and students do and gives them information according to which teaching and learning can be altered. The idea of assessment is to give feedback and plan for the next actions, ways for improvement and set new goals according to the development. Feedback in educational contexts is information provided to a learner to reduce the gap between current

performance and the designed goal (Sadler, 1989). Effective feedback does not address the errors only, it gives the learner advice on how to proceed to reach the goal that has been set.

Gibbs and Simpson (2005: 19, cited in Educational Development Unit 2020) name the purposes of feedback:

- correct errors;
- develop understanding through explanations;
- generate more learning by suggesting further specific study tasks;
- promote the development of generic skills by focusing on the evidence of use of skills rather than on the content;
- promote meta-cognition by encouraging students' reflection and awareness of learning process involved in the assignment;
- encourage students to continue studying.

Educational Development Unit (2020) highlights the importance of varied sources when defining feedback. Therefore, it can be said that feedback is a dialogue between a teacher and a student or between peers, in which case it is called peer feedback, and the feedback can be generated by students themselves through self assessment.

Topping (1998: 250, cited in Strijbos et al 2010) defines peer assessment as “an arrangement in which individuals consider the amount, level, value, worth, quality, or success of the products or outcomes of learning of peers of similar status”. Liu and Carless (2006) state that peer assessment and peer feedback are different because peer assessment is based on standards and grades are involved; peer feedback includes detailed comments without formal grades. Peer assessment and peer feedback both enable students to be actively involved in their own learning process, help them notice important aspects in the assessment process and, therefore, teach them better self-assessment skills and learning from others’

mistakes. While assessing peers, students' own skills are developed. As peer assessment and peer feedback have very many features in common, they are used as synonyms in this present study.

Altogether the process of using peers during the whole teaching and learning process, where students are given opportunities to learn from each other, can be called peer learning. Boud (2002) emphasises that "peer learning should be mutually beneficial and involve the sharing of knowledge, ideas and experience between the participants". In all the above mentioned cases, the student is the centre of attention during the learning process.

Most of the studies on the topic of peer assessment, some also discussed in the present thesis, concern higher education. However, it cannot be concluded that it is not an important issue among basic school or upper secondary school students and teachers. As the author of this thesis has been working with mostly basic school and upper secondary school learners, she is interested in seeing if the results of the previous studies show similarities or significant differences.

The aim of the present study was to determine the effectiveness of peer feedback in the EFL academic writing context. The thesis tries to answer the questions whether the feedback peers give to each other is useful, whether students use the feedback they get from their peers, and whether students find peer feedback useful.

The thesis consists of two chapters. Chapter 1 gives an overview of formative assessment and concentrates on feedback and peer feedback as elements of formative assessment, and the strengths and weaknesses of peer feedback. Chapter 2 focuses on the research on peer feedback. In this chapter the research questions, a description of the method, the results of the study with the discussion are provided.

1. Chapter One: FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT AND PEER FEEDBACK

Chapter 1 discusses the characteristics of formative assessment. It gives an overview of the term and concentrates on feedback and peer feedback as elements of formative assessment, and the strengths and weaknesses of peer feedback.

1.1 Nature and purposes of formative assessment

Formative assessment is oriented to students' needs and its goal is to help all students reach learning outcomes. According to the National Curriculum for Upper secondary Schools:

Students shall be involved in the process of assessing himself or herself, and his or her companions, in order to develop his or her own objectives, to analyse his or her learning and behaviour according to the objectives, and to increase motivation for learning (National Curriculum 2014).

Through helping all students reach the desired learning outcomes, formative assessment aims to improve education. In order to achieve this, formative assessment involves observations of the learning process, gathering information about the learners and providing feedback to them. Each of these aspects is briefly discussed next.

The first important aspect of formative assessment is improving education. Guskey (2003) discusses the idea that assessments can help improve education, but as long as we use them only as a means of ranking schools and students, we will miss their most powerful benefits. He believes that in order to use assessments to improve instruction and student learning, teachers need to change their approach to assessments in three important ways: make assessments useful for students, follow assessments with corrective instructions, give second chances to demonstrate success. Research experiments show that while students are given feedback using comments, students ignore the comments when marks are also given (Black et al 2004:13). This means formative assessment works the best when marks are not

given. Educational Development Unit (2020) emphasises that formative assessment is assessment for learning because it helps teachers monitor students and make changes in the learning process when necessary; at the same time it allows students to monitor themselves and through self assessment recognise their own strengths and weaknesses. Cartney (2010) states that today assessment does not only measure learning as an outcome but as an essential factor allowing learning to take place. The same author explains that, as different studies show, students usually focus on what they have to do to meet the assessment requirement, and this is what drives them to make an effort and learn, which highlights the relationship between assessment and learning. Therefore, we can talk about ‘assessment for learning’ not ‘assessment as measurement’ (Jawah et al 2004, cited in Cartney 2010: 551-564). It can be said that by using formative assessment students are trained to notice the process of learning, focus on the process and through that improve education and learning.

The second important aspect of formative assessment is observing the process of learning and gathering information about learners. The information can be used both by teachers to improve and plan their teaching and students to improve and plan their learning. That type of learning helps students to identify their strengths and weaknesses, and set new goals to improve. The Assessment Reform Group (2002) defines assessment for learning as a process of gathering information by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there. The same group emphasises that assessment for learning helps to identify where students are in their learning, and what they need to improve. At the same time, it helps teachers understand their students and plan more effectively. This observing helps teachers understand their students and find the best approach to each student individually. Garrison and Ehringhaus (2009) claim that formative assessment is a part of the instructional process and gives the information needed to adjust teaching and learning while they are happening. These adjustments help to reset

goals and make changes according to students' needs. They consider student involvement the most important part of formative assessment, arguing that this type of assessment is effective only when students are involved in the assessment process. This is what motivates students' learning the most. They believe giving descriptive feedback is one of the key components of engaging students in the assessment of their own learning. To be successful and reach the goals, students have to understand what is expected of them, what the goal is and how to get there. It is the teacher's responsibility to gather enough information about each student to be able to help them. The goal of formative assessment is to gain an understanding of what students know and what they do not know in order to make responsive changes in teaching and learning and techniques (Boston 2002). Even though the centre of learning and teaching is the student, teachers play an important role in the whole learning process. Formative assessment is based on information that teachers gather during the learning process. Teachers are responsible for observing, discussing and analysing their students' work to use the information to adapt learning and teaching in order to set new goals for the student. Boston (2002) claims that when teachers know their students' strengths and weaknesses during the learning process, they can use the information to adjust instruction. The author names re-teaching, alternative approaches, and giving more time for practising as activities that lead to student success.

The third important aspect of formative aspect is giving feedback. The types of feedback investigated most often are simple feedback types that give outcome-related information, and elaborated feedback types that provide additional information (Strijbos et al 2010). Strijbos, Narciss and Dunnebier (2010) group simple feedback components as follows: knowledge of performance, knowledge of result and knowledge of the correct response. According to them, elaborated feedback has some additional information in it:

knowledge of task constraints, knowledge about concept, knowledge about mistakes, knowledge of how to proceed, and knowledge of metacognition.

Black and William (1998, cited in Boston 2002) presents a list of recommendations to improve teaching, which includes formative elements and focuses on feedback: frequent short tests should be preferred to infrequent long ones; new things learnt should be tested within quite a short time; teachers should work with other teachers and sources to provide best quality tests. Brown (2005: 84) claims that feedback has to be at the heart of the learning process and should help students understand not only the mistakes they have made but also what they need to do to improve. Students also need to know what is good about their work to develop even further. Brown (2005: 85) emphasises: “Formative feedback has to be detailed, comprehensive, meaningful to the learner, fair, challenging and supportive”.

‘Good’, ‘effective’ and ‘useful feedback’ are sometimes used as synonyms in different studies. White (2007) uses both terms ‘effective’ and ‘useful’ in her study investigating effective feedback practices for pre-service teacher education students. Both words describe feedback which gives the receiver information about the gaps between their current performance and the desired outcome. Effective or useful feedback has to give the receiver an opportunity to fill that gap. Brookhart (2017: 2) describes good feedback using similar aspects: communicating clear targets to students and helping them set their next steps and goals. Havnes, Smith, Dysthe, Ludvigsen (2012) compare different studies of and approaches to how assessment information is gathered. They conclude that feedback is the main component in formative assessment and it is said to have the strongest impact on learning, being concentrated on the learner. Effective feedback helps students to understand what they have done well and what they have to do to improve.

Usually feedback comes from the teacher, but Boston (2002, citing Fontana and Fernandes, 1994; Fredricson and White, 1997) discusses two experimental research studies

which show that when students know more about the assessment criteria and learning process and are taught to reflect on their work, they improve quicker than those who do not. Boston (2002, citing McCurdy and Shapiro, 1992, Sawyer, Graham and Harris, 1992) highlights the fact that “students with learning disabilities who are taught to use self-monitoring strategies related to their understanding of reading and writing tasks also show performance gains.” As the number of students with learning disabilities grows, and there are low-achieving students who need extra care, it is crucial for our schools and teachers to realise that and use elements of formative assessment more.

Using formative assessment is an essential feature of modern teaching, giving students opportunities to try their best and providing teachers who can understand the importance of improving students’ learning experiences, and their own teaching practices (study.com 2020). The key character here is the teacher who decides how to involve students in the learning process so that they are able to set their goals and know their strengths and weaknesses.

Formative assessment provides students with feedback during the whole learning process and gives teachers information about how students are learning. Therefore, learning is more focused on the student and how they learn and can improve.

1.2 The essence of peer feedback

As formative assessment is becoming increasingly more central, self- and peer assessment are becoming usual parts of teaching and learning in our schools. There are three main ways in which peer feedback can benefit students’ learning: using peer feedback makes students take more responsibility for their learning, using peer feedback raises the quality of the final result and systematic training allows students learn from the process and that raises the quality of peer feedback.

Teachers have acknowledged the importance of students taking more responsibility for their learning and being able to reflect on their knowledge and skills. Teachers encourage students to use self-assessment to analyse their learning process, and peer assessment to gather information from their peers to improve their skills and peers' skills. Assessment methods like these have been implemented in the context of different school subjects including EFL classes. Rollinson (2005) discusses different reasons for teachers choosing to use peer feedback, for example in the ESL (English as a Second Language) writing class. The most important of the reasons is the fact that peer readers can provide useful feedback. He gives some examples from his study in 1998 where 80% of peers' comments as feedback were considered valid, and only 7% were possibly harmful. The same study clearly showed that peer writers revise effectively using their peers' feedback: 65% of comments were accepted either completely or partially. Other reasons Rollinson mentions are the more specific feedback that peers provide, and the effect peer assessment gives to the provider: reading texts written by others may make the reader a better writer.

Using peers in the process of giving feedback is widely used in different schools. The process can be organised differently: a group of students of the same age can provide feedback to each other or students of different ages can work together. All students are actively involved in the learning process and have a chance to help and to get help. Every helper can become the one who needs help. Topping (2005: 643) stresses that students who need help in one subject may be helpers in another subject. That teaches students considerably more than just the subject or the topic. Students do not only learn about the mistakes they make on a certain topic this way, but "they also learn transferable skills in helping, cooperation, listening and communication" (Topping 2005: 643). Topping (2005: 631) explains that the archaic approach of peer learning saw a peer helper as a teacher's helper who was normally a "good student" and, therefore, may not have gained himself or

herself from the process of teaching lower-level students. Today it is quite sure that using peer feedback and assessment is a “learning by teaching” experience that is challenging for both students and teachers. Sluijsmans et al (2001, cited in Liu and Carless 2006) note that peer feedback should be used more than peer assessment because students should be involved in the assessment process not only for assessing and then comparing the scores with those of the teacher, but it should be a part of the learning process every day while learning. This way the stress level of assessing others, which can be one negative aspect of peer assessment, is lower and learners’ motivation might be higher.

The second aspect several studies have shown that peer feedback results in the higher quality of the final product. A group of undergraduate teacher education students participated in the study by Li, Liu, Steckelberg (2010) where they got peer feedback from two of their peers to the first drafts of their project. After that they could revise their project based on the peer feedback they had received. The study tried to find the answer to the question whether the quality of the students’ final projects can be predicted by the quality of the peer feedback students provide. The results of the study show that actively used peer assessment improves learning, students ensure that reviewing peers’ work eases their own learning, and the results also support the fact that the more constructive feedback students give, the better they complete the task. The same study had another research question: whether the quality of students’ final projects can be predicted by the quality of the peer feedback students receive. Here the results differ from our common-sense belief that the better the quality of the feedback, the better the quality of the performance. This particular study did not find a direct link between the peer feedback students received and the better quality of their final project. The authors give two possible explanations for it: As the students were aware of the possibility that the peer feedback may vary in quality, they were advised to look for additional information and go back to study the content area to find the right answer if they

had conflicting pieces of feedback. The other reason could be that, as all the students both gave and received feedback, they were able to improve their own draft even if the feedback was poor. In conclusion, the authors claim that understanding the content and marking criteria, which both contribute to performance, helps students to be more effective in assessing.

The third important aspect that defines peer feedback is training. In order to develop the skill of giving feedback it needs to be practised. That is why systematic training is essential in giving feedback. In their article Carless and Boud (2018) call it feedback literacy and emphasise the importance of not only improving student learning outcomes through feedback but also being a core capability for any work in the future and lifelong learning. Lam (2010) describes the essential need for systematic training of peer feedback in EFL writing classes. Practice is the way to overcome the potential risks of low reliability; for example, students become more competent in analysing their own mistakes and peer assessments to improve their next performance.

Giving students opportunities to be involved in the learning and assessing process is essential. This way students can take more responsibility for their learning and are able to analyse their work and improve their knowledge and skills not only in a particular subject but also notice their own mistakes by giving feedback to peers. The keyword here is systematic training. Being able to give effective feedback which is useful to the receiver takes time and practice.

Why use peer feedback

Formative assessment needs active students who are involved through the whole process of learning, planning and assessing included. The main reasons why peer feedback should be used are being involved in the learning process and setting of the criteria, getting

better results compared to drafts before peer feedback and feedback provider also benefiting from the process.

Garrison and Ehringhaus (2009) consider self and peer assessment tools which help to create a learning community in the classroom, where students are involved in their learning. The authors believe that students who have been involved in criteria and goal setting are capable of self and peer assessment, and can see each other as resources for understanding and checking for quality.

The study results in Taiwan (Liu and Eric 2013) investigating the influence of peer feedback demonstrated that students value the feedback from their peers; it made them use the feedback, adopt it to generate new ideas and they improved their work using the feedback. It shows that students appreciate peer feedback and use the feedback given to learn from it and to improve their work.

Reese-Durham (2003) carried out a survey to find out to what extent peer feedback is meaningful and effective, what the peer-evaluators learn from assessing a peer's paper and if it leads to a better quality of the paper that was assessed. The results showed that the quality of the final paper was higher because the students used the peer's feedback to improve their paper. Reese-Durham had also noticed that giving feedback with red ink damages students' self-esteem but using peer-assessment gives a good opportunity to make the evaluation process part of the learning process and keep students more involved and feeling confident. All students admitted that they intended to use the feedback that was given to their paper and that they felt that such an activity helped them notice their own mistakes and become better researchers. The participants also mentioned that the process of peer assessment helped them better understand other learners and the fact that they are all in this process together and can help each other. This is something that teaches students to be more self-confident. Liu and Carless (2006) believe that peer assessment has a much greater

impact on students' learning: "Students can learn not only from the peer feedback itself, but through meta-processes such as reflecting on and justifying what they have done" (Liu and Carless 2006). Teachers should use peer assessment more in their classes to provide a wider range of feedback and error-correction possibilities. According to Gunji's (2009) study on a writing course, self- and peer feedback were more effective and produced more improvement than feedback by teachers. One of the reasons was the discussion after the feedback, which among peers focused more on meaning than on form. Teachers should not underestimate students' skills and willingness to improve themselves and their peers.

Teachers have to understand what the key elements of learning are, how they can be contributed to and how they work on students. When using formative peer assessment, students' judgements usually include comments which are supposed to support the learning process by providing feedback against the criteria, highlight the strengths and weaknesses and, possibly, give tips for improvement (Falchikov 1996, cited in Gielen et al 2010). While giving feedback, the assessor also benefits from the process: the assessor sees other examples and approaches, gets a better understanding of the criteria and standards (Topping 1998, cited in Gielen et al 2010). While practising that type of formative feedback using peer assessment, it makes students notice their own mistakes more, think more broadly while expressing themselves and be more aware of the criteria, because they have learnt from others' examples.

Some issues with peer feedback

Although using peer feedback has several benefits, there are some issues as well. The most often mentioned downsides according to the literature seem to be reliability and validity of peer feedback and the fact that students do not trust themselves when giving feedback.

While some studies show that peer assessment can be reliable, there is proof that it is considered a weakness in many cases. Liu and Carless (2013) declare that according to their study in Hong Kong, the main reason why peer assessment is not used by most of the teachers is because teachers have doubts and do not fully trust this form of assessment. The same article lists some reasons: teachers have concerns about reliability (students' knowledge, objectivity), collating marks is time-consuming, it may be stressful for the students to assess their peers. Only one teacher in this study noted that "peer assessment is about getting and giving feedback, not about giving grades". One aspect of reliability concerns may be that students do not take peer feedback seriously and find the easiest solutions while giving feedback. The study carried out in Taiwan (Liu and Eric 2013) concludes that students tend to give less feedback in the second peer feedback than in the first one. Even though the students could adjust their homework based on the feedback they got from their peers, they did not always obtain all of it. However, according to the study, the quality of the homework improved. The study results also showed that the students took specific feedback more seriously than scores, and were willing to improve their writing according to the peer feedback.

To assure trustworthiness of peer feedback, several pieces of feedback should be received. Cho, Schunn and Wilson (2006, cited in Peergrade 2016) claim that studies at the college level have shown that when students are guided by a clear rubric and held accountable for the quality of their peer feedback, their assessments of their peers' writing have strong reliability and validity. The same online platform encourages teachers to allow for at least three different pieces of peer feedback in order to offer a more objective view and have more reliable result. In contrary, Liu and Eric (2013) report that different studies have been carried out on reliability of peer assessment and refer to Falchikov and Goldfinch's study in 2000 when they conducted a meta-analysis of 48 quantitative peer

assessment studies comparing the marks from peers and teachers. The result showed that “students are generally able to make reliable judgements” (Liu and Eric 2013). A study by Cho et al (2006: 900) showed that not using peer assessment because of the lack of reliability and validity is not relevant. At least at universities and with appropriate tools provided to help the peers give feedback, the feedback is relevant and valid. Another study, (Luo et al 2014) also found that the students in the study gave consistent scores to performances, and the feedback of peers and teachers was quite similar, which supports the opinion that peer feedback can be reliable and valid.

The other reason why peer feedback may be an issue is students not being very confident about the feedback they have to give. Cartney (2010: 551-564) claims that there is a gap between feedback given and feedback used by students. The reason may be because that students cannot take action and are not able to see how the suggestions can improve their work (Higgins et al, 2002, McCune and Hounsell, 2005, cited in Cartney 2010: 551-564). Cartney states that it is crucial to involve students in the assessment process so that they are familiar with the standards and criteria. The same author introduces a study among university students, where students had to assess each other’s essays using a marking scale, and one of the goals was to encourage students to get to know the assessment criteria and standards more. She claims to have achieved the goal because of the students’ comments:

“I could not have done it without the marking sheet. Because I knew my essay would be marked against those criteria, it made me think about my own work as well.” and “When you use the marking sheet you think my God tutors have to do all of this so you need to make it easy. It was almost like stepping out and looking down – having an insight into a different world. A sneak preview into how you are going to get better marks.”

This shows that students need to be aware of the criteria of assessment, but also that it actually helps them learn from it and use the knowledge in their future learning.

Peer assessment should not be considered as an alternative to teachers' assessment. Instead, it should be considered as "a supplementary assessment method for involving and empowering students" Peng (2010: 90). Using it as an additional method is why peer assessment is preferably advised to be used as a formative assessment tool, not a summative one.

Many studies can be found on peer assessment with a focus on students' thoughts on and opinions of it, the benefits and weaknesses of peer assessment. However, there are much fewer studies about the effects it has on students and whether they are influenced by it or not.

It can be concluded that several elements help to make peer feedback more useful to students, and knowing them gives teachers more opportunities to make the process of assessment more natural and outcomes more efficient. According to Norcini (2003) there are five steps to implement a process for peer assessment: the purpose of the assessment should be clearly stated; assessment criteria must be developed and introduced to the participants; training should be provided; the result of the assessment should be monitored through the process to check its reliability and validity; feedback should be provided to the participants to help them know how they have done. Following these steps helps to ensure the validity of peer assessment and teaches students how to be better at giving feedback and how to gain from feedback they receive.

2. Chapter Two: A STUDY OF PEER FEEDBACK AND ITS EFFECTIVENESS

The second chapter focuses on the research on peer assessment conducted in the outlook of the present thesis. In the following section the research questions, a description of the method as well as the results of the study with the discussion are provided.

2.1 The aim of the study and the research questions

The aim of the present study was to determine the effectiveness of peer feedback in the EFL academic writing context. The thesis is aimed at answering the following research questions:

1. Is the feedback that peers give to each other useful?
2. Do students use the feedback they get from their peers?
3. Do students find peer feedback useful?

2.2 Procedure

The sample consisted of one group of Year 10 English students who had been assigned to the advanced group at the beginning of the year. This group was chosen because their teacher has practised peer assessment before and the students already have some experience in it. The usual procedure was followed in the lessons. The only change which was made was the agreement on providing three pieces of feedback to each student. All students were under 18 years of age, so their parents signed permission slips beforehand to allow them to participate in the study (Appendix 1). Twelve out of thirteen students took part; one student was excluded from the beginning due to health issues. In this present study anonymous Student 1, Student 2 etc. are used.

The students were given the task of writing a personal statement to apply to a high school abroad. This was done as part of their regular English studies within the “Education”

topic. Before writing, students were shown videos about four different types of schools all over the world. Their similarities and differences were discussed in class.

The task asked students to choose one of the schools (or another one if they so wished) and write a personal statement to apply to the school. They were informed that their texts would be part of the study, and that their participation would remain anonymous. No grades were given for the study portion of the assignment. All statements were written using Google Docs.

From the start, the students had access to the marking scale that they later used to give peer feedback (Appendix 2), and a slideshow compiled by their teacher. The marking scale was also formed by their teacher who has been using it before. For the present study, some slight changes were made in the marking scale. Giving points was replaced with options tick (✓) if the aspect was in the personal statement to be found, and zero (0) if something was missing or wrong. That was done to encourage students using more comments when giving and receiving feedback and not concentrating on the points. The slideshow included the videos of the different schools and the requirements of the task. It also included some advice. This information was also included in the assessment scale.

In the first stage, students were given time to write the first draft of the personal statement. This took place from the 25th of November to the 2nd of December 2019. Within this time, students had three times 45 minutes to write the draft in the computer lab. They were instructed to look at the requirements and assessment scale. The teacher avoided giving feedback during this time even during the lessons and did not read or comment on the papers. Students got feedback from the teacher only after the study portion of writing the statement was complete.

The students who were absent were asked to complete the draft on their own. After the first week, all students had a draft or at least half a draft.

After the first deadline, the teacher assigned a simple code to all students, made copies of the students' personal statements on Google Docs and removed all names and identifying markers (such as playing very specific musical instruments that might make a student immediately recognisable).

The students proceeded with the peer assessment phase in the lessons during the second week. The students were assigned three peers to assess. This was done randomly. They were directed, but not explicitly forced, to fill in all parts of the assessment scales. They were expected to tick the aspects which were possible to be found in the personal statements, and also comment on them: what exactly was right or missing, when the "0" was used.

After all the feedback had been submitted, the teacher again made copies of the feedback and assigned the appropriate codes to match them with the correct statements.

In the final phase, the students were asked to complete their personal statement using the peer feedback they got. Again, they were directed to do this, and all students at least opened the files (observation from the lesson), but they were not forced to do anything specific with them. Students completed their personal statements from the 5th to the 11th of December 2019. During this time, they were allowed around 100 minutes of computer lab time to do so. Some students finished their work at home.

All students submitted a finished personal statement by the deadline on December 11th 2019 and could thus be included in the study.

The teacher made copies of the final versions of the statements, assigned codes, removed identifying details and sent all collected materials to the author of the study. They were as follows:

- first draft
- peer feedback 1

- peer feedback 2
- peer feedback 3
- final draft

In the next lesson, the students completed the online questionnaire sent by the author (Appendix 3). The questionnaire was anonymous and had fifteen questions about the roles and prior experience with getting and giving feedback. The aim of the questionnaire was to find out whether students find peer feedback useful or not.

This concluded the study for the students. They were then given feedback by their teacher and more time to improve their work before the final assessment. These activities were not part of the study.

To get the results, first all the drafts were read by the author of the present study and assessed using the marking scale. Then all three pieces of feedback and the final version of the personal statement were read and all the mistakes and shortcomings were systemised and inserted into an Excel table. This made it possible to answer the questions whether students give useful feedback or not and whether they use the feedback they received. The Excel table created contained information about all the aspects in the marking scale that are listed below.

The marking scale included four criteria: formatting, language, basic content and advanced content. For each of them, specific aspects students had to bear in mind both when writing and when providing peer feedback were listed. Some summarising charts were made using Excel to present the results of the questionnaire and get the answer to the research question whether the students find peer feedback useful.

2.3 Results

All in all 36 pieces of feedback were gathered. All of them gave feedback, “tick” or “0” was used. Most of the pieces of feedback had comments. Aspects were less commented in formatting section because there were less mistakes. In the language part there were

fourteen pieces of feedback which did not have any comments. The results of the study are presented following the order of the research questions. The three aspects the students were asked to comment on – content, language, formatting – are discussed separately.

2.3.1 Usefulness of the feedback

The first question of the study was whether the feedback that peers give to each other is useful.

Content

The content part of the scale was difficult to assess without concentrating on the text and checking the marking scale while giving feedback. However, the feedback given was quite satisfying. The students who gave feedback were good at noticing the proper beginning and ending, they drew attention to missing parts like interest, achievement and future goals. Many pieces of feedback not only used tick and zero, but commented on the mistake to help the author of the personal statement find the mistake more quickly or inspire them with praise. Comments like: “You could always make something more complex but I think it is quite fine already.”, “Great introduction!”, “I like your opening paragraph.”, “Keep up the work, you are doing great already!” give the writer more confidence to continue.

Five pieces of misleading feedback were identified while analysing the data. One piece of feedback claimed that there was no specific school mentioned in the personal statement although it was clearly stated. As the other two peers did not mention that as a mistake, it did not affect the final version of the writing. Two pieces of feedback marked as if there was no information in the text about specific skills and interests. Reading the draft proved that it was in the text; therefore, it can be deduced that it was just not enough for the person who gave the feedback. The same type of reason may be deduced when two assessors out of three claimed that there was no background information in the text. It was probably

not enough for the assessor because the draft was very short and all the topics were not covered; however, the specific reason was not commented on.

This study highlights two important elements of giving feedback on the content. The first one is that the number of the reasons and explanations given the assessor considers well done may differ. It is important for the writer to be clear and explain things properly to make sure that the assessor gets the idea and enough information. The other thing that can be deduced from the data is that it is very difficult for the students to notice if the text is logically structured. They can quite easily comment on the proper beginning and ending, but they do not notice if the transitions are smooth and sentences are connected to each other, and if the paragraphs with different topics follow each other logically. Only four pieces of feedback out of 36 mentioned coherent narrative in their feedback to help the peer with forming a logically built coherent narrative. Here are some examples of assessors giving some suggestions:

You should use more complicated vocabulary so that it looks a whole. Make it a bit more compact: use less words but the same amount of information. Make it look like a letter not just answering the questions.

All in all, most of the drafts (ten out of twelve) got very useful feedback so that the three assessors had covered most of the mistakes and drew the writer's attention to them.

Language

The language part of the scale had many aspects to check and some mistakes were very easy to miss, because the assessor may not have had enough knowledge to find the mistake. The students giving feedback noticed the different tense forms, mostly because the part of the text was missing which needed present, past or future tense forms. They marked it as 0 or commented on it as in the following examples: "You have not written about your

childhood.” or “Write about your future goals and aspirations.” The assessors noticed quite well when there were shortened forms used or spell check not used, but there were only four comments out of 36 about using basic vocabulary. Commenting on using basic vocabulary should have been considerably higher, because half of the students used the words like *good*, *big*, *like* more than once in their personal statements. There were some examples of slang vocabulary (*kind of*, *way more*, *helped a ton*) and the assessors did not mention that in their feedback either. It may be because they are used to using the same type of wording, and they do not consider it being slang. One thing that indicates not knowing enough is the feedback about punctuation. There was only one comment on using commas: *You make very long sentences, use commas.* , but there were some cases where the feedback should have had a comment on commas. It seems that the students cannot remember the comma rules with such phrases as *for instance*, *for example*, *also*, *however*.

On the whole, the feedback from all assessors was about the same types of mistakes, or at least one of the three assessors had mentioned the mistake. That made it possible for the author of the personal statement to check the problem area and determine how it could be improved.

In the language part of the scale, there were eight pieces of feedback out of 36 that did not refer to any mistakes; the students ticked everything. All the personal statements actually had some mistakes in them, and the other two assessors had found at least two mistakes. This is the biggest gap between the feedbacks. There may be different reasons: assessors do not notice the mistakes because they do not concentrate, they just read the text and it seems fine; assessors do not notice the mistakes, because they do not know it is a mistake; assessors do not take giving feedback very seriously and just tick without commenting on anything.

There were fourteen pieces of feedback out of 36 that did not comment on anything in the language part. The assessor only used tick and 0 to point out the mistakes. Although none of the twelve drafts got perfect feedback from all the assessors, there were nine drafts that got very useful feedback that could improve their statement greatly if used.

Formatting

This part of the scale was probably the easiest to use to give feedback on, because formatting mistakes are the easiest to notice. Most of the students noticed the mistakes and missing elements and, therefore, gave useful feedback. Out of 36 pieces of feedback, only four were misleading. Two of them claimed that the line spacing was wrong when it actually was not, one marked the alignment being wrong, but it was right. One of the four pieces of feedback ticked everything, which means there is nothing wrong, but in that case the feedback should have mentioned the wrong line spacing. Luckily, two out of three pieces of feedback mentioned it and the author of the personal statement could correct the mistake. That highlights the importance of receiving feedback from at least three different sources.

In the formatting section, there was one personal statement that got two misleading pieces of feedback out of three claiming that the line spacing and alignment were wrong when they were not. That gave the author of the personal statement an opportunity to double-check and decide whether it needed some adjustments or not. In that case the author made the right decision.

Ten drafts out of twelve got useful feedback that helped the author of the personal statement make some corrections and improve their writing. Two drafts out of twelve did not need any improvements because they met the requirement from the start. In one of the cases, peers noticed it and ticked all aspects or added positive and praising comments. In the other case, one of the three pieces of feedback was correct ticking everything, one was

misleading pointing to the line spacing error which was not actually a mistake, and one piece of feedback out of three suggested using indentation. As the draft was originally written using block style paragraphs, the author now took the advice and the final version of the personal statement was written using both styles. This example shows how suggestions should not be thought of as mistakes and with both correcting the mistakes and taking advice from suggestions, one has to understand what is actually wrong and how it can be corrected.

Strengths and weaknesses

The marking scale (Appendix 2) also asked about the most significant strengths and weaknesses of the personal statement. Most of the students (26 pieces of feedback out of 36) concluded their thoughts on the personal statement there after giving feedback. They were honest and thoughtful, briefly summarising the most significant strengths and weaknesses. Even though many of the pieces of feedback were short: “Unfinished.” or “Too long.” or “You have a few grammar mistakes.” or “Your paragraphs are not the same length.” or “You should show more that you are actually very interested in that school.”, they were accurate and helped the author of the draft understand the strengths and weaknesses of the writing and make some improvements in the final version.

At the same time, some pieces of feedback were very compact and thorough commenting on every part of the scale. Here are three examples of feedback from different assessors. Each example is feedback to one draft:

1. The paragraph sizes are hugely different; You have not named your goals and how that school is going to help you achieve them; You should talk more about your goals, achievements and why the school should accept you.
2. It is very nicely written. You really emphasise that you would just love to go there to study; You have talked about yourself, why you fit to that school. It shows that you have done research; The sentences are connected, the text feels like a whole.

3. Your most significant strength is talking about yourself and your background. It leaves a very positive and good impression of you; Your opening and ending paragraphs talk about your qualities; Your personal statement is very well written, it has no grammar mistakes, is logical and also talks about your future.

These motivating comments show good analytical skills used to inform their peers about their draft, help them analyse their draft and make some improvements for the final version of the personal statement.

The study results and the analysis show that students give useful feedback to their peers. In the formatting part, ten students out of twelve got useful feedback so that three pieces of feedback covered all the mistakes. Seven out of possible 36 pieces of feedback were perfect, which means every feedback covered all the mistakes. Four pieces of feedback out of 36 were misleading; therefore, it is important to have feedback from more than one student to be sure. It gave the author of the draft the opportunity to double check and decide.

In the language part the different aspects were not equally easy to notice. The students noticed quite easily if there were shortened forms used or spell check not used, but there were only four comments about using basic vocabulary. The pieces of feedback themselves were quite reliable noticing the same type of mistakes, so the author could trust the feedback and improve according to it.

To conclude the topic usefulness of the feedback, the following table (Table 1) gives a detailed picture of useful feedback all together.

Table 1. Number of useful and misleading pieces of feedback out of all possible 36.

	Number of useful pieces of feedback	Number of misleading pieces of feedback
Formatting	32	6
Language	28	8
Content	31	5

As Table 1 shows, there were 36 pieces of feedback all together and most of them can be considered useful because the pieces of feedback had mentioned at least some of the mistakes or places to improve. The formatting part had 32, language part 28, and content part 31 useful pieces of feedback to help the peers make some improvements in their draft. Six pieces of feedback out of 36 were misleading about formatting. The same numbers about language and content were eight and five. It is important to note that feedback was considered misleading also when the assessor had used ticks giving the author of the draft information that everything is correct although there should have been comments about mistakes.

Interestingly, the majority of the students highlighted both strengths and weaknesses equally. 28 pieces of feedback out of 36 commented on the strengths of the draft and also on the weaknesses. It shows that the students have understood the importance of additional information, explanations and examples, which all help the author of the draft to understand better what exactly has been done well and what needs some improvements. Feedback is effective only when it is understood and usable. The assessors also show that they are aware of the importance of balance: writing about weaknesses, always finding something good to motivate the writer. Those are the signs of an experienced assessor who knows the main rules and whose feedback is reliable.

2.3.2 The feedback used by the students

The second question of the study was related to whether the students use the feedback they get from their peers.

Content

Most of the feedback given in the content section was used to improve the draft, but all in all only three students used all the feedback that was written about the draft. According to the data, there were no students who did not use the feedback at all. However, Student 3 got quite useful feedback, but used only one aspect out of three to improve the draft. Only the feedback about academic results was used; feedback about personal achievements and future goals was not used. Student 6 only used two pieces of advice out of four. He or she stated the school and added the personal achievements, but still did not have a proper conclusion and did not convince the reader that enough research about the school had been done. Also Student 5 used the advice about his or her personal contribution to the school, but did not work enough on the comment on coherent narrative. That is especially unfortunate because very few pieces (four out of a possible 36) of feedback noticed that aspect and commented on the coherence of the narrative.

The draft of Student 2 met the requirements from the start and they did not need any improvement. Student 7 got very positive feedback (two out of three ticked all the aspects) but one piece of the feedback suggested more thorough background discussion and claimed that there were no examples of skills and interests, which was a somewhat misleading, because there were examples. It is possible that the assessor wanted to say there should be more. Due to all that, Student 7 may have decided not to use the feedback at all.

The remaining five students used most of the feedback they got. Some of them were students who had had a very short draft and, therefore, had a lot of accurate and useful

feedback to use and improve their writing. It is difficult to emphasise any aspects. In some cases it can be said that the most difficult aspect to improve was the coherence of the narrative. Some students tried to improve it, some did not. The analysis of the data shows that it is not an easy aspect for a peer assessor to recognise as a mistake, and it is apparently difficult to improve.

Language

Most of the feedback given in the language section was used by the authors of the drafts to improve it. All in all, five students used all the feedback that was given. That is more than in the formatting and content parts. At the same time, as explained earlier, in the language part, many mistakes were not noticed by the assessors. This means that the drafts did not have as many mistakes to correct as in the content part, for example.

According to the data there was one student (Student 1) who did not use any of the feedback provided. Two pieces of feedback out of three suggested Student 1 use the past tense form and write about his or her childhood and also use more advanced vocabulary, but none of the aspects were improved in the final version of the personal statement.

In the formatting and content parts there were some drafts that were considered perfect by the assessors. In the language part, however, all the drafts needed some improvements. Even though eight out of 36 pieces of feedback used only ticks and claimed the drafts to be without any mistakes, there was always at least one piece of feedback which pointed at a mistake. Five out of these eight drafts were actually quite good and were close to being perfect, so the feedback was quite accurate and it was used by the author of the draft. Six out of 12 drafts were improved so that most of the mistakes pointed out in the feedback were corrected. It cannot be pointed out which type of mistakes were mostly not corrected. Even the easiest mistakes to correct were in some cases still there, for example,

using a spell check or capitalised I. Student 4, for instance, not only had a 0 marked on the marking scale, but had a comment on not being polite enough. It may be that he or she tried to correct it, but did not really succeed.

According to the analysis of the data, in more complicated aspects, for example, using basic vocabulary or using proper punctuation, additional comments are necessary. It helps the author of the draft find his or her mistake more quickly, understand it better and, thus, correct it.

Formatting

Most of the feedback in the formatting section was used to improve the draft, but only four students used all the feedback they were given. Two out of twelve students did not use the feedback at all, although they should have done it because there were mistakes that needed to be corrected (Student 4), or did not use most of it (Student 7). This might be explained with the fact that Student 4 had one piece of feedback with all ticks saying that everything is fine with the draft. The other two pieces of feedback both had one misleading element in them, claiming that there was a mistake in alignment and spacing, but actually there was no mistake in these areas. The same feedback said that the draft needed clearer paragraphing, which was a mistake, but the author did not take the advice into account. It may have been a matter of trust and he/she just ignored the feedback, thinking the assessors may be mistaken again. Student 7 corrected the font according to the feedback by one assessor, but ignored the feedback about clear paragraphs and alignment. In that case the feedback was accurate and useful, but was not used by the author to improve the draft.

Two of the twelve drafts met the formatting requirements from the start and they did not need any improvement. One of the drafts got appropriate feedback with all ticks and comments that the draft had been written well. One of the drafts out of these two got positive

feedback with a suggestion to use indentation. That confused the author of the draft and his/her final version of the writing had a mixed paragraphing with both block style and indentation. In that case it can be said that taking the advice was harmful, but it was the only mistake in the draft, and the author got the feedback which confirmed it.

The remaining four students used most of the feedback that was provided. The feedback was mostly about the alignment, the number of words and spacing. One aspect of feedback that was not used the most often (three out of four students) was about clear paragraphs or using both styles of paragraphing.

The study results and the analysis clearly show that students use the feedback they get from their peers. In the formatting part, eight students out of twelve used all the feedback or most of it to improve their draft. Another two of the drafts did not need any improvements from the start. The final two students did not use the feedback provided, or if they did, it is not evident in their work. In the language part, eleven students out of twelve used all or most of the feedback to enhance the draft. One student used none of the feedback. In the content part eight students out of twelve used the opportunity to correct the mistakes of the draft. They used all or most of the feedback provided. One of the drafts was already without mistakes, and three students corrected none or fewer than half of their mistakes to improve their personal statement.

2.3.3 The questionnaire – the roles and prior experience with getting and giving feedback

The third question the study tried to find an answer to was whether the students find peer feedback useful.

Former experience with feedback

Most of the twelve students had had some experience before with giving or receiving feedback. The numbers which demonstrate the previous experiences with feedback are provided in Figure 1.

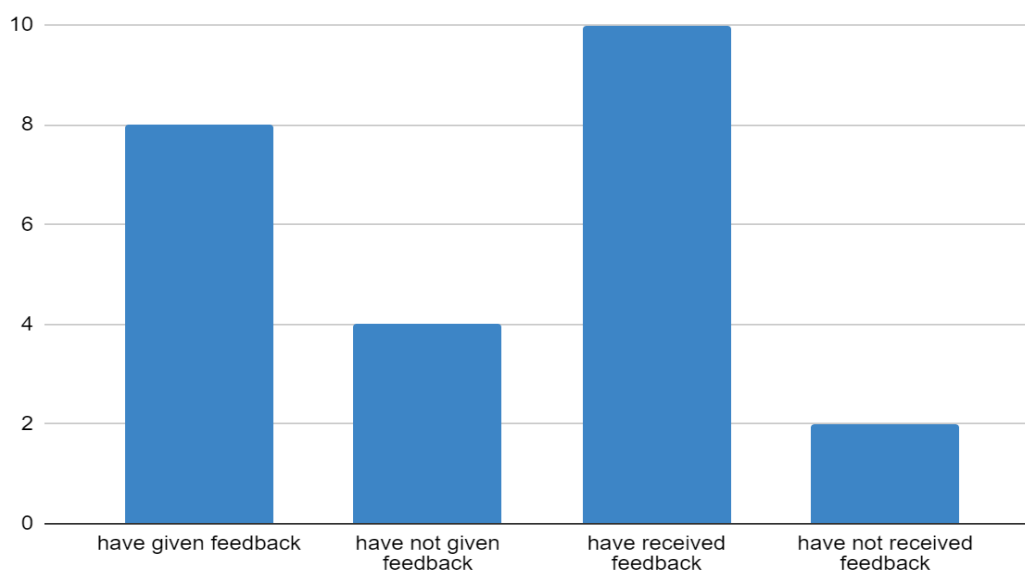


Figure 1. Former experience with peer feedback.

The results of the questionnaire show that eight out of twelve students had given feedback before. Most of them had done it in an English lesson, but giving feedback to essays in Estonian was mentioned by five students. Four students had never given feedback to their peers before; one of them did not remember having done it before. Two students out of twelve had never received feedback from their peers. The other ten named different activities in a group, reading and giving feedback to essays and speeches in English and Estonian lessons. Chemistry, biology, mathematics and history lessons were all mentioned once. It probably depends on the student and how they recognise peer feedback. Two students explained how they see peer feedback: “When I let my friend read my essay and listen to the

comments after that, I can correct my mistakes according to the comments and improve my essay that way”. It may be that not all students see such an activity as peer feedback.

According to the results of the questionnaire, most students see the benefit of peer feedback in getting information about their mistakes:

Then I know how others see my work. I learn about my mistakes and can correct them to get better results.

Peer feedback makes you notice what you can and also what you cannot do yet.

One student wrote that getting feedback from peers had not helped him or her; one student could not decide if it had helped.

Students also consider giving feedback to their peers beneficial to themselves as exemplified by the following statements:

Giving feedback to others helps me find my own strengths and weaknesses in that text.

Giving feedback to others helps me analyse myself better.

Correcting others makes me notice similar mistakes in my own writing.

I feel good about myself after giving feedback.

Two of the students wrote that giving feedback to peers has not really given anything to them.

According to the present study both feedback from teachers and peers is appreciated by students.

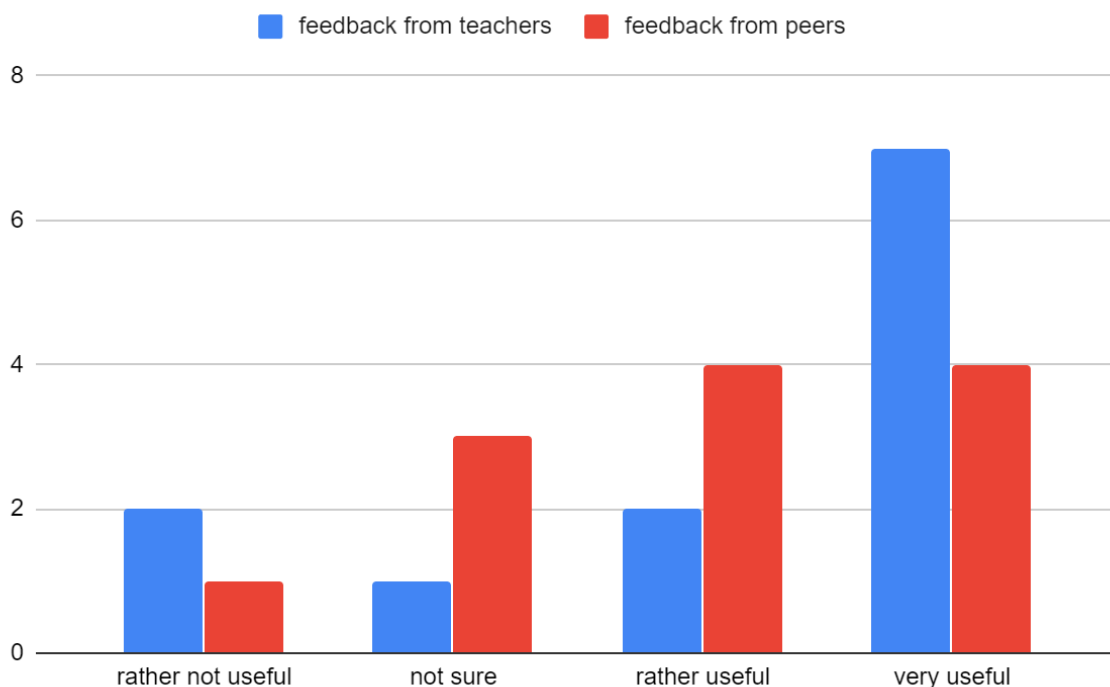


Figure 2. Usefulness of feedback from teachers and from peers.

As can be seen in Figure 2, feedback from teachers and from peers are both rated mostly very useful or rather useful. The chart shows that seven students out of twelve think teachers' feedback is very useful; the same number for peer feedback is four. All in all, eight students out of twelve consider peer feedback very useful or rather useful. None of the twelve students thinks feedback given by the teacher or by peers is not useful at all. Therefore, it can be said that both teacher and peer feedback is appreciated.

Personal statement - getting feedback

When asked about getting feedback while writing the personal statement, most of the students answered that peer feedback helped them during the writing process. On a scale where 5 is very useful and 1 is not useful at all, five students out of twelve marked 4, and four students marked 5. Therefore nine students out of twelve (75%) felt that peer feedback had helped them improve their draft to write a better personal statement. See also Figure 3.

As the marking scale which helped the students to give feedback asked them to assess the draft concentrating on three parts (formatting, language, content), the author of the thesis wanted to know what type of mistakes were most often pointed out. All three parts of the marking scale were mentioned when deciding what types of mistakes were drawn attention to by the peers the most. As the respondents could choose more than one and add options, the results show that mistakes about content were the ones mentioned most frequently. Six students received advice on content, five students got comments about language, and four students about formatting. Mistakes in spelling and vocabulary were mentioned once.

The most useful feedback that helped the student make improvements in the draft was about using more complex vocabulary. In this question students could choose more than one answer. Ten students claimed that peer feedback made them use more complicated vocabulary, seven of the students admitted that peer feedback made them make changes in the content, five of the students wrote that peer feedback helped them pay more attention to the structure of the text and four on the formatting rules. One student admitted that the author of the draft did not use the feedback and one answer claimed that he or she did not agree with everything in the feedback.

Personal statement - giving feedback

The responses to the questionnaire show that students understand that it is not only getting feedback that teaches them something, but that giving feedback teaches as well. The following quotes illustrate this point

Others' personal letters were interesting to read. It motivated me using more complex vocabulary. Giving feedback made me notice my formatting mistakes and order the paragraphs logically.

It taught me how to give useful feedback, add comments with explanations and examples. Also how to be fair while giving feedback.

Three students out of twelve claimed that giving feedback to the personal statements did not teach them anything or they could not see the benefit.

The most difficult aspects of giving feedback that students mentioned are illustrated by the following quotes:

Giving feedback about the content was the most difficult.

It was not easy to give suggestions how a peer should continue to improve the draft.

I am worried I do not notice the mistakes.

Checking the punctuation.

These four reasons were all mentioned twice. Some other reasons were named: “Deciding on the complexity of the vocabulary was difficult because I feel like my own vocabulary is good enough.”

One student mentioned the word ‘*guilt*’ that he or she feels while listing the mistakes. However, he or she understands that it is all for a good cause. One student wrote that there was nothing that made the process difficult.

Using more complex vocabulary is the most frequently named (five students out of twelve) type of mistake that students noticed in the peers’ work and tried to avoid in their own writing after that. Some other things that they noticed were *capitalising I*, *connecting sentences* and *reading the task more carefully*.

According to the questionnaire, the easiest thing to give feedback about was formatting. Formatting was named by five students out of twelve. Some other things mentioned were: “The drafts were not very long.”, “The marking scale was a good help and told us what to do.”

The overall conclusion of the usefulness of feedback can be seen in Figure 3 which shows how useful students think giving feedback and getting peer feedback was to them during the process of writing the personal statement.



Figure 3. The usefulness of giving peer feedback and getting peer feedback.

On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 5 is *peer feedback was very useful to me* and 1 is *peer feedback did not teach me anything*), the most popular choice about the usefulness of giving feedback to the personal statement is 4 (seven students). All the answers are between 2 and 5 for giving feedback. At the same time, getting feedback has higher scores. Nine students out of twelve felt that peer feedback they got from the peers had helped them improve their draft to write a better personal statement. The results show that students notice a larger effect on their writing when getting feedback. It is probable that noticing the positive effect that they gain from giving feedback takes time and systematic practice.

The outcomes of the study show that half of the students did not really like to be in the role of the assessor and give feedback. They provided different reasons:

I worry about giving wrong directions because I am not sure about the mistake.

I am afraid I do not notice the necessary things and I am useless.

I do not like it because people may take it personally and get offended.

I just do not find it interesting.

The same number of students liked being in this role because, as they put it:

I liked giving good feedback and motivating peers.

I liked it because it made me notice my own mistakes quicker.

Giving feedback is something I enjoy. I have helped my peers with that before, and I would like to become a teacher one day.

As the number of participants in this study was small, broad generalizations cannot be made, but it is interesting to see the different and understandable reasons students give to liking or not liking the role of the assessor. Again, using formative assessment, including peer feedback, practising and using it systematically, makes it more natural and in the future these students do not have to worry about the negative aspects they have mentioned in this study.

2.4 Discussion of the results

In this section the results of the present study are compared with the results of similar former studies which were introduced in the first part of the thesis.

Is the feedback that peers give to each other useful?

The present study, used 36 pieces of feedback all together and most of them can be considered useful because they mentioned at least some of the mistakes or places to improve. The most effective feedback was given in the formatting and content part. To be more precise, the formatting part had 32, language part 28, and content part 31 pieces of feedback that helped the peers make some improvements in their draft. Few pieces of feedback were misleading, not drawing attention to the mistakes or shortcomings. Rollinson (2005) emphasises the fact that peer readers can provide useful feedback. Some examples from his study in 1998 show the same tendency. In the results of his study, 80% of peers' comments as feedback were considered valid, and only 7% were misleading or not effective. There may

be different reasons why assessors give misleading feedback: they may not notice the mistakes because they do not focus enough. Liu and Eric (2013) carried out a study where the results indicated that the reason for inconsistency, and therefore misleading the assessee, is the fact that students are more likely to give less feedback in the second feedback than in the first one. That leads to a problem where not all the mistakes are noticed and the feedback may be misleading or not effective enough. However, the results of the same study showed that at the same time the quality of the feedback improved. There are studies (e.g. Liu and Carless 2013) that claim the reason for not using peer assessment in classes is that teachers are not sure if the peer assessment is reliable and valid enough. In contrast, several studies (e.g. Cho et al 2006, Luo et al 2014) show that peer feedback can be very consistent and very similar to teachers' feedback. It comes down to the matter of teachers trusting their students and their ability to improve through practice. In the present study, six pieces of feedback out of 36 were misleading about formatting, eight about language and five about content. It is important to note that feedback was considered misleading also when the assessor had used ticks giving the author of the draft information that everything is correct although there should have been comments about mistakes. As said earlier, it may be because not all students notice the mistakes that need correcting.

Do students use the feedback they get from their peers?

The results and the analysis of the present study clearly show that most of the students use the feedback they get from their peers. There were some drafts that did not need any improvement in some of the three parts: content, language, formatting, and the feedback showed the same. Most students used all or a majority of the feedback provided to improve their draft. However, in every part of the marking scale there were one or two students who did not use the provided feedback. Rollinson's (2005) study had similar results: 65% of

comments as feedback were accepted either completely or partially. It can be said that peer writers effectively use their peers' feedback. The possible fallback for feedback receivers could be the reason that the receiver cannot see the connection and is not able to understand the content of the comment as Cartney (2010) has suggested. According to Cartney, here lies the reason why it is essential to let students be a part of the whole learning and assessment process and familiarise them with standards and criteria. This increases the possibility of following feedback and becoming better at gaining from it. This means that more time should be spent on training to improve the quality and efficiency of peer feedback.

Do students find peer feedback useful?

The majority of the students participating in the present study have experienced peer feedback before. Ten out of twelve have received peer feedback and eight out of twelve have given peer feedback before. Most students see the benefit of peer feedback in getting information about their mistakes. They appreciate the possibility to learn about their mistakes they have made and also learn about themselves, what they can do and what they have to work on, through peer feedback. Students also consider giving feedback to their peers beneficial to themselves. It was said that giving feedback helps them analyse themselves better, find their strengths and weaknesses, and notice similar mistakes in their own work. Even though nine out of twelve students rated getting peer feedback rather useful or very useful, giving peer feedback was not that highly rated. None of them marked it as very useful (Figure 3). The results of the study by Li, Liu, Steckelberg (2010) show that actively used peer assessment improves learning; students ensure that reviewing peers' work eases their own learning, and the results also support the fact that the more constructive feedback students give the better they complete the task. Therefore, it can be expected that

the students in the present study will notice the effect on their own learning in time and while practising peer assessment.

As the results of the present study show that the majority of the students used the feedback their peers gave them, it is a sign of appreciating the peer feedback and the willingness of learning from it. A similar conclusion was reached in the studies of Liu and Eric (2013) and Nancy Reese-Durham (2003). Both studies claimed that the quality of the final paper was higher because the students used the peer's feedback to improve their paper. Students see their peers as teachers from whom they are ready to learn.

However, it can be suggested that students are still getting used to the whole process of being the assessor, because - as the responses to the post-study questionnaire showed - the teacher's feedback is still highly rated and some students appreciate it more than peers' feedback (Figure 2).

A sign that proves that more time and practice is needed to get used to the new role, being the assessor, is the fact that half of the students in the present study liked being in the role of the assessor and half did not like the role. They liked advising peers and motivating them, and found it beneficial, because assessing others makes them notice their own mistakes better. Those who did not enjoy the role of the assessor mentioned insecurity, because they are not sure if they find the mistakes or know how to really correct them. The reason here may be the lack of practice again. Lam (2010) explains that systematic training in EFL writing classes helps students become more competent in analysing their own mistakes and they are able to use peer assessment to improve their next performance. It is possible that this is how they grow more confident and start enjoying the whole process, being in different roles and setting their own goals.

The result of the study compared to previous studies mentioned in the present study are similar. Teachers should not be afraid of using peer feedback and should trust students

because the majority of them are capable of giving useful feedback. Furthermore, even though in every part of the marking scale there were one or two students who did not use the provided feedback, most students used all or the majority of the feedback provided to improve their draft. It seems that students are still getting used to the whole process of being the assessor, because - as the responses to the post-study questionnaire showed - the teacher's feedback is still highly rated and some students appreciate it more than peers' feedback. Also quite surprisingly half of the students did not like the role of the assessor and did not enjoy that part of the experience. All in all it can be said that the results of the present study show more similarities rather than significant differences when compared to previous studies.

CONCLUSION

Since the Estonian National Curriculum emphasises formative assessment as a part of the learning process and the topic of peer feedback has become a more important issue to discuss in Estonian schools, the present study concentrated on the topic of peer feedback and its efficiency on secondary school level.

According to different researchers (Rollinson 1998, Garrison and Ehringhaus 2009, Havnes et al 2012, Boston 2002) using peer assessment in classes, including EFL classes, has a number of benefits. For example, knowing more about the assessment criteria and learning process; motivating, and analysing their mistakes and their progress; reflecting on their peers and teaching them how to learn from their own and peers' mistakes.

On the contrary, some researchers (Liu and Caress 2013, Liu and Eric 2013) have noticed weaknesses in using peer assessment. For example, the matter of reliability because of students' knowledge and objectivity; peer assessment being time-consuming; the possibility of students not taking giving feedback very seriously. However, the studies which find weaknesses, almost always have beneficial elements as well. Therefore, peer assessment should be practised more to overcome the possible problems and turn them into benefits.

The aim of the present study was to determine the effectiveness of peer feedback in the EFL academic writing context. The thesis tried to answer the questions whether the feedback peers give to each other is useful, whether students use the feedback they get from their peers, and whether students find peer feedback useful.

To answer the questions, a study was conducted in a group of Year 10 English students. The students were given the task of writing a personal statement to apply to a high school abroad. In the first stage, students were given time to write the first draft of the personal statement. The students had 3 x 45 minutes to write the draft in the computer lab. While working the students could use the marking scale. They then proceeded with the peer

assessment phase in the lessons. The students were assigned three peers to assess. In the final phase, students were asked to complete their personal statement using the peer feedback they got.

Returning to the research questions, it can be said now that the feedback peers give each other is useful. Feedback is useful when it helps students to understand what they have done well and what they have to do to improve. In other words, the feedback is effective. The present study analysed 36 pieces of feedback all together and most of them can be considered useful because they mentioned at least some of the mistakes or places to improve.

As for the second research question, the findings indicate that students use the feedback they get from their peers. Namely, most students used all or majority of the feedback provided to improve their draft. However, there were some students who did not use all the provided feedback. As for the reasons why all the feedback was not used to improve their draft, it may be the question of not being used to different roles and the feedback is not understandable enough to act on it. To improve the quality and efficiency of peer feedback, more training is needed.

What concerns the third research question, the results of the present study show that the majority of the students see the benefit of peer feedback in getting information about their mistakes. They appreciate the opportunity to learn about their mistakes and their knowledge and skills through peer feedback. However, students consider giving feedback to their peers less beneficial to themselves. It was said that giving feedback helps them analyse themselves better, find their strengths and weaknesses, and notice similar mistakes in their own work, but none of them marked it as very useful. On the scale of 1 to 5 (where 5 is *peer feedback was very useful to me* and 1 is *peer feedback did not teach me anything*), the most popular choice about the usefulness of giving feedback to the personal statement is 4 (seven students), four students chose 3. Nine out of twelve students rated getting peer feedback

rather useful (4 on the scale) or very useful (5 on the scale). Furthermore, it can be suggested that students are still getting used to the whole process of being an assessor. Namely, the teacher's feedback is still highly rated and some students appreciate it more than peers' feedback.

Most of the studies on using peer feedback have been carried out in higher education institutions and very little research has been done on using peer assessment with basic school or upper secondary school students, especially in the context of EFL classes. According to the present study, it can be said that the results are quite similar to previous research. Younger students are able to give effective feedback, peers are willing to use the feedback, and they see peer feedback as a way of learning and improving. The results show some tendency towards insecurity and hesitation of not being a good enough assessor and some students still prefer the teacher's feedback, but the results are encouraging for teachers to use peer assessment systematically as a part of the learning process.

Further research might examine younger students' opinions of peer assessment and the willingness and ability to practise it in basic school. It would be interesting to see if the quality of feedback improves in upper secondary school if regular training of peer feedback starts in basic school.

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APPENDIX 1. PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

17.11.2019

Lugupeetud lapsevanem või eestkostja

Palun nõusolekut kaasata Teie laps enda magistritöö uurimusse, mille valimisse kuulub ka Teie lapse inglise keele rühm.

Uurimus eesmärgiks on analüüsida kaasõpilaste antud tagasiside kasulikkust õpilase kirjalikule tööle (personal statement). Uurimuse käigus kirjutatud töö, tagasiside ja küsitlus on anonüümsed. Uurimus toimub sama ülesande raames, mida tunnis nagunii tehakse, mingeid lisakohustusi uurimuses osalemine kaasa ei too. Uurimisobjektiks on õpilaste kirjutatud tööd mitte õpilased ise.

Uurimusega selgitatakse välja, kas ja milliseid kaaslaste antud tagasiside ettepanekuid õpilased oma kirjatüki parandamisel kasutavad, kas see aitab parandada nende kirjutamise oskust ja kuidas tagasiside andmine ja saamine neid arendab.

Uurimust viib läbi Põltsamaa Ühisgümnaasiumi inglise keele õpetaja ja Tartu Ülikooli anglistika osakonna magistrant Eva-Brit Bergmann.

Uurimus toimub inglise keele tundide ajal ajavahemikus 25.11.-13.12.2019.

Täna Teid koostöö eest!

Lugupidamisega,

Eva-Brit Bergmann

eva-brit.bergmann@poltsamaa.edu.ee (lisaküsimuste puhul võib alati kasutada ka Stuidiumi sõnumeid)

Annan nõusoleku uurimuses osalemiseks.

JAH

EI

Lapse nimi:

Lapsevanema allkiri:

Kuupäev:

APPENDIX 2. MARKING SCALE FOR STUDENTS

Statement written by:	Assessed by:	
School:	√ / 0	Notes
Formatting (6)		
Font: Maven Pro 11		
1.5 line spacing		
Justified alignment		
Clearly visible paragraphs, consistent spacing		
350-500 words		
Name at the top right-hand corner		
Language (11)		
Polite, formal, no slang		
Spell check (-1 point per spelling mistake)		
I (mina) is capitalised		
No shortened forms (don't, won't, I'll etc.)		
Vocabulary - proper terminology has been looked up where possible		
Vocabulary - prepositions (good AT etc.) have been used correctly, looked up where necessary		
Vocabulary - basic vocabulary avoided. Complex vocabulary used where possible.		
Basic punctuation (spaces, commas, full stops, apostrophes). NB! Ülakoma ' asemel ei kasuta rõhumärki ´é		
Past tenses (childhood etc.)		

Present tenses (current studies / hobbies / interests). NB! Right now/currently + -ing vorm (right now, I am studying)		
Future tenses or other ways of expressing the future (goals, aspirations)		
Basic content (8)		
Begins logically (introducing yourself or another logical way)		
States that you want to apply to a specific school		
Your background discussed (where you are from etc.)		
Your academic results and academic interests discussed		
Your hobbies and other interests		
Your future goals/aspirations		
Why you chose the school		
Ends logically (expresses what you wanted)		
Advanced content (8)		
Your specific personal achievements or qualities named		
Your specific skills / interests named (specific = examples that have names or numbers or other detailed information)		
Your goals and aspirations include clear references to yourself AND society / your community / the world		
You show how/why the school fits your goals, what you would do there		
You show that you have researched the school (specific)		
You offer a specific realistic contribution to the school		
You leave a positive, reasonably confident, polite and intelligent impression		

The text forms a coherent narrative (sentences are connected to each other and paragraphs follow each other logically).		
The most significant weakness(es) of the personal statement		
The most significant strength(s) of the personal statement		
Suggestions for personal statements / future writing (to take it to the next level)		

APPENDIX 3. THE QUESTIONNAIRE FOR STUDENTS – THE ROLES AND PRIOR EXPERIENCE WITH GETTING AND GIVING FEEDBACK

Küsimustik (personal statement)

Olen Põltsamaa Ühisgümnaasiumi õpetaja ja Tartu Ülikooli anglistika osakonna magistrant Eva-Brit Bergmann. Oma magistritöös uurin kaaslastele antud tagasiside kasulikkust õpilase kirjalikule tööle (personal statement). Uurimus on anonüümne.

Küsimustiku täitmisele kulub 10 minutit.

Aitäh.

* Kohustuslik

Tagasiside andmine üldiselt

1. Kas oled enne andnud kaaslastele tagasisidet mõne ainetunni raames? Millist? Mis aines? *

2. Kas oled saanud enne kaaslaselt mõne ainetunni raames tagasisidet? Millist? Mis aines? *

3. Kuidas kaaslaselt saadud tagasiside on sind aidanud? *

4. Kuidas kaaslastele antud tagasiside on sind ennast aidanud? *

5. Kui kasulikuks pead kaaslase ja õpetaja antud tagasisidet? *

Märkige ainult üks ovaal rea kohta.

	Pole üldse kasulik	Pigem pole kasulik	Nii ja naa	Pigem kasulik	Väga kasulik
Õpetaja antud tagasiside	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Kaaslase antud tagasiside	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Mõttele praegusele tööle (personal statement) tagasiside SAAJANA.

6. Kui kasulik oli kaaslase antud tagasiside sulle oma töö parandamisel? *

Märkige ainult üks ovaal.

	1	2	3	4	5	
polnud üldse kasulik	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	oli väga kasulik

7. Millistele vigadele kaaslane kõige enam sinu tähelepanu juhtis? *

Märkige kõik sobivad.

- vormistus
 keelekasutus
 sisu

Muu: _____

8. Kuidas hindad saadud tagasiside kasu oma motivatsioonikirja teise mustandi kirjutamisel? *

Märkige kõik sobivad.

- Pöörasin rohkem tähelepanu vormistusreeglitele.
- Kasutasin keerulisemat sõnavara.
- Jälgisin ajavormide kasutamist.
- Pöörasin tähelepanu teksti ülesehitusele.
- Lisasin või muutsin sisu.
- Ma ei kasutanud seda tagasidet.
- Tagasiside oli liiga pinnapealne, et kasulik olla.
- Ma ei olnud tagasisides kõigega nõus.

Muu: _____

Mõtle praegusele tööle (personal statement) tagasiside ANDJANA.

9. Mida kaaslase töö parandamine sulle endale õpetas? *

10. Mis oli tagasiside andmisel kõige raskem? *

11. Mis oli tagasiside andmisel kõige kergem? *

12. Milliseid probleeme märkasid kaaslase tööd parandades ja oskad edaspidi oma kirjalikes töödes vältida? *

13. Kui kasulikaks pead kaaslasele tagasiside andmist? *

Märkige ainult üks ovaal.

1 2 3 4 5

Kaaslasele tagasiside andmine ei õpetanud mulle mitte midagi Pean kaaslasele antud tagasisidet endale väga kasu

14. Kas sulle meeldib olla hindaja / tagasisidestaja rollis? Miks? *

15. Kui soovid veel midagi kaaslaste tagasisidestamise kohta öelda, võid seda teha siin:

RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL

ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

Eva-Brit Bergmann

Peer assessment and the link between feedback given and feedback used.

Kaaslase tagasiside ja seos saadud tagasiside ning selle kasutamise vahel. (Magistritöö)

Aasta: 2020

Lehekülgede arv: 62

Käesolev magistritöö analüüsib kaaslase antud tagasiside seost selle kasutamisega. Eestis on aina enam õpetajaid, kes kasutavad kujundavat hindamist ja selle elemente oma tundides. Kuna see on aga suhteliselt uus lähenemine, siis ei tunne ei õpetajad ega ka õpilased end selles protsessis väga mugavalt.

Käesoleva magistritöö eesmärk oli uurida kaaslase antud tagasiside efektiivsust keeletunnis akadeemilise teksti loomise kontekstis. Antud magistritöös püüti vastata küsimustele kas õpilaste antud tagasiside on kasulik, kas õpilased kasutavad kaaslaselt saadud tagasisidet, ja kas õpilased peavad kaaslase antud tagasisidet kasulikuks.

Magistritöö teoreetiline osa annab ülevaate kujundava hindamise, tagasiside ja kaaslase tagasiside mõistetest ja olemusest. Töö empiiriline osa keskendub uurimusele kaaslase antud ja tagasiside saaja poolt kasutatud tagasiside seosele. Uurimuses osalesid kaksteist 10. klassi õpilast, kes kirjutasid inglise keele tunnis motvatsioonikirja ja said oma mustandile tagasisidet kolmelt kaaslaselt ning said oma mustandit vastvalt tagasisidele täiendada. Uurimuse tulemused näitavad, et 10. klassi õpilased on võimelised kasulikku tagasisidet andma, õpilased arvestavad kaaslase antud tagasisidega, et oma tööd täiendada ja vigadest õppida.

Märksõnad: kujundav hindamine, kaaslase tagasiside

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Eva-Brit Bergmann

15.05.2020

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Kinnitan, et olen koostanud käesoleva magistritöö ise ning toonud korrektselt välja teiste autorite panuse. Töö on koostatud lähtudes Tartu Ülikooli maailma keelte ja kultuuride kolledži anglistika osakonna magistritöö nõuetest ning on kooskõlas heade akadeemiliste tavadega.

[Autori allkiri]

Eva-Brit Bergmann

19.05.2020

Lõputöö on lubatud kaitsmisele.

[Juhendaja allkiri]

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19.05.2020