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Peer review in academic writing: Different perspectives from instructors and students

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Abstract

This article employed a mixed-method approach to examine peer review through the eyes of writing instructors and first-year college students, including native and non-native speakers of English. A total of 162 participants took part in the study, including 124 students and 20 full time writing instructors. The quantitative analysis involved multiple chi-square tests and Fisher's exact tests with Bonferroni adjustments for Type-I error. The qualitative data were examined for common themes and summarized in categories illustrated by participants' quotes. The results of the study showed significant differences between the instructors and the students in relation to the writing aspects that they focused on when doing peer review. Two important trends were revealed: 1) Both student groups were more focused on language accuracy and range, particularly concerning grammar, spelling and punctuation; and 2) The instructors were more involved with aspects related to the writing itself, such as thesis statement; organization; coherence; content; and evidence and examples. A significantly higher percentage of the instructors reported problems with peer review related to lack of confidence, low appreciation for peer feedback, and reluctance to provide critical comments. The solutions offered by the students and the instructors also varied between the two sides.

Peer Review in Academic Writing:

Different Perspectives from Instructors and Students

Introduction

Peer review is a pedagogical approach in academic writing classes where English is taught either as a first, second, or foreign language (Huang, 2015; Min, 2006; Tsui & Ng, 2000). Many researchers (e.g., Berg, 1999; Hu, 2005; Patchan & Schunn, 2015) observed that peer review is an important activity in the process of developing learners' writing skills. It makes students more aware of their intended audience (Leki, 1993) and helps them improve their critical and analytical writing and reading skills (Nystrand & Brandt, 1989). Berg (1999) noted the positive role of peer review on improving the organization and clarity of the writing.

Research has been conducted on students' perceptions and experiences (e.g. Sukumaran & Dass, 2014; Yastibaş & Yastibaş, 2015), and instructors' perspectives (e.g. White, Morgan, & Fuisting, 2014; Vorobel & Vásquez, 2014). Most of these studies focused on the perceptions of ESL and EFL teachers; however, the perspectives of writing instructors, Native Speaker Students

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(NNSs) and Non-native Speaker Students (NNSs) at college level seem underrepresented in the literature (Vorobel, & Vásquez, 2014). This lack of comparative research became central to the present work and served as its motivation and rationale. Peer review has become a common practice in introductory composition classes (Brammer & Rees, 2007; Hu, 2005), and it is important to investigate the perspectives of both first-year academic writing instructors and students (L1 and L2) and to identify aspects of the writing skills they focus on, potential problems of peer review, and possible solutions. Moreover, writing instructors often lack adequate preparation and understanding of the multiple factors and challenges involved in the implementation of peer review in their classes. They make assumptions about the benefits that students get from certain activities and set up objectives based on their own beliefs. However, in reality, students' perceptions of what is important and beneficial may not match those of their instructors. The contribution of the present study is that it triangulates students' and instructors' perspectives and highlights discrepancies in their opinions of peer review.

Literature Review

Peer review is one of the most common activities that teachers use to evaluate students' work (Anson & Anson, 2017; Brammer & Rees 2007; Hu, 2005; Yu & Hu, 2017). It is founded on the concept of learning as a social activity which is shared by several theoretical frameworks, including Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and sociocultural theory, activity theory, and collaborative learning theory. Hyland and Hyland (2006) argued that peer interaction during the peer review process gives students the confidence to revise other people's work, allows them to discuss problematic issues, and helps them identify their audience. The view of writing as a process rather than a product (Flower and Hayes 1981; Hayes 2012) has established

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peer review as a major activity in writing classes due to its potential to stimulate learning through interaction, exchange of knowledge and ideas, risk taking and construction of meaning (Hu, 2005; Zamel, 1987).

A plethora of research on students' perceptions of peer review reveals controversial trends. Some studies report that students find peer review to be helpful in developing their writing skills and encouraging them to be autonomous learners (Hislop & Stracke, 2017; Huisman, Saab, Driel, & Broek, 2018; Yastıbaş & Yastıbaş, 2015). Another study by Ion, Sánchez Martí, and Morell (2019) found that both the peer reviewers and peer reviewees benefited from the peer review process and showed improvement in their writing skill. Not only students held positive attitudes of peer review (Hislop & Stracke, 2017), but also, they perceived it as an activity that helped them reduce anxiety, boost their confidence, and improve their writing and collaboration skills (Yastıbaş & Yastıbaş, 2015).

In contrast, other studies have observed negative perceptions of peer review. According to Kaufman and Schunn (2011), one of the main reasons for students' unfavorable attitudes was their lack of trust in the ability of peers to provide relevant and worthwhile feedback. Another reason, as revealed in Rollinson's study (2005), was that students perceived peer review as a lengthy process with repetitive reading of drafts, writing comments, discussing the feedback with other readers, and/or with the writer. Other negative experiences were attributed to teachers' insufficient monitoring of the process and the feedback that is provided.

Miscommunication between peers due to their different cultural backgrounds has also been identified as a problem interfering with the peer review process. Working in mixed groups of students with different cultural and language backgrounds can present challenges to the participants and potentially lead to negative attitudes. Academic writing classes in the U.S. often

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consist of L1 and L2 students, of which the latter come from different parts of the world. This requires teachers to adapt their teaching methods to suit all students. Zhu (2001) investigated differences in giving written feedback in mixed classes of L1 and L2 learners. The study was conducted on three groups with each group consisting of native and non-native speakers. The data included students' comments and notes during peer review discussion. The study showed that L2 learners took fewer turns in discussion, although their overall written comments were similar to those of L1 learners. Cheng (2013) found that when L1 and L2 students work together, there tends to be a power inequality where the former group appears to take a more central and powerful role.

Another reason for students' unfavorable attitudes could be linked to the discrepancy between instructors' and students' expectations of peer review. Research and practice have shown that students and teachers focus on different aspects of writing when giving feedback. In a comparative analysis of students' and instructors' feedback Caulk (1994) observed that the instructor comments were typically general and pertained to the whole paper, whereas the students' feedback was related to specific aspects of the writing and rarely addressed the writing as a whole.

Other studies have examined the effect of peer review on specific aspects of writing. Their results show different trends. In Berg's (1999) study, it was reported that students' attention was on meaning and the revised drafts reflected this. Rouhi and Azizian (2013) focused on two aspects related to grammar, English articles and simple past tense. They found that after the peer review workshop, students showed improvements in these aspects. Another study by Crossman and Kite (2012) reported that students found peer review helpful for the following aspects: audience focus, support, organization, and writing conventions.

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Despite the fact that peer review has been studied extensively, there hasn't been a recent comprehensive examination of the aspects of the writing skill that are being addressed during peer review and the perspectives and perceptions of the different participants in the process. As seen from the brief review of literature, previous studies have focused on separate aspects: writing and language issues (Berg, 1999; Caulk, 1994; Rouhi & Azizian, 2013); students' perceptions and experiences (e.g. Sukumaran & Dass, 2014; Yastibaş & Yastibaş, 2015), and instructors' perspectives (e.g. White, Morgan, & Fuisting, 2014; Vorobel & Vásquez, 2014).

Therefore, one of the objectives of the current work is to present a triangulation of the perspectives of writing instructors, first-year students, including NSOE and NNSOE, on target aspects of peer review. Second, many of the previous studies have examined peer review either in L2 contexts or on graduate students, but there are only a few on undergraduate mixed classes (L1 and L2), specifically first-year classes. Additionally, researchers have identified some problems of peer review but failed to offer solutions. Given the common use of peer review in first-year writing programs, it is important to harmonize instructor and learners' understanding and expectations of its objectives and role in the process of teaching writing. To help reach this common ground, the present article highlights the differences in instructor and learners' views of peer review, what they take from it, the problems they experience, and the solutions they offer.

Research Questions

1) Which aspects of academic writing do NSOE students, NNSOE students and instructors focus on during the peer review process? Are there significant differences between the different groups of participants?

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2) What are some problems of peer review as experienced/perceived by the students (NSOE and NNSOE) and the instructors? Are there significant differences between the groups regarding the reported problems? What possible solutions are suggested by the participants?

Method

Participants

A total of 162 instructors and students at a mid-south public university in the U.S took part in the study. They were categorized into three groups: 1) 124 first-year students who were native speakers of English (NSOE); 2) 18 first-year students who were non-native speakers (NNSOE); and 3) 20 writing instructors. The NNSOE students had different linguistic backgrounds as shown in Table 1. There were similar proportions of male (47%) and female (53%) student participants. The instructor sample consisted of full-time instructors and teaching assistants. The majority of them were NSOE (90%) with only 10% NNSOE teaching assistants. Among them 60% were females and 40% were males.

Include Table 1 here

Data Collection

The study employed a mixed-method approach to examine certain aspects of peer review in first-year academic writing through the eyes of writing instructors, first-year students, who were Native Speakers of English (NSOE) and first-year students who were Non-native Speakers of English (NNSOE). The surveys were created using a university-approved software named Qualtrics and included three sets of items. The first one gathered demographic data about participants' gender, first language, and status (student or teacher). The second set of items aimed to elicit data about the aspects of the writing skill which were prioritized by the instructors and students during peer review. Twelve aspects of academic writing were given as separate

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responses and the participants were asked to check all that are relevant to them. The first four responses covered aspects of writing related to language accuracy and range (*grammar range and accuracy, sentence structure, vocabulary range and accuracy, and spelling and punctuation*); the next seven responses referred to aspects related to the writing itself (*thesis statement, purpose, organization, content, paragraph structure, coherence, evidence and examples*); one response was about references and citations. Lastly, an option titled “*Other*” was included, giving the participants the opportunity to add their own responses. The third set of items aimed to gather data about problems related to the use of peer review, which were experienced/perceived by the participants in the study. The first item was stated as “*No problems*”, followed by five given responses formulated based on common problems experienced during peer review, and one titled “*Other*”, where students were encouraged to write their own unique answers.

Procedures of Data Collection & Analysis

The data was collected over two semesters (spring and summer) after approval by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The researcher was granted permission to contact the entire population of 50 academic writing instructors and 250 of students via email, requesting their consent to participate in an online survey on a voluntary basis. The response rate was 40% for the instructors (20 out of 50) and 56.5% for the students (142 students out of 250). Among the students, 18 (12.7%) were non-native speakers of English and 124 (81.3%) were native speakers of English. The disbalance in the number of native and non-native students was representative of the actual proportions in the student population on campus.

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The quantitative data obtained from the survey were processed through the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (IBM SPSS) version 24. Considering the nature of the data (frequency and proportions) and the big difference in sample sizes, non-parametric statistical methods were used in the data analysis. Frequency statistics were calculated for each survey item, representing the % of participants who had selected a particular response within each of the three study groups. Multiple chi-square tests were performed to examine possible group associations with particular responses. For the chi-square tests, the results were interpreted as significant at $\alpha = 0.05$ ($p < 0.05$).

When significant group associations were found, the responses were further compared pairwise using Fisher's exact test, including the following comparisons: 1) NSOE students vs. NNSOF students; 2) NSOE students vs. instructors; and 3) NNSOF students vs. instructors. To control for Type I error, Bonferroni adjustments were applied as the *alpha level* was divided by three ($.05/3$) and all *p-values* were compared to $\alpha = .0166$. If the *p-values* were smaller than $.0166$, then the difference between the respective groups was considered significant.

Results

Which aspects of the writing skill do students (NSOE and NNSOE) and instructors focus on during peer review?

The participants' responses to the 12 aspects of writing included in the survey were cross tabulated between the three groups of participants (NSOE students, NNSOE students, and instructors) and examined for significant associations through the Chi-square test (Table 2). None of the cells had expected counts less than 5. Significant group associations were found on seven aspects of academic writing, including *grammar range and accuracy* ($p = .001$); *spelling*

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and punctuation ($p = .001$); *evidence and examples* ($p < .001$); *coherence of ideas* ($p < .001$); *thesis statement* ($p = .013$); *organization* ($p = .03$); and *content* ($p = .008$).

The remaining aspects of academic writing showed lack of significant association with group: *sentence structure* ($p = 0.060$); *vocabulary range and appropriateness* ($p = 0.342$); *purpose* ($p = 0.076$); *paragraph structure* ($p = 0.811$); *citations and references* ($p = 0.510$).

Under the option “Other”, only 5 participants provided answers, 2 (1.6%) NSOE students and 3 (15%) instructors. Cross tabulation of these responses showed that 3 cells had expected count less than 5 and for this reason, statistical association with group was not pursued. The individual responses of the participants are provided at the end of the current section.

The seven aspects of writing, which showed significant group associations (Table 1 above), were further analyzed through Fisher’s exact test, which aimed to compare: 1) NSOE students vs. NNSOE students; 2) NSOE students vs. instructors; and 3) NNSOF students vs. instructors.

The results revealed the following trends: 1) *Grammar range and accuracy* was almost equally prioritized by 62% of the NSOE students and 67% of the NNSOE students, with no significant difference between them ($p = 0.709$). However, both groups differed significantly from the instructors’, of which only 20% showed attention to *grammatical range and accuracy during peer review* (NSOE students vs. instructors, $p < .001$; NNSOE students vs. instructors, $p = .004$).

2) The results for *spelling and punctuation* followed a similar trend as 60% of the NSOE students and 56% of the NNSOE students indicated that they focused on this aspect during peer review ($p = 0.740$) vs. 15% of the instructors. Thus, both groups of students seemed to focus

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significantly more on spelling and punctuation than their instructors (NSOE students vs. instructors, $p < .001$; NNSOE students vs. instructors, $p = .009$).

3) Regarding attention given to the *thesis statement* during peer review, the highest percentage of respondents were instructors (75%), followed by NSOE students (48%) and with the lowest rate among the NNSOE students (28%). The difference between the two student groups was not significant ($p = .116$) nor between the NSOE students and the instructors ($p = .023$). Only the NNSOF students differed significantly from the instructors ($p = .004$). In sum, the NNSOE students were the least likely to focus on the *thesis statement* during peer review compared to the NSOE students and the instructors.

Include table 2 here

4) Concerning *organization*, a significant difference was observed only between NSOE students (67%) and the instructors (95%), $p = .01$. NNSOE students (76%) seemed to pay more attention to organization than NSOE students, but without significant difference ($p = 0.357$). No significant difference was found between NNSOE students and the instructors, $p = 0.122$.

5) Regarding focus on *examples and evidence*, a significant difference was observed between all groups. The lowest percentage of participants who focused on *examples and evidence* during peer review was in the NNSOE group (22%) vs. 52% in the NSOE group ($p = .002$) and vs. 90% of the instructors ($p < .000$). The difference between the two student groups was also significant ($p = .017$).

6) Focus on *content* during peer review was indicated by 48% of the NSOE students, 50% of the NNSOE students, and 85% of the instructors. A significantly higher percentage of the instructors considered *content* an important aspect of peer review compared with the NSOE

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students ($p = 0.002$) and the NNSOE students (0.012). The percentage of students who focused on *content* during peer review was very similar in both groups, $p = 0.848$.

7) *Coherence of ideas* was selected by 85% of the instructors, 36% of the NSOE students and 33% of the NNSOE students. The instructor group differed significantly from both student groups (with NSOE students, $p < 0.001$; with NNSOE students, $p = 0.001$).

Overall, based on the pairwise comparisons, two trends were revealed that distinguish the students from the instructors. The first trend shows that language accuracy was prioritized by the students in the current study. A significantly higher percentage of the students focused more on *grammar range and accuracy* and *spelling and punctuation* as compared to the instructors.

(Figure 1).

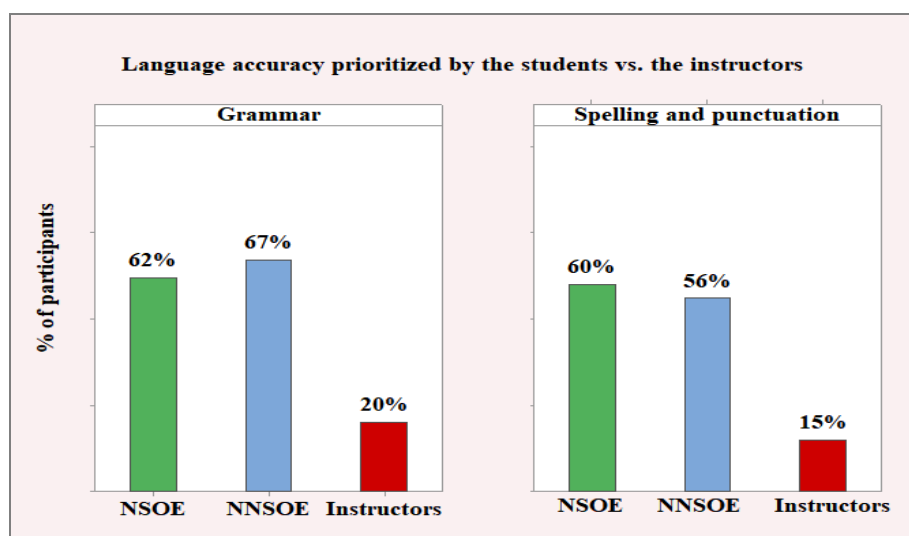


Figure 1: Differences between students' and instructors' views of language accuracy

The second trend reveals that the instructors in the current study were more focused on aspects related to the writing itself rather than on language accuracy. A significantly higher percentage of them in comparison with the students considered *thesis statement; organization; evidence and examples; content; and coherence of ideas* as the focus of peer review (**Figure 2**).

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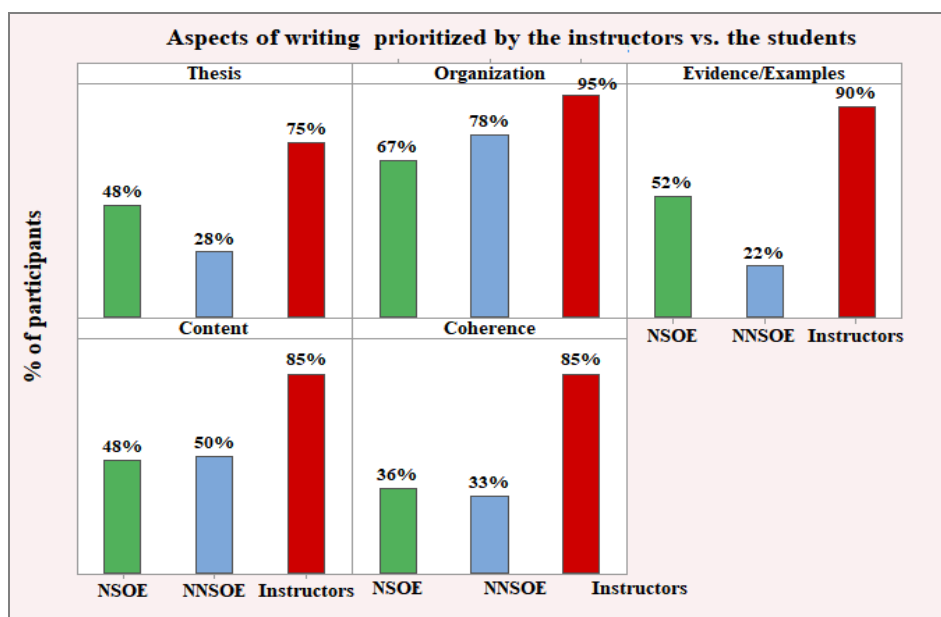


Figure 2. Writing aspects prioritized by the instructors during peer review as compared to the students

Other aspects of academic writing the participants focus on during peer review. Five

responses were provided under the option *Other* (Table 3). Two of them were related to the grammar of academic writing, and both of them were provided by instructors. The first instructor defined “*anything grammar related*” as “*surface issue*” and expressed the opinion that first-year students were not experienced enough to help each other with grammar. The second instructor noted that the focus on grammar depends on the stage of the writing. She would ask students to pay attention to grammar in a second/final draft, but not in a first draft. One instructor mentioned a focus on *formatting*, and two NSOE students added a special focus on *the reader*, whether the writing will “make sense” and whether it can involve the reader.

Include Table 3 here

Problems of peer review as perceived by the participants

The results from the analysis of the survey data about *problems with peer review* as experienced or perceived by the participants in the study are summarized in Table 4. Group

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associations with particular problems were examined through cross-tabulation of the responses and chi-square tests. Five of the 8 items showed significant associations with group: *No problems*, $p = 0.005$; *Lack of confidence to give feedback to peers*, $p < 0.001$; *Peer feedback is not valued*, $p < 0.001$; *Reluctance to give critical comments*, $p < 0.001$; and *Students do not get credit for doing peer review*, $p < 0.001$. The remaining three items did not show significant associations with group: *Peer review takes too much time*, $p = 0.513$; *Ineffective grouping of peers*, $p = 0.278$; and *Other problems*, $p = 0.469$.

Include table 4 here

When participants were asked to report additional problems other than the ones included in the survey, 13 (10.5%) NSOE students, 2 (11%) NNSOE students and 4 (20%) instructors provided responses which are summarized in Table 5.

Include table 5 here

The problems added by the students were categorized in three themes: *lack of competence*, *lack of commitment* and *insufficient effort* on behalf of some students. The ones provided by the instructors included: *failure to understand their peers' feedback and reluctance to ask for clarification*, *lack of interest*, *demoralizing influence of some peers on the group dynamics*.

The items which showed significant group associations (Table 3 above) were further analyzed through Fisher's exact test for pairwise differences: 1) NSOE students vs. NNSOE students; 2) NSOE students vs. instructors; and 3) NNSOF students vs. instructors.

The following trends were established based on the pairwise comparisons: 1) A significantly higher percentage of both student groups reported *not having problems* with peer review: 44% NSOE vs. 5% instructors, $p = 0.001$; 43% NNSOF vs. 5% instructors, $p = 0.005$.

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Almost equal percentage of the NSOE and NNSOF groups did not report problems with peer review, $p = 0.892$.

2) A significantly higher percentage of the instructors (60%) considered *lack of confidence to provide feedback* to be a problem of peer review vs. 18% of the NSOE students ($p < 0.001$). The comparison with the NNSOE students, of whom 28% indicated *lack of confidence* as a problem was not significant at the adjusted alpha level ($p = 0.034$). The two student groups did not differ significantly ($p = 0.312$) as a relatively small percentage of them indicated *lack of confidence* as a problem.

3) Both student groups showed a more positive view of the value of peer feedback than the instructors did. Sixty-five percent of the instructors indicated that *peer feedback was not valued* vs. 11% NSOE students ($p < 0.001$) and vs. 17% NNSOE students ($p = 0.003$). A relatively small percentage of both student groups marked *peer feedback was not valued* as a problem, with no significant difference between them ($p = 0.440$).

4) *Reluctance to give critical comments* was pointed out as a problem by 65% of the instructors vs. 17% of the NSOE ($p < 0.001$) and vs. 6% of the NNSOE ($p = 0.001$). The two student groups did not differ significantly, $p = 0.214$.

5) *Students do not get credit for doing peer review* was indicated as a problem by a significantly higher percentage of instructors (40%) vs. 2% of the NSOE students ($p < 0.001$) and vs. 6% of the NNSOE students ($p = 0.013$). A very small percentage of both student groups indicated this to be a problem, without significant difference between NSOE and NNSOE students ($p = 0.279$).

The significant differences between the student and instructors' responses regarding potential problems associated with peer review are illustrated on Figure 3 below.

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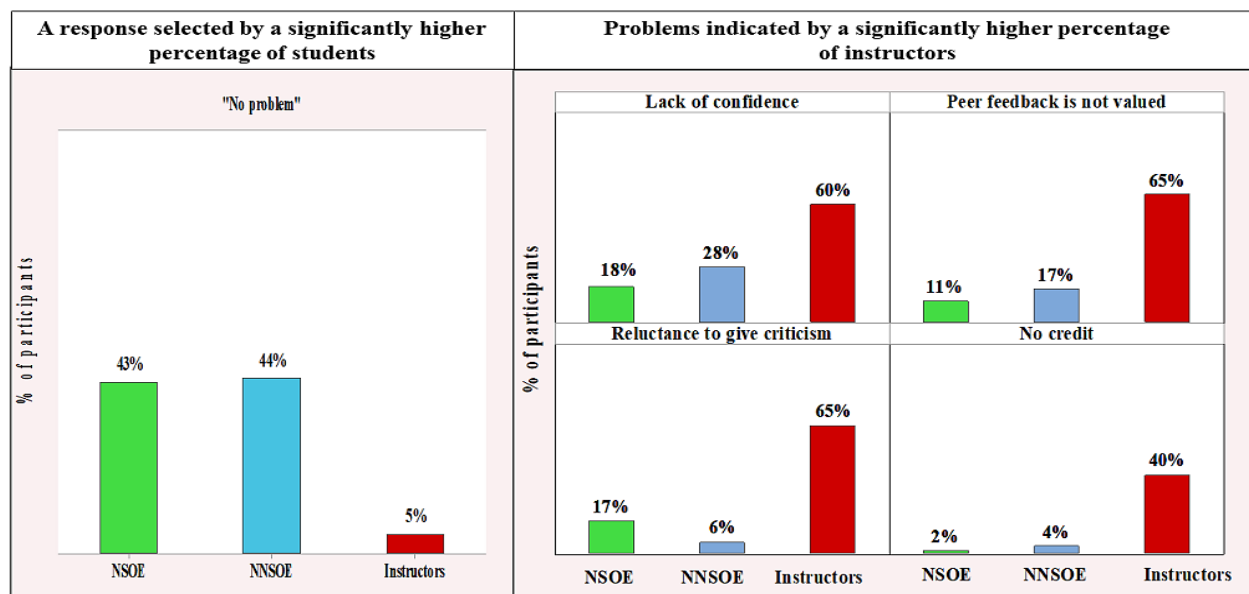


Figure 3. Significant differences in students' and instructors' opinions about problems associated with peer review

Solutions suggested by the participants

The participants who reported problems with peer review were asked to propose ideas for overcoming these difficulties in an open-ended question. Their responses were analyzed for common ideas and key words and categorized into themes, separately for the instructors and the students.

Five main themes (Table 6) were generated from the data provided by 16 (out of 20) instructors. Some of the instructors mentioned the importance of *training* students in constructive critical feedback and *modeling* some of its key elements as a way of improving the learning outcomes of peer review. Other instructors believed that *grading* peer reviews increases the motivation and engagement of the students. *Monitoring and encouraging* students during peer review was another theme that appeared in the written responses provided by the instructors. Two of the instructors believed that making peer review *anonymous* positively affects the

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participants and the outcomes, whereas in other two responses it was suggested that using *a variety of formats and activities* would sustain the motivation and interest of the students.

Include table 6 here.

From the students' responses, only 38 out of 130 were deemed relevant and useful. Based on this data, 6 themes were identified (Table 7). Some of the students believed that the instructors should help them develop confidence in giving critical feedback. Others were concerned with the way peer groups were formed. They suggested that the instructors should take into consideration students' proficiency level and/or interests. Other students believed that the quality of peer reviews would improve if reviewers were graded for the feedback they provide. Five of the students thought that unstructured peer review would be more effective than structured review because it would allow students the freedom to focus on what they deem important. Another idea suggested by the students was to assign peer review as homework instead of class work. They believed that this would free class time for other issues to be discussed and would enable students to provide more useful and detailed feedback to their peers. One student expressed a negative attitude to value peer review and suggested replacing it with other alternatives.

Include table 7 here.

Overall, both the instructors and students emphasized the importance of boosting students' confidence in providing critical feedback and proposed making peer review a component of students' grades as two measures that will help improve the quality of peers' feedback.

Discussion and Pedagogical Implications

The main trend extrapolated from the results of the present study shows that instructors and students approach peer review in a different way. For the most part, they had different views about which aspects of the writing should be prioritized and different perceptions about the problems that are experienced in the process of doing peer review.

The quantitative data indicates that the writing instructors put emphasis on the macro aspects of writing, including organization, evidence, and coherence. On the other hand, both student groups focused on the language aspects of their peers' writing like grammar, spelling and punctuation. The only exception was observed for *vocabulary range and accuracy*, which was selected by less than 50% of the participants in all groups.

Previous research on instructor and student perceptions of peer review in most cases did not pursue to compare the perspectives of the two sides, except for Caulk's (1994) study which observed a similar tendency of instructors focusing on the integrity of the writing vs. students' prioritizing language issues. Partial corroboration can also be found with the results reported in Storch (2005), where students were observed to pay more attention to the product rather than the process.

The current study introduced the participants to seven different potential problems of peer review and asked them to list more problems (if any) other than the 7 listed in the survey. Interestingly, a significantly higher percentage of both student groups did not report problems whereas the majority of the instructors did. There was also a discrepancy in the type of problems reported by the instructors and the students. A significantly higher percentage of the instructors marked *lack of confidence to provide feedback* as a problem vs. a small percentage of the students.

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The majority of the instructors reported that *peer feedback was not valued*, whereas the students in both groups were more appreciative of peer feedback. Another difference was in relation to critical feedback. More instructors believed that students were *reluctant* to give critical feedback vs. a small percentage of the students.

Another mismatch between instructors and students was related to giving/receiving credit for peer review. A significantly higher percentage of the instructors believed that the quality of the peer review process may suffer due to the fact that *students do not get credit for doing peer review*, whereas a very small percentage of both student groups indicated this to be a problem.

The additional problems offered by the students included *lack of competence* to provide worthwhile feedback, *lack of commitment* and *insufficient effort* on behalf of some students. The ones provided by the instructors included students' *inability to understand their peers' feedback*, *reluctance to ask for clarification*, *lack of interest*, and *demoralizing influence of some peers on the group dynamics*.

The discrepancies between instructors' and students' perceptions of the problems that affect the quality of peer review in writing classes cannot be validated by previous findings due to a lack of comparative research between instructor and student perceptions and practices. Yet, it should be mentioned that some problems, including lack of confidence to provide worthwhile feedback, students' different cultural backgrounds, and lack of sufficient monitoring from the instructor have been reported in Kaufman and Schunn (2011), Zhu (2001), Cheng (2013) and Rollinson (2005).

The least difference between the instructors and the students was observed in their suggestions about how to solve the problems of peer review. The most important ideas include *training* students to provide constructive *critical feedback*, *modeling* key elements, *grading* peer

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reviews, *monitoring* the peer review process, and diversifying the process by using a variety of *formats and activities* in order to sustain the motivation and interest of the students. Similar solutions, such as the importance of training, have been emphasized in previous studies (e.g., Berg, 1999 & Min, 2006).

Overall, in the context of the present study the discrepancies between the instructors' and students' responses are prevalent, whereas the agreements are few. This takes us back to the main purpose of the study which was based on the rationale that instructors often make assumptions about the benefits that students get from peer review and set up objectives that may not be understood by their students. The findings have supported the initial hypothesis by revealing a contrast in the way instructors and students perceive the objectives, priorities, and challenges of peer review in academic writing classes. This mismatch between instructor and students' perceptions can negatively affect the effectiveness of the activities and the learning outcomes. To bring both sides together, instructors can use several techniques, including but not limited to the following:

- introducing students to the objectives and expected outcomes
- initiating critical reflection on the experience in whole class discussions
- surveying students' opinions on target issues
- using focus groups to find solutions of experienced problems.

Before drawing the final conclusion, it should be mentioned that the findings of the present work are subject to certain limitations. The study was conducted within the framework of writing curricula in the US university system and may not be as relevant to other educational contexts. The sample of non-native English speakers was small and may not adequately represent

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the opinions of the bigger population of foreign students enrolled in writing classes at US universities. The study was based on a bigger project and the results presented here reflect certain trends in the data, but not the entire spectrum.

Conclusion

The findings reported in this article have practical implications for writing instructors or instructors in any subject area in which writing plays a significant role. The contribution of the present study is that it brings to light the differences in the way peer review is perceived and approached by writing instructors and students. It uncovers the discrepancies in what aspects of writing they prioritize and what they perceive to be the problems which interfere with the effectiveness of the process. In the existing literature, this issue has not been explicitly addressed. The findings raise awareness of an undercurrent underlying the surface process which is usually ignored or not even considered by writing instructors. The existence of contradictions between the learning goals that instructors set up for their students and the students' actual perceptions and experiences can be a serious obstacle to meaningful and effective instruction. The discrepancies can be resolved through needs analysis and continuous communication between instructors and students with the purpose of creating opportunities for students to become active participants in planning, executing, and evaluating the process of peer review.

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Table 1. Demographic data about the participants in the study

Number	Males	Females	NSOE	NNSOE	Total of participants
Students	66 (47%)	76 (53%)	123 (87%)	18 (13%)	142
				6 Spanish	
				5 Arabic	
				3 Chinese	
				2 Amharic	
				1 Susu	
				1 Vietnamese	
Instructors	8 (40%)	12 (60%)	18 (90%)	2 (10%)	20

Table 2. Percentage of participants who focus on particular aspects of writing during peer review

<i>Which of the following aspects of writing do you focus on when doing peer reviews?</i>	Group	N	N (%) participants who focus	χ^2	p
1) Grammar range and accuracy	NSOE students	124	77 (62%)	13.12	.001**
	NNSOE students	18	12 (67%)		
	Instructors	20	4 (20%)		
2) Sentence Structure	NSOE students	124	69 (56%)	5.611	0.060
	NNSOE students	18	7 (39%)		
	Instructors	20	6 (30%)		
3) Vocabulary range and appropriateness	NSOE students	124	55 (44%)	2.148	.339
	NNSOE students	18	5 (28%)		
	Instructors	20	7 (35%)		
4) Spelling and punctuation	NSOE students	124	74 (60%)	13.769	.001**
	NNSOE students	18	10 (56%)		
	Instructors	20	3 (15%)		
5) Thesis statement	NSOE students	124	59 (48%)	8.698	.013*
	NNSOE students	18	5 (28%)		
	Instructors	20	15 (75%)		
6) Purpose	NSOE students	124	79 (64%)	5.144	.076
	NNSOE students	18	8 (44%)		
	Instructors	20	16 (80%)		
7) Organization	NSOE students	124	83 (67%)	7.05	.029*
	NNSOE students	18	14 (78%)		
	Instructors	20	19 (95%)		
8) Paragraph structure	NSOE students	124	72 (58%)	.421	.811
	NNSOE students	18	10 (56%)		
	Instructors	20	13 (65%)		
9) Evidence and examples	NSOE students	124	65 (52%)	17.745	.000**
	NNSOE students	18	4 (22%)		
	Instructors	20	18 (90%)		
10) Content and its relevance	NSOE students	124	59 (48%)	9.659	.008**
	NNSOE students	18	9 (50%)		

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	Instructors	20	17 (85%)		
11) Coherence of ideas	N SOE students	124	45 (36%)	17.290	.000**
	N NSOE students	18	6 (33%)		
	Instructors	20	17 (85%)		
12) Citations and References	N SOE students	124	42 (34%)	1.347	.510
	N NSOE students	18	5 (28%)		
	Instructors	20	9 (45%)		

** - Statistically significant at $p \leq .01$; * - Statistically significant at $p < .05$

Table 3. Responses under the option “*Other*” about aspects of academic writing the participants focus on during peer review

Aspect	Quote	Participant
Grammar related	<i>“Anything grammar-related is called “surface” issues, which are something most students can generally comment on, but they are not experienced enough, especially in a first-year writing course, to teach their peers about this area of writing.”</i>	Instructor
Formatting	<i>“Formatting”</i>	Instructor
Reader related	<i>“I also try to make sure everything makes sense to the reader.”</i>	N SOE student
	<i>“Does it make for a good read?”</i>	N SOE student

Table 4. Percentage of participants who selected particular responses related to problems with peer review

Do you find problems with peer-review? If so, indicate which and/or add your own.		Group	N	N (%) participants		p
1)	No problems	N SOE students	124	53 (43%)	10.711	.005*
		N NSOE students	18	8 (44%)		
		Instructors	20	1 (5%)		
2)	Peer review takes too much time.	N SOE students	124	16 (13%)	1.335	.513
		N NSOE students	18	3 (17%)		
		Instructors	20	1 (5%)		
3)	Lack of confidence to give feedback to peers	N SOE students	124	22 (18%)	16.97	.000**
		N NSOE students	18	5 (28%)		
		Instructors	20	12 (60%)		

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4)	Peer feedback is not valued.	N SOE students	124	13 (11%)	34.633	.000**
		N NSOE students	18	3 (17%)		
		Instructors	20	13 (65%)		
5)	Reluctance to give critical comments	N SOE students	124	21 (17%)	26.406	.000**
		N NSOE students	18	1 (6%)		
		Instructors	20	13 (65%)		
6)	Ineffective grouping of peers	N SOE students	124	8 (6.5%)	2.563	.278
		N NSOE students	18	0 (0%)		
		Instructors	20	0 (0%)		
7)	Students do not get credit for doing peer review.	N SOE students	124	2 (2%)	39.899	.000**
		N NSOE students	18	1 (6%)		
		Instructors	20	8 (40%)		
8)	Other	N SOE students	124	13 (10.5%)	1.51	.469
		N NSOE students	18	2 (11%)		
		Instructors	20	4 (20%)		

** - Statistically significant at $p \leq .01$; * - Statistically significant at $p < .05$

Table 5. Additional Problems Reported by the students and instructors

Problem	Quotes	N participants
Lack of competence	<i>“Sometimes your peers may not know what they are talking about.”</i>	4
Lack of Commitment	<i>“Others may not take it as serious as you do.”</i>	8
Inequality of work/effort	<i>“I receive little feedback, but I give great feedback.”</i>	3
	Instructors	
Lack of comprehension	<i>“Students don't always understand their peers' comments; as in, a lot of times they don't understand their teachers' comments due to comprehension issues, and they are not going to ask anyone for clarity, so they end up not doing what they were advised to do because of a lack of understanding”</i>	1
Lack of interest	<i>“Often, students aren't invested in improving their work or helping others—they are not engaged with the class.”</i>	1
Demoralizing influence	<i>“There are certain students who simply don't want to participate in peer review. Sometimes they can exert a real drag on the group around</i>	1

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	<i>them.”</i>	
Inequality of benefits depending on the team	<i>“Some students get much more out of it than others depending on what group or pair they are in.”</i>	1

Table 6. Instructors’ Proposed Solutions for Peer Review Potential Problems

Themes	Illustrations	Number of contributors
1. Training and modeling	<i>“Modeling appropriate critical feedback helps students get over their reluctance to be critical.”</i>	4
2. Grading	<i>“I grade peer reviews and tell them I expect them to take at least a couple of their classmates’ ideas into consideration.”</i>	4
3. Monitoring and encouraging peer work.	<i>“I walk around the class, check, and approve their comments to give them confidence.”</i>	4
4. Making peer review anonymous	<i>“I have thought about printing off my students’ papers and leaving their names off so it remains anonymous.”</i>	2
5. Using different formats of peer review	<i>“I think this comes back to designing multiple scenarios for peer review, never doing the same thing twice, etc.”</i>	2

Table 7. Students’ Proposed Solutions for Peer Review Potential Problems

Themes	Illustrations	Number of contributors
1. Boost students’ confidence	<i>“just do it more and get my confidence up.”</i>	13
2. Group peers more effectively	<i>“Pair people up effectively so they actually get valuable opinions.”</i>	9
3. Grade reviewers	<i>“A way to solve this would be to take grades for peer review so that many people will take it more seriously.”</i>	8
4. Use unstructured peer review	<i>“give us the freedom to pick out what we think is wrong without any guidance or persuasion.”</i>	5
5. Assign peer review as homework	<i>“To resolve the time issue, let peer reviewers take the work home to prepare a more detailed or concise review.”</i>	2
6. Find alternatives to peer review	<i>“no peer review. find an alternative.”</i>	1
