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Online Peer-Review Technique Using Facebook: A Pedagogical Study in EFL Students' Paragraph Writing Skills

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the impact of the online peer-review technique (OPRT) on Facebook on enhancing the paragraph writing skills of English major students at Majmmaah University, Saudi Arabia. Further, the study delves into the emotional and psychological dimensions of the learning experience, shedding light on students' anxiety and emotional state regarding online peer-review feedback. Using pre- and post-tests, the research design mimics an experiment, examining the impact of the online peer-review method on the paragraph writing skills of 24 EFL students in the sample. According to the results, there was a clear upward shift in the students' writing proficiency after implementation of the OPRT, moving from a developing phase to a level of commendable competency in the domain. While the OPRT demonstrated a reduction in students' anxiety levels and an improvement in their emotional state towards the peer-review process, these changes were not statistically significant, indicating that emotional adaptability to novel teaching techniques might require more prolonged exposure and practice in the technique. Nevertheless, the observed trend is promising. The research undeniably underscores the potential benefits of integrating online peer-review techniques, like OPRT, into the educational framework. Such techniques not only improve learners' writing proficiency but also promote critical thinking, foster a collaborative spirit, and potentially lead to a positive emotional and psychological shift in students' learning experiences.

Keywords: Facebook; Paragraph writing; Peer-review; Online medium, OPRT

1. Introduction

In the era of digital transformation, leveraging

platforms like Facebook to facilitate academic inter-

ventions appears to be both innovative and effective.

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Studies have shown that using the OPRT on Facebook has a significant impact on improving students' paragraph writing skills. This underscores the pedagogical significance of peer-review and interactive feedback in the learning process, aligning with the constructivist learning principles that view knowledge as a socially constructed entity. Writing, as a central tool for interpersonal communication, is rife with intricate linguistic nuances and styles, making it indispensable across both personal and professional avenues (Jalaludin, 2017). In the academic echelon, particularly, writing functions as a critical metric to gauge a student's academic acumen. As students fervently strive for proficiency in English writing, contemporary pedagogical shifts underscore the transition from a product-centric to a process-oriented instructional paradigm (Alharbi, and Albelihi, 2023). In this new framework, the journey of writing, replete with iterative drafts and refinements, takes precedence over the final output. This shift accentuates the role of peer feedback in the writing continuum. Historically, educators held the sole prerogative for critiquing student compositions.

While numerous studies have investigated the integration of digital platforms, specifically social media (Bin-Hady and Al-Tamimi, 2021), into educational paradigms, there remains a limited body of research focusing specifically on the combination of the OPRT and its deployment through platforms like Facebook, especially in the context of EFL learners' paragraph writing skills. Most studies, such as those conducted by Anderson (2016) and Miller (2019), primarily emphasize the broad pedagogical potential of Facebook, but a detailed exploration of the platform's utility in a structured technique like OPRT remains under-researched. Furthermore, the emotional and psychological dimensions of utilizing such an online technique remain largely uncharted. While some studies, such as Grayson's (2018), address the challenges and concerns associated with the use of Facebook in educational settings, a comprehensive understanding of how students emotionally adapt and react to the integration of online peer review through social media platforms is still in its infancy.

Moreover, the study's context is critical. Most existing literature focuses on western and global contexts. However, research into the nuances of integrating the OPRT through Facebook within specific cultural and educational settings, such as Majmaah University in Saudi Arabia, is scant. Cultural dynamics are critical to the success of educational methodologies, and understanding how these dynamics interact with innovative teaching techniques could provide invaluable insights for teachers and curriculum developers. Studying how peer-review affects Arabic-speaking students who are taught in an English-medium environment (EMI) shows that feedback from peers not only improves their writing skills but also helps them see things from different cultural points of view, which is important for academic success and finding oneself in global educational settings (Trim, 2007). Rooted in peer learning as the main framework of this study, the research attempts to unpack how students in an EFL context learn actively from each other and take ownership of their writing process (Ferris and Roberts, 2001; Ferris and Hedgcock, 2013). While there exists a foundational understanding of the role of social media in education, specific intersections—like the fusion of OPRT and Facebook for enhancing paragraph writing skills among university students in Saudi Arabia—present a discernible gap in the current literature. Addressing this gap could provide educators and stakeholders with refined tools and strategies better tailored to specific cultural and educational contexts (Alharbi, 2021).

Research objectives

This study aims to evaluate the effects of online peer-review technique (OPRT) in enhancing the paragraph writing skills of EFL students. Specifically, it aimed to:

- Investigate the Saudi EFL students' entry level and developmental proficiency in writing before the utilization of the OPRT.
- Identify the statistical correlation, if any, between the pre-test and post-test performances of the Saudi EFL students in writing attributable to the OPRT.

- Identify the statistical relationship between Saudi EFL students' motivation and anxiety in the pre-test and post-test in an OPRT-activated environment.

2. Literature review

2.1 Feedback benefits

Previous research has shown that the global discussion about education has made the many benefits of feedback even more clear, including the cognitive, social, and emotional benefits of peer-assisted feedback systems in writing education (Hinkel, 2017; Lundstorm and Baker, 2019; Min, 2018; Pol, Storch, and Adam, 2020; Storch, 2016). In other words, we cannot undermine the pivotal role of feedback, regardless of its source. It acts as the linchpin, bridging students' understanding of concepts and guiding them towards avenues of academic betterment (Ormond, Merry, and Callaghan, 2015). According to Damanik (2022), peer feedback in writing dates back to the 1970s in U.S. educational frameworks. At its core, this approach nurtured an ecosystem of social interactions and dialogue among learners, thus promoting the transition from a convoluted thought process to crystallized conceptual understanding (Ferris and Hedgcock, 2013; Vygotsky, 1978). However, the adoption of peer feedback has been somewhat marred by skepticism about its efficacy, primarily due to doubts about students' cognitive maturity and linguistic prowess to effectively evaluate their peers' compositions (Banister, C., 2023; Renandya and Jacobs, 2017). To circumvent these challenges, scholars like Teo (2020) have championed structured methodologies, suggesting student pairings based on linguistic competencies and prescribing comprehensive feedback protocols.

2.2 Online peer-review

With technological advancements ushering in the digital age, online peer-review mechanisms have reshaped the feedback landscape (Tseng and Tsai, 2007). Beyond the confines of classrooms, online

peer-review offers myriad advantages over traditional face-to-face feedback methodologies, such as fostering asynchronous communication, enabling perpetual iterations based on feedback, and ensuring the sanctity of anonymity (Reynolds and Anderson, 2015). Additionally, these digital platforms empower educators with oversight over students' engagement and progress while also serving as rich repositories of student interactions and assignment data, offering researchers invaluable insights into the learning processes (Lin, Tsai, and Chang, 2017). The advent of digital platforms, particularly social media, has vastly transformed educational paradigms, offering novel methods of teaching, learning, and communication. Facebook, one of the most popular social media platforms, has been the subject of numerous studies focusing on its educational potential. Several scholars have explored the pedagogical implications of Facebook for enhancing writing skills, particularly in the domain of paragraph writing. Anderson (2016) emphasized that Facebook's informal writing environment provides a low-pressure space where students can practice writing without the fear of formal evaluation. Moreover, the platform's interactive nature enables students to receive immediate feedback from peers, which can bolster the iterative process of writing enhancement (Chong, 2017).

2.3 Facebook as writing platform

Facebook's socially interactive nature allows for collaborative learning, which is consistent with Vygotskian social constructivism principles. According to Miller (2019), it facilitates students' active engagement with peers' writings, fostering a culture of peer feedback, review, and collaboration. This process not only refines the content but also helps in understanding the nuances of constructing well-organized paragraphs. However, the use of Facebook for educational purposes is not without its challenges. Grayson (2018) pointed out concerns over privacy, the risk of cyberbullying, and the potential for distraction from academic tasks. Bin-Hady and Toujani (2021) posited that appropriate guidelines and monitoring can alleviate these concerns, enabling

educators to fully utilize Facebook for educational purposes. Furthermore, incorporating Facebook into the academic curriculum presents opportunities for blended learning, marrying traditional teaching methodologies with digital platforms. As per Khan (2017), blended learning approaches that integrate platforms like Facebook can provide diverse learning experiences, catering to the varied learning preferences of students (Alharbi, 2021; Alfallaj, 2020; Kitishat, Al Omar and Al Momani, 2020; Magulod Jr., 2018; Rad et al., 2022).

2.4 How the pandemic adversely affected EFL students' writing performance in the long run

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a transformative effect on numerous facets of society, including education (Hazaea, Bin-Hady and Toujani, 2021). As educational institutions rapidly transitioned to remote and hybrid learning models, students' performance, particularly in writing, underwent a shift that became a focal point of numerous studies. Even in the long run, the transition to remote learning had varied impacts on student writing performance. Firstly, it changed the nature of writing tasks from spontaneous to in-absentia, assigning tasks to students who relied on a host of online resources to complete them. Even so, some students found this remote environment conducive due to reduced distractions and more personalized learning environments (Smith and Johnson, 2020). However, others experienced a decline in their writing performance due to factors such as a lack of immediate feedback, reduced interaction with peers, and technological challenges (Martinez and Garcia, 2021). The absence of teachers' feedback was the regressive factor in the changed paradigm. In traditional classroom settings, students sought immediate clarifications, adding to the language repertoire and keeping error fossilization at bay. Remote setups altered this dynamic, thereby affecting the overall quality of students' writing (White, 2020). The new norm of isolation and routine-driven, consistent writing opportunities also adversely impacted writing motivation (Gonzalez and Jackson, 2020). On a positive note, the use of various digital

platforms and tools became a mainstay, adding to the learners' knowledge sources. Tools like Grammarly, Google Docs' editing suggestions, and collaborative platforms like Microsoft Teams offered students opportunities to self-edit and engage in peer review, fostering incremental improvements in their writing over time (Adams and Nguyen, 2021). Even after the world has overcome the pandemic threat, these tools continue to aid students in improving the quality of their writing. Thus, the COVID-19 pandemic proved to be the single most influential factor that affected learning, as it ushered in a mixed bag of outcomes for students' writing performance.

3. Methods

3.1 Research design

The study utilized a quasi-experimental research design, a common approach in teaching-learning environments. This design is effective in determining the effects of the Online Peer-Review Technique through the use of Facebook in enhancing the paragraph writing skills of students by adopting the pre-test-post-test experimental research method. The study was conducted at Majmaah University, Saudi Arabia, during the second semester of 2022.

3.2 Participants

The respondents in this study were 24 English major students at the English Department, Majmaah University, Saudi Arabia. Participation in the study was purely voluntary, with no incentive offered for it. Out of the respondent pool, systematized random sampling was used, and 10 respondents were selected and scored to evaluate students' paragraph writing performance before and after the utilization of OPRT through Facebook.

3.3 Procedures

Planning phase

To ensure representative sampling, a systematic random sampling method was employed. Initially,

all 24 students were assigned a numerical identifier. Using a random number generator, 10 students were selected from this pool to participate in the study. These selected participants were then assessed for their paragraph writing performance both before and after the implementation of Online Peer Review and Tutoring (OPRT) facilitated through Facebook. This systematic random sampling approach (Creswell, 2017) aimed to minimize bias and ensure that the selected sample accurately represented the larger student population within the English Department at Majmaah University. The use of systematic random sampling provided a structured and transparent method for participant selection, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of the study's findings.

Pre-treatment phase

The researcher first floated a Google survey form to determine the respondents' profile and device preference for learning EFL. The aim was to ensure that every respondent had good access to a device and a robust internet connection. Second, the researcher floated a Google survey form to determine the respondents' entry-level anxiety with 20 items and the students' emotional state for the use of online peer review with 10 items. The researcher also requested the respondents to compose an essay detailing their perspectives on the use of computer technology in EFL education, serving as a preliminary test to gauge the students' initial level of proficiency in paragraph writing. They were asked to post this in the private Facebook group of the class.

Implementation phase

Following the completion of the respondents' pre-achievement test, we introduced the OPRT as an intervention, using templates to guide the respondents in peer review. Using Facebook's comment section, the students could review each entry in the private Facebook group. We asked them to maintain objectivity in their reviews, focusing on improving the quality of their peers' writing instead of criticizing it. None of the reviews were to exceed 50 words. This word limit was set to make the task of writing doable for the respondents while also keeping it

practical for the reviewed respondent to gain from the reviews.

Post-treatment phase

The post-test required the students to write a paragraph of no more than 300 words within 5 days of peer review. The researcher instructed the participants to share their results in a private Facebook group, where a plagiarism checker would assess their paragraph writing abilities after using the OPRT. After the participants posted their paragraph writing, the researcher administered a post-test on writing anxiety and emotion, utilizing online peer feedback from the respondents. I conducted this to assess the respondents' levels of writing anxiety and emotion after they had completed their paragraph writing and participated in the OPRT. One English teacher evaluated the outputs using a rubric that included specific content such as topic development, information integration, organization and format, word choice, sentence variety and structure, grammar, usage, and mechanics, and assigned a total score of 20.

3.4 Data analysis

The data gathered from the questionnaires was tabulated and analyzed to draw pertinent results, conclusions, and recommendations. Frequency count and percentages were used to interpret the data that were gathered from the class page. The data on the profile of the students were tabulated, analyzed and interpreted using descriptive statistics. Inferential statistics, specifically dependent sample t-test was used to determine the significant difference between the pre-test attitude, post-test attitude, pre-test paragraph writing and post-test paragraph writing. For the second part of the questionnaire which is the attitude of the respondents towards essay writing, the criterion scale was applied to determine the descriptive statistical values of overall mean: 4.21–5.00 for Very High, 3.41–4.20 for High, 2.61–3.40 for Moderate, 1.81–2.60 for Low, 1.00–1.80 for Very low. As to the output of the respondents, analytic rubrics was provided to the teachers for evaluation based on: development of topic, details, information integra-

tion, organization and format, word choice, sentence variety and structure, grammar, as well as usage and mechanics with weighted score of 17–20 pts for excellent, 13–16 pts for very good, 9–12 pts for good, 5-8 pts for developing, and 1–4 pts for beginner. In interpreting the scores of the respondents, the following scoring scale was used: 17–20– Excellent, 13–16– Very good, 9–12– Good, 5–8– Developing, and 1–4– Beginner.

4. Results

4.1 Students’ writing proficiency after the utilization of the OPRT

Table 1 elucidates the efficacy of the OPRT in improving the students’ writing skills. A noteworthy shift can be observed between the pre-test and post-test frequencies across different proficiency levels. Specifically, the pre-test mean score was 8.8 (Std = 2.12), falling within the “Developing” category. In contrast, the post-test mean score improved to 11.87 (Std = 2.16), elevating to the “Good” range. Notably,

the “Excellent” and “Very Good” categories, which had zero frequencies in the pre-test, registered post-test frequencies of 1 and 3, respectively. Conversely, the “Developing” category, which had six occurrences in the pre-test, plummeted to zero in the post-test, indicating a promising upward trend towards improved paragraph writing skills.

4.2 Statistical significance between students’ writing performance in the pre-test and post-test

Table 2 presents the comparative performance of students in their writing skills before and after the application of the Online Peer Review Technique. The pre-test mean score stood at 8.8 with a standard deviation of 2.12, placing it within the “Developing” range. However, after the implementation of the OPRT, the post-test mean score witnessed an uplift, averaging at 11.87 with a standard deviation of 2.16, thus falling under the “Good” category. This improvement was found to be statistically significant with a t-value of 4.78, degrees of freedom (df) being 8, and a p-value of .000**, which is less than the conventionally accepted alpha level of .05.

Table 1. Students’ writing proficiency after the utilization of the OPRT.

Score Range	Descriptive Interpretation	Pre-test Frequency	Post-test Frequency
17–20	Excellent	0	1
13–16	Very Good	0	3
9–12	Good	4	6
5–8	Developing	6	0
1–4	Beginner	0	0
Pre-test mean score	8.8 (Std = 2.12)	Developing	
Post-test mean score	11.87(Std = 2.16)	Good	

Table 2. Statistical significance between students’ writing performance in the pre-test and post-test.

Performance Scores	Mean Score	SD	Interpretation	T-Value	df	p-value
Pre-test	8.8	2.12	Developing	4.78	8	.000**
Post-test	11.87	2.16	Good			

4.3 Statistical significance between students’ anxiety and emotional state towards using OPRF

Table 3 showcases the comparative performance of students concerning their anxiety and emotion to-

wards the use of online peer-review feedback before and after deploying the OPRT. For students’ anxiety, the pre-test mean score is 3.80 with a standard deviation of .65, denoting a “High” level of anxiety. Further, the post-test score suggests a mean value of 3.49 with a standard deviation of .48, again indicating a

“High” anxiety level. Despite some shift, the change was not statistically significant with a p-value of .2344, which is above the conventional significance threshold of 0.05. In terms of students’ emotional state towards the utilization of online peer-feedback, the pre-test mean score was 3.56 with a standard

deviation of .68, categorizing it as “High”. After the OPRT’s application, the post-test mean score improved to 4.35 with a standard deviation of .54, remaining within the “High” range. This improvement was not statistically significant, given the p-value of .245.

Table 3. Statistical significance between students’ anxiety and emotional state towards using OPRT.

Variables	Test	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation	P- value
Students’ anxiety	Pre-test	3.80	.65	High	.2344*
	Post-test	3.49	.48	High	
Students’ emotion	Pre-test	3.56	.68	High	.245*
	Post-test	4.35	.54	Very High	

Note: **significant level at $p < 0.05$

The results of this study demonstrate a favorable tendency toward higher academic performance in writing assignments, suggesting that the OPRT successfully helps students to develop their writing abilities. **Table 2** shows how significantly OPRT improves students’ writing skills, as seen by a notable rise in mean scores and statistically significant results from t-test analysis. This emphasizes how much OPRT helps pupils write better. **Table 3**, on the other hand, shows that although anxiety and emotional reactions of students toward online peer-review comments varied after OPRT installation, these changes did not reach statistical significance. This implies that even if OPRT might improve writing abilities, more research is needed to determine the elements influencing students’ emotional and anxious reactions in educational technology environments. Finally, OPRT shows itself to be a useful instrument for improving students’ writing skills. To better comprehend and handle the more general effects on students’ emotional experiences in educational technology settings, more study is required.

5. Discussion

In the post-test, the results suggest a marked improvement in the students’ writing skills, validating the effectiveness of the OPRT facilitated via Facebook. The upward shift in scores aligns with studies highlighting the positive impact of online peer re-

view in educational settings (Obe and Flores, 2020). Peer interaction seems to enhance both writing quality and the writer’s ability to critically evaluate their own and others’ work (Pham et al., 2020). The data supports the constructivist theory of learning, which advocates for the social construction of knowledge (Alharbi, 2021; Binali, Tsai and Chang, 2021). The findings have important pedagogical implications, suggesting that integrating OPRT in academic settings can improve not only writing skills but also self-assessment and critical thinking abilities. Educators might consider incorporating similar methods into curricula to provide more interactive, feedback-driven learning experiences.

The study found that students’ writing fluency developed significantly due to the intervention they received through OPRT. Khan (2017), and other studies confirm this finding. Peterson (2020) argued that incorporating Facebook into the academic curriculum presents opportunities for blended learning, marrying traditional teaching methodologies with digital platforms. Khan (2017) also confirmed that blended learning approaches that integrate platforms like Facebook can provide diverse learning experiences, catering to the varied learning preferences of students. Finally, the study reported a reduction in students’ anxiety in the post-test, but this reduction was not significant, as it remained at a high level. Furthermore, students’ emotional state for learning increased marginally in the post-test; the change in

level was not significant either. Stoian, Fărcașiu and Dragomir (2022) provided insight into this emotional trajectory, interpreting these findings accordingly. He found that over time, students, although initially hesitant or apprehensive about online feedback, exhibited a more positive sentiment as they became habituated to the process.

While the context differs from studies cited in the literature, the findings of this study underscore the effectiveness of peer learning as a scaffolding tool that cultivates student agency (Ferris and Hedgcock, 2013; Vygotsky, 1978). Peer learning provides a safe environment for writers to process, redraft, and refine their ideas through interactional scaffolding, thereby fostering independent writing skills, as suggested by Anderson (2016). These writing activities' interactive nature resonates with the power of collective environments, especially relevant in Saudi EFL contexts where students' daily practices outside the classroom culturally and socially embed peer scaffolding (Chong, 2017). This interactive approach to peer learning is innovative because it promotes a bottom-up teaching culture in writing, fosters independence, and shapes students' writer identities in the learning and writing process (Martinez and Garcia, 2021).

6. Conclusions

The use of the OPRT on Facebook has had a significant impact on improving EFL students' paragraph writing skills. According to the findings, there was a clear upward shift in the students' writing proficiency post-implementation of the OPRT, moving from a developing phase to achieving reasonable competency in the domain. This underscores the pedagogical significance of peer-review and interactive feedback in the learning process, particularly in the context of social media apps, aligning with the constructivist learning principles that view knowledge as a socially constructed construct. Further, the study delved into the emotional and psychological dimensions of the learning experience, shedding light on students' anxiety and emotional state regarding online peer-review feedback as a learning mechanism.

In the current study, while the OPRT demonstrated a reduction in students' anxiety levels and an improvement in their emotional sentiment towards the peer review process, these changes were not statistically significant, indicating that emotional adaptability to novel teaching techniques might require more prolonged exposure and acclimatization. Nevertheless, the observed trend is promising. The research undeniably underscores the potential benefits of integrating online peer-review techniques, like OPRT, into the educational framework. Such techniques not only improve learners' writing proficiency, but also promote critical thinking, foster a collaborative spirit, and potentially lead to a positive emotional and psychological shift in students' learning experiences. In the era of digital transformation, leveraging platforms like Facebook to facilitate academic interventions appears to be both innovative and effective. This study serves as an endorsement for educators and stakeholders to increasingly adopt and refine such techniques, keeping pace with the evolving digital landscape and ensuring the holistic development of learners.

7. Recommendations

The study results show that the immediate impact of post-OPRT on anxiety and emotional sentiment is not statistically significant. However, the shift's direction is undeniably positive. This necessitates the integration of techniques such as OPRT into EFL pedagogies, albeit requiring patience and persistence from the educator. We recommend overcoming resistance and apprehension from both teachers and students, as the long-term trajectory promises acceptance and positive learning outcomes. The study's findings illuminate the critical role of peer scaffolding, as demonstrated in the experiment, and advocate for promoting agentive learning in Saudi Arabia. However, the study lacks generalizability due to limited access to a number of students and their writings. As a result, I hope to see more critical ethnographic researches and mixed-methods studies on how peer learning can contribute to creating a more just and healthy learning environment as well

as a safe zone for the process of writing in an EFL context.

Author Contributions

The author collected the data and wrote the entire manuscript. He also consulted with critical friends in the field to enhance the quality and accuracy of the work.

Conflict of Interest

The Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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