

# [Teaching writing skills to vietnamese students education essay](https://assignbuster.com/teaching-writing-skills-to-vietnamese-students-education-essay/)

## Background of the problem

Writing skill which includes language, private knowledge and skill, emotion and the interaction of personal opinion is difficult and challenging to learn and develop for many students in EFL contexts in general and in Vietnam in particular. In Vietnam, there are many teachers of English who even believe that teaching writing skill to EFL learners is more complex than teaching other communicative skills (Mazdayasna &Tahririan, 2001). Although language learners have to learn hard to have good compositions, they still have made a variety of errors or mistakes when writing. In other words, EFL learners often feel stressful and anxious when writing in a foreign language (Spratt & Leung, 2000). Consequently, language teachers and researchers have made an effort to know how they can do to help students be able to minimize their mistakes in their writing. However, they also admit that it is impossible for them or any teacher to read and correct all the students’ compositions on writing lessons because “ correcting written work is time-consuming” (Ur, 1999, p. 74), especially for large classes. Peer feedback (also peer correction, peer response or peer review) with its advantages can be a promising way which can be used to encourage students to read and give comments and suggestions together for enrichment of their peers’ writings before the final versions of their products are submitted to their teachers. Peer correction works as a vital part in the process approach to teaching writing because it helps learners realize their learning level as well as their demands for enhancement of writing ability. Brown (1994) and Gipps (1994) have the same opinion that feed back is one of the main factors in the process of English learning and teaching. Many other researchers, for example, Paulus (1999), Min (2006) promote the idea that verbal and written feedback should be applied to foster writing skills. This strategy, thus, has been used popularly on the writing lessons of many English classes in Vietnam consisting of those at centre of Informatics and Foreign Language, Thai Nguyen College of Education, Thai Nguyen Uni. Ur (1999, p. 74) states that peer correction can help us not only save time, but also develop the “ critical reading” skill for “ content, organization, style and language accuracy”. Additionally, peer feedback can receive an efficient method to make students to have “ critical thinking” of writing and assessment skills than teacher feedback. ??? In other words, peer feedback helps learners make good use of their own effort to make their writings expressive and effective. However, in spite of its roles and impact on the process of writing, peer feedback has not been paid much attention in Vietnam. Some researchers such as Tran (2007), Phan (2007) who are interested in peer response in writing introduce their point of view, knowledge and experience about this topic in their researches which show the present state of employing peer feedback learners’ attitude and especially offer some suggestions to better the current response training.

## Purpose of the study

As mentioned above, it is not difficult to find out studies which research the role of peer feedback in writing skill on the way to foster it. However, the writer of this study with to do the research to know about the fact of peer feedback in Vietnam in general and the Centre of Informatics and Foreign Language, TNCE, TNU more clearly. This study also investigates whether peer feedback can have positive impact on ESL writing process among pre-intermediate non major students at this Centre or not; they can revise their own writing works to develop their writing skill or not and how this process really happens. Bearing in mind, the writer decides the research with title “ Using peer correction in teaching writing skill to help Vietnamese college non-major students at CIF, CE, TNU reduce errors in their written compositions”

## Research question(s) or statement of hypothesis

This study aims at finding answer to the following research question:

How can peer correction helps EFL learners reduce mistakes in their written compositions?

The question is addressed to one of the writing classes that I am teaching this term in Centre of Informatics and Foreign Language, College of Education, Thai Nguyen University with the aim to examine how peer correction affects the process of revising and writing a complete composition of my students here.

## Organization of the study

This study can be divided into five chapters. In this chapter, background of the EFL writing in local context is given and the aim of this study is also identified. Chapter 2 mentions some reviews of the literature which go through related literature and researches, in which, general of writing teaching and a brief idea of peer feedback in writing skill will be focused. In chapter 3, the writer describes the methodology and processes of the research. Chapter 4 presents data analysis and findings. Chapter 5 gives some implications of the study, summarizes main point discussed in the study, indicates some limitations and proposes some suggestions for the further researches. Lastly, the final parts of the study are appendixes and references.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

## Overview of writing process

Lannon (1989) claims that writing is a process delivering meaningful messages and including its own specific goal. This process requires students to work hard instead of regarding it as an uncomplicated act (Byrne, 1988). However, in language teaching and learning process, Tribble (1996, p. 3) defines writing as a language skill that involves “ not just a graphic representation of speech, but the development and presentation of thoughts in a structured way”. This means writers need to arrange their ideas logically and systematically. There have been different approaches to teaching writing EFL classes but two most popular ones are product approach and process one. Product approach can be the traditional method of writing which stresses the final outcome of the writing process as well as grammar, usage, form and mechanics of the composition. Students are often asked to write a similar paragraph basing on the model and using new taught structures, vocabularies or any aspects of language. After that, the teacher will correct students’ writings or “ feedback in the class commonly means the correction of the students’ language errors” (Mazdayasna &Tahririan, 2001, p. 56). Therefore, students find difficult to know why and how they made errors to avoid repeating them on the next tasks. Though thanks to this method students can sometimes reject errors (Tribble, 1996), it does not encourage students create in writing at all, “ the use of language is manipulate of fixed patterns; the patterns are learned by imitation” (Pincas, 1962, p. 185).

Over the last forty years, there has been remarkable interest in writing process. There are many researchers and educators suggesting language teachers that they should pay attention to students’ writing process instead of only their final writing version (Paige Way, Joiner and Seaman, 2000). Process writing can contain stages such as rewriting, writing, revising and rewriting or editing. However, Reid (1993) supplement this process with three more stages, namely, responding, evaluating and post-writing, in which peer feedback is focused more in responding.

Prewriting: something done before drafting such as choosing a topic, brainstorming, collecting data, organizing.

Composing / drafting: actually writing.

Revising: selecting organization, structures, edition or collection word.

Rewriting: completing stage step by step.

Responding: getting the teacher and peers’ responses, discussing with them about papers to improve the content.

Evaluating: receiving marks or scores from the teachers.

Post-writing: any activities happened after completing rewriting and getting assessment (role-play)

Cresswell claims that to as students to exchange their writing draft is an effective way to foster their learning autonomy and help them become alert reader when proofreading their partners’ written tasks (2000). As the result, they also have critical thinking when they read their own paper to find and correct themselves their mistakes in those, i. e. their writing ability can be develop (Markino, 1993). It is necessary to allow students to have more time to write and get feedback from their teachers and classmates, and then rewrite the drafts so that they can let reader be abele to understand their idea expressed on the paper better (Frankenberg-Garcia, 1999).

## Definition and some types of errors

Different researchers have different ways to categorize errors. In this study, the writer only wishes to refer one of classification strategies based on the relation to comprehensibility given by Burt and Kiparsky (1972) because of its close concern with the notion of mistakes mentioned in this study. These researchers divided error into two main types: global errors and local ones. Henclrikson (1978) notes that we will be able to realize which error is global or local, because error can be regard as “ communicative” or “ non-communicative” ones. According to Ellis (1997), while global errors such as over generalization or simplification have an effect on explanation of the whole structure of sentence, local error just affect a single factor in sentences, i. e. word, phrases, closures or grammatical morphemes. Burt and Kiparsky (1974) also claim that global error have higher hierarchy than local errors. Thus the global ones seem to be care about and be corrected more than local ones Norish (1983). However, those local errors can be considered as “ minor ones”, error in tense and aspect”, they are popular mistakes of English writing learners.

## Peer feedback and its impact on reducing mistakes and developing writing skill

“ Knowledge is best acquired through negotiated interaction” (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996, p. 380). There are many approaches to error correction and also definitions of peer feedback from many linguists and experts. According to Richards, et al,

Peer feedback is an activity in the revising stage of writing in which students receive feedback about their writing from other students-their peers. Typically students work in pairs or small groups, read each other’s compositions and ask questions or give comments or suggestions (1992, p. 268).

Some other researchers of EFL writing state that feedback play an essential role in the process of writing. Keh (1990) claims that giving feedback means giving comments and suggestions, which helps the writer edit his or her composition. Through teachers or classmates’ feedback, students can know what kinds of mistakes they made and how to cope with those mistakes. Therefore, if students can get a “ productive feedback”, they can correct their own errors and avoiding making the similar mistakes in the later writing tasks. It is wise for teachers to require learners’ responsibilities for their own writing performance and their peers’ ones because of the strong effect of peer feedback on students’ review as well as their writing skill. Zamel (1987) supposes that peers are actual and direct readers or reviewers.

In the fact that, there are a number of methods teachers utilize to assist students check their mistakes but indeed teachers seem to not be able to resolve the problem individually. Students play the parts of both writers and readers or givers and receivers. Hefernick (1983) regards peer editing as learning and teaching instrument for teachers and learners because students can give helpful feedback each other.

Peer writers can edit their own written compositions basing on the readers’ remarks and comments (Mendonca and John, 1994; Rollison, 1998), so the writers can be better at learning writing. Students can also have superior performance by the student-to-student activities because these activities are often more detailed than teacher feedback (Caulk, 1994). Also, Mangelsdorfin thinks that peer review can help many students to have diverse perception about their topics as well as foster the ideas and make them more clearly in the EFL writings. Therefore, researchers believe that “ peer feedback can have a positive effect on classroom dynamics and can help to train learners in skills they need to become autonomous” (Spratt et al, 2005, p. 157).

Joyce (1997) employs a research to explore main strategies so as to respond to the EFL students’ composition writings. After the twelve-week period, by comparing the initial writing sample and the third one after using peer editing, he shows that writing competency of students grows strongly and concludes this strategy is efficient and necessary.

In the research conducted by Wong (1999), peer correction was carried out and discovered by qualitative data to ease the process of EFL writing in four factors: grammar, rules and concepts, meaning and emotional elements. In addition, it helps students improve awareness of writing skill. Quantitative findings of this study introduce 97% students admit that they want to apply peer correction in the future. It is important to stress that the writer of this study learns a lot from Wong’ research, and longs to use some his methods in this research to examine whether it is suitable for the writer’ teaching fact.

Kurt and Atay (2007) also experimented with 86 Turkish Prospective Teachers of English. Those participants are divided into 2 groups: Experimental group (writing an essay and receiving peer feedback) and control group (writing an essay and receiving teacher feedback only). This study concluded that peer feedback helps Turkish PTs reduce writing anxiety and it is really considered as a complementary factor of the teacher feedback.

Despite its advantages, peer response has its own weakness. Its procedure requests the training and organization from the teacher as well as it depends on students’ ability of collaboration with peers. Many students give their partners too general and ambiguous reviews. They make their peers find it difficult to understand and catch messages or information. The writing ability, thus, seems to not improve (Tsui & Ng, 2000).

## CHAPTER 3: METHODS AND PROCEDURES

## Methods of the study

The research is done qualitatively in the context of a 30-student English class. They are non-major students; their level of English proficiency is pre-intermediate and their writing ability is average. In this report, the writer uses two research tools to collect and analyze the needed data, i. e. recording and interview.

Recording is used to record the process of peer correction. Chosen subjects were invited to record their discussions and then they were transcribed (Appendix C) for analyzing. Voice recorder is chosen instead of video recorder to prevent their discussions from the presence of another people, which may interrupt their current process of peer correction. The writer also hopes that through recordings she can derive how students check and correct their writings each other and what types of mistakes are corrected most.

The second tool used in this study is interviews with students at the end of the research to study whether this strategy is really suitable for them or not, that is, expose students’ attitude toward peer correction strategy as well as their opinions and get their suggestions to make this process better. According to Herbert and Irene (1995), in interviews students need to know the way of actual listening. Because they are pre-intermediate non-major students, they can only use English during the interviews, so they can speak in Vietnamese and then the writer record and translate them into English.

## Procedure

As a matter of ethics, the whole procedure of teaching and learning is implemented similarly to all students of the class after all of them give consent to be part of the research. However, due to the limit of the study, I only focus to record and interview the learning engagement of two students (who I call anonymously in this report as A1 and A2 as a matter of ethics) during this process as the data for analysis.

The writer after considering carefully decide to make peer correcting tasks in class. Before the real peer correction, the writer design some exercises to introduce the way to check a composition. They were guided to focus on some discrete mistake. Items are subject-verb agreement, spells, tense, verb form, number, part of speech. The structure of sentence, content, and organization of the composition/essay is also asked to be commented. Firstly, the students were asked to check sentence by sentence and then, they worked in pairs to check the paragraph (Appendix B)

This research lasted for 8 weeks, and the writer chose 3 topics to ask students to write, discus and correct and then rewrite before submitting to give the teacher. These topics are informal letter to a pen friend; a descriptive passage about a close relative in your family; a biography passage of a famous person.

During this process, the writer asks students to give them tape-recorder to record their own discussions.

In this paper, interviews are well-prepared. After recording them, the writer will transcribe and translate them (Appendix ?)

## ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

## Data analysis

Analysis of data from the recordings

The writer, in this part, wish to learn about the process of peer correction through discussions taken recordings of subjects and interviews between the writers and them. After that, the writer would assess the result of the recorded discussions and interviews.

It is undeniable that peer correction help students improve EFL writing a lot, although the level of subjects is not high, they can give comments on a variety of types of mistakes language such as article, preposition, S-V agreement, infinitive or gerund an sometimes even whole structure of the composition or word choice. When correcting mistakes, they also give some suggestions and explain the reasons for those mistakes. Below are some examples in collected data.

## Extract 1(topic 1, A1’s composition)

Before correction:

She and I are very different but we got on well together. She is short and I’m tall. She likes stay at home and watch television with my parents’s.

A2: Ok. Sentence 1 is ok. In sentence 2, you should use get, not got, simple present. Next sentences let me see, here, like add v-ing not bare verb. My parents’s, I don’t know my parents’s here mean, without possessive mark is correct. Do you agree?

A1: Yeah of course

After correction:

She and I are very different but we get on well together…. She is shorter than me….. She likes staying at home and watching television with my parents…

## Extract 2 (topic 1, A2’s composition)

Before correction:

My young brother is a 15 year old and I am 20 year old. My brother learn at Song Cong town and I learn at TN college of education.

A1: My young brother is a 15 year old. You don’t need an article here, it is not a noun and years, not year. It’s plural. My brother learn at Song Cong town and I learn at TN college of education, wrong form of the verb the third singular person.

A2: Okie. Learns not learn

After correction:

My young brother is 15 years old and I am 20 years old. He learns at Song Cong town and I learn at TN college of education.

## Extract 3 (topic 2, A1’s composition)

Before correction:

I was born in a family of farmer. My parents are workers in a company and my brother is married and works for the post office.

A2: I don’t understand the next sentences. I was born in a family of farmer. My parents are workers in a company. Why?

A1: Oh, so so sorry, I mean classes in society. But I can’t express this idea.

A2: Working class, you mean? Or you will not ? sentence. Are you clear? Now, next, any brother is married, was, not is and works for the post office.

After correction:

My parents are workers in a company and my brother is married and works for the post office.

## Extract 4 (topic 2, A2’s composition)

Before correction:

It’s verry wonderful.

A1: Verry? Wrong spelling. It’s Very. Can you find out the sentence?

A2: Yes. That’s right.

After correction:

It’s very wonderful!

Through recordings, the writer also realizes that apart from getting knowledge to improve their writing skill, students are very interested in their discussions. They seem to feel confident and have responsibilities with their task.

Analysis of data from the interviews

The information from the interviewed reveals students’ thoughts, feelings and ideas toward this process.

Although A1 has not tried peer correction before, she is convinced of this strategy after this study. She feels that she can realize her mistakes clearly and correct them. She is also able to avoid repeating on the next task. She wants to work in group of 3 or 4 to get more feedback from her peers. That means she admit the role of the peer feedback in developing her writing skill.

## Extract 6 (interview between the writer and A1)

W: Will you use this strategy again?

A1: Yes, of course.

W: Can you give some suggestions to make the process better?

A1: I like working in group of three or four. That’s all.

W: Thank you very much!

Unlike A1, A2 has used this strategy many times. Therefore she has a lot of experiences. Her ideas express her deep understanding of peer correction. She also likes it and she knows how it assists her in her writing process. However, she stresses the role of the teacher in the process of revising.

## Extract 7 (interview between the writer and A2)

A2: I like it. But I still want teachers correct it finally.

W: Why do you think so?

A2: Because I myself sometimes find out my own mistakes. My partner can help me that. Moreover, when reading the text of my partner, I can learn something from it. However, there are some mistakes we can’t correct we need teacher.

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## Findings

According to the data analysis from the two lessons, it can be personally concluded that

the most important feature that makes my students to engage more in the lesson is the kind of assessment which forces them to learn although the meaningfulness of tasks also more or less affect the level of engagement

the most meaningful tasks to my students are tasks that can help them to pass the tests at the end of the semester not tasks that give them reasons to communicate as I expected

## REFLECTIONS

This study has given me a chance to know more about my students, about what goes wrong with them when they are not engaged in my reading class. In the study, I also have chance to access a number of researches of many experienced language educators and teachers, from which I obtain new knowledge of language teaching and learning in general and knowledge of meaningful tasks in teaching extensive reading in particular.

During the research, I also learn more about the methods of doing research in a scientific way. Firstly, I learn to look at the situation of my English teaching and learning critically and make research questions with the hope of improving it. I also learn to arrange and organize my ideas and my work systematically to fit the timetable of the research procedure. But the most important thing is that I learn how to put my background knowledge into the knowledge repertoire of related previous studies to have a broader view of the situation and to make my research skills (such summarizing and synthesizing) useful by activating them creatively and critically.

However, the research still has some drawbacks regarding the methods of data collection and analysis that I might change in my next research if I have more time. Firstly, instead of just doing the research on 2 lessons, I intend to do research from the beginning of the semester so that my students not only have chances to choose the texts themselves but also have chances to choose the topics they are interested in. Moreover, when I observe them in the whole semester, the effect of other aspects like the pressure of testing, the emotion of learners, etc. can be avoided and thus, the data I collect may become more reliable. Secondly, instead of interviewing my students after the research, I will interview them during the research, which may give me more chances to adjust my lessons to be more suitable and meaningful to them.

## CONCLUSION

To sum up, the research has brought to me some important lessons of English teaching and learning in general and of working with my students in particular.

Firstly, the research affirms for me that extensive reading activities are good activities that students want to do. It is not because in the activities, students have opportunities to choose the texts of their own interest and at their own level of proficiency but also because extensive reading activities give them another environment of reading in which they are not in pressure to read. Thus, they can comfortably improve their English fluency.

It is also proved by the research that students are more engaged in the extensive reading activities when the tasks are more meaningful to them. More specifically, in my case that means the tasks that give my students a more meaningful reason to complete engage them more. However, it is also noted that the purpose of learning for mark (i. e. learning to prepare for final-term tests) should also be taken into considerations as a factor that affects the engagement of students.

However, since the research is not totally as good as I expected, I would like to do further research on this topic on the following issues:

How to balance the two kinds of reading (i. e. more communicative extensive reading and test-based intensive reading) to make reading activities more meaningful?

How do the extensive reading activities look like if the students are allowed to choose the texts in groups?

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## APPENDICES