# A Study of Peer Assessment of English Writing in High School

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*Abstract*—**Peer assessment is beneficial for improving the issue of poor effectiveness in evaluation and lack of student subjectivity in traditional English writing classes, but there is relatively little research on this feedback model in high school English writing classes. With the publishing of the new curriculum standards, learning ability, and thinking capacity are more emphasized, however, in current high school English classes, they are mostly absent. This article aims to discuss the advantages of peer feedback on writing in achieving subject core goals under the guidance of curriculum standards, explore the relationship of mutual promotion between the two elements, and the potential problems of attitude arbitrariness, unfamiliar operation, and limited evaluating quality when applying peer feedback in high school. Corresponding suggestions are proposed as evaluating routinization, responsibility distribution, group diversification, assessing standards specification, and assessing ways diversification to provide assistance in the application of peer assessment in high school English writing teaching.**

*Keywords*—**peer assessment, core competencies, high school English, writing evaluation**

## I. INTRODUCTION

Peer assessment typically refers to learners providing oral or written feedback on their peers' writing in pairs or groups [1]. Numerous studies have shown that in peer assessment, writers can effectively reduce their anxiety, thereby stimulating thinking and improving the quality of writing. Many discussions and studies on applying the feedback model of peer assessment to English writing in universities have shown that in the feedback model of peer evaluation, students become the main evaluators and active participants, which has a potential learning-promoting effect [2]. However, there is still relatively little discussion on the effectiveness and existing problems of peer assessment in high school. After the release of the high school English curriculum standards (2020), subject core competencies have received a lot of attention and emphasis. Cultivating students' language knowledge, learning ability, cultural awareness, and thinking capacity has become an indispensable part when high school English teachers design their classes, and writing teaching is no exception. Ability is the foundation

and prerequisite of competencies. High school teachers often use a writing evaluation model, which is a simple scoring and summary, summarizing excellent sample essays, and thus completing writing class. This evaluation model does not meet the curriculum standards and does not regard students as the main body, which is not conducive to their development and improvement. Many students are numb to accepting unsatisfactory scores or have a flat view of scores that do not rise or fall, and replace their original words, sentences, and grammar with teacher-provided revision prompts without thinking, resulting in frequent occurrences of the same errors and hindering the improvement of their writing competence. We need to innovate teaching ideas and evaluation models, with diversified assessment as the main operation. The peer assessment gradually elevates students' writing level through identifying and filling in gaps, and learning from strengths and weaknesses, achieving true student-student progress [3].

Based on the above, this article will discuss the problems and countermeasures of applying peer assessment in high school English writing classes.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Reasons for Peer Assessment to Promote Learning

During peer assessment, students become the main body of reviewing and evaluating. In the traditional writing evaluation, students usually passively wait for the score and the evaluation that entirely belong to the teachers, and the analysis and thinking of the article also belong to the teachers. But in the process of peer assessing, students are not only the objects of evaluation but also need to actively think and learn, evaluate the works of others, and have the opportunity to re-examine writing requirements and evaluation standards [4].

During peer evaluation, students become the subject of reflection. In the traditional evaluation, score levels, and revision suggestions are pointed out by teachers, and students rarely think or question the ratings and incorrect circles given by the authoritative. Furthermore, essay correction in the traditional classroom usually involves dozens of students, thus, teachers will quickly skim their works and emphasize the mistakes made by the most to the whole class, which is not targeted enough. Students face assembly-line-like grading results, and their

initiative to reflect and gain more is limited. Also, high school teaching tasks are heavy and complex for them. In peer assessment, students will first re-examine the evaluations given by their peers rather than authoritative ones. They can critically think and absorb the suggestions, leaving a deeper impression on their minds. What's more, when faced with more targeted and specific evaluations, students can feel valued and are more willing to value article writing and the evaluation suggestions they receive, which enhances their driving force for writing learning.

Overall, peer evaluation has multiple meanings for both writers and evaluators, such as constructive reflection, task completion time increase, key components of high-quality writing focus, a strong sense of responsibility, and students' metacognitive development [5].

### B. Core Competency Goals

The core competencies of English subject (2020) mainly include language ability, cultural awareness, thinking quality, and learning ability. Specifically reflected in writing, language ability refers to the ability to express meaning, as well as language awareness and sense. Cultural awareness permeates the understanding of Chinese and foreign cultures and the recognition of excellent cultures in writing. Thinking quality refers to the ability and level of logical, critical, and innovative discourse. Learning ability refers to the awareness and ability of students to actively apply and adapt English learning strategies, broaden English learning channels, and help themselves improve writing efficiency and quality. In fact, English writing is a means for students to output their ideas and viewpoints, and it is the interweaving application of core competencies in the subject.

### C. The Connection between Them

The process approach is currently advocated in domestic writing teaching, emphasizing that the writing process is not an isolated behavioral process of the writer, but a cyclic process of psychological cognition, thinking creation, and social interaction [6]. In the guided peer assessment process, students can achieve effective ideological collision and interaction, which is more conducive to achieving subject core goals. At the same time, the core competence goals make it more feasible for teachers to guide the dimensions and values of peer assessment in the process of writing. Therefore, the guidance and implementation of core competence goals and the application of peer assessment are mutually reinforced.

Peer evaluation is a student-centered writing evaluation method that emphasizes the learning process. It can not only enhance students' writing ability, but also enhance their enthusiasm and critical thinking in writing. This is in line with the requirements of cultivating students' thinking qualities in the new curriculum standards regarding the concept of "cooperative learning" and core competencies. In the implementation and research of peer evaluation, it has also been found that students are more willing to participate in interactive environments, which not only reduces the burden on teachers but also improves their language ability and thinking quality [7]. Meanwhile, the feedback method of peer assessment is conducive to promoting information reconstruction, developing cognition, promoting communication, cooperation, and progress, and enhancing interest-driven and active participation. A series of cognitive development processes and brain thinking activities lies in the process of peer evaluation. Various ideas are constantly presented in the brain, and they communicate, analyze, and judge each other. With writing tasks, students should first fully understand the writing prompts and requirements, then apply existing knowledge and cognitive schemas, and complete the writing task. When conducting peer evaluation, students once again activate their thinking, examine writing requirements, extract specific information from writing requirements, refer to evaluation standards, and compare, analyze, judge, and evaluate their own and others' works. This process further consolidates students' language knowledge, improves their cognitive and analytical abilities, develops their thinking capacity, and cultivates their learning abilities. Gao Ying pointed out in her research on English writing among college students that the activity of providing feedback in peer assessment requires higher levels and higher-order thinking, which to some extent helps to solve the obvious problems of logical confusion, unclear reasoning, and lack of evidence in writing, such as the absence of critical thinking [8]. The same problem also exists in high school English writing, so it can also be applied to promote the development of high school students' critical thinking ability.

Under the guidance of curriculum, teachers need to pay attention to dimensions that differ from traditional writing evaluations, such as cultural awareness and thinking capacity. In the guidance of peer evaluation, the teacher provides assessing criteria such as whether the discourse structure is clear and whether the intrinsic value is correct and positive. Guided by core competencies, it can make the reference guidance of teacher evaluation and the implementation of student evaluation more comprehensive, ensuring the role of feedback in improving writing to a certain extent.

## III. POTENTIAL ISSUES OF PEER ASSESSMENT APPLYING IN HIGH SCHOOL

### A. Doubts about Students' Attitudes

The possible attitude issues may arise from the questioning of new roles of students in the peer assessment. Peer assessment subverts the traditional role of students as mere evaluators, empowering them with the right and opportunity to evaluate others, while also causing discomfort in the process of identity transformation. Students have been accustomed to being evaluated by authoritative figures like teachers, believing that learning evaluations should be carried out by high-level English speakers, and some of them prefer to receive feedback and recognition from the authoritative.

Students not only feel uncomfortable with their identity as evaluators, but also have doubts about their own and peer evaluation abilities. The professionalism and fairness of the evaluation process are questioned by students. In terms of professionalism, students are more likely to pay attention to details but overlook the overall picture when paying attention to peer assessment, while teachers tend to evaluate from a more logical angle. This situation is more common when there is a significant gap in writing ability between the two partners, and peer assessment may not have a positive impact on writing as a result [9].

In terms of fairness, evaluation is easily influenced in a conservative cultural context, students may not be able to directly point out their peers' errors or give low scores during practice. In a domestical empirical study, some students reported that pointing out too many errors would make others feel embarrassed and thus difficult to give a true score. In addition, students believe that differences in the understanding of evaluation criteria by different assessors may lead to different results. When the results of peer assessment are related to formal grades, students' doubts about the feedback model may even develop into concerns and dissatisfaction [10].

### B. Lack of Familiarity with Mutual Assessing

Although most high school students have developed basic critical thinking skills and can write about thoughts and feelings based on their own life and learning experiences according to requirements, they still lack experience in evaluating articles written by others. Students are not familiar with the standards of grading, and also the marking of grading symbols. With generalized assessing standards, it is also difficult for them to adapt to different types of articles and make targeted judgments on discourses with different characteristics. This belongs to a cognitive problem in peer evaluation, where students sometimes find it difficult to understand and agree with the abstract evaluation standards set by teachers, or to match the abstract standards with specific correction objects. Moreover, establishing a high-quality peer assessment model requires time to organize, train, and monitor. If it is only used as an occasional supplement, organizing students to conduct will not only fail but also take additional time.

### C. Limited Quality of Student Mutual Evaluation

There are two situations where the quality of peer assessment is limited. Firstly, the levels of students fairly vary, and some high-level students have little interest in peer evaluation because their papers have no obvious errors that can be corrected by lower-level peers. Therefore, high-level students may even hold a negative attitude toward peer assessment [11]. Secondly, the English language ability of high school students is indeed limited, and errors in syntactic structure, word collocation, semantic coherence, and discourse cohesion are difficult to detect within their ability and accurate correction suggestions are hard to give to others.

In this term, students do not fully recognize themselves or their peers as evaluators, and they lack confidence in their competence to accurately and fairly evaluate their peers' learning outcomes. Although peer feedback can create a relatively relaxed atmosphere for learning, the implementation and acceptance of peer feedback are supposed to improve. Dong, Nan, and Liu [12] found that although students have received relevant training, some of them still have doubts about implementing peer assessment due to the inadequacy of experience and limited language abilities, thus the effect is not satisfactory. Teacher feedback is based on years of teaching experience, which can provide more insightful opinions that students are willing to accept and enhance their writing self-efficacy.

## IV. SUGGESTIONS

### A. Evaluating Routinization and Responsibility Distribution

To avoid peer assessment becoming a time-consuming form, teachers can integrate peer assessment into their daily work, making it more routine and habitual. Students are required to form peer assessing groups, and each essay exercise will be conducted within the group to form a habit of reflection and re-examination. And make the mutual assessment responsible. Students need to view essays as real name evaluators, taking responsibility seriously. They can also establish a responsible atmosphere in the class. When students receive carefully reviewed essays, which show that their efforts receive corresponding sincere rewards, they will form expectations for peer feedback activity, and the peer assessment can realize a virtuous cycle.

### B. Diversified Mutual Evaluation Grouping

Homogeneous grouping refers to grouping students of the same level into evaluation groups. When their levels are similar, students have the ability to discover and correct inappropriate and incorrect aspects in the evaluated essay. However, homogeneous grouping may hinder the development and improvement of students with weaker learning abilities. Students with weaker language foundations and learning abilities feel inadequate when evaluating the essays of others, including articles of the same and higher levels, which is not conducive to achieving effective evaluation.

Heterogeneous grouping can form teams of students of different levels. High-level students are grouped with students of the same or lower level, in which they can be the supportive role of the team and promote the common progress of group members. In particular, lower-level students can appreciate and learn from team members' work during assessment. Combining homogeneous and heterogeneous grouping and diversifying peer assessment grouping are conducive to leveraging the advantages and disadvantages of different grouping forms. URL and time accessed must be given.

### C. Concretization of Evaluation Criteria

High school students have a relatively shallow grasp of English articles, and the flexibility of students for peer

assessment is limited to grammar, vocabulary, and obvious structural confusion. Faced with different literary genres, students find it difficult to adapt to the so-called universal evaluation criteria, and the checklist suitable for teacher evaluation is not suitable for peer evaluation among high school students. In this regard, teachers need to set clear evaluation criteria according to the characteristics of different genres. For example, in the evaluation of articles like notice, emphasis should be placed on the conciseness and no absence of information, while in the story continuation, emphasis should be placed on the setting of the environment and the logic of the plots, etc. Setting more specific evaluation criteria can help students reduce the difficulty of peer assessment, improve the quality, and also greatly benefit the application of peer assessment in high school English writing classes.

Several peer assessment standards of writing with differences based on the type of genres can be repeatedly used to help students better understand the standards and the characteristics that good articles have, thus forming a habit of reflection. Making reflection and re-examination of writing a habit of students, so as not to become a momentary trend, can the value of peer assessment be maximized.

### D. Diversified Feedback Modes

Zhang and Hyland [13] examined the writing feedback engagement of English learners in a diverse interactive environment, and pointed out that a diverse interactive environment enhances learners' emotional, cognitive, and behavioral engagement. One of the ways in a diverse interactive environment is to combine feedback from teachers and students. The feedback model of "peer assessment + teacher feedback" helps to improve students' English language knowledge, language application ability, and text quality.

Due to the limited abilities of students themselves, simple peer assessment is limited in improving their English language proficiency and the quality of writing. The model of "peer assessment + teacher feedback" develops feedback to not only improve students' English language knowledge and language application ability, but also helps to enhance their writing awareness and text quality. In the process of peer assessment, teachers also need to play a leading and exemplary role. Before students' mutual assessment, teachers need to do a complete demonstration to provide students with examples to follow. Teacher demonstration should not only demonstrate the process and results of evaluation to students, but more importantly, explain to students the reasons, basis, thinking process, and factors to consider to make a certain assessment. The dynamic demonstration of teacher is beneficial for students to understand and grasp the entire mutual assessing process, then help students make reasonable evaluations, and give practical and feasible improvement suggestions. After peer assessment, the teacher reviews the essay with correction marks and suggestions. The review content includes the quality of the student's essay and the assessment provided by other students. Corresponding feedback should be given for both the essay and the assessment. Implementing peer assessment does not mean that teachers are detached from the process of essay evaluation, nor is it for the sake of saving time. Instead, it is to better motivate students' critical thinking, independent judgment, and comprehensive assessing abilities, and enhance their learning and thinking qualities. Therefore, teachers should judge whether students truly understand the requirements of writing, the stylistic framework, and the usage of words and sentences from the evaluations given by students, and provide practical feedback like suggestions for peer assessing work.

## V. CONCLUSION

The exploration of peer assessment in writing has gradually developed in practice in universities. Given the promoting effect of this feedback model on important qualities such as high school students' critical thinking capacity, cooperation, and reflection consciousness, it is necessary to discuss and explore its application in the secondary school stage. Most second language learners in high school have developed the ability to proficiently express themselves in their mother tongue, and their thinking capacity has progressed to the teenage stage. They should no longer be limited to second language proficiency and only be assigned learning tasks that lack critical thinking challenges. The habit cultivation of peer writing assessment is beneficial for both teachers and students. With the recognition of potential problems, this feedback mode should be implemented in high school to enhance their writing abilities and overall development.

### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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