Peer-Assisted Learning: Revisiting the Dyadic Interaction Process in L2Academic Writing

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Abstract

Peer-assisted learning (PAL) is a form of collaborative learning which is an effective method of helping learners to give feedback in Second Language (L2) Academic Writing (AW) courses; however, there are still many teachers today who do not implement this approach for various reasons. With fewer students, a student-centered approach is ideal. In larger classes however, an alternative approach might be required to maintain a similar amount of feedback without sacrificing quality. This research proposes PAL as a viable alternative for large AW classes, in helping to facilitate meaningful interaction and improve critical thinking skills through deep engagement with writing tasks.291 students, across nine

faculties, participated in the study. Being able to receive ongoing and detailed feedback was essential in order for students to fully acquire the range of skills and knowledge needed to participate effectively in later advanced writing and research courses. A survey was administered to students to determine which method of feedback was most beneficial in helping students to improve writing: teacher-feedback solely or a blend of PAL with in-class teacher instruction. Results showed that 80% of students felt more engaged with the writing process through the PAL system with regard to pedagogic, academic, affective, cognitive, metacognitive, and social factors. The research concludes that there is great potential for collaborative learning in higher education institutions in the L2 context depending on various factors, such as the learner's language skills as well as motivational levels of both the teacher and learner.

Keywords: Peer-Assisted Learning, Collaborative Learning, L2 Academic Writing, TEFL/TESL

Introduction

There has been a consistent movement in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms in Japan over the past three decades toward a more student-focused classroom as universities seek to increase the level of students' communicative competence and "independent-mindedness" (McCarthy, 2017). In Japanese tertiary institutions, Second Language (L2) Academic Writing (AW) courses are often assessed solely by the teacher with students completing writing assignments individually. Providing a learning context which encourages collaborative feedback through dyadic interaction is atypical among teachers, even though such an approach can help students take more ownership of the learning process, thereby increasing developmental awareness.

Peer-Assisted Learning (PAL) is a form of collaborative learning in which students learn *with* and *from* each other (Boud, Cohen & Sampson, 2013). In essence, PAL involves the sharing of knowledge in mutually beneficially ways through various activities such as discussions, advising, project-work or tutoring. The contemporary concept of collaborative learning is deeply rooted in sociocultural theory (see Vygotsky, 1978; Dillenbourg, 1999; Slavkov, 2015) which highlights how learningis mediated through experience with peers. It has gained momentum within higher education institutions with its focus on personality development, group dynamics, interdependence and the development of cognitive (such as problem solving, decision making and knowledge elicitation) and metacognitive (such as

reflection and higher-order thinking) mechanisms. Boud (2001) essentially describes PAL as a way of moving beyond independent learning to interdependent learning.

In essence, today's concept of collaborative learning describes a kind of social didactic contract between peers (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). The idea is that a pair of non-professional collaborators from a similar social grouping engages in a common task in which each individual works with and is accountable to each other. Smith and MacGregor's (1992) assumptions of dyadic interaction in the classroom were the main underlying principles of this research:

1. Learning is an active process whereby students assimilate information and relate new knowledge to prior knowledge
2. Learning requires a challenge that opens the door for active engagement with peers
3. Learners benefit when exposed to diverse viewpoints
4. Learning flourishes in a social environment
5. Learners are challenged socially and emotionally, thereby creating their own unique conceptual framework

Implicit in the process is that learning is active, and that there is a shift in learning from a teacher-centered to a more student-centered model of learning. This kind of flipped classroom seemed to be the ideal environment for the L2 AW classroom. Figure 1 illustrates the expected placement of collaborative instruction within the revised course principles:
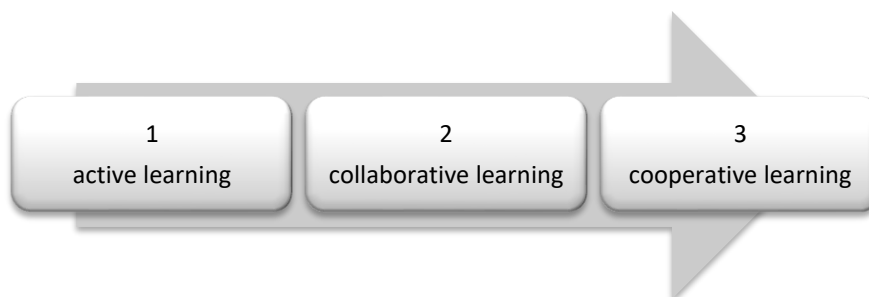

Figure 1. Developmental stages in the AW curriculum

Active learning as the first stage, saw students actively engaged with the assigned task. Collaborative learning as the second stage, saw students actively engaged with each other within the learning process. Cooperative learning as the third stage, saw students as having complete ownership of their learning along with collaborating with peers. The students in this study were considered to be at Stage 2 in their developmental progress.

In the L2 AW classroom in particular, collaborative learning practices have received considerably more notice in recent years (see for example, Storch, 2005, 2009; Arnold,

Ducate & Kost, 2009; Kessler, 2009; Elola & Oskoz, 2010; Kessler & Bikowski, 2010, 2012). It has been recognized widely as contributing in most studies to higher quality and increased ownership in writing (Storch, 2005); attention to pedagogical factors, particularly content, organization, and vocabulary (Shehadeh, 2011); increased opportunities of self-discovery and self-awareness (Hyland, 2003, 2010); analytical and critical reading and writing skills (Storch, 2005; Webb, et al., 2014) as well as providing students with real-time, meaningful and detailed feedback as formative assessment at both the local and global feedback levels (Li, 2013; Babaii & Adeh, 2019). Despite its popularity however, the number of teachers implementing PAL in L2 classrooms continues to remain low (Miao, Badger, & Zhen, 2006; Min, 2006). In the Japanese context, this is possibly due to resistance to independent or interdependent learning from students due to the traditional teacher-centered system of education experienced through K-12, the teacher's concern of student inexperience and inaccuracies in peer-editing, issues of fairness in the classroom, affective factors or a lack of training in how to implement PAL in the L2 classroom.

This research proposes PAL as a viable alternative for helping facilitate meaningful interaction and improve critical thinking skills through deep engagement with writing tasks. Two further areas of significance for conducting this study are related primarily to the situational context. First, it was conducted at a Japanese national university with participants from nine non-English majoring faculties (Engineering, Law, Economics, Sciences, Medicine, Design, 21st Century, Agriculture and Education) with varying language proficiencies. Most studies of this nature in Japan have been conducted at private or national universities on a small scale or in liberal arts universities with students who major or have a higher proficiency in English (see for example Hosack, 2003; Kondo, 2004; Yakame, 2005; Wakabayashi, 2008; Mulligan, 2011; Ruegg, 2015). Second, class sizes at this university were larger than the typical university L2 AW classrooms of 20-25 students, with teachers teaching an average of 30 students. Due to cutbacks in budget, hiring of less teachers, the increasingly large student numbers in classes and more demands being placed on teachers each year to produce students who were able to communicate in global contexts, new and innovative initiatives needed to be developed to meet administrative and institutional expectations.

Conducting this study was thus essential at this time for both teachers and students. For teachers, PAL aimed to develop a collaborative classroom culture and reduce workload. As collaborative learning has been shown to be a realistic approach for teachers to effectively manage large class sizes (Mulryan-Kyne, 2010), it was considered to be appropriate. For

students, it was expected that those who participated in the PAL process would achieve greater metacognitive awareness by activating prior L2 knowledge, sharing current micro and macro levels of knowledge and experiences through meaningful interaction, assuming more responsibility for their learning and becoming more independent-minded and critical in their approach to learning. Figure 2 illustrates the underlying concept behind the PAL approach.
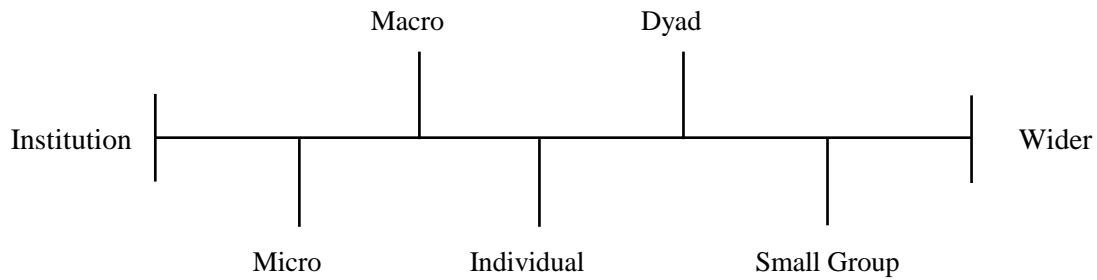
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         Micro         Individual      Small Group
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Figure 2. Continuum of micro and macro levels of social interaction

Contextual Situation

This study was carried out over two years with 261freshman students at a national university in Japan. Participants in this study made up about 15% of the total number of students taking all freshmen AW class, so the researchers were able to gain feedback from a wide cross-section of students. Students majored in nine different faculties and had one mandatory 90-minute AW class per week. This meant, except for those with advanced levels of English, lack of motivation or purposeful study goals was a substantial challenge for many students who simply did enough to gain the credit. For teachers who had to struggle with how to sustain motivation for a course many students deemed unimportant, this was also a challenge. Teacher input, for the most part, was the traditional teacher-centered method of classroom management with little emphasis on dyadic interaction between students.

Research Design

The questions this research sought to answer were:

(1) What are current perceptions of PAL among teachers?

(2) Is a PAL approach suitable for large classes?

(3) What are student perceptions of utilizing a dyadic interactive approach to writing through PAL?

(4) Which type of instruction-type do students prefer, traditional teacher-centered, PAL or a combination of both?

Methodologically, four steps were taken to answer research questions: 1. Interviews, 2. Implementation of the PAL program, 3. Student observation/Teacher reflection and 4. Post-PAL survey.

1. Pre-PAL Interviews

An interview was conducted with AW teachers to ascertain whether they were using a PAL approach in class or not, and their reasons. The current AW curriculum required students to produce a well-organized, coherent three to five paragraph essay using a process approach. It was found that the teaching approach varied, according to teaching style, level of experience and number of classes being taught. Although the idea of PAL was fully supported by teachers, one teacher saying that is a "truly integral part of any interactive learning," almost all teachers admitted to utilizing PAL "just a little" or "only once after returning first drafts." For these teachers, there was interest in PAL, but no clear understanding of how to approach it in a way that was logistically viable, could motivate students and help them to be more open and communicative. Table 1 is a representation of the common reasons why most teachers resisted peer editing. These were attributed mainly to time, attitude, difficulty and cultural factors:

Table 1
Reasons for Not Implementing a PAL Approach

Time	"It takes away from speaking time which the students need. They can do writing for homework" "Only once, a bit after they have completed one draft"
Attitude	"Students don't communicate"
Difficulty	"It's just so hard!"
Culture	"Students I've taught in the United States are more open and talkative, so it works well. Japanese students are quite hesitant"

2. Implementation of PAL

PAL was introduced to 261 students to identify whether an alternative system could be adopted to increase learner ownership and help reduce the teacher's workload. As each class had additional 6-8 students, the traditional method of process writing employed at the university had become excessively time-consuming, contributing to an even heavier work burden and increased stress levels. That is, students were expected to prepare three drafts of

a 5-paragraph, 800-1,000-word essay, which had to be checked by the teacher and returned in a timely manner. Having 4-5 classes of 30 students on average meant giving feedback on about 140 essays three times during this period. Each essay took 3-5 minutes of concentrated effort (about 2-3 hours per class), depending on errors found in formatting, content, syntax, lexis and mechanics. The increase in student numbers, in many cases, thus resulted in less and often reduced quality feedback. Added to the challenge was the realization that some students resubmitted the essay with the same mistakes, which led to further frustration.

In practice, it was explained to students, that having a well-structured, coherent essay was valued at 60% of their grade, which was the bulk of student assessment. Students were presented with model essays for comparative analysis, and then given self-directed instruction on correct formatting and organization. Specific grammar weaknesses which consistently appeared in previous writing assignments were addressed throughout the semester, in addition to the use of appropriate lexis, cohesiveness, appropriate citations and finally the mechanics of writing. The teacher's evaluation checklist was given to students at the start of the course to encourage them to participate in self-directed learning monitoring activities before collaborating with partners. This also ensured that students had the necessary vocabulary for effective communication as well as providing guidance for PAL discussions. Students were asked to read each other's writing in a "reading round" activity and then provide feedback on peers' essays. Students were shown real examples of constructive criticism written in the L1 and L2 on other students' writing in order to understand how to give effective feedback. Whenever students encountered a problem that they could not solve between themselves, teacher consultation was offered to assist with the problem. Thus, PAL aimed to teach students to be more responsible for their learning by encouraging them to be more active, think more critically about their writing without expecting all instruction to come from the teacher, give guidance to their best ability and ask for help when needed. As a motivational factor, an additional bonus was given to students who showed improvement from the first to final drafts. The teacher would only give bonus points however, to students who used a highlighter on the revised drafts showing changes made. This was done to prevent students from resubmitting the previously submitted essay without making any changes. Figure 3 illustrates the main differences between the traditional system and the newly implemented PAL system.
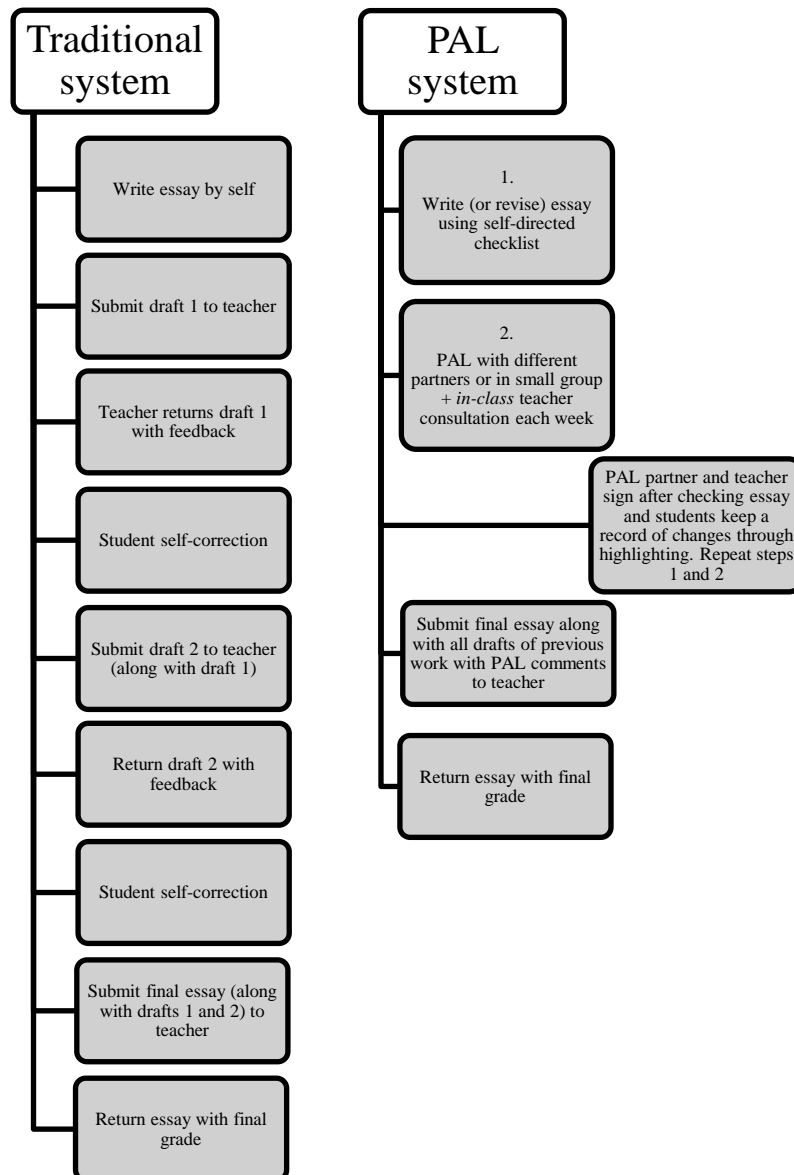
Figure 3. Comparison of traditional and PAL approaches employed in the AW class

3. Observations and Teacher Reflection

Non-obtrusive observation was done during lessons to collect qualitative data. Data collection over the 15-week semester involved detailed observation of the students as they were engaged in peer-review activities. The researcher used a covert approach in which the participants were unaware of the observationin order to minimize any changes to their behavior. It was thought that a voice recorder would be too intrusive and cause anxiety. Thus, extensive and detailed notes were made in a diary for each class to identify strategies commonly used when giving feedback. Notes were made up of verbatim and paraphrased

commentary of the students in their L1 (when possible) and L2; non-verbal language such as gestures and facial expressions; and the researchers' reflective comments.

Students were given the option to communicate in either their L1 or L2 when using the checklist as guidance. The teacher however encouraged use of the L2 to increase communicative competence. Use of L2 was observed to varying degrees. Observational data extracted from the teacher diaries found that students who had difficulty in sustaining discussions in English used the English terminology from the checklist, the instructor's verbal instructions used frequently during class, and photos taken of the visual diagrams drawn on the whiteboard and/or the teacher's instructional PowerPoint slides. This was, at times, interspersed with the L1 for meaningful communication. The higher-proficiency students used various strategies, such as comparative analysis with essay examples in the textbook and reviewing class worksheets to review the important points in each category on the checklist. Table 2 offers a brief example of PAL dialogic exchanges.

Table 2
Example of Dialogic Interactions

Example	Lower-proficiency	Higher-proficiency
1	*(L2: reading from class handout)* A: What is this? B: A hook. You can use a question or a…a quotation…	*(L2: Talking about essay content)* A: Is important point, biology? B: No. Interesting. For example, people like math better because…" A: eh? *Kore wa* B: Speak only in English! (laughter)
2	*(L1: translation mine)* "Let s read together." (students read paperaloud)	*(L2: Talking about structure)* A: Should I give an example? B: Yes"

This demonstrates that with sufficient guidance and scaffolding, students are able to communicate meaningfully while assisting each other.

4. Post-PAL Open-ended Survey

A survey was used to obtain quantitative data post-PAL. The following questions were asked:

1. Was PAL useful for you? If yes, how? If no, what were the difficulties you experienced?

2. In future AW classes, which system would you prefer: teacher checks, PAL or a combination of both? Please explain.

The survey was administered through *surveymonkey.com*. The researchers decided that an open-ended survey would generate data, which more accurately reflected student voices in the situational context and offer a rich source of qualitative data. The survey data was subsequently downloaded and reviewed separately by the two researchers to identify common categories through a grounded theory approach.

Survey Data Analysis

Using Glaser's (1992) grounded theory approach, the data was first coded separately and then examined collaboratively to ensure that categories were agreedupon. Notes were taken throughout the entire process to show relationships inductively as they emerged. Following this, a theory was generated. Initial results showed that approximately 80% of students found PAL to be effective in reducing stress and enhancing the classroom environment. Analysis of survey data yielded six main factors in which students found PAL beneficial:

1. Pedagogic (teacher; classroom)
2. Academic (relating to language skills)
3. Affective (motivation; confidence; anxiety)
4. Cognitive(analyzing/reasoning)
5. Metacognitive (reflection, problem-solving, awareness, discovery)
6. Social (friends, group members)

Student comments were then put into the relevant categories. Table 3 is the breakdown of the collected survey data and the number of references from the 261 participants.

The survey resulted in two general conclusions. First, interactional feedback offered comprehensible feedback as learners were able to understand class material more quickly, deeply and effectively than by solely a teacher-centered method; and second, even though learners were faced with affective issues and challenged by a lack of perceived L2 language weaknesses, they positively reported on the benefits of a PAL system. The most revealing result from student feedback was the importance of the interactive process in the classroom, as their social interaction seemed to work as a catalyst in activating higher-order thinking processes. That is, students, through dialogue, became more aware of errors and were able to solve problems with less teacher assistance. In most cases, this caused students to feel more comfortable about asking for help which resulted in an enhancement of writing ability. Salient points from each category follow.

Table 3
Benefits of PAL

Factors	Student references	Reference
Pedagogic (teacher; classroom)	1. Teacher explanation for childish mistakes wastes time and reduces teacher burden.	20
	2. It's a good use of class time.	3
	3. It is an innovative system.	3
Academic (relating to language skills)	1. It enhances my academic writing ability.	37
	2. I can improve my speaking ability.	11
	3. I can learn new vocabulary and phrases and improve spelling and grammar.	4
	4. I can improve my reading ability.	3
	5. I can understand my friend's ability.	2
Affective (motivation; confidence; anxiety)	1. It is easier/less stressful to ask friends than the teacher about mistakes.	26
	2. It's fun! The class is active I do not feel sleepy.	22
	3. I am motivated to do better work and be like my friends. I feel more confident.	12
	4. I enjoy one-to-one teaching.	8
	5. I am ashamed to hand in a bad essay. Editing helps to improve the essay before giving the teacher.	6
Cognitive (analyzing / reasoning)	1. I can improve editing skills.	5
	2. I can ask more academic questions to the teacher or student.	5
	3. I can imitate good writing.	1
Metacognitive (reflection, problem-solving, awareness, self-management)	1. I can realize my own mistakes and solve problems.	24
	2. I can learn from other students' writing (good writing and mistakes).	21
	3. I can analyze if my essay is good or not good and improve my own writing by myself.	20
	4. Teaching others and listening, I can understand the important points of an essay (structure/how to write/goals).	20
	5. I can develop a capacity for thinking / I can use my mind more.	18
	6. Students can learn more independently.	9
	7. I am more careful about my writing.	8
	8. I notice how to fix my essay by finding mistakes in another student's essay.	7
	9. We can understand our regular mistakes.	3
	10. We can continue learning outside the classroom (with checklists).	2
Social (friends, group members)	1. Discussion with friends develops general English abilities.	45
	2. Friends can pick up mistakes I miss (and opposite).	44
	3. I enjoy communicating and working with friends.	39
	4. I can get another student's opinion and advice.	24
	5. I can share information/ideas about the topic and get different viewpoints.	23
	6. Problems are resolved more quickly with friends.	12
	7. I can get extra feedback from more than just the teacher.	10
	8. I can read other students' essays.	8
	9. I can get to know classmates better and deepen friendships.	4
	10. I enjoy fighting/debating with friends.	3

Pedagogic factors: Within pedagogicfactors, the main comment from students was that simple mistakes were a waste of the teacher's time and PAL helped to reduce the teacher's burden. This comment is atypical in this type of study, as most research tends to comment on factors related to benefits to students. However, it should be noted that although peer feedback may indeed reduce the teacher's editing or feedback workload, preparation time as well as in- and out-of-class consultation time increases (Deni, 2011).

Academic factors: As a result of sharing ideas, students commented on general gains in all language skills. Student however reported language gains, most significantly in their writing and speaking skills, less so with lexis and syntax. For students who communicated in the L2, they saw major improvements in purposeful communication skills. This is in line with research such as Ellis (1997), Hansen and Lui (2005) and Storch (2005) in which students' revisions of structure and content became superior after being introduced to PAL.

Affective factors: Although there are many studies in the L1 AW classroom, which proclaim the affective benefits of peer-review, L2 studies especially in the Asian context have received mixed findings (Zhang, 1995). However, by shaping the L2 learning process through social interaction, an active, positive learning environment was created. This finding is similar to Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003. Most of the remarks made by participants about PAL were positive in that they found it easier to communicate with other students than the (native) teacher. Thus, the class became more active, they responded that they felt less sleepy (especially after lunch), and finally, they felt increased levels of confidence as they became more deeply connected with the learning process. Some students even expressed a desire to be more like their friends. A few students felt anxiety showing their essay to other students. For these students who preferred to work independently, the instructor allowed them to do what they felt comfortable with. As part of constructing a non-threatening learning environment, it was felt that students should be given the choice whether or not to participate in the process and work quietly by themselves if they chose not to.

Metacognitive factors: Fundamental to any learning program is the ability for students to make use of their repertoire of knowledge and plan and reflect on their learning. Higher-order thinking was one of the most important factors mentioned by students as they gained more insight into their ability to learn intentionally. Students showed a heightened awareness of what constituted a good and poor essay; they could realize common errors in

their own work; and especially for more advanced students, learned self-monitoring skills in how to revise their writing independently outside of the classroom. These findings are substantiated by research, which has demonstrated increased metacognitive awareness of the writing process and self-efficacy through dyadic interaction (Yarrow & Topping, 2001; Tsai & Lin, 2012).

Social factors: A major consideration when considering PAL as an alternative approach to process writing was the level of collaboration expected between students. Cote (2006) suggests that the instructor may have a better idea of how to pair students who are most compatible with each other, but the researcher decided to use a more holistic approach and have students choose their ownpartners, so that they could feel more comfortable and fully enjoy the learning process. Of the six categories, social factors were the main category which students reported as most beneficial. Seven of ten references entered into the double digits, illustrating that students preferred a reciprocal learning process. Communicating with as many friends as possible ensured a greater number of chances to find errors, reorganize ideas, improve depth of knowledge of content and reach more agreements on revisions. This was similar to findings in Mulligan (2011). There were some cases in which students felt that PAL was a waste of time because friends chatted away the time instead of staying on task. Overall though, most students took the opportunity to use the class time to improve their essay with friends and consult with the teacher rather than having to complete it by themselves later for homework. Having access to friends and teacher consultation for immediate assistance during class was a significant motivating factor in the collaborative process.

Negative Comments about PAL

While most students considered PAL beneficial, there were some major problems noted. The negative comments from the 20% of students who did not feel comfortable using PAL are seen in Table 4.

Three particular positions raised by students which can be noted for future reference are:

1. It is more useful for the teacher to check students' essays
2. Students cannot accurately make judgments about other students' errors because of a low-proficiency level
3. It is difficult to find mistakes, especially grammar

Table 4
Challenges of PAL

Factors	Student references	References
Pedagogic (teacher; classroom) Academic (relating to language skills)	1. It's more useful for the native teacher to check essay drafts and point out mistakes	21
	2. It takes a lot of time	6
	3. Only the teacher can explain mistakes correctly/accurately (The teacher is God!)	6
	4. It's the teacher's job	4
	5. It does not fairly evaluate each student's ability	1
Academic Affective (motivation; confidence; anxiety)	1. Students cannot check work correctly or give bad advice because they lack skill/confidence	37
	2. We don't fully understand academic writing	9
	3. We cannot know the perfect style of writing	4
	4. PAL increases chance of making mistakes	4
Affective (motivation; confidence; anxiety)	1. I am scared of failing class or causing others to fail because of a poor essay	3
	2. I dislike or feel embarrassed about my draft being checked by others	2
Cognitive (analyzing / reasoning)	1. I cannot answer difficult questions	1
Metacognitive (reflection, problem-solving, awareness, self-management)	1. It is difficult finding mistakes (mostly grammar and expressions)	23
Social (friends, group members)	1. My partner and I are reluctant to check essays strictly	7
	2. Students do not believe me when I point out mistakes (and vice versa)	2

Regarding the first issue, many students felt the teacher would be the most competent in giving feedback. Their concern was mainly that students did not have the capacity to give appropriate feedback on lexical choices and natural grammatical constructions. A study by Gousseva-Goodwin (2000) also found that many students had a preference for teacher editing, thus wishing to complete essays by themselves. The lack of language proficiency was another deterrent for students as, at times, they found it difficult to judge the validity of their peer's comments. This issue was also raised by Kroll (2001). The third point is also valid in that students sometimes offered inaccurate or misleading advice. This was also a concern raised by Horowitz (1986).

For teachers interested in implementing PAL, these issues can be resolved by making it clear, throughout the PAL process, that the teacher will provide additional feedback on grammatical and lexical errors while students should, at first, focus on content and organizational and structural errors. For students who felt comfortable providing advice on grammatical structures, they were welcome to tackle the challenge (especially in more advanced classes). Further, by making use of in-class teacher consultation time and

changing partners frequently, students should be able to resolve major issues before the essay submission deadline.

A noteworthy point of consideration for instructors when conducting a PAL program, is to help students realize that they are not wholly without knowledge or experience as they bring to the classroom knowledge of the L2 learned throughout high school and content knowledge based on life experiences. By activating and engaging prior knowledge, students are able to naturally give guidance in their stronger areas; and through communication, they are able to improve their weaker areas. Although there were some negative responses to PAL, all in all the program was considered a success with 80% of students reacting positively to the collaborative process. As for the students' quality of writing, there was a marked improvement in almost all papers with teacher feedback focused largely on grammatical and lexical errors instead of basic structural and organizational errors of past. This is an area the researchers hope to pursue.

Implications

PAL was found to be effective with both lower and higher proficiency language learners when implemented in a non-threatening, encouraging and inclusive learning environment. That is, PAL needs to be explicitly planned, modeled, taught and controlled if it is to be successful. Without guidance, it would perhaps aggravate negative attitudes towards collaborative learning. It is suggested in particular, that with lower-proficiency students, a clear, easy-to-understand checklist be devised in simple English, rather than in the students' L1, to familiarize students with basic AW vocabulary and structure. Students should also be allowed to decide whether to speak in their L1 or L2 in order to remove any feelings of anxiety. Having more emphasis on structure and formatting which conforms to a specific rhetorical framework, rather than initial accuracy of grammar/lexis, is also suggested for a basic-level AW class. This would ensure that students are able to understand the differences between academic norms in their L1 and the rhetorical preference of the target audience (Walker, 2006). Once it is established that students have a solid AW foundation, teachers can then focus on various rhetorical forms in more advanced classes. Deciding on the type of peer-assessment – whether qualitative (advice and suggestions) or quantitative (assigning points according to specified criteria) or both, would further ensure a complete and mutual understanding between student/student and student/teacher during feedback sessions (Babaii & Adeh, 2019).

Finally, for teachers who feel tentative about implementing a PAL approach, the following is a breakdown of the wide range of strategies observed of students giving feedback that can applied to their own classrooms:

- Using a highlighter or pencil to check important structural and formatting rules
- Writing basic comments in English such as 'Good!' 'Spell,' 'Clear thesis statement,' 'Needs another opinion' "More support," or 'Same idea, different words'
- Revisiting the essay framework with the model essays for comparative analysis
- Using positive facial expressions and open body language
- Sitting close together side-by-side rather than face-to-face while assisting peers in order to remove the desk as an 'obstacle'
- Using smart phones to translate words or sentences and find more appropriate vocabulary

Conclusion

The use of PAL in the EFL classroom rests on strong theoretical and pedagogical bases in its ability to help students develop higher-order thinking skills as well as deepen knowledge of the AW process. From a theoretical perspective, it is rooted in Vygotskian principles of social constructivism in which social interaction is emphasized. From a pedagogical perspective, the use of pair work helps to maintain classroom management by keeping the classroom active and providing students with numerous opportunities to use the L2 in a purposeful and meaningful way. In a traditional AW class, communication about writing tends to be minimal as students work alone on their tasks. With PAL, students not only communicated more, but they learned how to edit at a level beyond the word or sentence level, a problem which has surfaced in other PAL contexts. Through collaboration, students' level of awareness of both organizational and syntactical elements of the AW process was raised, which may not have been possible had they continued to work by themselves. There was some improvement in knowledge of grammar, as students were able to better understand how to express their opinion through writing, rather than through translation of random sentences or doing grammar drills as they learned in high school. Students' knowledge of lexis also improved greatly as they were expected to use a thesaurus to change basic vocabulary into vocabulary used at a higher academic level. By assuming joint responsibility over the writing, students seemed to feel less anxiety about submitting poor writing to the teacher, a concern held by some participants in this study. Although culturally, it has been said that Japanese students tend to be less talkative than other groups of students,

this study found that with clear guidelines (through checklists), a strong emphasis on structure and content(60%) and less emphasis on grammar/lexis (30%) and punctuation/spelling (10%), students were able to collaborate easily, enjoy the writing process and feel less overwhelmed about completing writing tasks.

Although PAL worked quite successfully in this L2 context, there were some concerns which need to be considered. Cultural expectations were initially a challenge as a few students were not outgoing or confident enough to participate in a communicative approach to writing. However, by encouraging students to look beyond the word or sentence level mistakes and focus on other areas such as structure and content, this helped to lessen anxieties. Another limiting factor that must be noted is the initial workload for the teacher. In order tohave students effectively working together, checklists, various methods of modeling editing procedures as well as providing example essays at different levels and lengths needed to be prepared before the start of the semester. Therefore, although teacher feedback time in this research was cut by about 30-50%, the preparation time doubled. However, as the materials were recycled for the following courses, this was seen as a limiting factor only for the first cycle of the PAL program.

To conclude, this research suggests that there could be great potential for collaborative learning in higher education institutions in the L2 context depending on various factors, such as the learner's language skills as well as motivational levels of both the teacher and learner. Many teachers may be unsure about how, when, where and why to develop collaborative learning; however, based on the evidence presented here, there is a possibility that by introducing students to a PAL approach, a metacognitive classroom culture would be encouraged. Students participating in this study were more readily able to see the benefit of PAL after experiencing an approach in which they worked solely by themselves. Not only did they become more active participants in the writing process, but their knowledge of the writing process, which they had previously learned (and forgotten in many cases), deepened tremendously and they developed a more purposeful reason or enjoyable way to study English. Furthermore, students' essay letter grades in most cases went up by one grade through dyadic interaction compared to independent work. By the end of the course, students were able to edit their own writing in some capacity as well as teach other students, whether in their L1 or L2, how to improve writing. John Gay, English poet, and dramatist, once said, "Tell me and I forget, show me and I remember, involve me and I understand." By flipping the classroom, the researchers and students were able to engage more thoroughly and enjoyably with each other and the writing process.

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