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# Applying Peer Feedback Technique to Enhance Students' Writing skill of English Narrative Paragraphs at Dong Nai Technology University

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**ABSTRACT:** Writing is an indispensable skill in learning the English language. However, students at Dong Nai Technology University usually meet with difficulties in the writing process. Thus, this action research aims to examine whether peer feedback technique enhances DNTU English majored students' writing skill, specifically in the narrative genre, and to find out their attitudes towards this technique. Thirty English majored freshmen in the researcher's Writing 2 class took writing tests and reflection. A collaborator completed the classroom observation checklist during two cycles. The analysis of students' writing tests and observation checklists showed the intensification of 5 aspects of writing after the intervention. Thus, peer feedback had a significant effect on students' improvement in writing skills of English narrative paragraphs. The results also revealed that most students expressed their positive attitudes towards their writing improvement thanks to this technique. This study not only supplies further indication for the power of peer feedback technique as an efficient technique to maximize English writing learning and teaching but also suggests the effective peer feedback technique in writing class.

**KEYWORDS:** peer feedback technique; students' improvement; narrative paragraphs; students' attitudes.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Writing is considered one of the most challenging skills in learning a language. According to Nunan (2001), the most troublesome thing to do in a language is possible to produce a coherent, fluent, extended piece of writing, which most native speakers never master. Besides, students' errors seem to be the chief and common problem in their writing performance. Davies and Pearse (2002) assert that errors are an unavoidable part of the learning process. Errors also reflect what students are trying to achieve, what problems they are having, and what they should focus on to improve (Lavery, 2001). As a result, giving feedback to students' writing has been a major aspect to conduct studies in the field of target language attainment. To give feedback, peer feedback is considered effective. It is a technique in which learners consider other's sources of information and interact through taking responsibilities as a formally trained teacher, tutor, or editor in giving comments and critique each other's written drafts in two formats (written and oral) (Liu and Hansen, 2002). Students can role as audiences and improve their writing work by giving other students' writing drafts comments. Gonca & Eksi (2012) point out that peer feedback can assist because it provides students with many options to consider when revising their compositions.

Since the benefits of peer feedback technique in improving students' writing ability are proven in many different studies (George, 1984; Jacobs, 1987; Atlee, 2005), peer feedback is applied and incorporated in writing curriculum in many different schools and universities not only in the world but also in Vietnam. Unfortunately, my university (Dong Nai Technology University) has not yet identified the peer feedback's value

in teaching writing skills for English-major students. The traditional writing teaching method is still applied as the typical approach in their writing classes where the instructors play an important role in giving feedback to students' writing. However, this is an overloaded and time-consuming job. Not all of the students could receive feedback that reflects all aspects and problems of their writing from the teacher. Students become more passive and show their lack of interest in learning writing skills. It is obviously shown in my Writing 1 class where I just applied teacher feedback as the main teaching approach. The serious problem is that students' writing ability was not enhanced well. After the Writing 1 course, the average scores of their writing performance were very low (about 4.5 out of 10). Mistakes of the content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics were repeated many times in each of their writing assignments which does not meet the outcome standards of the subject but also affects the students' quality. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate the effectiveness of new writing teaching technique (peer feedback) in enhancing students writing skills, which this research aims to pursue in the context of Dong Nai University where no similar research is conducted.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### ***Application of peer feedback in writing.***

Peer feedback in literature writing sometimes refers to peer-review, peer evaluation, peer response, or peer editing. It is purely feedback given by peers. During the peer feedback process, learners are considered sources of information and interactants for each other through taking responsibilities as a formally trained teacher, tutor, or editor in giving comments and critique each other's written drafts in two formats (written and oral) (Liu & Hansen, 2002). Students can role as audiences and improve their writing work by giving other students' writing drafts comments (Yang, Richard & Yu, 2006). Therefore, peer feedback is considered a process of interaction in which two students cooperate to evaluate and give feedback to each other.

The peer feedback technique in writing has drawn many researchers' attention not only in the world but also in Vietnam to investigate its effectiveness in improving writing skills and learners' attitudes towards this technique. In Ting & Qian's study in 2010, they examined the application of peer review in EFL Writing Classroom in China. The findings showed that this method, in general, could not help improve all of the aspects of writing a paper. Most of the revisions were usually on the surface of writing such as grammar, spelling, punctuation, and so on. Nevertheless, students can benefit from practicing giving feedback for their classmates' writing. For instance, they can become more critical readers and revise their writing better through reading their friends' writing pieces critically. Contrary to Ting and Qian's (2010) study, Noor (2016) found peer feedback assisted his 8th-grade students to enhance their writing skills in all aspects, particularly in the narrative genre in his action research. At the end of the 2nd cycle, a questionnaire was delivered to students to get students' opinions and feeling about peer feedback. Students' attitudes towards this technique were positive, and they also increased their critical thinking. In Vietnam, an experiment that explores the effectiveness of peer feedback as an instructional activity in teaching academic writing done by Pham Vu Phi Ho and Nguyen Thi Thuy Duong in 2014 found peer feedback as an efficient tool that helps learners correct their drafts as well. Besides, they explored that students give more feedback on local areas than global ones. Le Thi Thuan and Truong Vien (2018) conducted a mixed-method research study to investigate the perception of students towards peer feedback, the reality of applying peer feedback in English writing classes and find solutions to improve learners' writing ability. The findings expressed positive attitudes of students to peer feedback. However, there were also still some limitations in employing this technique such as learners' English competence, cooperation, teacher guideline, and motivation, and time limitation.

From the previous studies mentioned above, it can be seen that the peer feedback technique is still an interesting topic that provides conflicting results of not only its effectiveness but also learners' attitudes towards it. The efficiency of the peer feedback technique needs to be confirmed by more empirical studies. These are the reasons why this study was conducted to bridge the gap of research, to investigate if this technique improves students' writing.

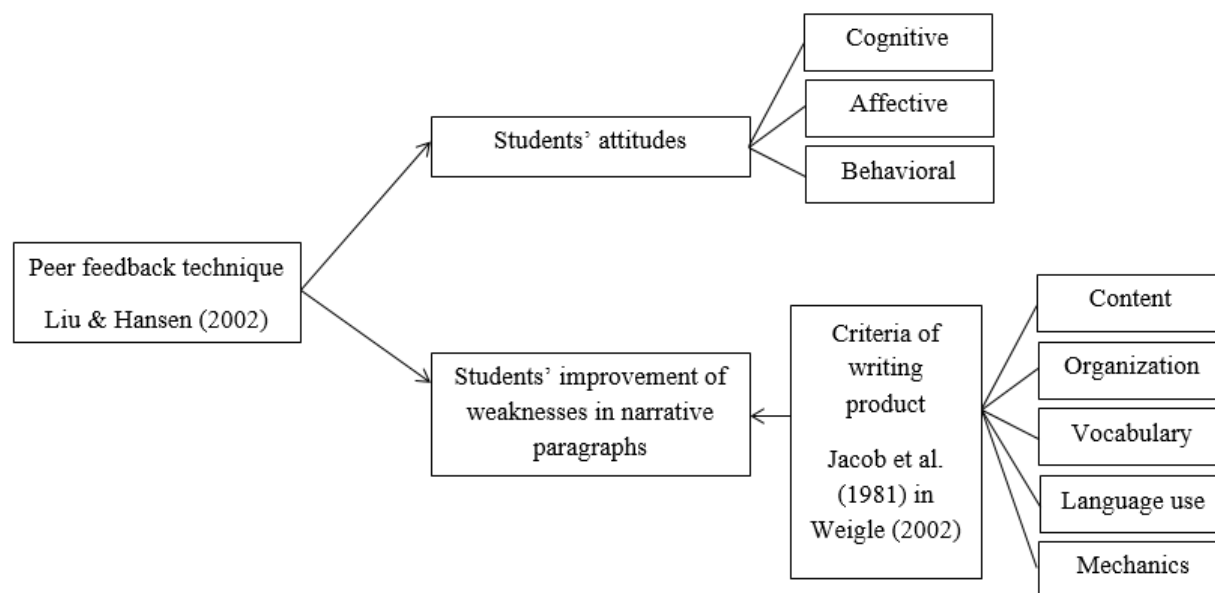
### Conceptual Framework

To meet the requirements of the research's aims, peer feedback is applied as the core technique to teach students English narrative paragraphs.

Peer feedback is defined in different ways. However, this research will follow the theory of peer feedback technique from Liu and Hansen (2002) to make a definition of its operation during the experiment. Specifically, students are responsible for giving feedback (comments, critiques, and suggestions) to each other's composition in both written and oral forms as trained teachers, tutors, or editors. In this study, two techniques of giving peer feedback including peer feedback checklists and talking about the paper are employed, which assists learners to improve their writing skills better by providing and receiving feedback in written and oral forms. Hansen and Liu's (2005) guideline is employed during the learning process because it helps decrease time-consuming by focusing most of the time on the training stage where students get knowledge of peer feedback technique and the ways to give feedback. Students' improvement of English narrative paragraph writing is assessed based on 5 criteria consisting of contents, organization of ideas, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics extracted from Jacob et al.'s (1981) analytic writing scoring rubrics cited in Weigle (2002) because it is commonly used to evaluate learners' writing, and these five aspects of writing are basic conditions that learners must acquire to have a good writing composition.

In terms of learners' attitudes towards peer feedback technique, it is investigated based on 3 aspects of attitudes including cognitive, behavioral, and effective ones. There have been different attitudes towards peer feedback techniques which are found in some previous attitudinal studies. It includes both positive and negative ones. In this study, students' attitudes to their improvement of 5 writing aspects including contents, organization of ideas, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics, and their feeling towards peer feedback techniques are investigated to capture a clear picture of their attitudes.

The conceptual framework of this study is presented in Figure 2.2 below.



**Figure 1.** The conceptual framework of this study

### Research questions

This study aims to address the following research questions:

1. Does the use of the peer feedback technique help improve DNTU students' weaknesses of writing skills in their English narrative paragraphs?
2. What are DNTU students' attitudes towards peer feedback technique in their English writing process?

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### Participants, context and measures

This study was conducted in Dong Nai Technology University (abbreviated as DNTU), Trang Dai Ward, Bien Hoa city, Dong Nai province. Thirty English-majored freshmen who registered in the researcher's Writing 2 class were selected to participate in this research. These 18-year-old participants included both genders (17 females and 13 males). These freshmen spent ten years learning English in middle and high schools. They had passed the Writing 1 subject in the second semester of the 2019-2020 Academic year. All of these students had not approached the peer feedback technique in their writing process before enrolling in the Writing 2 class.

Students were selected by using a convenience sampling method. They took part in the intervention during 6 English narrative paragraphs teaching sessions, took the test, and completed the reflection delivered by the researcher. Students after writing the first draft of the narrative paragraph were asked to work in pairs in order to conduct guided peer feedback activity. Peer feedback activity occurred in sessions 2 and 3 in Cycle 1 and 4 and 5 in Cycle 2. Students exchanged each other's drafts and gave indirect feedback by using correction symbols and completed the peer feedback checklist which mainly focuses on the organization, contents, and ideas in twenty minutes. Then they were asked to give paper and checklists back to the writers. They had 10 minutes to do oral feedback in which the confusion or suggestions in their writing are discussed and clarified. The feedback collected from both written and oral forms was considered and used by the writers in order to revise, edit, and rewrite a new draft. The drafts after rewriting were submitted to teachers.

#### Data collection procedure

The research began conducting on the 7th of April, 2020. Both quantitative data (tests) and qualitative data (observation checklist and reflection) were collected. Two cycles of action research are demonstrated as below:

##### Cycle 1

Students took the pre-test. The results and data collected from this instrument helped the researcher find out students' writing ability and mistakes they usually made to design suitable lesson plans, materials, and activities to improve their writing.

##### Plan

The researcher based on the results in the pre-test to prepare the entire instruments such as lesson plans and assignments to apply in the teaching and learning process.

##### Action

In this step, the peer editing technique is applied to maximize the students' writing skills. The researcher played a role as a teacher to give writing material and teach the students by using peer editing techniques. The researcher implemented the planning that was stated in the form of lesson plans. The lesson plans were needed as guidance of the researcher to describe the effectiveness of the peer editing technique in writing. The activities in action happen in 2 meetings for one cycle.

##### Observe

In this phase, the observation of this research was done by the collaborator who observes the implementation of peer editing technique in the teaching and learning process by using an observation checklist. The observer helped the researcher to observe, ticked on Yes/No column, and gave comments on the problem he saw during each session in terms of students' performance and their attitudes.

##### Reflect

In this step, the result of the observation checklist and the result of students' writing assignments were analyzed as the evaluation result. The result of this reflection was taken into consideration to plan the next cycle.

##### Cycle 2

In cycle 2, the activities were similar to those in cycle 1, but there were some emphases due to the revised plans based on the result of cycle 1.

After each cycle was completed, students were asked to submit their revision as their posttest. Before the post-test scoring, the researcher invited 2 other English teachers to be the scorers for these post-tests to make to scores valid and reliable. The criteria would be unified before scoring happens. Then, the reflection was also delivered to students to collect the data of their attitudes towards peer feedback in their writing.

#### Data analysis procedure

Results of pre-test and post-test were compared by using Paired-Samples t-test in SPSS 19 software. 5 main aspects including content, organization, language use, mechanics, and vocabulary were described in detail.

Qualitative data from the observation checklist and reflection were analyzed according to the 6 following steps (Creswell, 2012) as Prepare and Organize the Data for Analysis, Collected qualitative data was organized, Explore and Code the Data, Coding to Build Description and Themes Codes, Represent and Report Qualitative Finding, Interpret the Findings, and Validate the Accuracy of the Findings.

### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Research question 1:** Does the use of peer feedback technique help improve DNTU students' weaknesses of writing skills in their English narrative paragraphs?

#### Results from students' writing tests.

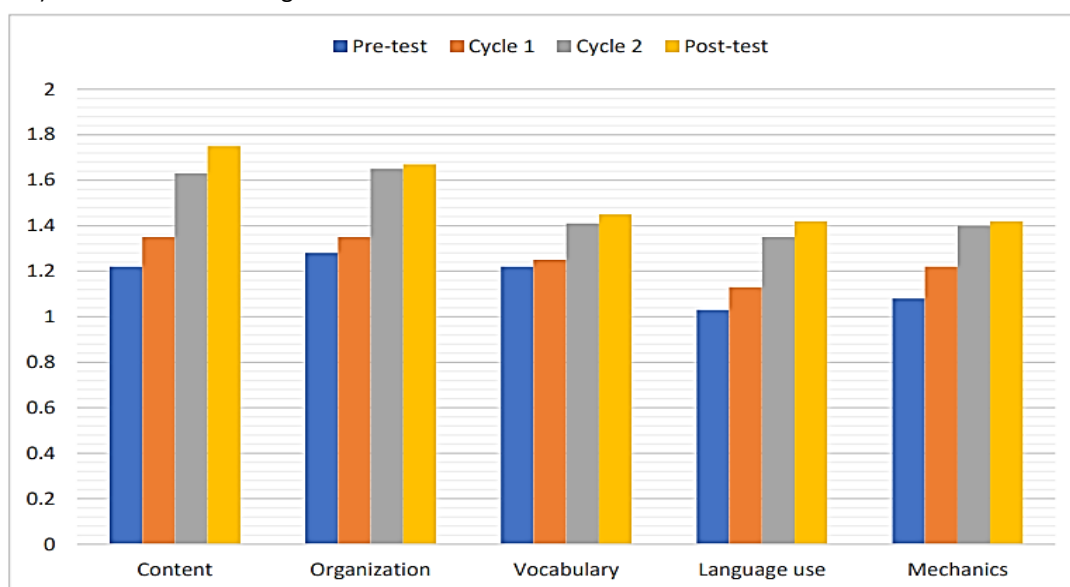
**Table 1.** Students' improvement of writing skills after the intervention

**Paired Samples Statistics**

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pre-test	5.85	30	1.40902	.25725
	Post-test	7.62	30	.80605	.14716

The means score of the pre-test was 5.85 and after practicing peer feedback the post-test increased to 7.62. These two results were significantly different. It can be inferred that the peer feedback technique is effective in improving learners' writing skills.

The improvement of students' writing aspects (content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics) is demonstrated in Figure 2 below.



**Figure 2.** The improvement of students' writing aspects

As can be seen in the chart, the improvement in content and organization of students' narrative paragraph writing is the greatest one after the action of two cycles. Besides, the enhancement when comparing the result of the pre-test with cycle 1 is just slightly increased. However, in cycle 2, it is raised significantly. Through the increase of test results, it is clear that learners benefited from the use of peer feedback in their writing process.

#### Results from classroom observation checklist

Besides the results from tests, the classroom observation checklist is known as a useful tool to evaluate learners' improvement after treatment used to triangulate the results taken from tests. The classroom observation occurred during 4 meetings (2 in cycle 1 and 2 in cycle 2). This section shows the result of the first part (statements 1 to 8) of classroom observation. The observer ticked yes or no on what he could see about the students' performance during the learning process. From that, the researcher can evaluate what students achieved and improved after each meeting. The results are demonstrated in Table 2 below.

**Table 2.** Student's performance in writing process

Student's performance in writing process	CYCLE 1			CYCLE 2	
	Meeting 1	Meeting 2	Meeting 3	Meeting 4	Meeting 5
The students understand teacher's instruction of peer feedback technique.	YES Some students still confused about how to use peer feedback.				
The students are able to write the first drafts with the assigned topic within a determined time.		YES	YES	YES	YES
The students are able to give response in both written and oral forms to peers' writing critically.		YES	YES	YES	YES
The students are able to edit their mistakes of content based on feedback from their partners effectively.		NO	YES Some students are still confused to deal with this aspect.	YES	YES Students can fix it better than the previous session
The students are able to edit their mistakes of organization based on feedback from their partners effectively.		NO	YES	YES	YES

The students are able to edit their mistakes of vocabulary based on feedback from their partners effectively.		NO	NO Vocabulary is still a big problem. They cannot find out more suitable words or idioms.	YES	YES Students are able to use more appropriate vocabulary in their writing.
The students are able to edit their mistakes of language use based on feedback from their partners effectively.		NO	NO Mistakes of tenses are still not fixed.	YES	YES Most of them can use correct tenses in their writing.
The students are able to edit their mistakes of mechanics based on feedback from their partners effectively.		NO	NO Most of students do not know how to edit punctuation mistakes.	YES	YES Students can recognize mistakes of punctuation faster and correct them in the right way.

It can be summarized that DNTU students' weaknesses in writing narrative paragraphs were improved gradually through each cycle. Specifically, in meeting 2, students could not edit any mistakes in writing aspects. In meeting 3, the mistakes of content and organization were fixed better by most of the students. However, the observer noted that students got difficulties in editing their mistakes of past tense and punctuation. In addition, he also identified "vocabulary is still a big problem for most of the students. They cannot find out more suitable words or idioms for their edition". Basing on this note, the researcher prepared the solution for the next cycle by focusing on coaching students on how to give feedback and fix mistakes of vocabulary. These writing aspects were observed to be corrected by students in final drafts efficiently. In detail, vocabulary was observed more appropriately in students' writing. Moreover, tense and punctuations are improved more effectively. In brief, students' writing skill was enhanced after 2 cycles of implementing peer feedback technique.

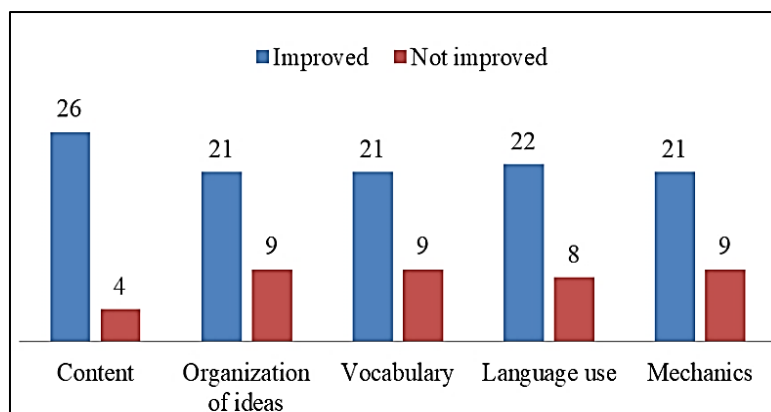
After analyzing the data from the results of the test and observation checklists, it one more time confirms the positive effects of the peer feedback technique on DNTU students' writing skill of narrative paragraph. After analyzing the data from the results of test and observation checklists, it one more time confirms the positive effectiveness of the peer feedback technique on DNTU students' writing skill of narrative paragraph.

**Research question 2:** What are DNTU students' attitudes towards peer feedback technique in their English writing process?

### Results from the reflection

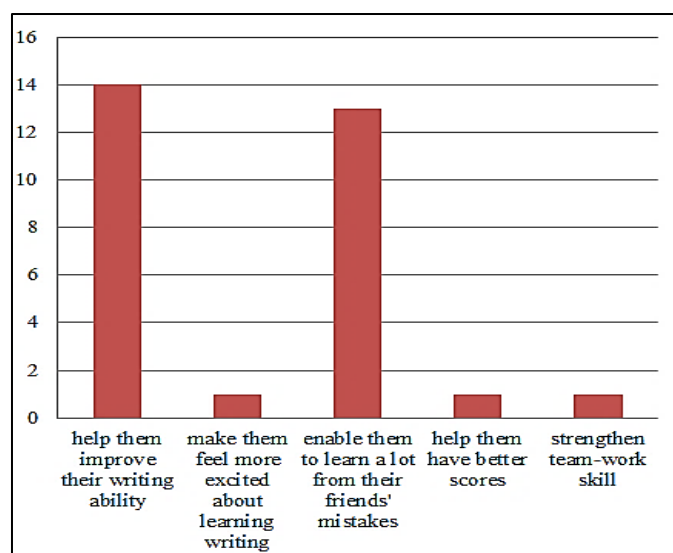
The qualitative results from these instruments was described in two main contents corresponding to two questions in the reflection: (1) students' attitudes to the improvement of five writing aspects such as content, organization of ideas, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics; (2) students' feeling about peer feedback technique in their writing process

Figure 3 as below would give an overview of students' attitudes to the improvement of five writing aspects from the reflection. The findings from Figure 3 illustrates 26 out of 30 students considered that their content of writing was improved. 21 out of 30 students agreed that the organization of ideas, vocabulary, and mechanics in their writing were enriched. In addition, 22 out of 30 students pointed out that this technique can help them learn a lot from their friends' mechanic mistakes and improve these mistakes by themselves. There was just 13 to 30 percent of students did not see any changes in their writing performance after taking the intervention.



**Figure 3.** Students' attitudes to the improvement of five writing aspects

To examine whether a teaching technique is successful or not, taking learners' feelings towards that technique is important. After coding, classifying, and analyzing data, the results demonstrate the surprising number that 100% of students expressed they were fond of using peer feedback technique in learning writing because of different reasons: (1) helping them improve their writing ability; (2) enabling them to learn more from their friends' mistakes; (3) making them feel more excited about learning writing skill; (4) helping them have better scores and (5) strengthening their team-work skill. Figure 4 below would perform the reasons with the relevant number of students.



**Figure 4.** Students' feeling about peer feedback technique in their writing process

### Results from classroom observation

The results from the observation checklist are considered as tools to triangulate the data from the reflection. This section reveals the changes in students' attitudes to peer feedback activity during two cycles. The attitudes were just observed in meeting 3 and 5 where peer feedback activity occurred. It is displayed in Table 3 below.

The results from Table 3 demonstrate the positive shift of students' attitudes to peer feedback activities during 2 cycles. In the first cycle, at the second meeting, students were not ready to share their writing with their friends; they do not show their interest when working with other people; they could not find out the mistakes of their friends, but some of them showed positive motivation in learning writing. It might be the first time students tried doing peer feedback technique. Therefore, it was not easy for them to accept and do it with all of their interest.



**Table 3.** Students' attitudes during the learning process

Students' attitudes during learning process	CYCLE 1		CYCLE 2	
	Meeting 2	Meeting 3	Meeting 4	Meeting 5
The students are willing to review their classmates' compositions.	NO	YES Observed. But many students are shy to share their drafts to their partners.	YES	YES Students are comfortable when sharing their compositions with their partners.
Students are willing to work with others paired with them.	NO	YES Some of students feel annoyed with their partners	YES	YES Most of them are pleased to work with each other
Students are more confident in their writing performance	NO	YES	YES	YES
Students are confident in their knowledge of target language	NO	NO They took a lot of time to check the mistakes by using the Internet.	NO	NO Students still confused when giving suggestions or pointing out mistakes to their friends.
Students are more excited about learning writing	YES	YES	YES	YES

In the next meeting, students were more willing to share their drafts, but not all of them were confident to do this. However, they became more comfortable sharing their draft in the second cycle. In addition, students were paired based on their test scores, but most of the students were upset with their partners. At this session, although students were more accustomed to this technique, the problems of pair-work should be considered to ease students and make the activity more efficient.

In cycle 2, they were more satisfied. Peer feedback helped students feel more confident in their writing performance in both cycles. One of the problems which was usually found in many studies is the lack of students' knowledge of the target language. It was also observed in the classroom. The result showed that just a few students are confident in their target language knowledge. On the other hand, most students had to take a lot of time to check their friends' mistakes by using the Internet. It was not improved in cycle 2. Despite it, it was observed that students felt more interested in learning writing subjects in both cycles.

From the results of the observation checklist and reflection, it can be concluded that students' attitudes to peer feedback techniques are positive. It helps improve their five aspects of writing when composing a narrative paragraph. All of the students showed their preference for this technique because it helped them to improve their writing skills, made them feel more excited about learning writing, enabled them to learn from their friends, helped them gain higher scores, and develops their teamwork skills.

## V. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of peer feedback technique on improving students' writing skills. After the analysis of data collected from students' tests, observation checklist, and reflection, the finding showed that peer feedback is a beneficial technique for improving learners' writing skills. The researcher also found out that most of the students have positive attitudes to peer feedback techniques in

helping them enhance their mistakes of 5 aspects of writing. In addition, all of the students showed their interest in employing peer feedback in their writing process because of different reasons such as helping them get higher writing scores, enable them to learn a lot from their friends' mistakes, make them feel more interested in learning writing skill, strengthen their team-work skill and help them improve their writing skill. In brief, most of the students in this research shared their positive attitudes to peer feedback techniques.

## VI. LIMITATIONS

All studies have limitations, so this study is not an exception. There are 2 main limitations as below:

The first limitation is the sample for the study which just includes thirty first-year English-major students. The findings are only reliable in the research context, but they cannot be generalized and convincing enough in a larger population.

Secondly, this research just focuses on only one type of writing which is narrative writing. It will be better if there is more time to investigate students' writing improvement in different genres.

## VII. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCHES

Despite the limitations of this study, the findings are still valued with the proven effectiveness of the peer feedback technique at DNTU. However, it is recommended that further studies can be conducted in a broader population of students in different universities of Vietnam or other countries to check if it works in other contexts. Besides, it is expected that different types of writing should be investigated to measure the improvement of students' writing ability with the employment of peer feedback techniques. Finally, the efficiency of the peer feedback technique can be proven with different English skills. It will make the teaching methodology more diverse with the contribution of peer feedback if it works.

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