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Foreign Language Learning and Teaching

Undergraduates' Perceptions of
Anonymous and Open Digital
Peer Feedback in Academic Writing

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Introduction into feedback

- * Corrective feedback: “Learners’ erroneous ... L2 production” (Li, 2014, p. 196).
- * Peer feedback: A formative developmental process (Hyland, 2000).
- * “An opportunity to change roles” (Berggren, 2015, p. 67):
 - * Student authors become readers.
 - * Consider this impact over prospective teachers.
 - * Collaborative teacher development: Less dependent on outside experts (Barfield, 2016).

Theoretical background of peer feedback: Scaffolding

- * **Sociocultural theory:**
 - * Benefit from communicative activities to enable a socially mediated process (Kayi-Aydar, 2013).
- * **Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD – Vygotsky, 1978):**
 - * Peer interaction:
 - * **Scaffolding** (Weissberg, 2006).
- * **Social / Genre Approach (Tribble, 2015):**
 - * Existence of both expert and novice authors.
 - * Depends on scaffolding.
- * **Process Approach (Wette, 2015):**
 - * Encourages student creativity by thinking (e.g., brainstorming, planning, drafting and revising).

Advantages of peer feedback

- * Beneficial and improves writing skills (e.g., Hu, 2005; Hu & Lam, 2010; Zhao, 2010, 2014).
- * Benefits both for authors and reviewers (Aghaee & Hansson, 2013).
 - * Greater benefits for reviewers than authors (Lu & Law, 2012; Lundstrom & Baker, 2009).
- * Reveals writing problems that had been overlooked (Ruecker, 2010).
- * Makes learners more autonomous (Hyland, 2000; Villamil & Guerrero, 1996).
- * Develops higher order thinking skills (Mangelsdorf, 1992).

Potential problems in peer feedback

- * Reliability is questionable (Aghaee & Hansson, 2013) due to problems of students with limited abilities:
 - * **Problem 1:**
 - * **Misleading** each other due to their own deficiencies and **lack of trust** in peers' feedback (see Berggren, 2015; Nelson & Murphy, 1993; Paulus, 1999; Rinehart & Chen, 2012; Rollinson, 2005; Ruecker, 2010; Saito & Fujita, 2004, Yang, Badger, & Yu, 2006; Zhao, 2014).
 - * **Problem 2:**
 - * Reluctant to criticize friends (Liou & Peng, 2009).

Anonymously multi-mediated writing model (Razi, 2015)

- * Provides solutions to the problems.
- * Writing process in the model:
 - * First draft
 - * Peer review by 3 anonymous reviewers
 - * Revising and resubmitting

Solution to Problem 1: Assigning multiple reviewers

- * **Categorize** students in three groups: 'good', 'moderate', and 'weak'.
- * Each student:
 - * Receives feedback (directive/corrective) from a good, moderate and weak peer.
 - * Consider the **output hypothesis** (Swain, 1998):
 - * Feedback enables '**forming and testing hypothesis**', then comes '**metatalk**', and finally '**noticing**' (see Thwaites, 2014).
 - * Provides feedback to a good, moderate and weak peer.
- * Asymmetrical vs. symmetrical feedback (Hanjani & Li, 2014)
- * Subsequent applications of ZPD enable both asymmetrical and symmetrical considerations.
 - * **Asymmetrical:** feedback from an expert to a novice learner.
 - * **Symmetrical:** feedback between learners of equal ability.

Solution to Problem 2: Anonymity in peer feedback

- * Limited research in the relevant literature.
- * Anonymous peer review provides awareness of academic writing (Robinson, 2002).
- * Better writing performance and more critical feedback in anonymity (Lu & Bol, 2007).
- * Survey: preference of anonymity among university students (Hosack, 2003).
- * Superiority of anonymous peer reviewers over open ones (Razi, 2015).

Metacognitive skills

- * Three essential cognitive processes in writing (Ong, 2014):
 - * Planning, transcribing, and reviewing.
- * Metacognitive knowledge of tasks operates when the nature of a task forces learners to think about how they will manage.
 - * For difficult tasks, learners allocate more time, or prepare an outline (Flavell, 1985).
- * Metacognitive experiences occur when careful, conscious monitoring of one's cognitive efforts is required (Abbott, 2006).

Why digital environment?

- * **The superiority of online feedback over traditional modes is not clear (Elwood & Bode, 2014).**
- * Enables timely and more effective feedback.
- * Not confined to physical and time constraints.
- * Accelerates peer review process.
- * Anonymity may not be possible without digital technology.
- * Eliminates social constraint of face-to-face feedback (Ho & Savignon, 2007).
- * Gives the possibility to seek teacher's advice and peer's guidance online simultaneously (DiGiovanni & Nagaswami, 2001).

Main aim of the study

Revealing undergraduates' perceptions of receiving and providing peer-feedback either 'openly' or 'anonymously' in a digital online environment in EFL academic writing.

Research Questions

- * **RQ1:** Do EAP learners prefer receiving peer feedback openly or anonymously?
- * **RQ2:** Do EAP learners prefer providing peer feedback openly or anonymously?
- * **RQ3:** In what ways do the participants think that peer review was beneficial?
- * **RQ4:** In what ways do the participants think that peer review was problematic?
- * **RQ5:** How do EAP learners consider the quality of peer feedback that they received on a digital environment?
- * **RQ6:** Do the participants think that receiving feedback from peers contributed to their paper?
- * **RQ7:** Do the participants think that providing feedback to their peers contributed to their own paper?



Setting and participants

- * Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Turkey:
 - * Faculty of Education, English Language Teaching Dept.
- * 2014-2015 academic year, spring term
- * Participants:
 - * *First year students enrolled in Advanced Reading and Writing Skills course*
 - * *Two groups of participants from three intact classes:*
 - * *Categorized in accordance with their academic writing proficiency*
 - * $N = 60$ ($n_{female} = 42, n_{male} = 18$)
 - * $n_{open} = 30$ ($n_{female} = 21, n_{male} = 9$)
 - * $n_{anonymous} = 30$ ($n_{female} = 21, n_{male} = 9$)

Instruments

- Turnitin as a digital environment
- Questionnaire with open ended questions

Procedure

- * 2014-15 fall session Advanced Reading and Writing Skills course grades to categorize students.
 - * 'good', 'moderate', and 'weak'.
 - * Participants were aware of this categorization:
 - * Did not know into which category they were placed.
- * Received feedback from three peers, either openly or anonymously.
- * Provided feedback to three peers, either openly or anonymously.
- * Rationale: Teachers should consider different student groups carefully and give precise instructions about the peer review task (Rollinson, 2005).

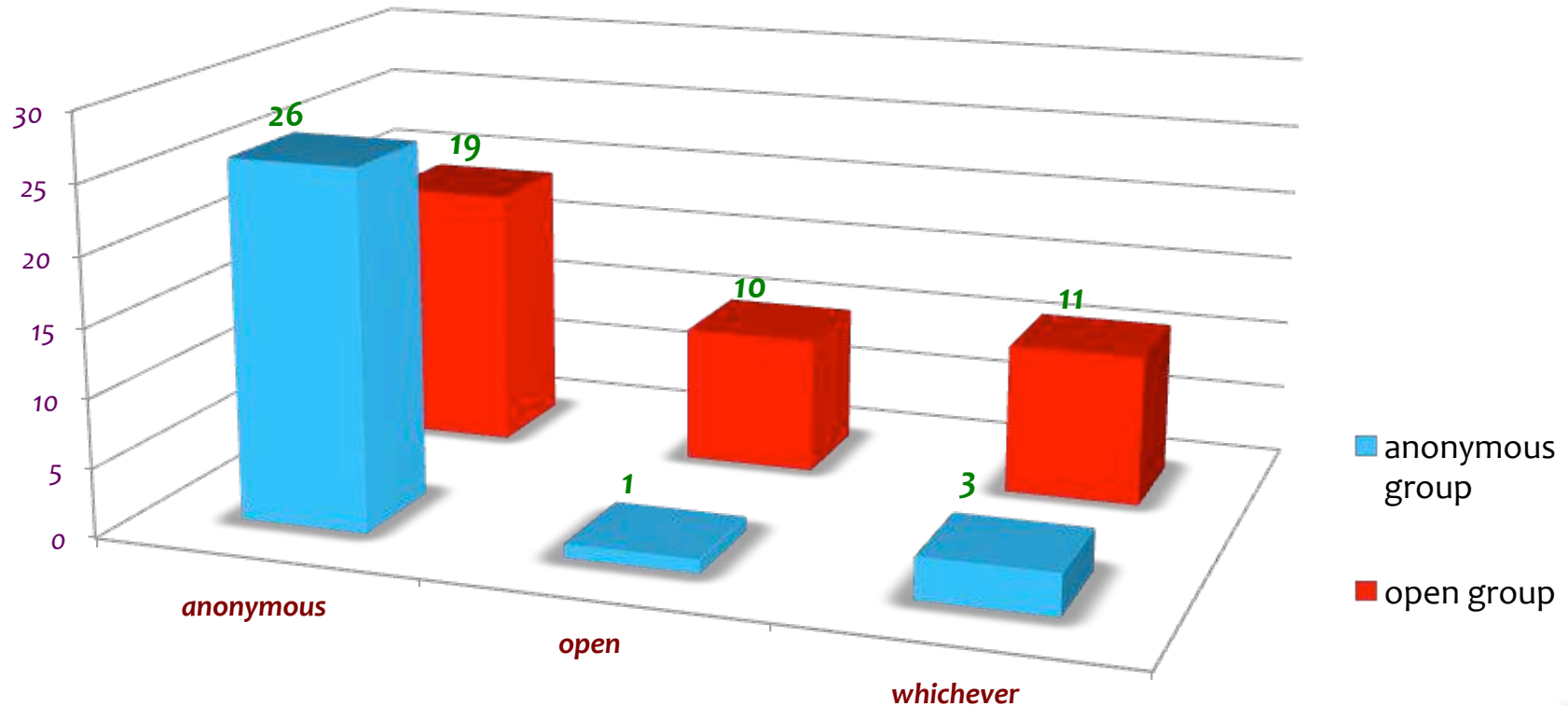
Procedure (cont')

- * **Advanced Reading and Writing Skills Course:**
 - * Syllabus adapted from Razi (2011).
- * **Assignment:**
 - * 1,500-word review paper (excluding the abstract and references),
 - * ELT related topic chosen by the student,
 - * Three phase submission:
 - * Introduction, discussion, and conclusion.
 - * For each submission, multiple (3) open/anonymous peer feedback on a digital environment.

Findings

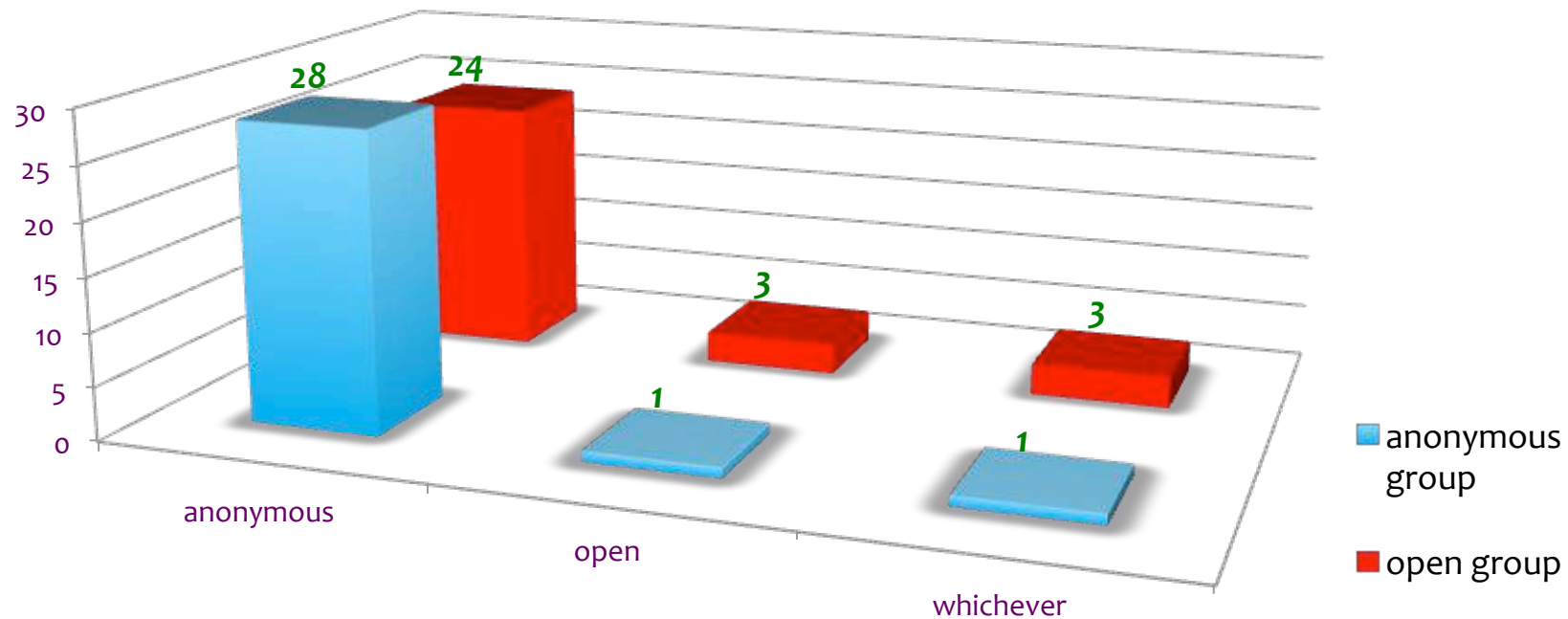
RQ1: Do EAP learners prefer receiving peer feedback openly or anonymously?

Majority of the participants prefer receiving peer feedback anonymously.



RQ2: Do EAP learners prefer providing peer feedback openly or anonymously?

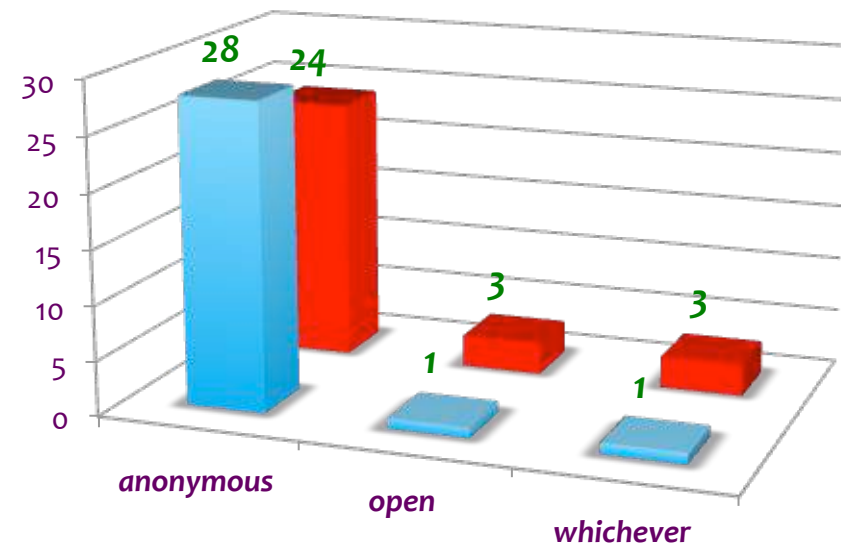
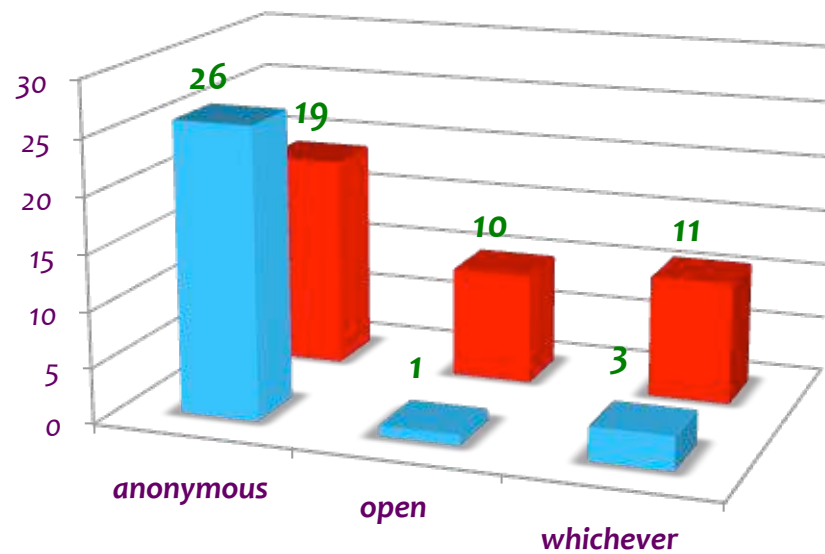
A vast majority of the participants prefer providing peer feedback anonymously.



RQ1 & RQ2:

Comparison of preference over receiving and providing anonymous or open feedback.

Anonymity is more preferable in the case of providing feedback.



■ anonymous group ■ open group

RQ3: In what ways do the participants think that peer review was beneficial?

Group 1 (Anonymous)	Group 2 (Open)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• grammar (21)• punctuation (12)• spelling (11)• flow of ideas (7)• academic writing rules (5)• vocabulary selection (4)• linking devices (3)• complexity of sentences (1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• grammar (18)• punctuation (10)• spelling (9)• flow of ideas (4)• vocabulary selection (4)• academic writing rules (3)• linking devices (2)• headings (1)• paper style (1)

RQ4: In what ways do the participants think that peer review was problematic?

Group 1 (Anonymous)	Group 2 (Open)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Weak feedback (16)• Irrelevant feedback (2)• Wrong feedback (7)• No contribution to flow of ideas (1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Weak feedback (10)• Wrong feedback (8)• No contribution to flow of ideas (3)• Irrelevant feedback (2)• Mistrust to the reviewer's suggestion (1)• No contribution to developing more complex sentences (1)• Reviewing three papers brings too much workload (1)



RQ5: How do EAP learners consider the quality of peer feedback that they received on a digital environment?

- * 5-scale likert question:
 - * 1 = very poor, 2 = poor, 3 = acceptable, 4 = good, 5 = excellent
- * **$M_{\text{overall}} = 3.58, SD = 0.79$**
- * Independent samples *t*-test
 - * Significant differences $t(50.66) = 2.57; p = .01$
 - * **$M_{\text{anonymous}} = 3.83, SD = 0.59$**
 - * **$M_{\text{open}} = 3.33, SD = 0.84$**
 - * a medium effect size ($d = 0.66$)

RQ6: Do the participants think that receiving feedback from peers contributed to their paper?

Group 1 (Anonymous)	Group 2 (Open)
Yes = 28	Yes = 29
No = 0	No = 0
Slightly = 2	Slightly = 1

RQ7: Do the participants think that providing feedback to their peers contributed to their own paper?

Group 1 (Anonymous)	Group 2 (Open)
Yes = 28	Yes = 28
No = 1	No = 1
Slightly = 1	Slightly = 1

It is interesting to note that the participant who indicated that receiving feedback from peers did not contribute to her paper, appreciates the contribution of providing feedback to peers with regards to writing a better paper.

Participants' comments on anonymously multi-mediated writing model: Multiple reviewers

Participant 1:

“I received weak feedback from several of my friends. They just skipped my mistakes since they did not care the assignment. Receiving feedback from three peers minimized this problem as at least one of them called my attention to the problems in my paper. In addition, the detailed rubric that we used to provide feedback was so beneficial. In this way, as reviewers we knew what to focus while providing peer feedback.”

Participants' comments on anonymously multi-mediated writing model: Digital platform

Participant 2: “Since the complete writing process was on a digital platform, I felt a bit stressed but anyway this helped me motivate myself to finish the task in time.”

Participant 3: “I enjoyed writing in such a way where cutting edge technology was available. This increased my motivation to writing.”

Participant 4: “I benefited from submitting drafts in terms of avoiding plagiarism.”

Participant 5: “It enabled us to work anywhere and anytime we wanted. This was so practical!”

Participant 6: “Digital peer review was so practical in comparison to traditional type of peer review. I could benefit from different colours for example while providing feedback to different types of mistakes.”

Participant 7: “I didn't have to run after my friends begging them to provide feedback to my paper. It also helped us save our planet by working paper-free.”

Participants' comments on anonymously multi-mediated writing model: Anonymity supporters

Participant 8: “It is more objective as we do not know who gives the feedback.”

Participant 9: “In anonymous peer review, I think we hide our emotions along with our identities.

Participant 10: “One of my friends lost a friend simply because of open peer review as the reviewer criticized her.”

Participant 11: “When reviewers know our identity, they might review our papers based on their thoughts on our personality.”

Participant 12: “In the case of open peer review, I could not criticize effectively to avoid hurting my friend’s feelings.”

Participant 13: “No one criticizes his/her best friend’s paper truly.”

Participant 14: “Knowing the author made me under the impact of my prejudices against them.”

Participant 15: “Not everybody can control his/her emotions. Some friends behave very badly after being criticized by a peer.”

Participants' comments on anonymously multi-mediated writing model: Anti-anonymity supporters

Participant 16: “I prefer open peer review as it encourages the reviewer to be more careful in providing feedback.”

Participant 17: “I want to know about the reviewer as I need this information to decide whether to trust his/her suggestions or not.”

Participant 18: “I want to receive open peer feedback as I can later have the opportunity of talking to my reviewer with the details of my paper and his/her suggestions.”

Participants' comments on anonymously multi-mediated writing model: Peer review

Participant 19: “I spent too much time on the same page while writing my paper and this prevented me from recognizing my mistakes. Peer reviews helped me reveal such mistakes.”

Participant 20: “I learned from my friends' mistakes.”

Participant 21: “I realized my own mistakes by reviewing my friends' papers.”

Participant 22: “I can find a mistake in my friend's paper but I have difficulty in realizing a similar mistake in my own paper.”

Participant 23: “I benefited from my previous mistakes while providing feedback.”

Participant 24: “Providing feedback to my peers helped me learn and remember academic writing rules better.”

Discussion

- * Receiving feedback from several peers and revising accordingly requires deep analysis.
- * Development of **metacognitive skills**:
 - * **Autonomous learner**
- * Written corrective peer feedback contributes to the development of form-focused cognitive processing:
 - * Results in employment of **metacognitive revising strategies** (Nishino & Atkinson, 2015).

Conclusion

- * EAP learners preferred both receiving and providing peer feedback anonymously.
- * Anonymity seems more important while providing peer feedback to keep their identity.
- * Peer review, either openly or anonymously, seems beneficial especially with regards to the mechanics of papers such as grammar, punctuation, and spelling.
- * Its contribution to other components of papers such as flow of ideas, vocabulary selection and academic writing rules seems limited.
- * EAP learners can provide 'good' feedback, yet some received weak or wrong peer feedback. This provides evidence for the necessity of receiving feedback from multiple peers in accordance with reviewers' writing proficiency.
- * Anonymity enabled providing better quality feedback.
- * EAP learners believed that both receiving and providing feedback helped them write better.



Pedagogical implication: Suggested feedback exchange in anonymously multi-mediated writing model

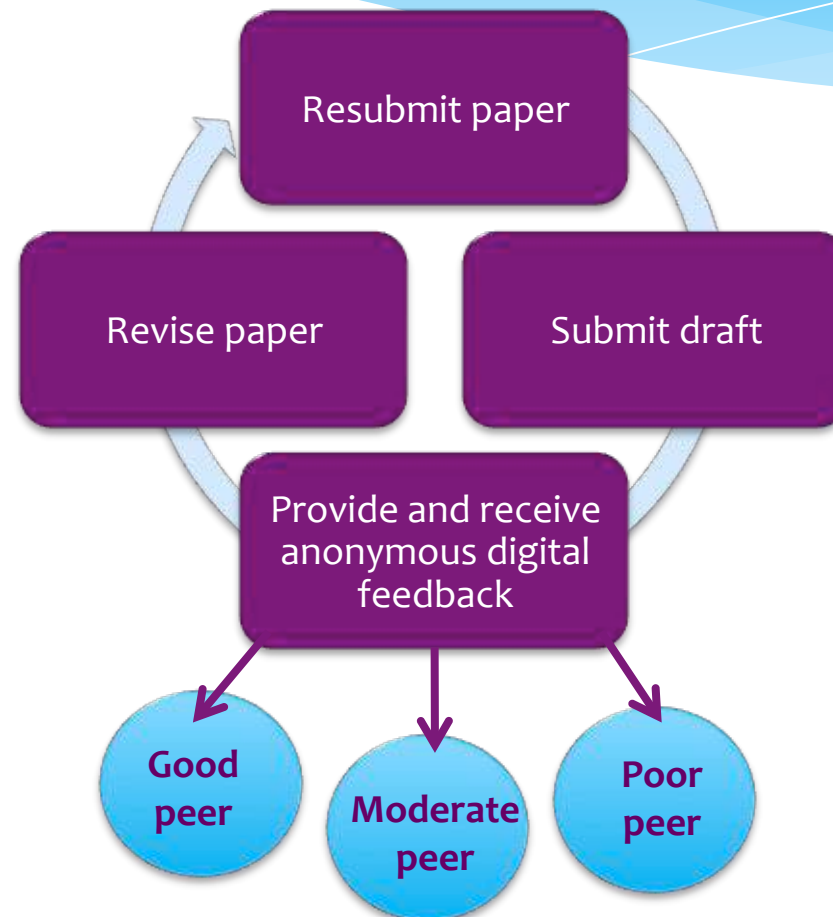


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(Adapted from Razi, 2015)

Implications

- * Group students carefully and give precise instructions about the peer review task (Rollinson, 2005).
- * They change roles (Berggren, 2015) and student authors become readers.
- * Familiarize them with peer feedback on a digital platform.
- * Model how to use the rubric to provide peer feedback.
- * Extra work might be demotivating, avoid being too demanding:
 - * Appreciate peer review in final grades (see Razi, 2015 for the suggested formula).

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