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Which Engages Students More in English Writing: Teacher+Peer Feedback or Teacher-Only Feedback? -A Study in Chinese Tertiary Education

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of "teacher+peer" mixed feedback on undergraduate English writing engagement, aligning with the emphasis on comprehensive feedback in English Language Teaching and student-centered learning principles outlined by the *College English Curriculum Guide* (2020) in China to answer two main research questions: how does the "teacher+peer" mixed feedback pattern influence engagement in English writing among Chinese tertiary students behaviorally, cognitively, and emotionally and does mixed feedback yield significantly higher engagement than teacher-only feedback? Conducted a 12-week semester with 85 first-year undergraduates, the study compared an experimental group receiving "teacher+peer" feedback with a control group receiving"teacher-only" feedback, utilizing data from pre- and post-intervention questionnaires and post-intervention focus group discussion. Findings reveal that the mixed feedback approach significantly enhances learning engagement across all dimensions—emotional, cognitive, and behavioral—outperforming "teacher-only" feedback. A substantial post-intervention mean increase is observed in the experimental group, in contrast to minimal changes in the control group. It expanded the existing literature on writing feedback, engagement theory, and peer involvement in the ELT domain through empirical data from the Chinese context. Additionally, the pedagogical implications include rotating mixed-ability groups, overcoming cultural hesitancy among reserved Chinese students, and accommodating variations in English proficiency, facilitating the conduction of the research-informed "teacher+peer" writing feedback in similar contexts outside China.

Keywords: EFL writing, Chinese Tertiary Education, "teacher+peer" mixed feedback, writing engagement

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Introduction

The 2020 College English Guide of China (*Guide*s for short) states that college English writing instruction aims to enable students to "write to express personal opinions on general topics in English; to be able to write English abstracts and papers related to their specialties." (MOE, 2020, p. 9). Concerning the approaches to achieve these goals, the document highlights the importance of fostering "students' initiative, autonomy and strategies in learning," (MOE, 2020, p.33), suggesting that curricula should cater to students' personal interests, academic goals, and future career demands, thus arousing their engagement in learning. However, the gaps still retain, for example, teachers are mostly the only subject of evaluation even until recently although the growing instructional workload and expanding class size in higher education made them already exhausted in China (Shi, 2019), and students scarcely were involved as members of the evaluation group, being unable to conduct self-evaluation and peer feedback thus to boost their engagement in the writing process.

To investigate whether the "teacher+peer" mixed feedback enhances learners' engagement than "teacher-only" feedback in English writing, this study is conducted to achieve these objectives: to identify whether learner writing engagement is impacted by "teacher+learner" feedback behaviorally, cognitively, and emotionally, and to compare the engagement yielded by mixed feedback and teacher-only feedback. The current study seeks answers to the following research questions:

i. How does the "teacher+peer" mixed feedback pattern influence engagement in English writing among Chinese tertiary students behaviorally, cognitively, and emotionally?
ii. Does mixed feedback yield significantly higher engagement than teacher-only feedback?

The "teacher+peer" mixed feedback approach, which integrates teacher guidance with peer remarks, may meet the demands of the updated *Guides*, stating the importance of combining learner-centered teaching and teacher guidance (MoE, 2020) and thus promote learners' engagement in writing. Learning engagement, defined as the degree to which learners actively participate in educational activities and experiences (Reeve, 2012), is evaluated for understanding the learning process and fostering future progress (Ren, 2023). It is considered one of the most pivotal feedback types in tertiary education (Noroozi et al., 2023). Active student engagement impacts academic outcomes (Gao et al., 2019). Thus, strong writing engagement fostered in the feedback process is essential for the effectiveness of writing outcomes.

Review of Literature

In this section, the existing literature about"teacher+peer" mixed feedback, writing engagement, and the combination of the two dimensions is reviewed to lay a foundation for the current study and identify the research gaps.

"Teacher+Peer" Mixed Feedback

Back in the 1960s, teacher feedback dominated the feedback domain in the teaching of writing in English as a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL), and its authority was unanimously recognized by learners. There are various definitions for teacher feedback, which encompass the corrective information provided by teachers to students (Flower, 1979) and a feedback mechanism through which teachers provide comments and suggestions to improve learners' writing (Hyland

& Hyland, 2019). This study defines teacher feedback as a teacher's review of students' writing and the provision of revision information via written feedback (Zhao, 2024). Ferris and Roberts claim that learners prefer teachers' written feedback over other forms of feedback (2001), echoed by Mustafa et al. 's research findings that teacher feedback is the most helpful measure from learners' viewpoints (2022). On the other hand, peer feedback usually refers to students providing oral or written feedback on their peers' writing in pairs or small groups (Yu & Lee, 2016). With other names as peer assessment or peer review, it features several aspects: effectiveness, which is proven by Cai (2011), feasibility (Liu & Ji, 2018), and learners' perceptions and attitudes towards it (Bai & Li, 2020).

Studies largely support combining teacher and peer feedback, namely "teacher+peer" mixed feedback, finding it boosts motivation, reduces anxiety, and improves writing quality, autonomy, and engagement (Yu, 2020). Xing and Wang (2023) rank it as the most effective among feedback sources, and students prefer it over single-source options (Demirel & Enginarlar, 2016; Loan, 2017). However, some studies suggested that the practicality of English writing feedback largely depends on the verified contexts (Phothongsunan, 2023); hence, it is important to apply various feedback to cater to different environments. Additionally, students distrust peers involved in the "teacher +peer" feedback, due to perceived disrespect or incompetence (Zhou et al., 2020), feeling stressed by peer assessment (Stančić, 2021), or questioning peers' language skills, threatening the face-saving norms in Chinese culture (Xue, 2023), and insufficient specialized knowledge and literacy about the topic (Valero Haro et al.,2023). Therefore, this study is conducted to verify its effectiveness in boosting learners' writing engagement.

Writing Engagement

The definition of engagement could be traced back to Ralph Tyler in the 1930s, who viewed it as active participation in learning (Reeve, 2012), evolving through Pace's (1984, P.54) emphasis on "quality of effort". Fredricks et al. (2004) categorized it into behavioral (effort), emotional (affect), and cognitive (strategy) dimensions, which offer a conductible measurement for it. Behavioral engagement manifests learners' behavioral responses to feedback (Tian & Zhou, 2020), mainly reflected by the length of revision and feedback uptake rate (Ranalli, 2021); emotional engagement refers to learners' emotional and attitudinal responses to feedback (Tian & Zhou, 2020), covering interest, value, and affect (Fan & Xu, 2020) and cognitive engagement pertains to feedback awareness, cognitive strategies, and metacognitive strategies (Han & Hyland, 2015). In this study, behavioral engagement encompasses time spent revising and frequency of feedback uptake; cognitive engagement covers the depth of processing feedback, and self-reported effort in understanding and applying it, and emotional engagement includes attitudes toward feedback, motivation, and confidence. Since most existing literature targets single feedback types: teacher, automated, or peer, whereas not sufficient mixed feedback studies (Tian & Zhou, 2020), this study intends to explore the impact of the combination of teacher and student feedback in the context of Chinese Tertiary Education.

Writing Engagement and "Teacher+peer" Mixed Feedback

Research on English writing feedback explores peer training, influencing factors, strategies, interaction, rubrics, and focus, with rising interest in learning engagement's role in English writing effectiveness (Xu & Fan, 2019; Zhang & Hyland, 2018). Studies also examine revision behaviors

(Goldstein, 2016), feedback processing depth (Kim & Bowles, 2019), and emotional responses (Mahfoodh, 2017). However, a few studies have comprehensively integrated emotional, behavioral, and cognitive engagement (e.g., Han & Xu, 2021). Moreover, most research focuses on single feedback types—such as teacher feedback (Zheng et al., 2020), automated feedback (Koltovskaia, 2020), or peer feedback (Geng & Yu, 2023)—while mixed feedback patterns remain underexplored. Although studies on mixed feedback (e.g., Tian & Zhou, 2020) highlight the benefits of combining teacher and peer feedback, the relevance of feedback approaches to writing engagement, particularly comparisons between single feedback (e.g.,"teacher-only") and mixed feedback (e.g., teacher and peer) in higher education, is still largely unexamined.

Methodology

The research design was elaborated in terms of participants, sampling, instrumentation, and procedure.

Design of the Study

This study employed mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative), which allow for a comprehensive analysis of engagement dimensions and student perceptions, aligning with the student-centered framework (MoE, 2020). The use of different data collection methods (questionnaire and focus group) will lead to deeper insight into the understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. As it is a quasi-experimental research, non-random allocation of subjects may potentially introduce selection bias; nevertheless, the convenience sample conducted in the study fits existing classroom structures (42-56 students per class), providing real-world applicability.

Participants

In the experiment, a total of 85 first-year undergraduates in two classes from a Chinese tertiary university with an age span of 18 to 21 participated in this study by obtaining their consent after informing the research purpose and procedures, and the rules of participant autonomy and confidentiality. In social science research, sample sizes of $N \geq 30$ are generally sufficient to produce a normal distribution of sample means (Uttley, 2019). The two classes are from the same school to avoid the difference due to their majors. The control class consisted of 42 students, while the experimental class included 43 students. The total sample of 85 participants exhibited a similar gender ratio of male to female students across both classes, as presented in Table 1. Pre-intervention English writing proficiency was assessed via the College Entrance Examination results in writing, yielding mean scores of 12.33 for the control class and 11.80 for the experimental class (out of a possible maximum score of 25). To confirm equivalence in writing ability, an independent samples t-test was conducted, resulting in a p-value of 0.418, which is greater than the conventional threshold of 0.05. This indicates no statistically significant difference, confirming that the English writing proficiency levels of students in both classes were closely aligned before the experiment. There is another t-test conducted to ensure similar baseline engagements between the two classes.

Table 1 *Demography of research participants*

Class	Number of Students	Gender (Male/Female)	Mean
control class	42	16/26	12.33
experimental class	43	17/26	11.80

Instruments

To explore the research questions and address the aims, two instruments are employed, namely, a questionnaire and a focus group protocol.

a. Questionnaires

This study administered surveys to measure self-reported engagement concerning three dimensions: behavioral (e.g., effort in revising), cognitive (e.g., focus on improvement), and emotional (e.g., enjoyment). The questionnaires were administered to measure these dimensions of participants in response to different feedback patterns. Among them, the questionnaire on writing engagement in the teacher's feedback mode served as the baseline for the subsequent questionnaire on writing engagement in the 'teacher + peer' feedback mode. The latter was adapted from the former by modifying specific wording to reflect the mixed feedback approach. Both questionnaires featured three main similar components: a behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement scale with 18 questions.

The behavioral engagement scale contains frequency and time spending, and the emotional engagement scale was constructed by revising existing frameworks, drawing on the three sub-dimensions of emotional engagement by Tsui and Ng (2000), Fan and Xu (2020), and Zhao (2024). They are interest, value, and feeling. Similarly, the cognitive engagement scale was developed regarding established research, including O'Malley and Chamot's (1990) classification of metacognitive strategies, Zhao's (2024) self-developed questionnaire for senior middle schools, and Lv's "Feedback Engagement Questionnaire for College English Composition," which contains three sub-dimensions of feedback awareness, cognitive strategies, and metacognitive strategies (2019). All items in the scales were positively worded and presented in a 5-point Likert format, with response options ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Higher scores on these scales indicate greater levels of emotional and cognitive engagement among learners. Before the distribution to the participants, a pilot study with 30 undergraduates who were also first-year and with similar writing scores in the College Entrance Examination with the mean scores of control and experimental groups was conducted, the reliability and validity of the questionnaires were tested as 0.812, 0.853.and 0.802 per dimension (The Cronbach's alpha value) and 0.801, 0.871, and 0.782 per dimension (The KMO value) separately, both >0.7, indicating they are reliable and valid. The questionnaires were distributed anonymously to students in both the experimental group and the control group.

b. Focus group protocol

To gather in-depth insights, a semi-structured focus group discussion was conducted after the intervention with six students from the experimental class, selected based on their writing performance in the College Entrance Examination (evenly distributed across beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels), which reflexes the real-world diversity in Chinese context, which involves mixed-proficiency level learners in the same English class in most cases. The discussion aimed to explore students' perceptions of the mixed feedback patterns and their impact on engagement. A focus group protocol was developed, comprising three questions aligned with engagement dimensions, addressing students' perceptions, attitudes, reactions, and judgments.

Procedures

After obtaining the necessary consent from the participants, the study was conducted step by step in a control group and an experimental group with the same course instructor to ensure standardization across groups, as shown in Figure One.

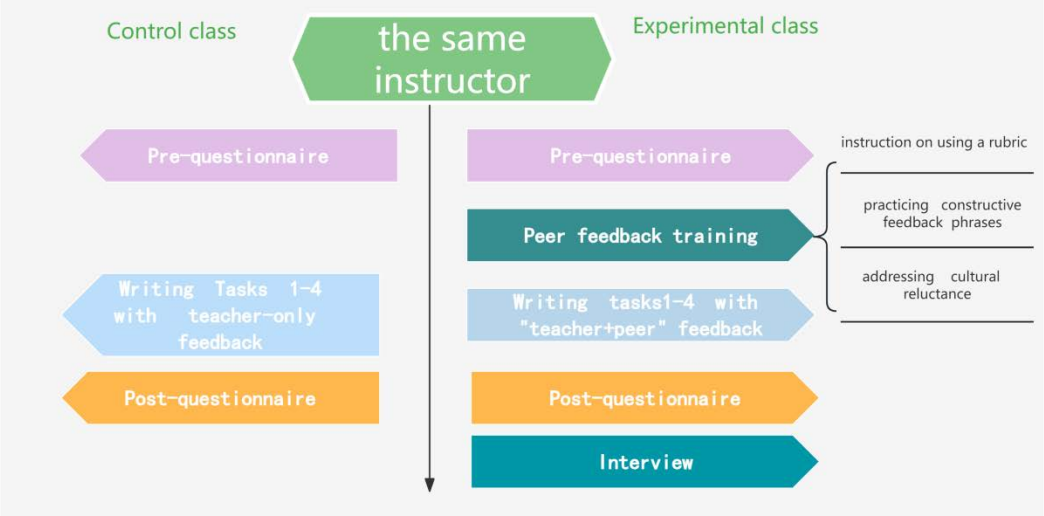


Figure 1. Research procedures

The experiment spanned 12 weeks, involving four writing tasks across groups. Initially, the researcher conducted a pre-survey with a questionnaire for both the control and experimental groups to establish baseline writing engagement levels and to find whether the classes have similar writing engagement levels for a decision about what data analysis approaches would be applied.

Next, before the intervention, a one-hour training session is conducted for the experimental class to equip students with peer feedback skills. This includes instruction on using a rubric (e.g., assessing clarity, organization, and language use), practicing constructive feedback phrasing (e.g., "I suggest adding more examples here"), and addressing cultural reluctance (e.g., role-playing to build confidence in critiquing peers respectfully). Training emphasizes actionable, specific feedback to complement teacher input.

The grouping strategy is employed. Students in the experimental class were grouped into small teams of 3-4 based on mixed proficiency levels (e.g., pairing stronger and weaker writers) to encourage balanced peer input, thus avoiding the aforementioned discrepancy between peers, which may result in ineffective peer feedback. The instructor assigns groups to ensure diversity through the intervention, thereby broadening exposure to different perspectives. This specific grouping strategy caters to the context, as Webb and Farivar (1994) argue that less-skilled students benefit from explanations by more-skilled peers, while higher-ability students deepen their understanding by teaching.

In the implementation phase, spanning over a semester (12 weeks), students in the experimental class draft and revise multiple writing assignments, receiving both types of feedback. Specifically, to optimize learner writing engagement, teacher and peer feedback were balanced by assigning the teacher the role of guiding the whole process, providing authoritative feedback in some critical aspects, such as controversial problems in peer feedback, complex grammar, and structure. Meanwhile, Peers were required to conduct the initial proofreading and feedback by the rubric through pre-intervention training, emphasizing words, general grammar, clarity, and idea development. The intervention was administered in a balanced sequence as shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2. Procedure of teacher-peer mixed feedback for experimental class

In contrast, the control group received traditional "teacher-only" feedback, where the same instructor provided written comments on drafts focusing on grammar, structure, and content. They submitted drafts directly to the teacher for feedback and revision without peer involvement. Their writing maintained consistency in task types and frequency (4 writing tasks) with the experimental group.

In the post-intervention phase, questionnaires to analyze changes in engagement levels across both classes were administered following the twelve-week intervention. The same questionnaires from the pre-intervention phase were administered to the control and experimental classes, allowing for direct comparison of pre-and-post scores. Firstly, paired t-tests within the experimental group explore how engagement shifts over time, addressing RQ1 for the experimental group. Then, the investigation utilizes statistical methods, specifically independent t-tests, to compare post-intervention engagement means between groups, assessing whether the "teacher+peer" feedback yielded higher engagement over "teacher-only" feedback (RQ2).

A qualitative research approach is employed through post-intervention focus group discussion conducted with a subset of the experimental class (6 students). This semi-structured session, lasting approximately sixty minutes, probed students' experiences with the teacher-peer mixed feedback pattern, using questions like "How did peer feedback affect your motivation to write?" (emotional), "Did you revise more after peer or teacher feedback?" (behavioral), and "How did combining feedback types influence your idea of writing?" (cognitive).

Data Analysis

In this section, the results and analysis of data collected to investigate the impact of the "teacher+peer" mixed feedback pattern on engagement in English writing are presented, addressing both its impact across behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions and comparative effectiveness against "teacher-only" feedback.

Impact of "Teacher+peer" Mixed Feedback on Learning Engagement

To address the first research question—how the "teacher+peer" mixed feedback pattern impacts engagement—within-group changes were analyzed. The experimental class exhibited a significant increase, indicating that the mixed feedback approach positively enhances engagement, likely due to the synergistic interplay of peer collaboration and teacher expertise. These changes are presented in Table Two.

Table 2. *The descriptive analysis of the data of the experimental group*

Experimental Group	Phases	Mean	Sd.	Md.	t.	p.
Emotional Engagement	Pre-intervention	3.56	0.431	0.42	5.46	<0.0001
	Post-intervention	3.98	0.428			
Cognitive Engagement	Pre-intervention	3.41	0.423	0.43	5.89	<0.0001
	Post-intervention	3.84	0.376			

Behavioral Engagement	Pre-intervention	3.46	0.301	0.57	9.36	<0.0001
	Post-intervention	4.03	0.366			

According to the table, emotional engagement increased from 3.56 to 3.98 and remains statistically significant ($t = 5.46$, $p < 0.0001$), indicating a meaningful improvement post-intervention. The rise from 3.41 to 3.84 in Cognitive Engagement is also significant ($t = 5.89$, $p < 0.0001$), suggesting a strong intervention effect. As for Behavioral Engagement, the increase from 3.46 to 4.03 shows the most considerable change and remains highly significant ($t = 9.36$, $p < 0.0001$). Therefore, this paired t-test indicates a robust improvement post-intervention.

Comparative Impact between "Teacher-peer" Mixed and "Teacher-only" Feedback

Independent t-tests were conducted to confirm the groups' similarity in engagement before the intervention, which is a critical step to ensure that subsequent differences are not due to baseline differences. It could be attributed to the feedback conditions rather than pre-existing disparities (Cohen et al., 2018). Drawing on Fredricks et al.'s (2004) multidimensional engagement framework, the analysis focuses on pre-intervention scores derived from a Likert-scale questionnaire, setting the stage for post-intervention comparisons and qualitative insights from focus groups. This initial examination of baseline data provides a foundation for understanding how engagement evolves in response to the differing feedback approaches implemented over the 12-week, as shown in Table three.

Table 3. *Independent sample t-test for writing engagement of two classes in the pre-intervention questionnaire*

Class	Domains	N.	Mean	Sd.	Md.	T	p.
control class	Emotional Engagement	42	3.67	0.417	0.11	1.2	0.23
experimental class		43	3.56	0.431			
control class	Cognitive Engagement	42	3.57	0.420	0.16	1.76	0.08
experimental class		43	3.41	0.423			
control class	Behavioral	42	3.39	0.288	-0.07	-1.09	0.28
experimental class	Engagement	43	3.46	0.301			

Both the control and experimental classes share several key features in their pre-intervention engagement levels across the behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions, as assessed before implementing the "teacher+peer" mixed feedback intervention. There are several similarities between the control class ($n = 42$) and the experimental class ($n = 43$) in their baseline engagement, as evidenced by the independent t-test results. For emotional engagement, the control class ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 0.417$) and the experimental class ($M = 3.56$, $SD = 0.431$) showed a mean difference of 0.11, with a t-value of 1.20 ($p = 0.23$), indicating no significant disparity. Similarly, cognitive engagement levels in the control class ($M = 3.57$, $SD = 0.420$) and experimental class ($M = 3.41$, $SD = 0.423$) yielded a mean difference of 0.16 ($t = 1.76$, $p = 0.08$), a result that, while approaching significance, does not cross the conventional threshold of $p < 0.05$. Behavioral engagement further underscores this equivalence, with the control class ($M = 3.39$, $SD = 0.288$) and experimental class ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 0.301$) differing by only -0.07 ($t = -1.09$, $p = 0.28$), a statistically non-significant outcome. These results are similar to those reported by Fredricks et al. (2004), who found that engagement scores across student groups often exhibit consistency at baseline in educational research settings.

Another independent sample t-test was conducted after the intervention; the results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. *Independent Samples T-test for Post-test of Emotional Engagement in Two Feedback Approaches*

	"teacher-only" Feedback		"Teacher + Peer" mixed Feedback				
	Mean	Sd.	Mean	Sd.	Md.	t	p
Emotional Engagement	3.76	0.411	3.98	0.428	0.22	2.42	0.018
Cognitive Engagement	3.59	0.476	3.84	0.376	0.25	2.69	0.009
Behavioral Engagement	3.35	0.502	4.03	0.366	0.68	8.72	<0.001

The results present the findings from post-intervention engagement data collected from the control group and the experimental group. Independent t-tests assessed post-intervention differences to find out whether "teacher+peer "outperforms "teacher-only" feedback.

Post-intervention results revealed significant differences favoring the experimental group across all engagement dimensions. For emotional engagement, the experimental class ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 0.428$) outperformed the control class ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 0.411$), with a mean difference of 0.22 ($t(83) = 2.42$, $p = 0.018$). Within-group changes showed a modest increase for the control group (+0.09) compared to a substantial rise for the experimental group (+0.42), suggesting that the mixed feedback pattern markedly enhanced emotional engagement, such as motivation or positive affect toward writing. Cognitive engagement followed a similar trend, with the experimental group ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 0.376$) exceeding the control group ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 0.476$) by 0.25 ($t = 2.69$, $p = 0.009$). The experimental group's cognitive engagement increased by 0.43, while the control group rose slightly (+0.02), indicating deeper cognitive processing (e.g., reflection on feedback) under the mixed feedback condition.

The most remarkable effect emerged in behavioral engagement, where the experimental group ($M = 4.03$, $SD = 0.366$) significantly surpassed the control group ($M = 3.35$, $SD = 0.502$), with a mean difference of 0.68 ($t = 8.72$, $p < 0.001$). The experimental group's behavioral engagement surged by 0.57, reflecting increased revision or effort, whereas the control group slightly declined (-0.04), potentially due to fatigue or lack of peer stimulation.

These results indicate that the "teacher+peer" mixed feedback approach significantly enhances writing engagement across all three dimensions compared to "teacher-only" feedback, addressing the second research question affirmatively. The experimental group's greater improvements highlight the intervention's efficacy in fostering motivation, reflection, and effort, aligning with prior research on peer-assisted learning (Webb & Farivar, 1994).

Besides the quantitative approach, the current study used qualitative analysis to gain in-depth insights into the influences of the intervention, thus complementing quantitative findings. Three questions were conveyed to the focus group discussion: How did peer feedback affect your motivation to write?" (concerning emotional engagement), "Did you revise more after teacher+peer feedback?" (concerning behavioral engagement), and "How did combining feedback types help you think about your writing?" (concerning cognitive engagement). The data are audibly recorded throughout, transcribed, and thematically analyzed to identify themes. The following is the feedback and the corresponding themes drawn from the focus group:

The feedback for Question 1 "How did peer feedback affect your motivation to write?" (emotional engagement) revealed that peer feedback significantly boosted students' motivation to write, fostering a sense of emotional engagement (four out of six interviewees reported). The theme

extracted manually revealed increased motivation through peer concern, encouragement, and self-esteem（three codes）, which aligns with the quantitative finding of a substantial increase in emotional engagement scores for the experimental group, as shown below:

Student 1: "I like this mixed pattern, especially when my classmate said my ideas were interesting and just needed clearer examples. I felt encouraged. It made me want to write better next time because I knew someone liked me and saw my potential in it."

Student 2"I feel teachers and my classmates are my good helpers in writing."

Student 5: "Teacher feedback is helpful, but peer feedback felt more personal and interesting. Like, my friend wrote, It is great, go on!' and drew a "thumb-up" symbol. That pushed me to enjoy writing more."

Student 6: "I was nervous at first, but after getting positive peer comments, I felt less stressed and more excited to improve my essay. If my teachers' remarks align with my peers' comments, I will be impressed and trust my peers more than before. "

The feedback for Question 2: "Did you revise more after 'peer+teacher feedback?" (behavioral engagement) revealed that peer feedback drives greater and more frequent revision, as shown below (four out of six interviewees reported):

Student 2: "I revised a lot more after peer feedback because they pointed out things I did not notice, like confusing parts. I would fix those before showing the teacher."

Student 3: "Teacher feedback was good, but it felt final. With peers, I would rewrite whole sections after our discussion because I wanted it to be clearer for them next time."

Student 4: "Yes. More than before..."

Student 6: "My group gave me ideas—like adding examples—and I kept revising until it made sense. I probably changed my draft three times after peers, then I felt confident to submit the draft to teachers, but only once after the teacher."

The original excerpts indicate that "teacher+peer" feedback prompted more frequent and iterative revisions, likely due to its collaborative and immediate nature (two codes), aligning with the experimental group's significant behavioral engagement increase.

The feedback for Question 3 "How did teacher+peer feedback pattern affect your idea about writing?" (cognitive engagement) demonstrated that peer feedback enhanced reflection (three out of six interviewees reported) utilizing "thinking harder, seeing my writing differently and two-step procedure" (3 codes) as shown below:

Student 2: "Peers gave me simple ideas, like 'this part is unclear,' and then the teacher explained why—like sentence structure. Together, it made me think harder about how to fix it."

Student 4: "Combining them helped me see my writing differently. Peers showed me what a reader might like to read, and the teacher gave me rules to follow, so I planned my revisions better."

Student 5: "I would think about peer comments first, then check the teacher's feedback to make sure I got it right. It was like two steps of the way."

In the third question, students reported that combining teacher and peer feedback deepened their cognitive engagement by encouraging critical reflection and strategic improvement in their writing. This theme also supports the quantitative data, where the experimental group's cognitive engagement improved markedly.

Discussions

In addressing RQ 1, the present study confirms that the "teacher+ peer" mixed feedback pattern is associated with significant enhancements in students' emotional, cognitive, and

behavioral engagement in English writing, which is consistent with the findings that students prefer it over single-source options (Demirel & Enginarlar, 2016; Loan, 2017; Yu, 2020). A similar finding was also reported by Nelson and Schunn (2009), whose study on peer feedback in writing highlighted its role in prompting iterative revisions, particularly when peers provide specific, actionable suggestions.

However, the results contradict some scholars' claim that learners prefer teachers' written feedback over other forms of feedback and that teachers' feedback is the most helpful in improving writing enhancement (Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Mustafa et al., 2022).

The above-mentioned contradiction entirely supports Phothongsunan's claim that the practicality of English writing feedback largely depends on the verified contexts (2023). Varied and specific English writing teaching environments, such as school policies and backgrounds, teacher professional capabilities, and students' English proficiency levels, would lead to significant diversity across schools and even classrooms.

In answering RQ 2, a comparison indicated that the mixed feedback yielded significantly higher engagement than teacher-only feedback. It aligns with Xing and Wang (2023), as they rank it as the most effective among feedback sources. Interestingly, with the integration of peer feedback to the writing outcome, the mixed method completely outperformed the "teacher-only" feedback, indicating the peer feedback somehow enhances the writing engagement, other than weaken it by students' distrust in peer due to perceived disrespect or incompetence (Zhou et al., 2020), feeling stressed by peer assessment (Stančić, 2021), or questioning peers' language skills, threatening the face-saving norms in Chinese culture (Xue, 2023), and scarce specialized knowledge and literacy about the topic (Valero Haro et al.,2023). There is no negative feedback on peer feedback in English writing in the current study. Surprisingly, Zhao (2024) conducted a related study in Chinese secondary education, finding that the emotional engagement in the two feedback modes is essentially identical, which may be caused by different study phases and motivations of participants.

Pedagogical Implications

The current study provides several pedagogical implications for educators aiming to enhance writing instruction, addressing logistical and cultural factors: using rotating mixed-ability groups instead of pairs, overcoming cultural hesitancy among reserved Chinese students, accommodating variations in English proficiency and engagement, and managing time constraints within a semester.

- Effective use of grouping techniques, specifically mixed-ability groups

The study's success in boosting engagement and qualitative reports of increased revision suggest that pairing stronger and weaker writers fosters diverse peer feedback and sustained effort. Educators should adopt this strategy to encourage balanced input and expose students to varied perspectives, enhancing collaboration and engagement over time. The consideration of rotating groups periodically may prevent stagnation and ensure that students benefit from multiple peer interactions.

- Training on cultural reluctance

A noted challenge in Chinese educational contexts, where students may hesitate to critique peers due to face-saving norms, also carries significant pedagogical weight. To overcome the difficulty, teachers should implement pre-intervention training sessions, as done in this study, to address the bias towards criticism and build students' confidence in providing constructive

critique. Since the training requires continuous efforts which may not be practical in some contexts, alternatively, offering anonymous feedback options—such as written comments submitted without names—can further reduce social pressure, ensuring that peer feedback remains productive without compromising cultural norms.

- Careful group composition

As for proficiency variability, where differences in English ability could worsen writing engagement outcomes, it underscores the need for careful group composition, statistical control, and the significance of teachers' involvement in feedback. Although this study assumed similar baseline proficiency, the significant cognitive engagement suggests a further study on groups with different proficiency or writing engagement levels, whose comparison may still be conducted by application of a covariate in analysis, as recommended in quasi-experimental designs (Cohen et al., 2018). This approach ensures that feedback interactions remain equitable.

- A manageable number of cycles

Time constraints within a semester pose a practical way for its employment. With only 12 weeks, the intervention achieved significant results across four writing cycles, suggesting that a manageable number of cycles is sufficient to yield engagement benefits.

Collectively, these implications suggest that integrating a "teacher+peer" mixed feedback approach into English writing curricula can substantially enhance student engagement, provided educators address grouping dynamics, cultural sensitivities, proficiency differences, and temporal limits.

Conclusion

This study has identified that the "teacher+peer" mixed feedback pattern significantly enhances engagement in English writing among Chinese tertiary students across emotional, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions, as evidenced by substantial post-intervention mean increases in the experimental group compared to minimal changes in the control group. The research has also shown that integrating peer feedback with teacher input outperforms "teacher-only" feedback, with statistically significant between-group differences and qualitative themes highlighting increased motivation, revision, and reflection, offering a robust framework for enhancing writing engagement in EFL settings. It enriched the existing literature on writing feedback and engagement theory in the ELT domain by incorporating empirical data from the Chinese context, and also advanced peer involvement through strategies to overcome the cultural reluctance of "hurting face" in collectivist cultures, such as China.

Admittedly, there are some limitations, such as the sampling technique and sample size, which probably prevent a general finding, and the short duration. Even the significant increase in writing engagement could partially validate the effectiveness of the mixed feedback, a further and longer intervention is deemed important and necessary.

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Appendix
Rubrics for Peer Feedback

Feedback types	Categories	Description
Form	**Words** **Singular/plural** **Word form** **Spelling** **Punctuation** **Sentence structure** **Grammatical errors** **Word count**	**Pron./prep./conj./articles** **Verb tense and voice** **Missing or adding** **Run-on/subject-verb agreement…** **Insufficient word counts**
Content	**Main-idea** **Content score points** **Genera** **Structure** **Redundancy**	**Clearly & accurately stated** **Complete** **Letter/diary/narration…** **Well-organized**