PRIMARYEDU

Primaryedu: Journal of Elementary Education
Volume 10, Number 1, February 2026

P-ISSN: 2580-9326 | E-ISSN: 2580-7714

Peer Feedback and Writing Revision in Primary Education: A Quasi-Experimental Study of Fourth-Grade Narrative Writing

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Article Info

Article history:

Received December 18th, 2025
Revised February 1st, 2026
Accepted February 16th, 2026

Keywords:

Formative Assessment
Peer Feedback
Primary Education
Writing Process
Writing Revision

Abstract

Writing revision plays a critical role in developing young writers, yet feedback practices in primary classrooms often emphasize correction rather than revision as a learning process. This study examines the impact of structured peer feedback compared with teacher feedback on students' revision outcomes in primary narrative writing. Using a quasi-experimental design, fourth-grade students from two intact classrooms produced an initial narrative draft, received feedback, and revised their writing. Writing quality before and after revision was assessed using an analytic rubric focusing on content, organization, and language use. The results indicate that students who engaged in structured peer feedback showed greater overall improvement than those who received teacher feedback alone. The most significant gains were observed in content development and text organization, suggesting that peer feedback supports meaning-level revision, including idea elaboration and coherence. Improvements in language use were more modest, indicating that linguistic accuracy may require sustained instructional support. Grounded in process writing theory, social constructivist perspectives, and formative assessment principles, the findings highlight structured peer feedback as an effective approach to promoting dialogic and reflective revision practices, while teacher feedback remains essential for guiding linguistic development in primary writing instruction.

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INTRODUCTION

Writing is a foundational literacy and communication skill that supports academic learning and cognitive development across primary education curricula. Through writing, students learn to express ideas, organize thoughts, and communicate meaning in coherent and audience-appropriate forms. At the primary level, writing instruction is expected not only to develop basic language skills but also to support students' engagement with academic content across subject areas. Nevertheless, writing remains one of the most challenging language skills for young learners, particularly when they are required to revise and improve their written work independently.

Difficulties in writing instruction are often most visible during the revision stage. Revision requires students to reconsider ideas, reorganize content, and refine language choices in response to evaluative input. In many primary classrooms, however, instructional attention tends to prioritize the production of final texts rather than sustained engagement with writing as a process. Feedback is frequently delivered through teacher corrections that emphasize surface-level features such as spelling, punctuation, or grammatical accuracy. In addition to this surface focus, teacher feedback is commonly one-directional, positioning students as recipients rather than active interpreters of evaluative input. Such practices may limit students' opportunities to reflect on meaning, organization, and communicative effectiveness, even though revision is central to the development of capable writers and transferable writing skills across disciplines (Fernando, 2020; Charalampous & Dárra, 2024).

The effectiveness of revision is closely related to the nature of feedback provided during the writing process. Feedback functions as instructional guidance that helps learners recognize gaps between their current performance and expected standards. Evidence from systematic reviews and classroom-based studies indicates that feedback supports writing development most effectively when it promotes reflection, engagement, and opportunities for revision rather than mere correction (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Wilson et al., 2024). Dialogic and formative feedback practices encourage students to interpret feedback as guidance for improvement, increasing the likelihood that feedback is meaningfully taken up during revision (Xie et al., 2024).

Peer feedback has therefore emerged as an alternative feedback strategy that actively involves students in evaluating writing and applying feedback during revision. Peer feedback requires students to read and respond to classmates' texts using shared criteria, positioning them simultaneously as writers and readers. This dual role encourages awareness of audience, coherence, and clarity, while also supporting reflective thinking about writing quality. In this study, peer feedback is conceptualized primarily as content-oriented and organization-focused feedback, with attention to audience awareness and overall text clarity, rather than as grammar correction alone. Empirical studies in primary and related educational contexts suggest that peer feedback can contribute to improvements in writing quality and revision practices when it is carefully structured and supported by clear criteria and teacher guidance (Lundstrom & Baker, 2009; Tičić & Štulina, 2024).

From a developmental perspective, peer feedback is particularly relevant for students in the upper primary grades. Learners around the age of nine to ten are increasingly capable of perspective taking, collaborative dialogue, and rule-governed interaction, provided that tasks are clearly scaffolded. At this stage, students can engage in simple evaluative judgments, discuss text meaning, and negotiate suggestions with peers, especially when feedback criteria are made explicit and modeled by the teacher. These developmental characteristics make structured peer feedback a pedagogically plausible approach for supporting revision in Grade 4 writing classrooms.

Peer feedback also aligns closely with formative assessment principles that emphasize learner involvement, continuous feedback, and shared responsibility for learning. Through peer feedback activities, students participate in evaluative dialogue, apply feedback to subsequent drafts, and begin to develop feedback literacy, understood as the capacity to interpret criteria, make judgments about quality, and act on feedback. Such practices position revision as an active learning process rather than a corrective endpoint (Black & Wiliam, 2009; Lv et al., 2021).

Despite its pedagogical potential, empirical research examining the effectiveness of peer feedback in primary school writing contexts remains limited. Existing studies have predominantly focused on secondary or tertiary education settings, while primary-level investigations are fewer and often vary in design and implementation quality. Moreover, many studies emphasize final writing outcomes rather than examining improvements that occur specifically through the revision process. Research reviews also note that younger learners may face challenges in providing effective feedback, including limited metalinguistic vocabulary, emerging genre awareness, and uncertainty about how to phrase constructive suggestions. These challenges highlight the importance of structured guidance and teacher facilitation in primary peer feedback activities (Charalampous & Dárra, 2024; Wilson et al., 2024).

Responding to these gaps, the present study examines the effectiveness of peer feedback in supporting writing revision among primary school students. Specifically, the study compares structured peer feedback with traditional teacher feedback to determine which approach more effectively supports improvement during revision. By focusing on revision outcomes rather than final products, the study seeks to clarify how different feedback sources influence students' engagement with meaning-level and surface-level aspects of writing.

Two research questions guide the investigation:

1) Is there a significant difference in the quality of writing revisions between primary school students who receive peer feedback and those who receive teacher feedback?
2) Which aspects of writing show the greatest improvement following peer feedback during the revision process?

In line with these questions, the objectives of the study are to evaluate the effectiveness of peer feedback in improving revised writing quality and to identify specific writing components that are most influenced by peer feedback practices. By foregrounding revision as a central learning activity, this study aims to contribute empirical evidence that informs instructional and assessment practices in primary writing education and supports the development of feedback-rich, process-oriented writing instruction.

METHOD

Research Design

The study employed a quasi-experimental design using a pretest–posttest control group structure. This design was selected to enable systematic comparison between feedback practices while preserving the natural conditions of classroom instruction. In primary school contexts, random assignment at the individual level is often impractical due to curricular and administrative constraints. The use of intact classrooms, therefore, represents a pragmatic methodological choice that balances internal validity with ecological relevance in classroom-based educational research (Creswell, 2014; Cohen et al., 2018).

Participants and Setting

The participants were fourth-grade students enrolled in a public primary school during the second semester of the academic year. The students were drawn from two intact classrooms that

followed the same curriculum, instructional schedule, and assessment policy. One classroom was assigned to the experimental condition (peer feedback), and the other to the control condition (teacher feedback). Students were between nine and ten years of age.

Both classrooms were taught by experienced primary teachers who had more than five years of teaching experience and were familiar with process-oriented writing instruction. While instructional goals and materials were aligned across classes, the teachers differed only in the feedback approach implemented during the revision stage. Preliminary data collected before the intervention provided baseline information on students' writing performance, reading comprehension, and writing motivation. These data indicated that the two groups were broadly comparable at the outset, supporting their use for comparative analysis (Lodico et al., 2010).

Writing Task

The central instructional task required students to produce a short narrative text based on a personal experience. Narrative writing was selected because it is developmentally appropriate for upper primary learners and constitutes a core genre in the primary language curriculum. Students were instructed to write a narrative of approximately three to four paragraphs describing a meaningful personal event, with attention to clarity of ideas, logical sequencing, and basic language conventions.

Writing tasks were completed individually during regular class time. Identical prompts, instructions, and time allocations were used in both classrooms to minimize task-related variability and strengthen the interpretability of observed differences (Cohen et al., 2018).

Instructional Procedure

The instructional intervention was implemented over four weeks and reflected a process-oriented view of writing. Initial classroom instruction focused on narrative structure, including idea development, event sequencing, and basic language features relevant to the genre. Students then produced an initial draft, which served as the pretest writing sample.

Following the initial drafting phase, feedback activities were introduced. Students subsequently revised their drafts based on the feedback received. The revised texts submitted at the end of the instructional cycle were treated as posttest samples. This sequence aligns with established recommendations for examining instructional effects on writing development through revision (Lodico et al., 2010; Creswell, 2014).

Peer Feedback Condition

In the experimental classroom, students engaged in structured peer feedback during the revision stage. Drafts were exchanged face-to-face among peers, and students provided written feedback using a guided feedback sheet aligned with the assessment criteria. The guide prompted students to comment primarily on content clarity, organization of ideas, and overall comprehensibility, with limited attention to language use. To support students' feedback practices, the teacher conducted a brief modeling session before peer review, demonstrating how to provide constructive and respectful comments using simple sentence starters *(e.g., I understand this part clearly…, You might add more detail about…).*

Rubric criteria were shared with students in simplified language, and sample texts were discussed to build basic assessment literacy. During peer feedback sessions, the teacher adopted a facilitative role by monitoring interactions, clarifying procedures, and supporting students' understanding of the criteria, without directly correcting the texts. This approach was intended to promote student autonomy and reflective engagement with revision.

Teacher Feedback Condition

In the control classroom, feedback was provided exclusively by the teacher. Written comments were added directly to students' drafts and addressed the same dimensions of writing emphasized in the experimental group, namely content, organization, and language use. The comments included brief explanations and suggestions for improvement. Students revised their texts individually based on this feedback, and no peer discussion or collaborative review activities were incorporated into this condition. Maintaining comparable instructional content while varying the source of feedback allowed for a focused examination of feedback effects (Creswell, 2014).

Measures and Scoring

Students' writing performance was assessed using an analytic scoring rubric consisting of three components: content, organization, and language use. Each component was scored on a scale from 0 to 20, yielding a maximum total score of 60. The rubric was adapted from established writing assessment frameworks and adjusted to reflect the developmental characteristics of primary school learners. Analytic scoring was selected to enable detailed examination of changes across specific aspects of writing (Cohen et al., 2018).

To ensure scoring reliability, 25% of the writing samples were independently rated by a second trained rater. Interrater reliability was calculated using Cohen's kappa, yielding a coefficient of .82, which indicates strong agreement. This procedure supports the trustworthiness of the performance-based assessment data (Lodico et al., 2010).

In addition to writing performance, students' reading comprehension was assessed using a standardized reading test administered before the intervention. Writing motivation was measured using a short self-report questionnaire on a five-point Likert scale. These measures were included to provide contextual information about participant characteristics and to support interpretation of the writing results, rather than to serve as primary outcome variables (Cohen et al., 2018).

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection followed a structured sequence aligned with the research design. Pretest writing samples were collected after initial instruction and before the introduction of feedback activities. Feedback and revision occurred during the intervention phase. Posttest writing samples were collected after students completed their revisions. All writing samples were anonymized before scoring. Scores for each writing component were recorded separately and then aggregated to produce total writing scores. Gain scores were calculated by subtracting pretest scores from posttest scores, a common approach in quasi-experimental educational research (Creswell, 2014).

Data analysis focused on identifying patterns of change in students' writing performance. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize pretest and posttest scores for both groups. Inferential analyses were conducted to examine within-group changes over time and to compare

gain scores between the experimental and control conditions. Effect sizes (Cohen's d) were calculated to support the interpretation of the magnitude of observed differences. Additional analyses examined patterns of improvement across individual writing components to provide a more nuanced account of revision outcomes. Statistical significance was evaluated at the .05 level (Cohen et al., 2018).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This section reports the outcomes of the quasi-experimental intervention by comparing students' writing performance before and after the revision process under two feedback conditions. Writing quality was examined using total writing scores and analytic scores for three components: content, organization, and language use.

Overall Writing Performance

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of pretest and posttest writing scores for both the experimental group (peer feedback) and the control group (teacher feedback).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Writing Scores

Group	Test	Mean	SD
Peer feedback	Pretest	64.20	6.45
Peer feedback	Posttest	78.35	5.98
Teacher feedback	Pretest	63.85	6.62
Teacher feedback	Posttest	71.10	6.21

Both groups demonstrated improvement from pretest to posttest. Initial writing performance was comparable across groups, indicating similar baseline levels. After revision, however, students in the peer feedback group achieved higher mean writing scores than those in the teacher feedback group. As illustrated in Figure 1, the increase in writing performance was more pronounced in the peer feedback condition, suggesting that peer-mediated feedback supported greater improvement during revision.

Gain Score Analysis and Effect Size

To examine the magnitude of improvement more directly, gain scores were calculated by subtracting pretest scores from posttest scores. The comparison of gain scores is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Comparison of Gain Scores Between Groups

Group	Mean Gain	SD
Peer feedback	14.15	4.32
Teacher feedback	7.25	3.98

Students who received peer feedback demonstrated substantially higher gains in writing performance than those who received teacher feedback alone. The difference in gain scores corresponds to a large effect size (Cohen's d = 1.66), indicating that the observed difference is not

only statistically meaningful but also educationally substantial. Figure 2 illustrates this contrast in mean gain scores across feedback conditions.

Writing Component Analysis

To provide a more detailed account of revision outcomes, gains were examined separately for content, organization, and language use. Table 3 summarizes the mean gain scores for each writing component.

Table 3. Mean Gain Scores by Writing Component

Component	Peer Feedback	Teacher Feedback
Content	5.20	2.60
Organization	4.70	2.30
Language use	4.25	2.35

The largest gains for the peer feedback group were observed in content and organization. These results indicate that peer feedback was particularly effective in supporting meaning-level revision, including idea elaboration, clarity, and logical sequencing of events. Gains in language use were also higher in the peer feedback group, although the difference between groups was less pronounced for this component.

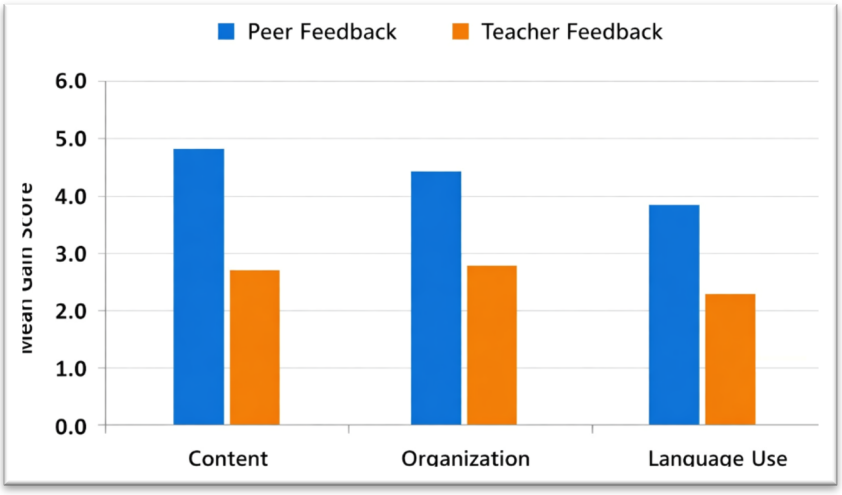

Figure 1. Mean Gain Scores for Content, Organization, and Language Use by Feedback Type

As shown in Figure 3, the gap between feedback conditions was most evident for content and organization, while improvements in language use were comparatively smaller. This pattern suggests that although peer feedback can contribute to linguistic improvement, aspects of language accuracy may require more sustained instructional support and explicit guidance, which are typically associated with teacher-led feedback.

Taken together, the results indicate that peer feedback was associated with greater overall improvement in writing quality during revision, particularly for higher-level components of

writing. These patterns provide an empirical basis for examining how peer feedback may reshape revision as a meaning-oriented learning activity, a point taken up in the following discussion.

Discussion

The patterns observed in this study are most productively interpreted when writing is viewed as a recursive process shaped by interaction, feedback, and repeated engagement with text. From a process writing perspective, revision does not function as a terminal stage but as a space where writers test ideas, reassess meaning, and gradually reshape their texts across drafts. Research on multi-draft writing has long emphasized that improvement often occurs between drafts rather than within a single act of correction, particularly when writers revisit texts with new perspectives (Nolan & Stoudt, 2021). The peer feedback condition in this study appears to have activated this drafts-to-drafts dynamic, although the intensity of engagement likely varied among learners.

From a process-oriented standpoint, peer feedback altered how students experienced revision itself. Rather than approaching revision as the execution of teacher-marked corrections, students were positioned to reconsider their texts through dialogue and comparison with peers. Studies on collaborative feedback processing indicate that peer interaction can transform feedback into a cognitive resource that supports targeted reworking of ideas and text structure, especially when learners are given opportunities to revise iteratively (Abrams, 2023). This interpretation aligns with the present findings, where peer feedback supported more sustained engagement with revision, particularly at the level of content and organization.

The cognitive and metacognitive demands embedded in peer feedback provide further insight into these outcomes. Giving feedback requires learners to articulate judgments, justify suggestions, and reflect on criteria, all of which engage higher-order thinking about writing quality. Research on languaging, that is, the use of language to process, externalize, and refine understanding, suggests that such metatalk during peer feedback can deepen learners' awareness of text organization and language choices (Storch & Alshuraidah, 2020; Swain, 2006). In inquiry-oriented learning environments, similar processes have been observed, with the act of giving feedback functioning as a learning activity that supports self-monitoring and reflective revision (Dmoshinskaia & Gijlers, 2023).

The social dimension of peer feedback further strengthens this explanation. Writing development does not occur in isolation but within a network of shared norms and negotiated standards. Drawing on social constructivist theory, peer feedback can be understood as a form of mediated learning that operates within students' zones of proximal development, where interaction with more capable or differently positioned peers supports emerging competencies (Vygotsky). Through engagement with peers' texts, students calibrate their understanding of quality, coherence, and audience expectations. Prior research consistently shows that such collaborative interaction can deepen writers' understanding of task demands, particularly when feedback is interpreted collectively rather than received passively (Kaçar, 2021). This social mediation may help explain why students in the peer feedback condition demonstrated stronger engagement with content development and organization during revision.

Formative assessment theory also provides a useful lens for interpreting the findings. Feedback is most likely to support learning when students are actively involved in interpreting criteria and using feedback to guide improvement. Peer feedback places learners at the center of this evaluative process, requiring them to exercise judgment rather than simply respond to

authoritative input. Research on assessment literacy highlights that students' capacity to benefit from feedback depends on their understanding of criteria and their ability to translate feedback into action (Ladbrook, 2020). The structured feedback guides and teacher modeling used in this study may have supported the development of such capacities, although it is unlikely that all students achieved comparable levels of feedback literacy within the limited intervention period.

The uneven gains across writing components warrant closer consideration. Improvements were more pronounced in content and organization than in language use, a pattern consistent with prior peer feedback research in both face-to-face and online contexts. Higher-level aspects of writing, such as idea elaboration, coherence, and audience awareness, appear more accessible to peer discussion and collaborative meaning-making. In contrast, linguistic accuracy and stylistic refinement often require explicit instruction, metalinguistic knowledge, and expert guidance (Kaçar, 2021; Nassaji & Kartchava, 2021). This suggests that peer feedback and teacher feedback may serve complementary roles in the revision process, with peer interaction supporting meaning-level revision and teacher input remaining critical for sustained language development.

The dialogic quality of peer feedback further distinguishes it from more traditional forms of correction. Feedback that invites response, clarification, and interpretation tends to foster greater self-regulation than feedback delivered as unilateral judgment. Research on dialogic and technology-enhanced feedback indicates that learners are more likely to engage deeply with revision when feedback is experienced as an interactive process (Wu, 2022). Even in low-technology classroom settings, peer feedback can approximate this dialogic function by encouraging negotiation of meaning and shared responsibility for improvement.

At the same time, the benefits of peer feedback should not be overstated. Its effectiveness depends heavily on scaffolding, clarity of criteria, and the teacher's facilitative role. Studies analyzing peer feedback through natural language processing reveal substantial variability in feedback quality, underscoring the need for instructional support to ensure that comments are specific, substantive, and actionable (Castro et al., 2023). Younger writers may also struggle with limited evaluative vocabulary or uncertainty about how to phrase suggestions, challenges that teacher modeling and sentence starters can help mitigate.

Several limitations shape the interpretation of the present findings. The study focused on written products rather than on the feedback exchanges themselves, leaving open questions about how specific peer comments were interpreted and enacted during revision. The relatively short duration of the intervention also constrains conclusions about longer-term development of writing and feedback literacy. Future research would benefit from integrating product-based analyses with process-oriented data, such as feedback dialogues, revision logs, or learner reflections, to capture more fully how peer feedback operates over time in primary classrooms.

Taken together, the integration of process writing theory, social constructivist perspectives, and formative assessment principles provides a coherent explanation for why peer feedback supported revision in this context. Peer feedback appears to contribute not simply by increasing the quantity of feedback, but by reshaping revision as a dialogic, reflective, and socially situated learning practice. For primary education, this suggests the value of embedding short, well-scaffolded peer feedback cycles as a regular feature of writing instruction, complemented by targeted teacher guidance on language use, to support the development of increasingly self-regulated young writers.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights revision as a central space for learning in writing instruction rather than a peripheral step toward a finished product. The findings indicate that differences in revision quality are closely linked to how feedback practices shape students' engagement with texts. When peer feedback was implemented through a structured and guided process, students were more inclined to revisit meaning, organization, and audience considerations during revision, rather than focusing solely on surface corrections.

Peer feedback positioned students as active participants in evaluative processes, encouraging cognitive and metacognitive engagement with writing. This engagement was particularly evident in higher-level aspects of writing, such as content development and text organization. At the same time, the more modest gains in language use suggest that peer feedback alone may not sufficiently support all dimensions of writing, especially those that rely on explicit instruction, metalinguistic awareness, and expert guidance.

The findings, therefore, point to a complementary relationship between peer and teacher feedback rather than a hierarchical one. Peer feedback can foster dialogue, reflection, and shared understanding of writing quality, while teacher feedback remains essential for modeling linguistic conventions and supporting students who require more direct scaffolding. The effectiveness of peer feedback depends on careful instructional design, including the use of clear criteria, explicit modeling of constructive comments, and opportunities for students to interpret and apply feedback during revision.

From a practical standpoint, the study suggests several implications for primary writing instruction. Teachers can integrate short peer feedback cycles as a regular component of writing lessons by providing simplified rubrics, sentence starters for feedback, and brief mini-lessons that distinguish between meaning-level revisions (e.g., idea clarity and organization) and surface-level revisions (e.g., spelling and grammar). Such practices can help young learners develop the language and confidence needed to give and use feedback more effectively.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The study examined short-term outcomes within a single instructional context and focused on written products rather than the feedback interactions themselves. Future research that employs longitudinal designs and incorporates process-oriented data, such as feedback dialogue, revision logs, or student reflections, could offer deeper insight into the development of feedback literacy and revision practices over time.

Taken together, the findings suggest that peer feedback, when thoughtfully designed and supported, can position revision as a formative and socially situated practice in primary writing classrooms. Its value lies not in replacing teacher feedback, but in expanding how students experience revision as an integral part of learning to write and gradually developing as more self-regulated writers.

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