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The effects of lecturer's model of e-comments and graduate students' e-comments and writing revision



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Abstract

The purpose of the current study was to investigate if the lecturer's model of e-comments helps graduate students enhance the quality of peer e-comments and writing revision. Fifty graduate students at HCMC Open University in Vietnam participated in the study. Data collection was from the students' drafts, lecturer's sample e-comments, peer e-comments and semi-structured interviews. The study found that the graduate students were able to produce more qualified e-comments addressing to global issues throughout the e-peer comment activities. In addition, there were no statistically different effects between the lecturer's e-comments and peer e-comments on the students' writing revision.

Conference paper

Rationale for the study

Ferris (2007) claims that giving comments on students' writing is one of the most challenging job of the writing instructors and it is the most time-consuming, so training future teachers how to provide qualified comments on students' writing is an important aspect. In addition, given appropriate feedback to meet the students' needs allows the instructor to invest in each student's progress (Ferris, 2003). Many research studies have compared the effects of lecturer and peer comments on student writer revision, and assessed student writer attitudes towards lecturer and peer comments. Ertmer et al. report (2007), Nelson and Carson (1998), Treglia (2006), Tsui and Ng (2000), and Yang, Badger and Yu (2006) reveal that students considered instructor comments are more helpful in improving their writing. More specifically, Tsui and Ng (2000) found that students have more confidence in lecturer comments because they perceive the lecturer to be more experienced and more authoritative. Students considered lecturer comments to be of better quality, more specific, and they were able to explain what the problems were, and gave concrete suggestions for revision. Yang et al. (2006) also found that students considered lecturers to be more professional, experienced, and trustworthy than their peers. One reason that student writers did not welcome peer comments is that the peer comments

seemed “incorrect” to them (Treglia, 2006). Cultural factors also made students feel uncomfortable with peer commenting and discourage them from being critical of each other’s work (Hyland, 2000).

In another vein, other researchers claim that peer commenting activities seem fruitful in the training of writing. According to Lui and Hansen (2005), peer commenting activities help get students involved in their responsibilities for their own learning, build critical thinking skills, augment linguistic knowledge, enhance participation, and improve both oral and written styles. Peer comment activities result in students taking more responsibility in their own learning process (Hyland, 2000). Therefore, a trend of research in this field is to find ways to train students to become better peer reviewers.

In order to train students to become successful peer comments to provide qualified comments on global and local areas, Min (2005) made use of four steps to train students to do peer comments. 18 EFL sophomore students participated in the researcher’s composition class at a large university in southern Taiwan. The results indicate that the numbers of comments and number of words produced post-training were significantly higher than those prior to training. In addition, the students were able to provide a greater amount of comments on the global issues after training. This indicates that students tended to allocate more attention to macro issues such as idea development and organization post-training. Besides, the students pointed out that the four-step procedure helped them become better reviewers, although following the four steps was both time- and energy-consuming. They also learned from their peers how to focus their ideas and view things from different perspectives. The study did not investigate the direct training peer comments via the lecturer’s own commentary practices.

In terms of investigating the effects of peer comments on writing revisions, Min (2006) examined the impact of trained peers’ comments and found that trained peer review did enhance the quality of students’ revisions. Most of the revisions after peer review training were on global areas such as idea development, unity, and organization. The result of this study also demonstrated that 77% of the trained peer review feedback was incorporated into students’ revisions. The training in the study did not take place during the course, but just at the short beginning of the course.

Pham V. P. Ho and Usaha (2015) conducted a study training students to provide blog-based peer comments on students’ writing papers. The results indicated that though the comments on global areas were greater than those on local areas, the qualified comments (revision-oriented comments) were not. The total revisions made during e-peer comments were greater than the total revision-oriented comments delivered by peers. The study failed to compare the effects of lecturer’s e-comments vs. e-peer comments.

Earlier research studies succeeded in training students to provide peer comments to help student writers improve their writing revision; however, they failed to compare the differences between lecturer’s and peer comments, and failed to investigate the effects between lecturer comments and peer comments on student writers’ writing revision. The current study aims to fill in these gaps in literature. Therefore, the purpose of the current study was an attempt to search for responses to the following research questions.

1. Are there any differences between lecturer’s and peer e-comments in terms of global and local areas? If yes, are there any differences between global and local qualified comments?
2. Are there any difference between the total revision-oriented comments and the total number of revision?

Research methods

Participants & Setting

The current study employed a quasi-experiment study. The characteristic of a quasi-experiment study is that it deals with the phenomenon of cause and effect (Walliman, 2001; Thomas, 2003; Hult, 2006; Charles & Mertler, 2004). In a quasi-experimental study, research is conducted under the conditions in which it is difficult to control many of variables and in which subjects cannot be assigned to special groups for the purposes of the research (Seliger & Shohamy, 2001). Nunan (2001) and Hult (2006) claim that it is not always feasible to carry out a true experiment for humanities due to the impossibility of randomly assigning subjects to experimental and control groups and controlling the research environment. 45 graduate students enrolling in the 45hr-course of Academic Writing for graduate students participated in the study. During the course, the graduate students were requested to writing 6 different assignments based on the training syllabus. Most of the assignments were composed outside the classroom as homework. It aimed to provide lecturer and students spaces to conduct e-comments to help enhance writing quality.

Previous researchers such as Berg (1999), Min (2005, 2006), Stanley (2003), Tuzi (2004), and Pham Vu Phi Ho & Usaha (2011 & 2015) have found its benefits when applying to the writing classrooms. Lecturer/peer e-comment activities help make students become more active and responsible for their own learning process in order to help one another improve their writing products, help lecturers reduce the amount of work when dealing with big-size classes (Pham Vu Phi Ho, 2015).

Students were required to work in a group of four or five (randomly selected) during the writing process. After completing their writing assignment, they needed to share their papers with their peers to seek for help. Meanwhile, they had to read their peers' papers and provide e-comments to help them correct mistakes and word usages, reorganize the ideas, make it in logical order, improve their writing quality in terms of unity, coherence, and organization, etc. These activities aimed at not only helping their peers to enhance their writing, but also helping student-writers themselves look back their writing for better revision. Each of them needed to read and provide comments to other three of their group members. Although these were time-consuming activities, they helped students learn from one another and perfect their writing faster. Peer comments were much appreciated if they focused more on the content and organization of the essays.

After collecting all the peer comments and revising their papers based on peer comments, they handed to the lecturer/researcher via email or the website (phamho.com/classes), including the peer comments and revised version. Then the lecturer selected the first five or six papers to provide e-comments using the function of Microsoft Word Processor (Menu => Review => New Comment). Figure 1 presents a sample of e-comments used during the training process.

A CRITIQUE OF THE JOURNAL “AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO DISTRIBUTED VERSION MANAGEMENT AND ROLE-BASED ACCESS CONTROL IN COMPUTER SUPPORTED COLLABORATIVE WRITING”

By Lee, Narayanan and Chang

Using an activity identification tag to manage multiple versions of a document is a new and helpful approach of the Journal in computer supported collaborative writing environment. This paper, however, contained several repeats in content. For example, the passages “the most important ...of granularity” and “its unique... AID tag” in the abstract part is repeated in the design and implementation section. Therefore, it would have been better if the authors had paraphrased these sentences by different structures. A second weakness, in my opinion, is that the researchers did not talk about the participants clearly by establishing a specific item. In fact, participants section is one of the most important features in a Journal. For this reason, a short passage giving particular information for this would have been necessary. The final weak point, the authors are sometimes too technical in their writing style which creates multiple difficulties for the average readers to understand. For example, the words granularity, protocols and Motif toolkit set are really hard for persons who are not computer experts to understand. Therefore, explaining the difficult technical terms in the brackets would have been helpful. However, the conclusion gave a wonderful summary about findings of the article.

- pham ho**
What do you mean by Chang? Include full name. Where is the year of publication?
- pham ho**
You need to include the authors here. Where is the summary of the journal?
- pham ho**
The compliment is OK.
- pham ho**
This is not a clear comment. The keywords are required to repeat throughout the article.
- pham ho**
They copy and paste the exact passage or paraphrase it? If just paraphrases, it is fine.
- pham ho**
Good structure of suggestion.
- pham ho**
The structure of the 2nd critique is beautiful but you did not provide a good critique. It would be better if you mentioned about method of sampling for this.
- pham ho**
I don't understand what you mean?
- pham ho**
This should not be a point for critiques because this is the best thing in writing a research article ad it is a requirement.
- pham ho**
These are keywords and they have to use, e.g. You cannot change to term protocols or Motif toolkit.
- pham ho**
Should be a compliment for the whole paper rather than just for the summary.

Fig. 1 Lecturer's e-comments on student's writing paper.

At the beginning of each training session, the lecturer showed the his e-comments to the whole class via the projector and explained every comment that he made. The purpose was to use those model e-comments to train the students' writing skills as well as to train them how to provide e-comments on their peer writing papers. The lecturer also observed peer e-comments on each paper to see if peers provided qualified comments or not. In case some comments provided by peers but led to no revision by the student writers, the lecturer also mentioned in his e-comments to get the student writer valued their peer's e-comments. After each training session, the lecturer sent back those comments to the whole class so that they could read to learn from the comments provided by the lecturer. The purpose was that the students has chances to reflect their own writing from the model e-comments or learned how to provide qualified comments on their peers' papers.

Data collection & analysis

Totally, 31 papers from those students who received lecturer's e-comments, including their e-peer comments were collected for analysis. In order to analyze areas of comments to respond to the first research question, I adopted coding scheme of Pham V. P. Ho and Usaha' (2015). In order to compare the revision made by the student writers after receiving e-comments to respond to the second research question, I made use of the feature of "Compare" in the Microsoft Office vs. 2016 (Menu => Review => Compare). This helped much for the comparison between the two writing versions. This feature traced back every single change in the subsequent draft such as insertions, deletions, Moves, formatting. Figure 2 presents the analysis for changes between drafts.

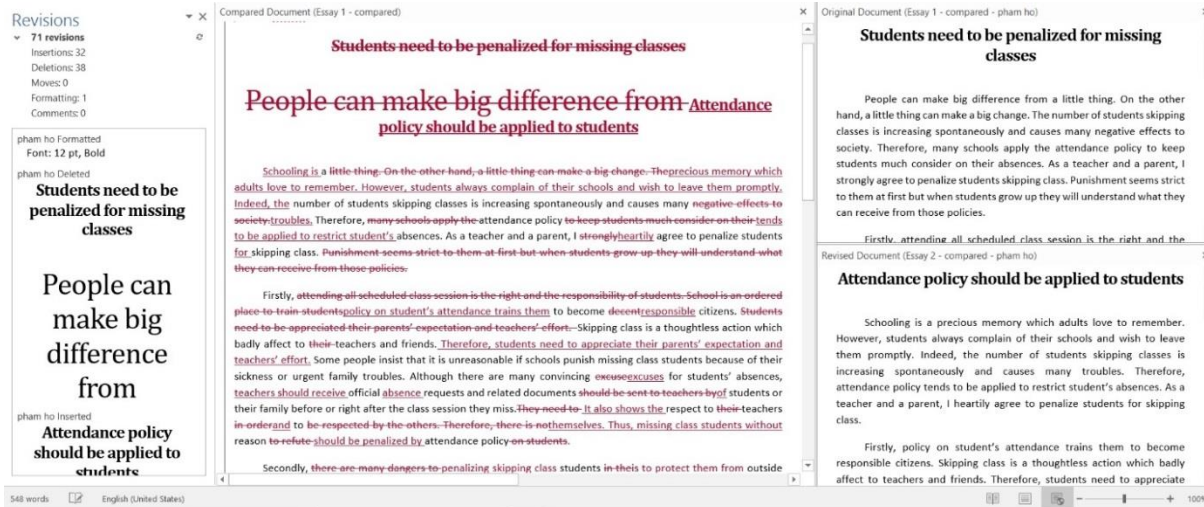


Fig. 2 Analysis of revisions

Findings and discussion

Research question 1: Are there any differences between lecturer’s and peer e-comments in terms of global and local areas? If yes, are there any differences between global and local qualified comments?

This research question was mainly responded by quantitative data. Some responses from the students’ interviews related to this issue (qualitative data) were also regarded. In order to respond to this research question, I compared the areas (local and global) and nature (revision-oriented comments) of comments between the lecturer’s and peer e-comments. Descriptive statistics, Paired-sample t-test, and independent sample t-test were employed from the SPSS vs. 22. Table 1 presents the comparison between peer and e-comments lecturer’s.

Table 1. Comparisons between peer and lecturer’s e-comments

Variable	M	SD	MD	t	df	p
Number of words in the comments						
Peer e-comments	194.57	123.105	-8.318	-0.227	54	.822
Lecturer's e-comments	202.88	151.438				
Total comments on both global and local areas						
Peer e-comments	20.87	9.999	5.871	2.161	55	.035
Lecturer's e-comments	15	10.469				
Total comments on local areas						
Peer e-comments	12.97	8.179	8.912	5.240 ^a	44.755 ^a	.000
Lecturer's e-comments	4.06	3.638				
Total comments on global areas						
Peer e-comments	8.75	5.147	-3.442	-1.72	52	.091
Lecturer's e-comments	12.19	9.152				

^aThe t and df were adjusted because variances were not equal.

Independent Samples t-test

Table 1 summarizes the comparisons of peer e-comments and lecturer's e-comments on student writers' papers. First, in terms of the number of words in the e-comments written by both lecturer and peers, on average, three or four group members composed 195 words on each peer's written paper ($M = 194.57$; $SD = 123.105$) while the lecturer made it for 203 words in the e-comment deliveries ($M = 202.88$; $SD = 151.438$). It seems that the lecturer provided more words (lengthier) in the comments than the whole group members when delivering e-comments (203 vs. 195). The difference between the means is 8.3 words. However, the independent sample t-test with $t(45) = -.227$, $p = .822$ ($P > .05$) indicates that there was not statistical significant difference between the lecturer and peer e-comments in terms of number of words. This indicates that the number of words provided by a group of three or four students are equal to that of a lecturer when providing e-comments on the peer's written paper. In terms of considering the lecturer as more preferable and professional in providing comments found by Nelson and Carson's (1998), Tsui and Ng's (2000) and Yang et al.'s (2006), the current study sets a different light to see the values of peer e-comments.

Second, table 1 also illustrates the total e-comments of lecturer's and peers' on both global and local areas. As can be seen, on average, each written paper received 21 peer e-comments on both global and local areas ($M = 20.87$; $SD = 9.99$). Lecturer seemed to provide less number of e-comments than peers ($M = 15.00$; $SD = 10.47$) on both global and local areas. The difference between the means is 5.87 points. The result of the Independent sample t-test with $t(55) = 2.16$, $p = .035$ ($p < .05$) indicates that the number of peer e-comments on both global and local areas in general were greater than those of lecturer's. In other words, the group members provided more comments to student writers' papers than the lecturer did. This means, three or four peers in a group could work more than the lecturer could in terms of numbers of e-comment deliveries. Compared to the number of words written in the comments, the lecturer seems to write lengthier in each comments in order to explain or give suggestions to each writing problem. This finding was an inventory compared to previous research in terms of comparing the number of words in the comments and the number of e-comments between lecturer's and peers' which were not found in key research studies in this field such as Berg's (1999), Pham V. P. Ho & Usaha's (2015), Min's (2005), Stanley's (1992), and Tuzi (2004).

Third, regarding the e-comments on local areas, comments addressing to wording, grammar, spellings, sentence structure, or punctuation, table 1 illustrates that on average, each written paper received 13 peer e-comments on local issues ($M = 12.97$; $SD = 8.18$); however, each paper received only 4 comments on local areas provided by the lecturer's ($M = 4.06$; $SD = 3.64$). The difference between the means is 8.9. The result of the independent t-test, $t(44.75) = 5.24$, $p = .000$ ($p < .01$), shows that there was a statistical significant difference between the peer e-comments and lecturer's e-comments addressing to the local issues. This finding indicates that the students provided e-comments on local areas greater than the lecturer. As mentioned earlier in this study, the lecturer who had to deal with big size classes, from 40 to 50 graduate students. Then if peers helped address to local areas when providing e-comments, the lecturer would have more time to focus on global issues such as content, idea development, or organization of the written papers which helped enhance the quality of students' writing. Truscott (1996) argued that only comments addressing to the global/macro-issues would help student writers improve their writing quality. In some sense, the activities of peer e-comments could help the lecturer received less local-error papers so that he/she could have time to focus more on the global issues to help student writers improve their writing quality.

Finally, in terms of e-comments on global areas relating to commenting on contents, idea development, and organization of the written papers, table 1 reveals that each written

paper received, on average, 8.8 peer e-comments ($M = 8.75$; $SD = 5.15$) on global issues. However, the lecturer seemed to address more to global issues when providing e-comments on student writer's papers ($M = 12.19$; $SD = 9.15$) than the peers'. The mean difference between e-peers' and lecturer's e-comments is -3.44. However, table 1 shows that there was no statistical significant difference between lecturer's and peer e-comments addressing to the global areas when providing comments ($t(52) = -1.72$, $p = .091$, $p > .05$). The null hypothesis was not rejected. This indicates that when providing e-comments, group members also addressed to global issues such as content, idea development or organization of the written papers to help peers enhance their writing quality. This was a big conflict with previous studies such as Nelson and Carson's (1998), Treglia's (2006), Tsui and Ng's (2000), and Yang et al. (2006) who found that peer preferred lecturer's comments than those of peers. Table 2 presents the comparison of revision-oriented e-comments (qualified comments) on both global and local areas.

Table 2. Comparisons between peer and lecturer's revision-oriented comments

Variable	M	SD	MD	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Local revision-oriented comments						
Peer e-comments	12.77	8.094	8.774	5.214 ^b	44.745 ^b	.000
Lecturer's e-comments	4	3.597				
Global revision-oriented comments						
Peer e-comments	4.88	3.542	-4.856	-2.677 ^c	34.018 ^c	.011
Lecturer's e-comments	9.73	8.483				

^bThe *t* and *df* were adjusted because variances were not equal.

^cThe *t* and *df* were adjusted because variances were not equal.

Independent Samples t-test

Revision-oriented comments are seen as qualified comments which trigger revision. These comments identified writing problems and requested the writers to make changes to enhance the quality of the papers. Table 2 compared global and local revision-oriented e-comments delivered by the lecturer and peers. Though the number of global issues of the lecturer's e-comments were more and the local issues were less addressed by the lecturer compared to those of peer e-comments, they didn't say much during the e-comment activities until qualified comments or revision-oriented comments, which trigger revision, were measured (Pham V. P. Ho & Usaha, 2015). In terms of comparing the revision-oriented comments on local areas during the e-comment activities, table 2 reveals that peers were found to deliver 13 revision-oriented comments ($M = 12.77$; $SD = 8.09$) which triggered revision on local areas and the lecturer provided much less than peer e-comments on this issues ($M = 4.00$; $SD = 3.60$). The mean difference is 8.77. There was certainly a statistical significant difference between the lecturer's and peer e-comments in terms of revision-oriented comments on local areas. That is, the peers provided greater local revision-oriented comments than the lecturer ($t(44.75) = 5.214$, $p = .000$, $p < .01$). Again, as mentioned earlier, peer e-comments were a great activity employing in the Academic writing classes for graduate students because peers provided much more qualified comments on local issues so that the lecturer had more time to focus on areas such as content, idea development, or organization of the written papers to help student writers enhance writing quality. This is a good support to previous research by Pham V. P. Ho and Usaha's (2015) who found that student writers needed more e-comments on global areas while local e-comments could be made by students themselves.

Particularly, table 2 shows that peers provided 4.9 revision-oriented comments ($M = 4.88$; $SD = 3.54$) on global areas while lecturer provided 9.7 revision-oriented e-comments ($M = 9.73$; $SD = 8.48$). The difference between means is -4.86. Independent sample t-test with

$t(34) = -2.68, p = .011$ ($p < .01$) indicates that there was a statistical significant difference between lecturer's and peer e-comments in terms of qualified comments (revision-oriented comments) addressing to the global issues. That means the lecturer provided more qualified e-comments than peers on global areas during the e-comment activities. This finding helped clarify what previous researchers such as Nelson and Carson (1998), Treglia (2006), Tsui and Ng (2000), and Yang et al. (2006) who claimed that lecturer comments were more professional and qualified than peers'. Furthermore, this finding filled the gap of Pham V. P. Ho and Usaha's (2015) for they didn't investigate this area of comparing lecturer's and e-peer comments.

Research question 2: Are there any different between the total revision-oriented comments and the total number of revision?

In order to respond to this research question, I compared the total of revision-oriented comments or qualified comments delivered by both lecturer and peers on both global and local areas during the e-comment activities with the total number of revisions made by the student authors to see if there is/are any correspondent between the total qualified comments and the total of revisions. In this case, paired sample t-test was used to compare. Table 3 presents comparison between the total of qualified comment deliveries and the total of revisions actually made by the student writers after receiving e-comments from both lecturer and peers.

Table 3. Comparing the effects of total revision-oriented comments on total writing revision

Variable	M	SD	Correlation	MD	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
The effects of revision-oriented comments on writing revision							
Total of revision-oriented comments on both global and local areas	14.83	9.765	0.710	-16.75	-6.525	51	.000
Number of revision	31.58	24.075					

Note: Paired Samples test

Table 3 reveals the comparison of mean differences in total of revision-oriented comments which triggered revisions addressing to both global and local issues. It was supposed that the means of these two were equal because after receiving these kinds of qualified comments to request for changes, the student writers might revise only what were asked to change. However, the result of the paired sample test indicates that the null hypothesis was rejected. On average, each written paper received about 15 qualified comments to request for changes ($M = 14.83$; $SD = 9.77$). However, nearly 32 revisions were made by the student writers ($M = 31.58$; $SD = 24.08$). The difference between means is -16.75. In other words, each subsequent draft made nearly 17 changes beyond the requests provided by the lecturer and peers. The result of the paired sample test ($t(51) = -6.53, p = .000, p < .01$), indicates that there was a statistical significant difference between the total of revision-oriented comments deliveries and the total of writing revisions made by the student writers. The correlation at .71 shows that there was 71% to say that these two variables were correlated. That is, the students revised the papers by themselves far from what were expected from the commenters (67%). In other words, after receiving e-comments, the student writers took more responsibilities for their own writing products. It is suggested that modeling e-comments in the classrooms is a powerful tool and should be employed as part of the lecture in the writing classroom.

This finding bolsters previous research studies such as Pham Vu Phi Ho & Usaha's (2015) who found that 61% of revisions were made by the student writers themselves, and Tuzi's (2004) found that of 60%. The result of the current study found 67% of the revisions made by the students themselves. However, other research studies such as Min (2006) found that 10% of the revision-oriented comments were not incorporated into revisions while other researchers such as Liou and Peng (2008), Rodriguez (2003) found that more 50% of revision-oriented e-comments were not incorporated into revisions; even worse, Liu and Sadler (2003) found that of 70%. The success of the current study suggests use of the model of consistent e-peer comment training during the course of academic writing rather than making it in a short period of training as in earlier research.

Conclusion

In short, in comparison between lecturer' and peer e-comments, the findings of the current study show that first, the total number of words written in the e-comments of both lecturer's and e-peers were not statistical significant difference. In other words, the number of words producing in the peer e-comments were as many as those producing in the lecturer's e-comments. Second, in terms of the total number of e-comments deliveries on both global and local areas, peer e-comments were statistically greater than those provided by the lecturer. That is, the graduate students provided more total of e-comments on both global and local areas on their peers' papers than those provided by the lecturer. Third, there was no statistical significant difference between the lecturer's and peer e-comments on global areas although the peer e-comments on local issues were more than those from the lecturer's e-comments on the local issues. Fouth, in terms of qualified comment deliveries or revision-oriented comments which trigger revision, there was a statistical significant difference between lecturer's e-comments and peer e-comments on both global and local issues. The lecturer tended to provide more qualified comments on global areas whereas the peers provided more on local issues. Finally, the results of the current study reveal that 67% of revision was made by the writers' own decision. The study suggests that lecturer's modeling e-comments in the classroom was a great effect on the students' learning reponsibilities.

The finding of the current study raises a controversy issue to previous research studies. Hyland (2000) found that the lecturers tended to view peer comment activities as a passive process, focusing on 'fixing up' the texts rather than as an active activity like the current study which viewed it as a supportive tool additional to lecturer's e-comments. Nguyen Thi Kieu Thu (2002) found that lecturer's comments were mostly on grammar and Montgomery and Baker (2007) found that the lecturer provided most of comments on local issues and little on global during the writing process.

CALL in Context

This study is part of a bigger research project at a University in Vietnam. The current research study fills the gap in research on lecturer and peer electronic comments (comments implemented via Word Processor of Microsoft Office) in terms of comparison between lecturer and peer e-comments. Previous research studies claim that student writers prefer lecturer e-comments to peer e-comments because the lecturer's comments are more trustworthy, experienced and professional. However, they failed to compare those e-comments between the lecturer's and peers' to provide statistical evidence. The aim of the current study is an attempt to investigate this gap. Its findings contribute to the body of knowledge with statistical evidence in this area of research. The findings of the study help lecturer and students value peer e-comments as qualified as lecturer's comments in some

aspects in the writing classrooms. Also, it values the peer e-comments as an important tool to help polish the language before handing in students' papers to the lecturer to seek for e-comments. This helps reduce quite a lot of work for the lecturer. Furthermore, the current study also found similar results to previous research in terms of comparing the total number of e-comments with the total of revision. Besides, the current study introduces a teaching model which helps the local context to deal with big size classes by consistently training graduate students to learn how to provide e-comments on one another's papers to help enhance writing quality. The current study fits the conference theme in such a way that the training model of e-comments for graduate students in the local context might shape the design of the learning environment of other contexts which share the similarities of big size classes. In addition, the study presents the statistic evidence that formulates the values of lecturer and peer e-comments so that other researchers could draw some ideas to handle their writing classroom, particularly to graduate studies.

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