The Effects of Anonymity and Non-Anonymity on Students’ Writing Reviews and Corrections

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Bio data

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Abstract

This study compared the effects of employing the senior review activity in two modes of anonymous and non-anonymous reviews. There were seven senior students who have made reviews on the essay writing drafts of two junior classes on the same topic. It was found that the two groups of junior students had positive attitudes toward the mode of reviews they participated in and that senior students had made more constructive comments on junior students’ writing when their names were not disclosed. The findings on senior students’ attitudes also informed that even though they had no problems with the review conditions of either being anonymous or non-anonymous, they preferred to know whose work they were reviewing. The paper discusses some implications for the application of a review activity in a writing classroom as well as directions for future studies.

Keywords: writing reviews; anonymity; non-anonymity

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Introduction

English has long been used as a global language for communication worldwide, and the proficient use of it as a language tool is of imperative importance (Nur, 2020; Rajab et al., 2020; Vallente, 2020). Even though the requirements of its command are high, many Thai learners at different levels have difficulties in learning the language (Arjpru, 2017; Foley, 2005; Noomura, 2013; Sritrakarn, 2018; Sweeney, Kunyot, & Preedeekul, 2017; Viriya, 2018). Not only that students find it difficult to master the skills in English, but teachers also find teaching English challenging as well. Baiyaem (1997) reported that the obstacles faced by teachers include heavy teaching loads and insufficient language skills and teaching knowledge. For students, numerous studies claimed that the challenges for their learning are such as the lack of opportunity to use English in real life (Noomura, 2013; Viriya, 2018; Wiriyachitra, 2003), being passive learners (Arjpru, 2017; Viriya, 2018), and uninteresting lessons (Viriya, 2018). Especially for many Thais as well as other Asian learners, the culture issue could be one of the barriers for students to learn the English language (Chen, 2019; Raymond & Choon, 2017).

Findings from previous studies show that many foreign language learners have anxiety in learning a language (Akbari & Sadeghi, 2013; Dordinejad & Ahmadabad, 2014). They are shy to communicate in English with their classmates (Arjpru, 2017; Vallente, 2020). Some even intend to make efforts to maintain friendly relationships with peers by trying to avoid confrontation in the interaction (Chen, 2019) while others may avoid asking questions for fear of being incorrect or feel embarrassed (Raymond & Choon, 2017). As a consequence, they engage less and display a passive role in class. These reflect serious problems as a result of cultural impacts. Given that exposure to the language through active participation in class is one of the key factors for successful English language learning, by avoiding to interact or participate, their chances for improvement could be limited. This may thereby result in unproductive learning outcomes. In order to overcome the abovementioned problems faced by both teachers and students in language learning and teaching, it is essential for the teacher to design a classroom learning activity that encourages students to interact actively using the language, take more control of their own learning, and work cooperatively to accomplish the task (Altun & Sabah, 2020). By focusing on the improvement of Thai students’ writing, the present study employed anonymous and non-anonymous review activities in an essay writing classroom. The following section discusses the literature related to the current study.
Literature Review

Writing

Writing is the act of putting down the graphic symbols that present a language in order to convey some meaning so that the reader can grasp the information which the writer has tried to impart (Sapkota, 2012). It is a key factor in students’ academic development and the primary means by which students transform from passive recipients of knowledge to active participants in their own education (Ruiling & Bol, 2007). Writing is a complex process that requires both language and many other skills to accomplish. For language skills, Watcharapunyawong and Usaha (2013) argued that writing requires both syntactic and semantic knowledge. For other skills, writing also requires a great deal of effort to continuously practice (ibid.). This also includes mental, psychological, rhetorical, and critical skills (Sapkota, 2012).

As far as the nature of communication is concerned, writing and speaking skills are different in that while spoken language is context-dependent, the writer and reader share neither verbal nor aural contact in written language. In other words, the language is used independently from the context in writing, and the structure is organized in a monologic way with a diversity of lexical choices relevant to the topic contents (Piriyasilpa, 2009). For these reasons, many students find writing skill to be the most challenging in real practice and in the examination (Sapkota, 2012; Zakaria & Hashim, 2020), and this problem exists even among native English speaking learners (Lu & Bol, 2007). In order to support students to compose their English essays more successfully, a number of strategies have been employed in the language classrooms; and one of the common techniques is the peer review activity.

Peer review

When students critique one another’s work with the intention of helping their peers revise and eventually improve their writing, the process is called peer review (Ruiling & Bol, 2007). Peer review is also defined by Waemusa (2017, p. 93) as “a learning process whereby students engage in communication for work evaluation and reflection.” According to Hosack (2003), peer review involves learners reading one another’s draft compositions and providing feedback that can be used by the writer when revising the drafts. Based on these definitions, the concepts of peer review can be summed up as a kind of cooperative learning activity in which students read the writing drafts of their peers and provide feedback with the goal to help revise and improve the drafts. Peer review can be both verbal and in written form. Even though the feedback made by students is suspected by Truscot (1996), other studies have argued that peer review has become commonplace in the writing environment (Ruiling & Bol, 2007) and the
activity is a central aspect of English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing programs across the world (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). Colpitts (2016) argues that allowing students to engage in peer editing of one another’s work is surely not as accurate as having the teacher do so, but it does reduce workloads for time-constrained educators.

Previous studies have conducted peer review activity in the language classrooms and claimed for numerous benefits of the activity. First of all, the peer review process promotes critical thinking and the awareness of effective writing skills (Kunwongse, 2013). It allows students to analyze and provide constructive feedback on their peers’ writing (Ngoc lac & Gurung, 2015) before making a reflection on their own work (Hosak, 2003). Evidence of this has been shown in the findings from the study by Colpitts (2016), in which student participants considered that both giving and receiving feedback from other students helped with the act of “noticing” and the act of “discovery.” That is to say, by analyzing their peers’ work critically, students are encouraged to reconsider and adjust their own writing. For those who receive the feedback, they are more attuned to the needs and expectations of the readers. This whole process enables students to interact analytically and promotes cognitive processing, which results in the ‘durability of memory’ (Houston, 2001, p. 270) and constitutes part of the process of second language learning (Swain, 2005). Secondly, feedback made by peers tend to be pitched close to the learner’s own level of proficiency, so it is potentially more informative to the novice writer than feedback provided by the instructor (Hosak, 2003). The study by Sritrakarn (2018) also showed that students felt comfortable receiving feedback from other students while teacher comments were sometimes confusing and abstract. Finally, peer review activity promotes social interaction and collaborative learning (Lu & Bol, 2007). Given that language learning happens as a result of social interactions (Vygotsky, 1986), learners need to be engaged in the writing environments which enable them to collaborate and interact with peers or adults. By taking an active role in analyzing their peers’ work, and by providing feedback and receiving comments through the peer review activity, students are provided with the opportunity to communicate linguistically and eventually acquire the target language (Swain, 2005).

Scholars have also pointed out some problems of peer review activity. Despite the problems in terms of time consumed (Kunwongse, 2013), the two main problems of peer review can be pointed out in terms of feedback quality and cultural issues. To begin, concerns have been made regarding the quality of peer feedback. Studies found that some students who provided feedback have limited knowledge of language and grammar (Wanchid, 2015) and felt they did not have enough English ability themselves to accurately give feedback to others.
Moreover, those who received the feedback stated that they still preferred the teacher’s feedback to the feedback received from other students (Sritrakarn, 2018). Even though some problems still exist in the application of peer review activity, numerous studies argue that if designed appropriately, the peer review activity can still bring benefits to students’ writing practices. Colpitts (2016), for example, argues that while the students lack the linguistic and grammatical abilities to always correct one another’s work with confidence, they still felt a sense of personal growth in terms of their own English writing ability occurring during the process of giving and receiving peer feedback. Therefore, it is essential for the study on peer review activity to be aware of those aforementioned problems and design the activity systematically to overcome the problems.

Another problem that has been mentioned in a number of studies is related to cultural issues, especially if identifiable peer review activity is conducted. Evidence from studies conducted in Asian learning contexts show that cultural norms can restrain students’ level of collaborative learning (Chen 2019; Cote, 2007; Lu & Bol, 2007; Waemuza, 2017; Wanchid, 2015). Scholars found that some learners have difficulty providing feedback because they are reluctant to criticize their classmates’ work (Hosac, 2003; Waemusa, 2017). Raymond and Choon (2007) explain that this is because Asian students are “face conscious” in nature (p. 198). They believe that one should be modest and should not put someone else to shame (ibid.). As a result, they tend to maintain a harmonious relationship in the classroom and avoid challenging others by asking questions or expressing their different thoughts on the discussed issue. In addition to these cultural factors, other related factors that have the potential to influence students to be easily biased or not honest in giving feedback are such as friendship, gender, race, interpersonal relationships, or personal preferences (Lu & Bol, 2007). This implies that cultural issues as well as learners’ identities are vulnerable during the language learning process and can be at risk if students are exposed to direct criticism or forced to be critical of their peers (Silver & Coomber, 2010). The discussion also raises the question of whether or not the undisclosed identity would help to promote more interaction and successful language learning among students.

By following the concepts of using ‘senior’ as a replacement for ‘peer’ (Sritrakarn, 2018), the present study aims to enhance the quality of feedback made in the review activity. Sritrakarn (2018) claimed that when working on the task with the assistance of experienced adults, students could refine knowledge and build up further from their existing knowledge and understanding of the subject matter. In this context of the investigation, the selected senior students have undertaken the English essay writing course. They, therefore, had the experience
in learning and composing the essay to review the writing drafts of junior students. To examine whether or not learner identities have an influence on the senior students’ reviews and the junior students’ corrections, anonymous and non-anonymous review activities were conducted. The following section discusses further the concepts of anonymity and its benefits.

**Anonymity**

Scholars define anonymity as the learning and teaching activity in which both reviewers and reviewees are kept unknown to one another (Lu & Bol, 2007), or learners’ real identities are kept unknown to others by using pseudonyms or not using names at all (Chen, 2009). Anonymity has been employed in different language classrooms of both native-speaking contexts (Chen, 2009; Lu & Bol, 2007) and non-native speaking contexts (Cote, 2014; Hosack, 2003; Jessup, Connolly & Tansik, 1990; Silver & Coomber, 2010). Based on the findings from these previous studies, the benefits of anonymity in language learning can be pointed out in three main aspects: deindividuation, interpersonal relationship, and more critical feedback.

First of all, anonymity contributes to deindividuation, which was defined by Lu & Bol (2007) as the situations in which individuals in groups stop thinking of other members as individuals and feel that they cannot be singled out by others. Anonymity fosters the level of comfort in language learning. When students feel that they cannot be singled out by others, they stop thinking of other members as an individual, resulting in a reduction of normal inner restraints and enabling group members to engage in behavior that they would not ordinarily display (Jessup et al., 1990). In this way, they participate and contribute more to the learning process. Evidence of this has been shown in the study by Chen (2019), which investigated the impacts of anonymity on international students’ learning performances and found that deindividuation promotes less peer pressure and that international students who have diverse backgrounds suffer less from the social constraints and feel more comfortable to participate.

Secondly, anonymity in peer review promotes interpersonal relationships among the participants. By nature, Asian students tend to be reluctant to criticize peers’ work (Hosack, 2003). They make an effort to maintain friendly relationships with peer students (Chen, 2019). So, they may try to avoid confrontations or conflicts with friends in face-to-face peer review activities. When staying low profile in the peer review activity, students make their comments less aggressive, allowing for a higher level of participation and production in peer interaction (ibid.).

Finally, anonymous review enhances more critical feedback. Anonymous reviewers were more honest with their comments and provided more critical feedback than those who
conducted peer review identifiably (Lu & Bol, 2007). Cote (2014) adds that the feedback provided anonymously is based solely on the text itself, not its author, because the reviewers do not know whose essay they are reviewing. The activity, therefore, provides a comfort zone for sharing critical feedback because students do not feel worried about their comments on their peers (Waemosa, 2017), and the students thereby are more honest in their critique and provide feedback without bias regardless of attitude toward the experience.

Even though there have been numerous studies employing peer feedback review in the Thai language classrooms (Sapkota, 2012; Sritrakarn, 2018; Wanchid, 2015), there has still been insufficient research comparing the use of anonymity and non-anonymity. Especially, the use of senior students instead of junior students has been very rare. To add more findings in the previous studies, the present study employed anonymous and non-anonymous review activities in an essay writing classroom. The study seeks to answer the research questions below.

1. What are the effects of anonymity and non-anonymity on the quality of junior students’ writing drafts?
2. How does anonymity or non-anonymity affect the reviews made by senior students?
3. What are senior and junior students’ attitudes toward the use of anonymity in peer review?

Method
Senior students
In this study, junior students’ writing drafts were revised by the same group of senior students. Initially, eight senior students (one male and seven females) were selected to provide feedback on junior students’ essay writing. These students, majoring in English and were in their fourth year, have passed the Essay Writing Course and were undertaking the Argumentative Writing Course. By considering the potential problems regarding the non-systemic process of senior students’ selection (see Sritrakarn, 2018), the senior participants in the current study were selected using the purposive-sampling technique. In so doing, the students’ TOEIC score reports were considered, and those who have passed the TOEIC at the minimum score of 480 were recruited as the research participants. Later on, one senior student opted out. So, there were seven senior students (one male and six females) who have been selected as the research participants.
Junior students

The two groups of junior students (Group A and Group B) majored in English. Students in Group A received feedback on their writing in anonymous mode while Group B students participated in the non-anonymous mode, receiving comments on their work by identifiable senior students. Twenty-three students (four males and nineteen females) in Group A enrolled in the Essay Writing Course in the first semester of 2019, and twenty-six students from Group B (two males and twenty-four females) enrolled in the second semester of the same year. The two groups of students have passed the Paragraph Writing Course, and their average level of English proficiency was pre-intermediate. During the research activity, some of the junior students from both groups did not participate constantly. This resulted in the number of junior participants in this study dropping to sixteen for anonymity (four males and twelve females) and seventeen for non-anonymity (two males and fifteen females).

The data collection process

Groups A (Anonymous Activity)

Prior to the data collection, both junior and senior student groups were trained to get familiar with the Microsoft word ‘review’ system. The knowledge of essay structure was revised to the senior students, and they were trained about the feedback types and how to provide feedback using the ‘review’ system on Microsoft word program. The junior students were also trained on how to track the changes or comments given by senior students, as well as how to accept or reject them using the ‘review’ system. During the training sessions, the teacher ensured that both groups of students had plenty of practice to get used to the ‘review’ tracking system on the Microsoft word program.

To collect the data, the teacher has made an announcement of the essay writing topic (Should same-sex marriage be legalized?) to the junior group and stated the deadline to submit the first drafts. After all junior students submitted their first drafts to their class email, the teacher checked emails and edited the names of the students by changing them to pseudonyms. The teacher then emailed the drafts to the class email of the senior group. The senior students would, later on, check emails and select the drafts they were assigned to review and provide feedback. After the reviewed drafts were returned back to the senior class’s email, the teacher changed the draft names back to junior students’ original names and emailed the drafts back to their class email. Junior students were told to return their edited drafts back on the deadline before the teacher changed the edited drafts back to the pseudonym and forwarded them to senior students for the second round of review. After junior students received the second
comments, they edited the drafts before submitting the final drafts to the teacher for marking. The data collection process can be summarized in Figure 1 below.

![Figure 1. The review process (anonymous review)](image)

**Group B (Non-Anonymous Activity)**

Junior students in Group B were also trained about the feedback types and negotiated about the learning goals of the activity. This group of junior students was not trained about the ‘review’ system of the Microsoft word program because they participated in the non-anonymous mode. However, the process of review, as well as deadlines for submission of each draft, were identified, and students were advised that they could consult the senior students directly if there were some questions or any further explanations needed regarding the reviews. The review process can be summarized as follows.

![Figure 2. The review process (non-anonymous review)](image)

As shown in Figure 2, the junior students had the opportunity to further ask questions regarding the comments or seek further advice from senior students during the review process of their first and second drafts before submitting their drafts to the teacher. There was less involvement from the teacher than the anonymous review during the editing process. However, students were advised that they could always consult with the teacher if they were not certain about the comments.
Research instruments

In order to investigate the effects of anonymity and non-anonymity on students’ reviews and writing corrections, the data were collected from three sources: students’ writing drafts, Likert-scale questionnaires, and group interviews. The junior students’ writing drafts on the topic: “Should same-sex marriage be legalized?” were collected. The drafts composed by those who participated in the entire activity were used for data analysis.

After the review activity, the questionnaires (see Table 5 and Table 6) were distributed to both junior and senior student groups to investigate their attitudes toward the activity. The designed questionnaires were sent to three experts in the field for comments and rating for content validity to validate the quality of the questionnaires prior to the distribution. Then the index of item-objective congruence (IOC) was calculated. The reviewers were asked to rate whether the question items were congruent (+1), incongruent (-1), or questionable (0). The items that had scored lower than 0.5 were revised, and the items that had scores higher than or equal to 0.5 were reserved. After changes had been made by the reviewers, they were piloted with students who were at a similar level to the research participants. Then, the reliability values of the two sets of questionnaires were calculated by using Cronbach’s alpha. In this study, the two sets of questionnaires had reliability values of 7.5 (for senior students) and 7.7 (for junior students), which were acceptable and could be used for data collection.

To ensure the validity of an interview protocol, an expert in the field was consulted for comments and suggestions of how to make the question items precise and concise. Then changes were made based on the comments. Finally, the senior students and the two groups of junior students were interviewed to investigate their attitudes toward the activity and to follow up as a clarification of some certain issues received from the findings (see Appendix A: Interview Protocol). These questions were flexible to students’ responses in that further questions were sometimes added and asked to clarify the initial response made by junior students to each question.

Data analysis

The collected data were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively to find the answers to the research questions set above. To answer research question 1, the first and final drafts composed by junior students were compared in terms of essay structure and changes made in their responses to the reviews received from senior students. For research question 2, senior students’ reviews were investigated by classifying the types of feedback. Further analysis of comments
made by senior students was done to see whether similar or different types of comments were provided when senior students’ names were disclosed and hidden.

Results

**Research question 1: What are the effects of anonymity and non-anonymity on the quality of junior students’ writing drafts?**

Taking a broad view, there was not much difference in the essay structures of the first and final drafts composed by the two groups of junior students. In other words, all of the students were aware of the essay structure and composed their drafts consisting of an introduction, body (with arguments), and conclusion. Further analysis of the first and final drafts of junior students’ writing was made to identify the efficiency of their correction. In so doing, changes in the final drafts as a result of senior students’ reviews in the first drafts were analyzed, and the findings are demonstrated as follows.

**Table 1**

**Successful responses to senior students’ comments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Anonymous reviews</th>
<th>Non-anonymous reviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total reviews</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>383</td>
<td>586</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Successful responses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>532</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>87.98</td>
<td>90.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsuccessful responses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>12.02</td>
<td>9.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table 1, while non-anonymity resulted in more corrections in junior students’ final drafts, both types of review led to more successful corrections (87.98% for anonymity and 90.78% for non-anonymity). The two types of review also led to unsuccessful corrections, and these were due to different reasons. The main reasons were tallied and calculated in percentages, as shown in Table 2 below.

**Table 2**

**Reasons for unsuccessful responses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>Anonymous review</th>
<th>Non-anonymous review</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ineffective feedback</td>
<td>17 (36.95%)</td>
<td>27 (50.00%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Original language already correct</td>
<td>23 (50.00%)</td>
<td>2 (3.70%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior students’ rejection</td>
<td>6 (13.04%)</td>
<td>18 (33.33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior students’ misunderstanding</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5 (9.25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjustment of reviews</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2 (3.70%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>46</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 shows that the unsuccessful corrections of junior students were influenced by different reasons. When examined closely, however; most of the unsuccessful corrections were caused by senior students (86.95% in anonymous review and 53.70% in non-anonymous review), by
either providing ineffective feedback or making changes of the statements which were already correct. While there were only three reasons which affected the unsuccessful corrections made by junior students in the anonymous review activity, the reasons for unsuccessful corrections in non-anonymity varied. This raises the question of whether or not the mode of review has the effects on the review quality made by senior students. Further analysis would therefore be made to examine the types and quality of reviews made in the two circumstances.

Research question 2: How does anonymity or non-anonymity affect the reviews made by senior students?

To identify the effects of anonymity and non-anonymity on senior students’ reviews, the researcher has initially analyzed the types of feedback made on junior students’ writing drafts. Following Sritrakarn (2018), the reviews which affect direct responses or changes in junior students’ final drafts were categorized into four types: direct feedback (when junior students are provided with correct form), indirect feedback (when junior students are reminded that errors exist but correction is not provided), metalinguistic feedback (when some kind of metalinguistic clue as to the nature of the error is provided) and comments (other types of feedback that do not fit in the previous three categories made by senior students and received responses). The findings are presented in Table 3 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feedback types</th>
<th>Anonymous review (383 reviews)</th>
<th>Non-anonymous review (586 reviews)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feedback types</td>
<td>Feedback types</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>Indirect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Metalinguistic</td>
<td>Comment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>Indirect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Metalinguistic</td>
<td>Comment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequencies</td>
<td>295 (77.02%)</td>
<td>1 (0.26%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>547 (93.34%)</td>
<td>11 (1.87%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 shows that most of the reviews made by senior students, both anonymously or non-anonymously, are direct feedback. Especially for the non-anonymous mode, almost all of the reviews were direct feedback (93.34%). In addition to the high frequencies of direct feedback, there were significant numbers of comments made in the reviews. These comments shown in the table (19.32% in anonymity and 17.17% in non-anonymity) are those which received responses from junior students. There have been, however, more comments made by senior students that did not receive explicit responses nor affect changes in the writing. These comments may have an influence on the improvements of junior students’ writing in some way.
Further analysis will therefore be made to investigate all the comments made by the senior students. To do this, the researcher followed the analysis framework of Sritrakarn (2018), and divided the types of comments into compliments, questions to the writers regarding the contents, criticism, and suggestions of how the essay could be better constructed. The findings from the analysis are shown in Table 4 below.

**Table 4**
*Types of comments (anonymous)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comment types</th>
<th>Compliments or support</th>
<th>Questions to the writer regarding the contents</th>
<th>Criticism</th>
<th>Suggestions of how the essay could be better constructed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anonymity</td>
<td>11 (11.11%)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7 (7.07%)</td>
<td>81 (81.81%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-anonymity</td>
<td>10 (20%)</td>
<td>2 (4.00%)</td>
<td>12 (24.00%)</td>
<td>26 (52.00%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 shows that senior students made more comments when they were anonymous, and most of their comments were to provide suggestions of how the junior students could improve their drafts (81.81%).

There must be infinitive verb after modal verb. (Narisa)
To avoid (using) the same word, this one you can cut ‘by’; and make prejudice to be adverb ‘prejudicially’ (Chanchai)

The examples above show that senior students took more engagement in the reviewing process and provided more explicit comments on junior students when being anonymous. Moreover, the use of modalities (“must” or “can”) shows their confidence in delivering comments on junior students’ writing. When their names were disclosed, the number of their comments dropped to almost half of those made in the anonymous activity. Moreover, they made comments by providing compliments, asking questions, and criticizing more often when being non-anonymous.

Good job!! ☺ (Compliment- Papawadee)
And then what is next? (Asking question- Tad-dao)
This sentence is too long. (Criticism- Chanchai)
Research question 3: What are senior students’ and junior students’ attitudes toward anonymous and non-anonymous review activity?

The third area investigated in this study was the attitude of the participants toward the activity. Questionnaires were distributed to senior students as well as the two groups of junior students, followed by group interviews. The senior students’ attitudes are presented in Table 5 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S. D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. It is useful to read and review the junior students’ work.</td>
<td>4.71</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Reviewing junior students’ work helps me improve my own writing.</td>
<td>4.43</td>
<td>0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Reviewing junior students’ work helps me give some ideas for my own writing.</td>
<td>4.71</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I am a better reviewer if I know whose work I am reading.</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I am a better reviewer if I don’t know whose work I am reading.</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>1.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. It is difficult to find things to say about the junior students’ writing if my name is disclosed.</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>1.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. It is difficult to find things to say about the junior students’ writing even though it is anonymous.</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>1.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. In my non-anonymous review, I often tell the junior students about the strengths of their writing.</td>
<td>4.86</td>
<td>0.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. In my anonymous review, I often tell the junior students about the strengths of their writing.</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. In my non-anonymous review, I often tell the junior students about the weaknesses or problems of their writing.</td>
<td>4.43</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. In my anonymous review, I often tell the junior students about the weaknesses or problems of their writing.</td>
<td>4.43</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. In my non-anonymous review, I often tell the junior students if I don’t understand something they have written.</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. In my anonymous review, I tell the junior students if I don’t understand something they have written.</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table 5 above, senior students had positive attitudes toward the activity. By indicating the low mean scores in number 6 (*It is difficult to find things to say about the junior students’ writing if my name is disclosed.*) and number 7 (*It is difficult to find things to say about the junior students’ writing even though it is anonymous.*), it indicates that senior students had no problems making reviews of junior students’ writing in either anonymous or non-anonymous mode. Even though they had no problems doing reviews with their names disclosed or hidden, the results, however; show that senior students preferred to know whose work they were reviewing as evidenced in their responses to number 4 (*I am a better reviewer if I know whose work I am reading.* m = 3.71) and number 5 (*I am a better reviewer if I don’t know whose work I am reading.* m = 3.29).

Junior students from both anonymous and non-anonymous groups had positive attitudes toward the activity and found the senior students’ comments useful. Table 6 shows that the anonymous group indicated a low mean score (m = 3.04) when being asked if they wanted to know the name of the reviewer after receiving comments (no. 9). The non-anonymous group, however, showed a high level of agreement on this point (m = 4.14). This shows that, interestingly, each group preferred their way of receiving reviews.
Table 6
Junior students’ attitudes toward anonymous and non-anonymous activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Anonymous Mean</th>
<th>S. D</th>
<th>Non-anonymous Mean</th>
<th>S. D</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I enjoy receiving the senior students’ comments on my writing.</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>4.36</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I find the senior students’ comments helpful when I revise my writing.</td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>4.36</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. In their comments, the senior students sometimes point out problems with my writing.</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>4.41</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. It is not useful if the senior students say only good things about my writing.</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>4.09</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I sometimes disagree with the senior students’ comments about my writing.</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The senior students’ comments help to make my ideas clearer for the reader.</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. The senior students’ comments help me improve the organization of my writing.</td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. The senior students’ comments help me improve the language of my writing.</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. When I receive comments on my writing, I prefer to know who has written them.</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

The findings from this study have provided some implications for language learning and teaching in Thailand and other EFL learning contexts, in particular for the application of the peer review activity. These implications will be pointed out and discussed below.

Anonymity has led to more constructive responses from junior students

As shown in Table 1 above, most of the unsuccessful corrections in both anonymous and non-anonymous activities were influenced by senior students, either providing ineffective feedback or making changes to the statements which were already correct. When examined further into the responses of junior students to senior students’ reviews in their second drafts, some in an anonymous group were made to react, question back, or challenge the senior students, and these actions were found in the drafts of junior students whose levels of proficiency were advanced or moderate. To exemplify this, Student ‘N’ in Figure 3 below was suggested by a senior student in an anonymous activity to combine two sentences. She challenged the senior student back by asking for the reasons to do so.
Moreover, the advanced junior learners also rejected the comments or feedback made by senior students more often than other students, and many of those rejections have led to successful corrections. The findings in this area confirm the claims made in previous studies regarding the quality of feedback made by student reviewers (Sritrakarn, 2018). The findings have also reflected some implications for the activity. Firstly, the teacher has to ensure that the chosen senior students have the capability to make reviews on junior students’ writing. Even though the average score of the selected senior students was 480, the findings show that the level of proficiency should be higher to reduce the chance to provide ineffective reviews. Secondly, the use of review activity may be suitable to certain groups of junior students whose level of proficiency was either advanced or moderate. For those who were poor students, the writing drafts should be submitted to the teacher to provide feedback or comments as well as to avoid confusion.

**Anonymous review activity influences the senior students to provide more constructive feedback**

From the findings, even though the two kinds of review have led to high frequencies of direct feedback made by senior students, when examined closely, senior students provided a greater number of comments to help the junior student better construct their essays when they were anonymous. When they could be identified, however, they shifted the strategies to provide compliments or support, to question the writers, and to criticize the junior students’ writing more often. This shows that anonymous review activity tended to provide senior students with ‘a comfort zone’ (Waemusa, 2017) in that when they provided feedback anonymously, they may become less worried about offending others (Hosack, 2003). So, they were courageous to take risks to provide direct suggestions when their names were hidden. When they could be identified, however, they avoided the chance to provide wrong comments by asking questions.
or making criticism. In doing so, they allow junior students to take their own risks for correction. Evidence of this could be found in the interview with senior students. Out of seven, two senior students said that they preferred being anonymous, and one of the reasons was that they did not want to lose their face if making wrong comments.

Being a senior student, I have to be careful not to make wrong comments and lose my face. They could laugh at me if my name was disclosed. So, I tried to say less and avoided making direct comments. (Tad-dao)

This finding supports the claim made by scholars in previous studies that Asian learners hold their value of saving face (Raymond & Choon, 2017), so they tend to be compromising and may not want to give comments sincerely for fear that it might cause (them or) their peers to lose face (Kulwongse, 2013; Wanchid, 2015). This reflects the beliefs and attitudes of senior students toward the activity, which could affect the opportunity of junior students in improving their writing. Clear explanations of the goals for learning and exchanging collaboratively should therefore be made at an early stage.

**Training should be organized and activity goals should be negotiated explicitly with senior students.**

As shown in Table 6, even though most of the students had no problems providing feedback either in anonymous or non-anonymous status, they have shown a high level of attitudes (m = 3.71) when being asked about their interest in knowing the names of the writers when making comments (*I am a better reviewer if I know whose work I am reading*). This reflects the uncontrolled curiosity of senior students about the owners of the work. Evidence of this was also demonstrated during the data collection stage when one anonymous-senior student posted the writing drafts of junior students on social media (Facebook) and made complaints about their writing problems. As the number of students in the context of the investigation was about ninety-six from year 1 to 4, it was still a small community. The primary goal for posting the writing drafts was, therefore, to trigger certain students who were also friends on social media and to communicate the feedback directly to the virtual community. By doing this, it reflected that some senior students did not seriously perform their roles of being anonymous, and this could lead to some misunderstanding or offense between the two groups of students.

The findings also imply that training and negotiation of the activity goals should be made at the beginning prior to the data collection. In particular, the concept of ‘deindividuation’ (situations in which individuals in groups stop thinking of other members as individuals and
feel that they cannot be singled out by others- Chen, 2019) should be presented to ensure that students did not take the review activity personally.

Furthermore, during the group interview, some senior students stated that they sometimes wanted to communicate directly to the owner of the work as they needed the clarification of some parts or wanted to explain some issue. Real communication, however, did not seem to happen as junior students submitted their drafts twice, and the activity was ended. Due to anonymity, both groups of students lack the opportunity to discuss the work or explain their points. The finding from this study supports the claim made by previous studies on the limitations of anonymous reviews regarding the lack of ongoing communication. Waemusa (2019), for example, stated that anonymous peer review has a limitation in terms of ongoing communication in that both reviewers and reviewees could not continue communication like that in the face-to-face method. Further study may create a special channel, for example, a Facebook group, where students use their pseudonyms to communicate. Alternatively, the teacher may create a common email address that can be used by both senior and junior students using their pseudonyms and let the students submit the drafts or return the comments without teacher intervention. By allowing students to take control of their own reviewing process, students may be able to manage the schedule and could seek further explanations from senior students. This could thereby promote more ongoing interactions among the two groups of learners.

**Conclusion**

This study investigated the effects of senior students’ reviews in anonymous and non-anonymous modes on the review quality and junior students’ corrections of their writing drafts. The findings from this current study have contributed to previous studies and provided useful implications on the implementation of review activity in the writing classroom. By demonstrating how the nature of anonymity helps to promote more constructive responses from junior students, the findings have also reflected the constructive nature of reviews made by senior students in the same circumstance. Moreover, the attitudes of students (both senior and junior groups) toward the activity also reflect their preferences in terms of learner identity disclosure, which provides implications and raises awareness of the teacher when applying the anonymous and non-anonymous review activity in other writing classrooms.

Some of the findings in this study, however, could be limited to the groups of learners investigated in this context only. Different findings could be informed when applying the same activity in other learning contexts. To confirm the findings from this present study, further
studies could, therefore, be conducted to investigate the effects of anonymity and non-anonymity in different learning contexts. Moreover, as indicated in Table 6 that each group of junior students preferred their individual way of receiving comments. It is important to note here that the two groups of students participated in the consistent mode of review until the end of the semester. These junior students did not have the chance to swap the modes of review to experience receiving reviews in an alternative way. Their attitudes toward the activity could, therefore, be based on a one-sided experience. To enable the more objective findings, junior students should be exposed to both circumstances, followed by the questionnaire distribution to compare their attitudes toward the two modes of activity.
References


Appendix
Interview Protocol

I. Interview questions for senior students

1. Did you find the anonymous and non-anonymous review activities useful?
2. Which of the two review activities did you prefer?
3. If you were not clear about the writing, what did you do?
4. Did you find any obstacles or problems during the two review activities?
5. Would you like to make any comments or suggestions for the implementation of anonymous and non-anonymous review activities in the future?

II. Interview questions for junior students (anonymous group)

1. Did you find the anonymous review activity useful?
2. How did the activity help you improve your writing?
3. If you were not clear about the comments, what did you do?
4. Did you find any obstacles or problems due to the anonymous nature of the review?
5. Would you like to make any comments or suggestions for the implementation of an anonymous review activity in the future?

III. Interview questions for junior students (non-anonymous group)

1. Did you find the non-anonymous review activity useful?
2. How did the activity help you improve your writing?
3. If you were not clear about the comments, what did you do?
4. Did you find any obstacles or problems due to the non-anonymous nature of the review?
5. Would you like to make any comments or suggestions for the implementation of a non-anonymous review activity in the future?