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TEACHER FEEDBACK AND STUDENT FEEDBACK ON WRITING TASKS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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This research aims to investigate if peer feedback is any different from teacher feedback. The study was conducted in a non-profit foundation university with 40 A1 level preparatory school students. Students were given a writing task and afterward, they were asked to give feedback on their peers' papers by using error codes provided by the teacher. At the same time, teachers gave feedback to the same papers by using the same error correction codes. Data were collected by means of a writing task which was supported by written feedback from students and analyzed through a comparative approach. By the end of these sessions, the focus of students and teachers were investigated to find out if they gave importance to the same issues. The results revealed that teachers used more correction codes than the learners and students mostly corrected surface level mistakes and this includes codes regarding language use.

Keywords: Peer feedback, Teacher feedback, Writing feedback, Second language acquisition, Language assessment.

Introduction

In most Turkish non-profit universities, students are expected to be at least B2 level speakers of English to be able to start their majors. However, most of them have a lower level of proficiency. That is why almost all students attend preparatory schools in which extremely intense EFL programs are followed.

However, they only have a year or so to improve their proficiency level both in terms of language use and content in a rather short amount of time. To achieve their goal students need all kinds of comprehensible input and following that an effective form of feedback.

Literature Review

As language acquisition starts with exposure to the language and taking a certain amount of input, it takes quite a long time for students to be ready to produce. After the students have taken enough input and become ready, they cannot produce the language fully accurately. Here, there is a need for help to get them to produce more without surrendering or being demotivated. With the help of feedback, the learners are scaffolded and shown the mistakes on the current work to work on. For the last two decades, many researchers have focused on the issue of giving feedback to promote writing performance in EFL and ESL settings (Diab, 2005; Hyland & Hyland, 2006; Rahimi, 2009; Rollinson, 2005). Therefore, feedback is a highly researched and debated area of the field. It is an undeniable fact that feedback has an important

role in the language acquisition process since it reflects on the current work, which leads to improvement by providing motivation and information on different aspects such as context, vocabulary, grammar and so on. It is also stated by Wang (2006) and mentioned by Klimova (2015) that feedback has a value in the classroom seeing that it reflects the latest performances of learners which have bear significance for improving their future performance. That is the reason why feedback should be an essential element of the assessment process. Regarding the topic of the study, as suggested by Hyland & Hyland (2006), feedback is crucial for the development of second language writing skills. As writing is a productive skill, it requires a great deal of knowledge in the second language in terms of vocabulary, organization, vocabulary and content. This knowledge's not being enough for a flawless production reveals the importance of feedback. As Forrer, Wyant & Smith (2015) argues "Feedback is a proven method of improving student performance. The more feedback received by students, the better the product quality." (p.3). Since feedback provides learners with corrections or highlights of the mistakes in the second language acquisition process, the writings are improved over time. The roots of the issue go way back to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of human learning which states the distance between what is known and what is not known can be reached with the guidance of a more capable person (Vygotsky, 1978). Leaning back to the theory, we set off the way from this point but does that person always have to be more capable? or does that person always have something to contribute regardless of the capability?

There are different views concerning the advantages and disadvantages of peer feedback on writing tasks. Zhang (1995) argues that there may be some concerns such as trust in the capacity of the peer. Similarly, Leki (1991) puts forward some students found their peers' feedback less helpful. However, it seems that some advantages go unnoticed while evaluating the issue. According to Rollinson (2005), peer feedback in writing classes has advantages in that students perceive it as more intimate and friendlier, which is motivating in the end. Related studies disproved the concerns over the capacity of peers (Chaudron, 1984; Lundstrom & Baker, 2009; Penoflorida, 2002). Rollinson (1998) argued that eighty percent of feedbacks given by college students were found valid as the result of investigation and feedbacks were accepted by peers on a large scale. Besides, Caulk (1994) stated that teachers' feedback focuses more on general issues whereas students have a specific orientation on the task. Still, researchers maintain the disadvantages mainly as time restriction, student characteristics and teacher roles (Saito & Fujita, 2004). As well as the drafting process, teaching learners how to give feedback is a time-consuming process as they need training and they need to be taught what constitutes a writing task in general. Characteristics of learners can play a role as not everybody feels comfortable with it. Learners need to be instilled collaborative facet of the issue. When it comes to the teachers, they might feel uncomfortable with giving such responsibility to the learners and additionally training learners for giving feedback can be challenging for them. As we count the advantages and the disadvantages of peer feedback; even though it is time- consuming both for learners and teachers, when provided necessary and adequate training, the process will be beneficial for both sides of the learning continuum.

As the literature above suggests, students need a source of feedback to improve themselves through negotiation. Vygotsky (1978) also says students' development and problem- solving skills are determined by their collaboration with more capable peers or seniors. Incorporate peer reviews and student-teacher conferences are two valuable alternative feedback methods to traditional error correction (Huntley, 1992). It has been already discussed that peer feedback is a good choice to provide and maintain the communication atmosphere of the classroom. However, most students still prefer teacher feedback over peer feedback. According to Zhang's (1995) study, %94 of two universities' ESL students said they choose teacher feedback over peer feedback. Moreover, it has been proved that students pay more attention to teacher feedback more than peer feedback when they were given the option. Tsuiand Ng (2000) observed that the secondary ESL learners in their study used more teacher than peer feedback in their redrafts. The participants of Yang, Badger, and Yu's (2006) study also used more teacher feedback (90%) than peer feedback (76%) in their redrafts in another study, (Zhenc & Badger & Miaoa, 2006) found that teacher feedback had a much more significant effect than peer feedback, with only 5% of peer feedback resulting in changes.

Overall, feedback is viewed as a means of fostering learner motivation and ensuring linguistic accuracy (Ellis, 2009). However, which kind is more effective or more suitable for learner preferences and expectations is another question (Diab, 2005). Another point is the focus of peer feedback and teacher feedback. The feedback provided to students may focus on content or on language use and grammar.

It is believed that the L2 learner's knowledge of grammar would improve when the class activities are performed by means of communication. Therefore, the teacher's feedback basically focuses on the content and the meaning instead of language use and structures. (Cook, 1991; Dulay, Burt, & Krashen, 1982; Goldschneider & Dekeyser, 2001; Schwartz, 1993; Rahimi, M, 2009). On the other hand, learners believe that meaningful feedback must focus on the structures as they pay attention to surface errors more than contextual errors (Diab, 2005). What is more, Radecki and Swales (1988) suggested in their study that if teachers don't correct each and every surface mistake of students, they may lose their accountability among their students.

All these facts and controversies that are discussed led us to think whether there is any difference between peer feedback and teacher feedback? The present study therefore, aims to bring about the differences emerged in feedbacks' of students and teachers by focusing on which aspects of language take their attention more during the correction process. To meet these objectives, the following research questions were addressed:

1. Which correction codes prepared for assessing writing tasks are used more frequently by the learners and the teachers?
2. Are there any differences between students' and teachers' feedback on the writing tasks in terms of language use and content?
3. What are the perceptions of students about peer feedback on writing tasks?

Methodology

1. Research Design

This present study adopts a mixed methods research design in which both quantitative and qualitative data are collected for data analysis. A Quantitative manner helps us to reach the numerical data while the qualitative manner that we follow helps us to get an in-depth understanding of the issue in question (Creswell, 2003).

2. Participants and Setting

The participants of the study were selected depending upon convenience sampling, one of the techniques of non-probability sampling. The data were collected from 38 multicultural preparatory school students of a Turkish non-profit foundation university in Istanbul, Turkey. The age range of the students varied between 17-24 years. The international students were mostly from Arabic countries such as the United Arab Emirates, Syria, Iraq, Iran and so on. Their background knowledge of English was limited to the daily use of English, which they developed during the survival process in a different country, Turkey. They lacked in writing skills especially in spelling and punctuation, which stems from the difference between the alphabet; Arabic that they use in their mother tongue and the Latin alphabet in the target language, English.

The preparatory school program consists of intense English lessons. An academic year is divided into four modules each of which lasts about 2 months and is dedicated to one level.

The participants of the study were in the first module of the preparatory school program and their levels were A1 according to Common European Framework (CEF). Every week, students take 25 classes of English. The course book is Face to Face, Elementary level book by Cambridge University Press.

The students had a writing task every week during a two-month long module. Each week, they were asked to write a paragraph, as their first draft, on a given topic related to that week's objectives in a class hour. They were not allowed to use additional sources but hard copy dictionaries. When they finished their first draft, their teachers gave detailed feedback on each students' first draft by means of "Error Correction Codes" document which was formed by the university (Appendix A). Teacher's feedback focused not only on students' use of the target language but also on the content, vocabulary and organization they provided on the papers. Once students got their first draft, they were asked to work on it by referring to the error codes and hand in the final draft the next day upon correction. When teachers got the final draft from each student, they graded papers by checking if students reflected on the feedback and corrected the mistakes and leaving additional feedback if needed. In the end, each student got a score from 1 to 5. Students' final score was given in accordance with a rubric (Appendix B) which was also provided by the testing unit of the university.

Even though the students were used to the setting of writing tasks, they have never received feedback from their peers. Thus, teachers had to give students an insight into peer feedback. They were also informed in detail about the error correction codes and how to use them.

3. Data Collection Procedure

Students were given a topic which was ''Write about your last summer holiday''. They had one class hour which lasted 45 minutes. On the writing paper (Appendix C), there were some prompts in the form of Wh- questions which required them to form a paragraph by answering those questions. The following class time was used for the peer check session. Students swapped their writing papers with their desk mates and underlined the mistakes by writing the error codes related to each mistake. After this language use focused feedback, they were asked to note down some comments below the writings. Afterwards, students were asked to reflect on this peer check session. They were required to write about the difficulties and eases they faced and also the emotions they had. Once the peer check session and the reflection session ended, the teacher checked the papers by referring to the same error correction codes and provided some written feedback on the papers.

4. Data Analysis

Data analysis was begun with the analysis of the quantitative data. With what we obtained from the writing papers through error correction codes (See Appendix A) both from students and instructors, the papers were read horizontally by three different researchers to improve the inter-rater reliability of the data analysis. As the codes emerged, frequencies were counted by the researchers and the total number for each code was calculated. The analysis was done to find out the differences of each feedback type's focus in terms of language use, organization and content and the main focus of the teacher's and students' feedbacks. As a result of the comparative analysis, frequency tables showing students' and teachers' use of error correction codes was displayed.

Analysis of qualitative data was followed after quantitative data to reach students' thoughts with the help of the reflection session. Students were directed a guided-question, and this question helps us to formulate our categories. After reading and rereading the students' reflection papers horizontally, sub-categories were emerged and presented in tables with examples.

Results

1. Results of Quantitative Data

After writing papers assessed by teachers and learners were collected, the frequencies of use of error correction codes were calculated. The Numbers are stated in Table 1 below.

Table 1. The number of error correction codes in the writing papers

	Frequency (f)	Percentages (%)
Teachers	656	69.4
Learners	288	30.5
Total	944	100

According to the findings, 944 error correction codes were founded on 38 different writing papers. 656 of them were coded by teachers while 288 were coded by learners. These results basically suggest that teachers gave more corrective feedback with the use of error correction codes than learners did.

With 20 error correction codes, learners and teachers evaluated writing papers. Table 2 states the frequency of use of error correction codes by learners and teachers.

Table 2. The use of each error correction code by teachers and learners

	Frequencies of Error Correction Codes Used by Teachers	Frequencies of Error Correction Codes Used by Learners
Mech	151	68
NN	110	35
∧	100	33
SP	84	63
WW	44	21
Tense	30	21
Pl /Sg	24	4
WWF	21	3
Prep	21	6
???	17	8
Art	14	3
NSENT	10	13
SVA	8	-
WO	7	3
Pron	6	3
Rep	4	6
Verb	2	2
Irr	2	1
NPARAG	1	-
Reg	-	1

According to the table above, learners and teachers found mistakes concerning mechanics (Mech) most. Additionally, it seems unnecessary words (NN), missing words (∧), spelling mistakes (SP), wrong words (WW), tenses (Tense) and the need for a new sentence (NSENT) have drawn almost equal amount of attention by both learners and teachers when their total number of coding was taken into account. However, some areas of mistakes such as plurality and singularity (Pl/Sg), wrong word forms (WWF), preposition mistakes (Prep), articles (Art) and vague language (???) have been emphasized by teachers more. Lastly, two error correction codes were not used by learners; these are the need for a new paragraph (NPARAG) and subject-verb agreement (SVA).

To be able to answer the second research question of the current paper, we have divided error correction codes into two categories as error correction codes regarding language use and error correction codes regarding context. At this point, it is important to note that two error correction codes have been placed under both categories since they function in both ways while evaluating the issue in question. This categorization can be found in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Categorization of Error Correction Codes

Error Correction Codes Regarding Language Use	Art, Pl/Sg, Prep, Pron, SP, Tense, Verb, WW, WWF,NN, WO, SVA, ???, Mech, ∧
Error Correction Codes Regarding Context	Irr, Reg, NSENT, NPARAG, Rep, Art, WW

Depending on the categorization of error correction codes, the frequencies were calculated from both learners' and teachers' side to discover how much attention was given to language use and context in writing papers. Here, we need to state that frequencies concerning mistakes related to both language use and context (Art, WW) have been also stated as numbers in the individual categories as language use and context. Findings have been tabularized in Table 4 below.

Table 4. *Coding frequencies and percentages on the categorization of error correction codes*

	Teachers		Leaners	
	Frequency (f)	Percentages (%)	Frequency (f)	Percentages (%)
Language Use	639	97.4	267	92.7
Context	75	11.4	45	15.6
Language Use and Context	58	8.8	24	8.3

Findings have shown that learners and teachers focused on language use more while giving feedbacks to the writing papers, the contexts took less attention. When the percentages of giving context-based feedbacks are taken into consideration, it is seen that learners provided more context-based codes,the suitability of which for the mistakes can be discussed. For codes including both language use and context, teachers marked such codes more than learners do. However, we could not find any significant differences in any percentages amongst the three categories. Whether learners used correct codes for mistakes or not and the possible explanations for the emergent frequencies in Table 1, 2 and 3 will be discussed in the following parts of this research paper.

2. Results of Qualitative Data

To support the findings of the peer check task and students' reflection on the task, an interview was conducted with participants. 15 participants reflected on the peer check task by answering three questions and the following themes emerged. The themes are going to be stated question by question below.

Question 1: How was the peer check task? (Difficult, easy, challenging…) Why?

Almost all the students except for the two of them agreed that the peer check task was difficult for them. As the reason of the difficulties faced in the task these 3 themes emerged:

Q1.a. Detecting the mistakes

Students stated that they could not detect the mistakes on their own even though they had the error codes document. It can be inferred from the students' statements below:

> *S6: 'It was difficult because I could not see the mistakes.'*

> *S14: 'I did not know the answers are true or false so it was difficult.'*

Q1.b. Students' handwritings' legibility

The Second theme was a result of students' bad handwriting skills. Since the Arabic students' L1 uses a different alphabet, they have difficulty in writing properly in English. This affects spelling and the meaning as well. As students said:

> *S5: 'It was difficult because the writing is bad.'*

> *S8: 'It was a very difficult work because I did not understand what he wrote.'*

Q1.c. Finding the appropriate error code

The theme stemmed from the students' struggle with the error correction codes. They had difficulty in relating the mistakes to the appropriate error codes.

> *S12: 'It was difficult for me because I could not find the error code.'*

Question 2: How did you feel during the task? Why?

Majority of the students felt bad and nervous during the peer check task. The themes emerged are as follows:

Q2.a. Lack of knowledge and experience

Students expressed their lack of knowledge and experience in both language use and the task itself. They clearly stated this issue as:

> *S10: 'I felt nervous because I was not ready.'*

> *S14: 'I felt bad because I thought I did not know anything.*

> *S15: 'I felt nervous because I am a student and I cannot decide if the answer is correct or not.'*

Q2.b. Learning from the mistakes

Students stated that they felt good during the task since they could ask their teachers about the mistakes and codes which led them to learn from their mistakes.

> *S6: 'I could ask the teacher and I learned my errors.'*

> *S14: 'Because when I did not understand I asked to my teacher.'*

Q2.c. Finding the task usual

Few students felt neither good nor bad. As a reason, they stated that the peer check task was no different than other tasks they carry out in the module.

> *S1: 'I am normal because this is a normal paragraph.'*

> *S5: 'I felt normal because it is a normal activity.'*

Question 3: Would you like to do it again? Why? Why not?

More than half of the students stated that they would not want to do a peer check task again. The following themes emerged:

Q3.a.The difficulty of the task

Some students indicated that one of the reasons why they would not like to do the peer check task again was the difficulty of the tasks. As they mentioned in the answers to previous questions, they had a hard time completing the task. Some extracts from the students' reflections are as follows:

> *S5: 'No because I could not find mistakes.'*
>
> *S7: 'No because it was difficult and risky.'*
>
> *S12: 'I would not because it was complicated for me.'*

Q3.b. Finding the task boring

As can be seen in the extract below, another reason why students would not like to do the task again was their feeling bored.

> S2: 'No because it was boring to do it.'

The possible explanations for the emergent themes will be discussed in the following parts of this research paper.

Discussion

1. Quantitative Data

After the analysis of quantitative data, findings have provided answers to our research questions. Once the frequencies of error correction codes emerged, it was seen that teachers responded to the errors more than learners did. Such a result was expected and the reasons for it were attributed to three different factors. The first reason lies in the language levels of the students, students were not proficient enough to decide on the errors since they were likely to make similar errors. Therefore, some errors may have been gone unnoticed during the feedback procedure. Depending on this possibility, we assume that some encounters may not have been received any improvement as Vygotsky (1978) stated that the Zone of Proximal Development functions with the guidance of a more capable person. The second reason can be a lack of experience. Students faced this task for the first time and because of the duration of the lesson; they may have had difficulty in arranging the time as to the task type. As it has been suggested by previous studies, time constraints can be a disadvantage (Saito & Fujita, 2004; Rollinson, 1998). The third and the last factor affecting the low frequency of the learners can be attributed to a lack of pre-training. According to Rollinson (1998), to reach effective outcomes in peer feedback, there are some techniques to get learners ready before and he has specified three objectives of pre-training; peer feedback helps students to raise their awareness and makes them realize that the procedure is productive in terms of interaction, response and revision.

When the codes given by learners and teachers were specifically examined, it was seen that learners corrected what is more obvious on the writing papers and what their English levels include while teachers dealt with mistakes requiring a higher level. This result showed similarities with what Paulus (1999) suggested as learners focused on the surface level. Also, such a finding led us to go back to early SLA studies. According to Brown (1973), there is an order of acquisition of grammatical morphemes.

Accordingly, we realized that our findings showed consistency with the order. Additionally, the frequencies of corrections by students are related to what they were instructed on writing papers before. Thus, their past experience in writing feedback had an impact on their role as editor.

As we stated earlier in the paper, the codes were divided into three as codes regarding language use, context, and language use and context. Findings suggested that the most frequently used codes were those concerning language used by both learners and teachers. The reason for this can be attributed to learners' current level of English. Codes regarding context gained less attention by both sides as to be able to focus on the general in skills may require experience and proficiency. Even though learners' and teachers' percentages for context-based corrections seem close, it has been found that learners could not use the correct code for the mistake many times. From teachers' side, the reason for the low percentage may have resulted from their main focus on language use while assessing the writing papers. However, this result showed consistency with Pearson (2018). He put forward that corrections for grammatical accuracy and lexical resource are taken more attention than coherence and cohesion. Finally, codes regarding both language use and context were used more by the teachers but the percentage difference is not much in the table. The reason for the minor difference is inaccurately coded papers by the students. We as researchers believe that the difference should have been more. However, this minor difference did not change the explanation behind what is seen. Detecting mistakes related to articles and wrong words require more competence and the ability to catch context while comprehending the language.

2. Qualitative Data

As it is stated and discussed in the previous parts of this paper, the feedback has great importance for students. Huntley (1992) suggests that peer feedback is one valuable way to provide students with feedback. However, interview results showed that the majority of participants found peer feedback activity difficult and as Zhang (1995) and Leki (1991) suggested, less helpful.

The challenge that students faced stemmed from various factors. Their lack of experience in giving feedback is one of them. The fact that participants didn't know the activity's concept caused them to feel nervous and insecure. If students would benefit more from this peer feedback activity with proper training and practice or not is still a dilemma. It was also stated that they lacked the knowledge to correct their peers' mistakes by using the right error correction codes which also created anxiety. Even though students expressed their feelings as mentioned above, they also mentioned their relief they felt once their teacher helped them out with spotting the mistakes and deciding on the codes.

Most of these problems about the task resulted from students' lack of readiness and their mental state. As some of the students suggested, they felt better once their teacher helped them out with the codes, which led us to think that students could perform better with collaboration. Supporting this thought, Vygotsky (1978) also discussed that students' problem-solving skills are determined by their collaboration with more capable peers or seniors. Vygotsky's statement could be adapted to this study and the form of activity could be changed. Students could be paired up with a pair who has relatively more information on the task in hand. By doing so, support could be provided and student performance would be boosted up.

The last point to be discussed regarding the interview results is the problem of students' handwriting legibility. As it was stated earlier, the main reason for this problem is students' L1 and their different choice of the alphabet. Most international students find it hard to write properly and that makes it harder to read and give feedback to their papers. This problem can be solved simply by asking students to bring a laptop or an iPad to the class on task days and to type on their computers.

Conclusion

The present study focused on the feedback of twenty students' and two teachers' feedback on writings. In accordance with past studies on EFL learners' writing, the results of this study indicate that teachers focus

on the mistakes within the text and underline every single mistake. However, students can detect a few mistakes and try to jot down kind comments below the paragraphs. Since the students were asked to give feedback to their friends, those unprofessional comments, which are not focusing on the mistakes, can be the results of the students' fear of harming the relationship among them and their friends. When the students' feedback on the peer check session is taken into consideration, it can be said that most of the students do not like to face their weaknesses and lacks which results in boredom of the students so, a decrease in the quality of the feedback sessions. The qualitative part of this study clearly showed that students need more practice with the error codes and in writing. When it comes to the quantitative part, the research suggested that teachers used more correction codes than the learners and students mostly corrected surface level mistakes and this includes codes regarding language use. The orientation of teachers was different in that they focused on language use and content more.

On the other hand, there were some limitations to the study. The first limitation was quite small in quantity but very big in terms of its effect on the study. Since it was an intensive English program, there were a few classes that were dedicated to peer check sessions. That was the reason why students had quite many difficulties. For further studies, students could be given more opportunities to practice both writing and the peer check task with the error codes. Secondly, the study was a small scale study. It was limited to only 20 A1 students, so for further studies, to include different levels and more students would be a suggestion.

Implications

From the results of the study, there are some implications to improve feedback sessions for writing in EFL classrooms. It is a fact that both in peer feedback and teacher feedback, students' understanding of the error codes and the mistakes is rather important for a better quality feedback session. Mainly, if the students know what the error codes mean and what the mistakes are, it is easier for them to learn from their mistakes and develop themselves in writing. In the frame of this finding, the first suggestion would be on the frequency of peer feedback sessions. As students had difficulty in detecting the mistakes and identifying them with the proper error codes, the number of the classes which are dedicated to peer check and feedback sessions can be increased and those classes could be done on a regular basis. As a second suggestion to the same issue would be having more classes for writing. Judging by the students' English proficiency level which is A1 and their lack of practice in writing, they had several mistakes regarding the language use, word order, mechanics and etc, so it can be good to give them more opportunities to practice writing. Another issue is the focus of feedback in writings. Judging by the findings, it can be said that there is more focus on specific mistakes within the text, which neglects the context of the writing. A possible implication suggestion would be to give importance to the context as a whole as well.

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