

The Incorporation of Peers' Correction Technique in the Classroom to Improve Writing Skill

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Abstract

Writing academic papers, dissertations or compositions in English is still a challenging task for most EFL students. Although many students work harder to produce good essays or compositions, they still need to make much effort to avoid making errors and/or mistakes. To overcome this sort of problems and to improve EFL students' writing skill, most EFL teachers of written expression module encourage their students to make small groups with their peers in the classroom to read their homework or essays, to collaborate, to learn from each other and then to correct their mistakes together. To this end, the aim of this study is to investigate EFL students' attitudes and views towards peers' correction technique as well as its effectiveness. To collect relevant data and investigate the importance of using peers' correction in the classroom, a triangulation method was employed: a teachers' interview, a questionnaire for second year licence EFL students and a class observation. The participants of this research study were forty two students of second year licence and 2 teachers of written expression module. The findings showed that students had positive attitudes towards peers' correction. Moreover, they were interested in incorporating peers' correction technique in the classroom because they saw it had a positive impact on enhancing their writing skills and learning process.

Keywords: EFL teachers, learners' attitudes, peer's correction, writing skill.

ملخص:

كتابة المقالات أو الأطروحات باللغة الإنجليزية لا تزال مهمة صعبة بالنسبة لمعظم الطلاب بالرغم من أن العديد منهم يعملون بجد لتحسين مستواهم في الكتابة إلا أنهم لا يزالون بحاجة إلى بذل الكثير من الجهد لتجنب ارتكاب الأخطاء. للتغلب على هذا النوع من المشاكل وتحسين مهارة الكتابة لطلاب اللغة الإنجليزية يشجع معظم معلمي التخصص على العمل بالافواج داخل القسم لقراءة انشاءاتهم الكتابية وتصحيح أخطائهم معا قصد التعلم من بعضهم البعض. وبالتالي فإن هدف هذه الورقة البحثية هو دراسة آراء طلاب قسم اللغة الانجليزية بجامعة الدكتور مولاي الطاهر (سعيدة) ولجمع البيانات اللازمة استخداما للمقابلة والاستبيان والملاحظة. شارك في هذه الدراسة البحثية اثنان وأربعون طالبا من السنة الثانية و استاذين من قسم اللغة الانجليزية (مادة التعبير الكتابي) وأظهرت النتائج أن هذه الطريقة لها تأثيرا إيجابيا على تعزيز مهارات طلبة اللغة الانجليزية في الكتابة وعملية التعلم. الكلمات المفتاحية: اساتذة اللغة الانجليزية، ومواقف المتعلمين، وتصحيحا لزملاء، ومهارة الكتابة.

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1. Introduction

With the shift in methods from the Grammar Translation Method to Communicative Language Teaching, teachers' role as feedback providers has also changed. In the early methods of language teaching, the teacher was considered to be the sole source of knowledge. Therefore, he/she was the only one responsible for correcting students' mistakes. However, recent methods and approaches have insisted on learners' cognition and autonomy. With such a change, a student-oriented technique such as peer correction has come up. The latter is involved in classrooms to enhance learner autonomy, cooperation, interaction, and involvement. Moreover, it may bring about a significant improvement in students' writing skills. Correcting mistakes by mates does not only enable EFL students to be more aware of their peers' mistakes, but it also promotes their level in academic writing. Hence, their motivation is expected to increase when they correct themselves away from their teachers. In this enquiry, we investigate to what extent peer correction has an impact on reducing students' mistakes, and what changes in their attitudes towards this technique are? To this end, the research was guided by the following research questions:

1. How can peer correction help EFL learners of Dr MoulayTahar University develop their writing abilities?
2. How do EFL students of Dr MoulayTahar University react to the use of peer correction?

Based on the questions mentioned above, we hypothesize that:

- 1/ When teachers initiate activities then they urge their students to work on them cooperatively and collaboratively, they enhance the opportunity to learn in a stress-free environment, this process leads to a higher level of motivation and achievement among students.
- 2/ The discussion of ideas between peers improves their oral fluency and learning process.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Peer Correction: An Overview

Writing is one of the most important skills in learning a new language; it is one of the most important skills in learning a new language; it is considered a challenging activity for most language learners because it is a combination of thinking and productive processes. It represents ideas in a structured way according to the conventions of language: grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and punctuation. Writing is the primary basis upon which students' learning process is evaluated. Although teachers have a strong desire to respond to students individually, the task is difficult and more complex especially in giving feedback to students due to time constraints. Henceforth, involving students in reviewing their peers is an effective method to improve their writings taking into consideration the process of writing with all its stages: prewriting, drafting, revising, proofreading and publishing that allows them to write good and complex compositions, rather than writing as a product that focuses on the final version (Whit & Arndt, 1991).

Peer correction can also be called peer review, peer evaluation or peer feedback. It is the process of "*integrated activities*" in which students are socially involved in "*responding to each other's writing*". In doing so, students as evaluators use different forms of evaluation generally set by the instructor and give feedback according to the given criteria about their peers' writing for further improvement (Johnson & Roan, 1989). This peer evaluation process calls for some interactive skills "reading, writing, speaking, listening, and thinking in which students are set in real communicative context to perform the language. Peer correction has many forms; it can be a small group response where students receive feedback from "a supportive audience", a pair response, in which two students exchange their writing and feedback with each other, or a whole group response, when all members of a group provide feedback to one student. From this idea, students are not only expected to develop their writing abilities but they are also able to correct their peers' mistakes and provide them with constructive comments. According to Rollinson (2005), the principles behind applying peer correction are:

1. Peer feedback is less threatening than teachers' feedback because students are more comfortable with their classmates and therefore, getting corrected by friends evokes less anxiety. In this way, students can gain confidence since they express and negotiate their ideas freely.
2. When correction comes from the teacher, it reinforces the teacher's authority. In a traditional language class, the teacher is an authoritative figure and he/she is considered to be the sole source of knowledge. Students play the role of just passive receivers of information. However, with the practice of peer feedback, the classroom becomes less dominated by the teacher.
3. The involvement of peers in the correction process makes the classroom atmosphere more supportive.
4. It helps students to be less dependent on the teacher.
5. It reduces students' writing anxiety, promotes their motivation and self-esteem, and increases their willingness to try new tasks.
6. Peer correction may create a suitable atmosphere in the classroom where some affective variables are found to help students develop their academic level and improve their writing process.

2.1.1. Benefits of Peer Correction

When students write for the teacher who is regarded as a limited audience, they do not experiment with different writing styles, they write to fulfil the expectations of the teacher and therefore, their writings are often bored (Pianko & Radzik, 1980). However, peer correction allows students to write for a variety of persons. When they write for a wider audience, they develop a greater awareness of the complexity of writing and they need to develop their thoughts (Pianko & Radzik, 1980). Peer correction reinforces the writer's obligation not just to express ideas but also to communicate meaningfully (Cooper, 1986). Another benefit of peer correction is developing confidence in detecting others' errors. Correcting and evaluating other papers helps students to be more critical (Pasternak, 1981). Students enjoy the opportunity to criticize peers' papers, they appreciate working together,

and thus, they value the response from their peers and consider their judgment to be accurate (Pianko&Radzik, 1980).

2.1.2. Cooperative Learning

This refers to working together to accomplish shared goals. The term cooperative learning refers to students working in teams on an assignment under conditions in which certain criteria are required. Within cooperative situations, students seek outcomes that are beneficial to themselves and the whole group. Hence, cooperative learning is the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to develop their own and each other's learning. It may be contrasted with competitive learning (students work against each other to achieve an academic goal). In the ideal classroom, all students would learn how to work cooperatively with others, compete for fun and enjoyment, and work autonomously (Olsen 1Kagar, 1992).

The success of cooperative learning depends on the nature and organization of group work. This requires a structured and careful designed program of learning so that learners interact with each other and are motivated to increase each other's learning. Olsen andKagar (1992) proposed five elementsof successful group-based learning in cooperative learning. Yet, in the current paper, we shed light on the most important element which is "positive interdependence"; it occurs when group members feel that what help one member will servethe entire group through cooperative learning tasks that build a spirit of mutual support within the group.When cooperative learning takes place, learners are involved in many metacognitive strategies either directly or indirectly such as: explaining, negotiating, and arguing. If cooperative learning is well planned, students become responsible for their learning and group learning too, this makes all learners autonomous. Cooperative learning produces greater achievement than traditional learning methodologies. According to Hymes (2007), using cooperative group activities would help students achieve their academic goals because they are involved in "comprehensible output" and at the same time receiving "comprehensible input". Moreover, cooperative learning has other social benefits, it provides respect for others and cooperation between students. Furthermore, it promotes linking and strengthens relations among students regardless of their multiple intelligences, thinking abilities, gender and social class.

2.1.3. Autonomy

Learner's autonomy in EFL classrooms is a supportive variable that increases proficiency in the target language and develops long-term learning. The learner is expected to be involved in the learning process, and to participate in it effectively by operating and using his competencies and efforts.Dicknson(1999) suggested that "autonomy is a situation in which the learner is responsible for all the decisions related to his learning" (p. 5).

3. Methods and Materials

The investigation aimed at studying the effectiveness of peer correction techniques as an alternative way to improve students' writing skills. To ensure that, we employed a triangulation method with three research instruments: classroom observation teacher's interview and students' questionnaire. At the end of the whole process, we gathered the data which was interpreted and analysed to obtain general conclusions.

Participants

The current study addressed forty-two EFL students (second year) and two teachers from Dr MoulayTahar University of Saida at the level of the English Department. We purposefully selected second-year students because they study the module only in the first and second year; they know about it and they help each other.

Research Instruments

To carry out this research, we implemented three research tools: classroom observation to notice how peer correction can take place in an English written course. Teacher's interview to investigate EFL teachers' opinions about the integration of peer correction in their classes and its effectiveness, in addition to students' questionnaire to examine their attitudes when they are correctors or they receive correction from their peers.

Research Procedures

The study was conducted at the English department of DrMoulayTaher University because we observed that foreign language learners express themselves freely with their friends rather than with their teachers. To this end, we selected the appropriate research instruments that fit the objectives of the study. The first step was attending written expression sessions with the selected level (second year). Then, we designed students' questionnaires and teachers' interviews to address the targeted population. After gathering the data, interpreting and analyzing all the information obtained we made general conclusions about EFL learners' attitudes towards peer correction technique.

4. Results**4.1. Classroom Observation**

We implemented the observation to gather the primary data about the implementation of peer correction. The information collected was related to the attitudes and perceptions of the participants towards this teaching and learning technique. During this phase, we focused on the interaction between the teacher and students as well as the interaction between students and peers.

4.1.1. Interaction between the Teacher and Students

We observed that the teacher gave clear instructions. In this way, students were able to understand everything that she said. We also noticed that while students were working together, the teacher kept control over her class; by doing so, students havecreated a positive environment where both the teaching and learning processes occur. We also noticedthat from time to time the teacher gave feedback to her students; students seemed to interact with the teacher and feel comfortable.

4.1.2. Interaction between Students and Peers

We noticed that students were encouraged to work with their peers and involved in their learning process. When students were working in pairs, most of them seemed to be comfortable in correcting and being corrected by their mates. They were orally making suggestions to their peers, giving comments and ideas.

4.2. Teachers' Interview

Teachers' interviewsaimed atexploring teachers' points of viewabout the integration of peer correction in their classes. The results of the interview revealed that

EFL teachers of Saida University implement cooperative learning activities to correct students' mistakes, such as peer correction which is an effective learning strategy that helps EFL students improve their writing skills and creates a suitable learning atmosphere that reduces students' speaking anxiety. On the whole, peer correction has positive effects on the learning process.

4.3. Questionnaire

The questionnaire addressed second-year licence EFL students; it is divided into two main sections: the first one was about learners' attitudes and perceptions and the second one was related to the effectiveness of peer correction. Additionally, we implemented a focus group because students were numerous.

Among the questions we have asked our participants, we have selected the following items:

Table 1. *Number of returned and non-returned questionnaires*

Questionnaire	Questionnaire	Percentage
Number of returned questionnaire	42	90,47%
Number of non-returned questionnaire	04	9,52%
Total	46	100%

Question one: Do you appreciate the process of correcting your writings by your peers?

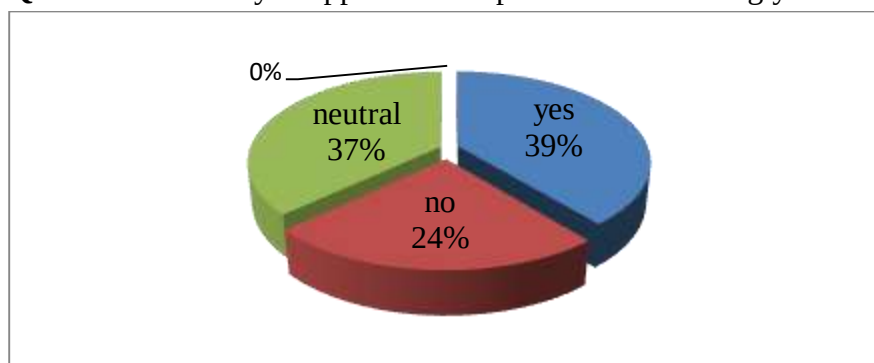


Figure 1. Students' opinions when their friends correct their writings

In response to question one: Do you appreciate the process of correcting your writings by your peers? 39% of the informants appreciate the process of being corrected by their mates; on the other hand, 24% showed the opposite and 37% had a neutral opinion.

Question two: do you prefer teacher's correction or peer's correction?

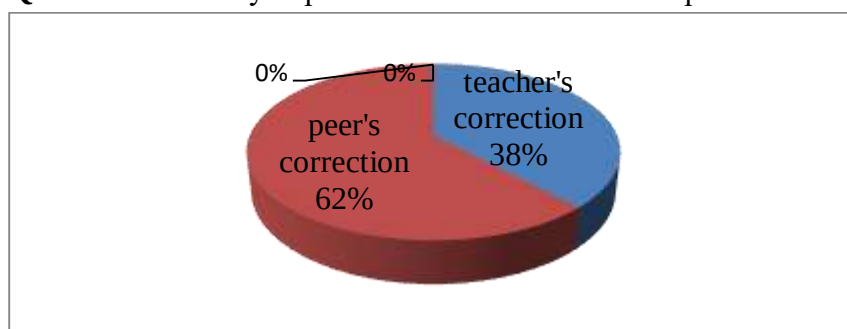


Figure 2. Comparison between teacher's correction and peer's correction

Figure two demonstrates that the largest proportion of the participants in this research prefers peer's correction rather than teacher's correction, to be more accurate 62% and 38% respectively.

Question three: do you see that peer correction enhances autonomy among EFL learners?

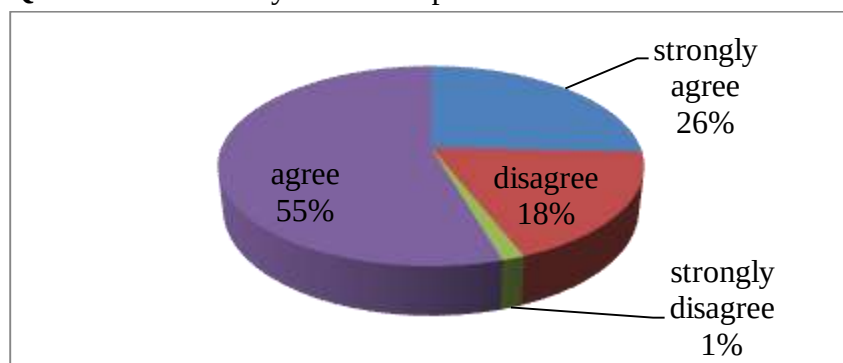


Figure 3. Enhancing learners' autonomy through peer correction

The third figure presents information about the impact of peer's correction on EFL students' autonomy. It shows that a large fraction, particularly 55% see that peer's correction enhance autonomy among EFL students and 26% agreed. However, 18% disagreed and 1% strongly disagreed.

Question four: when you correct your friends' writing mistakes, do you feel that you are improving your writing abilities?

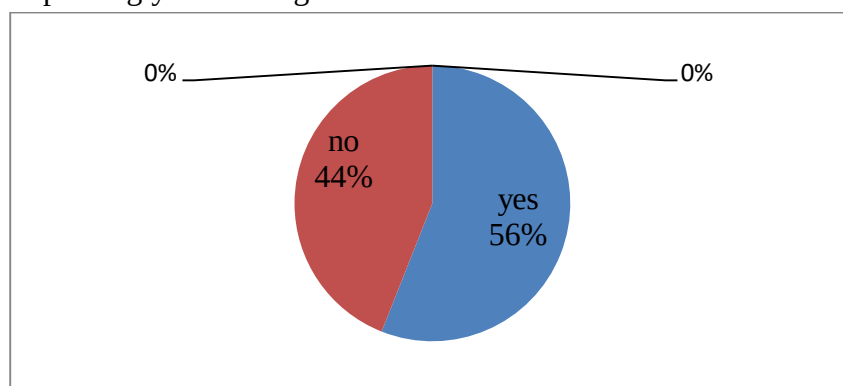


Figure 4. The improvement of students' writing process from their peers' mistakes

Peer's correction contributes to improving EFL students writing skills, in this regard, the fourth figure demonstrates that 56% of the informants see that peer's correction has a positive impact on improving their writing abilities and 44% disagreed

5. Discussion

The main concern of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of the peers' correction technique at Dr. MoulayTaher University of Saida. Based on the research instruments, we reached a set of results summarized along these lines.

Attitudes towards peers' correction were positive; 39% of students don't have a problem when their receive correction from their peers however, students tended to feel more positive when they correct their friends' writing. On the other hand, 62% prefer peer correction rather than teacher's correction (38%) because it enhances students' autonomy for 55% of our informants and improves their writings (56%).

These results are similar to the previous studies mentioned in the section above in terms of the significance of the incorporation of peer correction in foreign language

classes because it develops the four language skills simultaneously (speaking, reading, writing and listening) through effective conversations among learners.

To conclude, when the teaching and learning processes shift from a teacher-centred approach to a learner-centred approach, the whole environment becomes more enjoyable, interesting and significant, moreover, students' motivation is raised.

6. Pedagogical Implications

Peer correction can have important pedagogical implications because exchanging feedback in the form of negotiation can be an enabling activity for EFL learners to improve their critical thinking abilities which are not restricted only to the writing skill but also speaking, listening and reading. Besides, it is a variable alternative to teacher-centred classes, particularly with overcrowded classes.

7. Conclusion

The general conclusions that can be drawn from the findings based on the research instruments can be summarized in the following lines. The attitudes of participants are quite similar when they were correctors or were corrected by others. Hence, students are more willing to be involved in the process of learning from others and being a source of knowledge for their mates. Concerning students' attitudes towards this technique, the results of the study showed a positive change in the subjects of attitudes towards using peer correction in their writing compositions. Learners believe that to improve their writing skills, it is necessary to receive feedback from their peers since correcting errors collaboratively is more motivating rather than noting down correct forms from the teacher. To conclude, peer correction is important in English written courses. It helps students become accountable for their learning and encourages them to work on their weaknesses, moreover, it helps them reflect on their writing skills. Therefore, peer correction is of great importance in the writing process because students value the opportunity of sharing knowledge, comprehension, and correction.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Teachers' Interview

Dear teacher,

Would you please answer some questions about the implementation of peer correction in written expression classes?

Section one: General information about teaching written expression module

- 1- Which approach in teaching the writing skill?
 Grammar translation method
 Direct method
 Communicative language teaching
- 2- How would you evaluate your students' writing level?
- 3- Do you think that collaborative work is useful in teaching writing skills?
- 4- Do you think that learners improve their writing abilities when they exchange ideas?

Section two: teacher's viewpoint about sig peer correction

- 5- Do you use peer correction as a teaching technique? Would you please justify?
- 6- In your opinion, how can peer correction help EFL learners develop their writings?
- 7- What attitudes do you usually observe in students towards the use of peer correction?
- 8- Do you see that peer correction creates a suitable learning atmosphere in the written expression module?

AppendixB

Students' Questionnaire

Dear respondents,

You are kindly requested to fill out the present questionnaire that serves as a data-gathering tool to collect the information needed in our research entitled "The Incorporation of Peers' Correction Technique in the Classroom to Improve Writing Skill". To reach our goal we would be pleased to help us get the appropriate responses to our suggested questions. Your answers will be kept strictly confidential and the given information will be used for academic purposes. Your contribution is highly appreciated.

Section one: EFL students' attitudes towards peer correction

1- How do you feel when you correct your classmate's writings?

Excited confident ensure

2- How would you feel when your classmates correct your writing?

Interested worried bored ensure

3- Is it hard for you to notice your errors?

Yes no

Section two: the effectiveness of peer correction

4- Do you appreciate the process of correcting your writings by your peers?

Yes no neutral

5- Do you prefer teacher's correction or peer's correction?

Teacher's correction peer's correction

6- Do you see that peer correction enhances autonomy among EFL learners?

Strongly agree strongly disagree disagree

7- When you correct your friends' writing mistakes, do you feel that you are improving your writing abilities?

Yes no

8- Do you see that peer correction strengthens your relationship with your classmates?

9- Yes no