STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ABOUT PEER FEEDBACK FOR WRITING: THEIR EFFECT ON REVISED TEXTS

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Abstract

In EFL writing classes, peer feedback has attracted much attention from researchers. The collaborative learning theory designates that peer feedback promotes learning and improves writing skills (Hu & Lam, 2010). The present study aims to investigate Turkish EFL students' perceptions of peer feedback in their writing classes and the effect of peer-feedback in their writing development. The data in this study was conducted from students who study at an English language teaching department in a private university in Turkey. The initial part of the data was collected through pre-questionnaire and post-questionnaire to delve into any change in students' perceptions about peer-feedback. With regard to the second part, students' essays written before and after the treatment were scored by the researcher and a second rater to see the impact of peer-feedback. The results indicated improvement in students' second drafts after receiving peer feedback and provided evidence for the importance of collaborative learning theory. The questionnaire could not investigate a significant change in pre- and post-questionnaires. Nevertheless, this can be a substantial implication for the field underlying that EFL students may not be aware of the importance of peer feedback even feedbacks affect their scores positively.

Keywords: Peer feedback, student perceptions, writing development

Introduction

Academic assessment is one of the most controversial issues in the L2 writing area. There have been various methods and approaches to assess L2 learners' written texts. When assessing written texts, the assessment process intends to enhance the quality of learning and balances knowledge and performance (Boud, 1990). These two purposes can be identified as

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formative assessment and summative assessment. While formative assessment helps to monitor student learning and provide ongoing feedback to students, summative assessment evaluates student learning at the end of the teaching process by comparing it against some standards or benchmarks. Since formative assessment is neglected by many instructors, other alternative assessment methods could be applied in L2 writing classes. To improve students' learning, assessment-oriented learning can be applied which has grounded some principles such as learner engagement in assessment process, learner centrality, and significance of feedback (Farhady, 2018). Moreover, self, peer or collaborative assessments can be utilized to raise active and reflective learners (Sambell & McDowell, 1998).

Recently, peer feedback, which is an avail collaborative activity for L2 writing classes, has called attention of various researchers and instructors around the world (Hu & Lam 2010; Hyland & Hyland, 2006; Liu 2012; Rollinson, 2005; Zhu & Mitchell 2012). Liu and Hansen's (2002) definition of feedback is adopted in this research: "the use of learners as sources of information and interactants for each other in such a way that learners assume roles and responsibilities normally taken on by a formally trained teacher, tutor, or editor in commenting on and critiquing each other's drafts in both written and oral formats in the process of writing" (p.1). Peer feedback in L2 writing classes has drawn a number of theoretical underpinnings incorporating collaborative learning theory, sociocultural theory and second language acquisition research which all highlight the importance of interaction by collaboration, learner autonomy (Yang, Badger & Yu, 2006), self-regulation in learning and negotiation of meaning (Liu & Hansen, 2002).

Various studies focus on the topic of student peer response interaction and participation because peer feedback gives the chance for interaction and negotiation of meaning among L2 learners. These studies have examined students' scaffolding strategies and revision strategies (de Guerrero & Villamil, 2000; Tang & Tithecott, 1999), linguistic strategies for giving peer feedback and student-student interaction styles and in group dynamics (Nelson & Murphy, 1992).

Related Literature

Although finalized written texts of L2 learners were the focus in prior years, process writing theory has started to substitute it (Hayes & Flower 1980; Hayes 2012). Process writing theory focuses on writing as a process rather than a product; therefore, this perspective claims writing as a recursive, evolving, nonlinear and dynamic process (Chenoweth & Hayes 2001). Moreover, peer feedback provides the opportunity to apply the theory in L2 classes by giving

chance to learners to negotiate meaning and practice by interacting actively in the learning process (Hu, 2005). Although peer feedback is supported theoretically, there has not been a consensus of the effectiveness of peer feedback in L2 writing classes.

A substantial amount of studies has emphasized the importance of peer feedback in EFL writing classes (Farah, 2012; Lee, 1997; Kuyyogsuy, 2019; Nguyen, 2016; Sato, 2013; Rollinson, 2005; Tang & Tithecott, 1999). Peer feedback helps students to enhance writing competence through mutual scaffolding since they read, critique and provide feedback to their peers' written texts (Hu, 2005; Zhu, 2001).

Students' perceptions in correspondence with peer feedback has been also seen as an important factor affecting the quality of peer feedback (Farah, 2012; Lee, 1997; Tang & Tithecott, 1999). As Tang and Tithecott (1999) states, students' perceptions change positively during the semester as they use it appropriately. Moreover, they get involved discrete cognitive, social and linguistic activities during these peer works. To utilize peer feedback effectively in language classes, instructors need to consider some issues. For example, they can assign students into groups where they are comfortable or give them distinct roles where they can participate actively. Moreover, instructors can explain the instructions and purpose explicitly and use peer feedback as a regular class activity (Lee, 1997). As a result, students may develop positive attitudes towards peer feedback in the class. Positive attitudes towards peer feedback also enhance students' critical thinking skills, creativity, motivation and confidence in their L2 writing classes (Farah, 2012).

Besides, there is a common belief that teacher feedback is more beneficial than peer feedback in EFL context. Nevertheless, literature displays that peer feedback is more helpful for students than self- and/or teacher feedback (Diab, 2010; Yang, Badger & Yu, 2006; Zhao, 2010). Peer feedback helps students to reduce the rule-based errors in their written texts compared to self-feedback groups. Furthermore, peer feedback can increase students' awareness to build the relationship between meaning and form by collaborative work and negotiations opposed to self-feedback groups (Diab, 2010). In addition to self-feedback, comparisons between teacher and peer feedback have been done in EFL context. For example, Yang et al. (2006) compared teacher feedback and peer feedback in a Chinese EFL writing class. While over 90% of students found feedback 'useful' and 'very useful' in the teacher feedback group, 60% of students reported feedback as 'useful' and 'very useful' in the peer feedback group. The results also revealed that the peer feedback group made more meaningful changes compared to the teacher feedback group. Therefore, it can be specified that peer feedback and teacher feedback are both useful in EFL writing classes, but it might be in discrete

ways. In line with this study, EFL learners may apprehend their peers' comments more than the teacher comments, hence they benefit from their peers' comments more than teacher comments. Therefore, peer comments were incorporated more than teacher comments into revisions by students (Zhao, 2010).

Along with the importance of peer feedback, explicit instruction about peer feedback training is additionally seen to have an influence on students' writing skills. Thus, the impact of peer feedback in EFL classes can be maximized with the help of some training (Hu 2005; Yang& Meng 2013; Crinon 2012; Rahimi 2013). Such training can strengthen the quality of peer feedback, revised texts and writing performance. Rahimi (2013) and Lam (2010), for instance, claimed that trained students develop their writing skills in the long run and write higher quality texts compared to untrained participants. The training programs may involve different kinds of peer feedback training exercises which are awareness-raising, demonstration, practice, reflection and instruction, explanation of procedures and pre-response review (Hu, 2005). Besides, online peer feedback training also enhances students' writing skills and the effectiveness of their feedback to their friends.

In the Turkish EFL context, the prominence of peer feedback has been documented by various scholars (Bilki & İrgin, 2021; Ciftci & Kocoglu, 2012). Turkish EFL students find peer feedback in writing classes functional and believe that using peer feedback lowers their anxiety and enhances their confidence. On the other hand, Kaya (2021) discovered that students had negative emotions for identifiable peer-feedback while the results were positive for anonymous peer feedback. Moreover, peer feedback helps Turkish EFL students to learn from each other by collaborating (Yastibas & Yastibas, 2015; Kurt & Atay, 2007). Ciftci and Kocoglu (2012) investigated that students' revised drafts were affected positively by means of peer feedback. Similarly, Kaya and Yaprak (2020) explored the contribution of training on students' peer feedback and critical feedback performance. Results demonstrated that students' performance in giving peer-feedback heightened. In time, they could provide more efficient and high-quality feedback to their peers. Nevertheless, more studies need to be generated to investigate the effect of peer feedback training on students' writing skills and perceptions about it.

Despite the growing interest in peer feedback in writing classes, there have been a number of previous studies that investigated various distinct findings. One of the arguments against peer feedback addressed is the issue of reliability of peer feedback in writing classes. Maarof (2011) discovered that EFL students found peer feedback less helpful to enhance their writing skills than teacher feedback. Students were in the idea that they have an equal status with their peers, thus their peers were not proficient enough to give effective feedback as their

teachers. Suparma (2013) and Annisa et al. (2017) claimed that peer feedback has a positive effect on the writing skills of students who have low anxiety level; nevertheless, it is not functional for students with high writing anxiety. Another argument against peer feedback is about familiarity with this technique. Suba (2014) believes that students are not familiar with using peer feedback in their classes since the writing classes are mostly teacher- centered and product oriented. Therefore, utilizing peer feedback is not an effective technique for EFL writing classes.

In summary, these studies from literature expose that peer feedback is found to have both positive and negative effects on the learning process in EFL writing classes. Moreover, it was explored that students' ideas change when they use peer feedback effectively in their writing classes. When some students were asked to compare teacher and peer feedback, some of them found peer feedback more beneficial. Students' writing skills and attitudes towards peer feedback changed positively with peer feedback training sessions, too.

The primary aim of the present study is, therefore, to investigate the effect of explicit training on Turkish EFL students' perception change in peer feedback in their writing classes and the effect of peer-feedback on their writing development. In line with the aims of the study, the following research questions are reflected to analyze the data:

1. Are there any significant differences in EFL learners' perceptions about peer-feedback before and after the treatment?

2. Does peer-feedback have an effect on EFL learners' writing skills development?

a. What types of error correction codes are used in peer feedback after the training?

b. Did peer feedback lead to significant improvement in students' revised drafts?

c. Did peer feedback lead to significant improvement in students' writing skills when texts written with and without feedback were compared?

Methodology

Research Design

The present study adopted a single group quasi-experimental design based on the quantitative research paradigm. Two types of pre- and post-tests were conducted to investigate the impact of the treatment: pre- and post- writing tasks to check the participants' writing performance development and pre- and post- questionnaires to find out students' peer feedback perception changes.

Participants

The present study was administered in an English Language Teaching Department of a foundation university in İstanbul, Turkey. 61 freshmen Turkish EFL students between the ages of 18-22 participated in the study. Since all the participants passed the proficiency test implemented by the preparatory school, their language proficiency could be described as somewhere in between B2 and C1 according to Common European Framework for Languages. All the participants were enrolled in a Fall 2020 writing skills-I course which aimed to guide students to become better writers in divergent types of essays by reading, thinking, drafting, and revising. Their role was also to work as revisers for each other, and help each other become better writers. The participants took the course in an online setting because of the coronavirus pandemic regulations. Since it was the second semester taking all the classes online, participants got used to the online education procedures. The teacher and the students came together virtually for two hours on a video conferencing platform. The lectures were materialized by sharing the book or PPT slides on the screen, so that students could follow the teacher easily. Some pair or group works were implemented in breakout rooms to strengthen students' critical thinking. They wrote their writing tasks out-of-class time and sent each other via email to provide peer feedback.

Instruments

Quantitative data was gathered and analyzed in order to find the answers to the research questions of the present study. The data in this study was collected through:

1. Pre-questionnaire and post questionnaire
2. 1 pre-writing performance task and 2 post-writing performance tasks
1. Questionnaires

In order to investigate students' perceptions of peer feedback, Kuyyogsuy's (2019) peer feedback questionnaire was adapted. Once the adaptation was completed by the researcher, a focus group meeting was arranged to ask their views on the items. In accordance with their comments, some additions and deletions were also generated.

Pre-questionnaires and post questionnaires were conducted to explore perception changes of participants in connection with peer feedback in writing assignments before and after the treatment. The pre-questionnaire included 5-point Likert scale items with anchors at "1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = neutral, 4 = disagree, 5 = strongly disagree." The post-questionnaire included 4-point Likert scale items which included the same options as the first one except 'neutral'. This option gives the students the chance of not having any opinion

(Brown, 2000). If the questionnaire does not have the 'neutral' option, participants will be forced to specify their preferences. In the pre-questionnaire this option was given because students may really have no idea about the particular issue. Subsequent to the treatment, students were expected to think more critically on peer feedback; therefore, that specific option was taken out. In the questionnaires, students read 32 statements and chose the appropriate option among the numbers. The statements in the questionnaire asked for students' appraisal of peer-feedback as an instructional method, perceptions as a writing process, employment of affective strategies and critical thinking skills. In addition to measuring students' perceptions about peer feedback, the questionnaire also embodied questions about students' age and year in faculty.

2.   Writing Performance Tasks

The pre-writing performance task was collected prior to the treatment without any peer feedback. After the treatment, two post-writing performance tasks were conducted with their first drafts including peer feedback and revised drafts. Revised drafts were considered as an indication of the effect of peer feedback in their written products.

Data Collection

The researcher, who was the instructor of the course, came together with the participants every week regularly. The course lasted 15 weeks but the data was collected in 9 weeks (from week 6 to week 14). Before collecting the data, participants signed a consent form to participate voluntarily in the present study.

In the primary week of data collection, the pre-questionnaire was distributed to students without giving any instruction about peer feedback (see Fig. 1). In the second week, students submitted a narrative essay without any peer feedback. In the fourth week, students were trained to give meaningful and critical feedback to their peers. The training initiated by informing students about the distinction of peer feedback for their development of writing skills. Then, the criteria for peer feedback were explained in detail. Depending on the criteria, the students were reflected how to provide feedback related to different categories such as structure and organization. Finally, students practiced giving some constructive feedback by using error correction codes and received feedback by the instructor.

In addition to the training, the instructor distributed a rubric sheet and list of error correction codes to be used while giving peer feedback. The rubric comprised statements with regard to the organization of essay and use of appropriate grammar, vocabulary, punctuation, capitalization and APA style. Participants were asked to use the error correction codes while

reading their peers' essays. A week after the training, participants performed their first post writing performance task. They sent their first drafts to their peers, received feedback and revised their first drafts. They sent both the first and revised drafts along with the peer feedback sheets to the instructor. Participants wrote one more post writing performance task at an interval of two week following the same procedures as the first one. At the end, the post questionnaire was given to the participants.

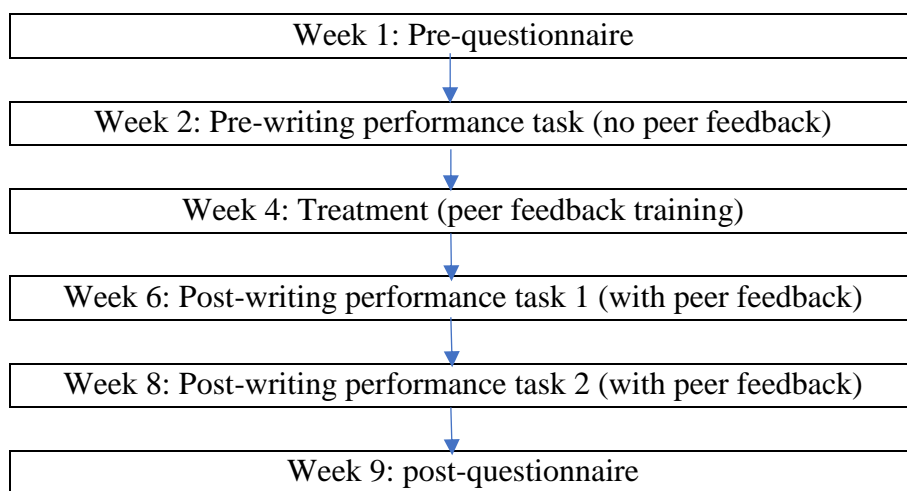procedures as the first one. At the end, the post questionnaire was given to the participants.

Week 1: Pre-questionnaire
Week 2: Pre-writing performance task (no peer feedback)
Week 4: Treatment (peer feedback training)
Week 6: Post-writing performance task 1 (with peer feedback)
Week 8: Post-writing performance task 2 (with peer feedback)
Week 9: post-questionnaire

Figure 1. Steps designed in the writing cycle

Participants were paired up randomly by the instructor as Female-Female, Male-Male and Female-Male patterns. They emailed their essays to their peers and gave online written feedback out of class hours. The essay topics were provided by the instructor for consistency.

Data Analysis

First, the prequestionnaire and post questionnaire were analyzed to gain insights into participants' perceptions of peer feedback in EFL writing classes. The questionnaires were analyzed by paired sample t-test to find the differences of students' perceptions before and after the training. Since one of the items in the 5-point Likert scale was taken out in the post questionnaire, students' responses in prequestionnaire and post questionnaire were also compared.

Second, the writing tasks were analyzed in three ways: (1) counting the error correction codes in post-writing performance tasks, (2) checking writing skill development from first draft to second draft and (3) writing skill development from prewriting task to post writing tasks.

Written texts were evaluated considering the points mentioned in students' peer feedback rubrics.

Results

Students' Perceptions About the Use of Peer Feedback in EFL Writing Classes

In order to investigate the effect of treatment on Turkish EFL students' perceptions of using peer feedback in writing classes, prequestionnaire and post questionnaire were analyzed. Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics with reference to student perceptions measured by the questionnaire. Table 1 indicates that students' perceptions of appraisal of peer feedback as an instructional method and writing process changed positively from pre-questionnaire to post-questionnaire. On the other hand, their perceptions changed negatively in terms of affective strategies and critical thinking skills from pre-questionnaire to post-questionnaire.

Table 1.

Descriptive statistics for students' perception changes of peer feedback

Questionnaire parts	Pre-questionnaire		Post-questionnaire		
	M	SD	M	SD	N
Appraisal of peer feedback as an instructional method	2.32	.56	2.38	.57	61
Writing process	2.48	.62	2.56	.67	61
Affective strategies	2.65	.44	2.33	.56	61
Critical thinking skills	2.17	.55	2.10	.63	61

To compare the mean scores of these two questionnaires, a paired sample t-test was performed. There was no statistically significant difference found between prequestionnaire and post questionnaire (see Table 2). Thus, treatment on peer feedback did not change students' perception about the use of peer feedback in EFL writing classes.

Table 2.

Paired samples test of students' perceptions of peer feedback

		Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean	Sig (2-tailed)
Pair 1	Pre-q.	2.4099	.20833	.10416	.555
	Post-q.	2.3491	.18874	.09437	

One reason behind this might be that one of the items (neutral) in the 5 point Likert scale was deleted in the post questionnaire to see what participants really think. The item

'neutral' states that the respondent has neither a positive response nor a negative response (Brown, 2000). Therefore, the percentages were calculated for each response in the questionnaires to see students' perception changes. In Table 3, the results indicate that the number of 'disagree' was marked more in the post questionnaire when 'neutral' was eliminated.

Table 3.

Students' perception changes about peer feedback

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Strongly Disagree	Disagree
Pre-questionnaire	17.68%	39.04%	30.09%	4.38%	8.81%
Post-questionnaire	19.75%	47.49%	0	7.38%	24.93%

Students' writing skills development in writing performance tasks

The present study tried to investigate whether there was a difference between writing performance of Turkish EFL students receiving peer feedback after a training on how to give peer feedback. In total, students wrote three written texts: one before the treatment (pre-writing task) and two after the treatment (post-writing task 1 and post-writing task 2).

Altogether, Table 4 designates that 61 students used 775 error correction codes in their post-writing task 1. Among these error correction codes in post-writing task 1, 34.1% were corrections related to grammar, 48.5 % were about spelling/punctuation/capitalization/APA style and 17.4 % were related to organization. In post writing task 2, students employed 845 error correction codes in total while giving feedback to their peers. Among 845 peer feedback codes, 34.2 % were related to grammar, 47.5% were about spelling/punctuation/capitalization/APA style and 18.35% were about organization. Moreover, the results reflect that practicing peer feedback helped students to increase the number of correction codes in their feedback to their peers.

Table 4.

Types of peer feedback in post-writing performance tasks

TASK	Total Error Correction Codes	Grammar	Spelling/Punctuation/ Capitalization/APA	Organization
Post-writing task 1	775	264	376	135

Post-writing task 2	845	289	401	155

Students were asked to send their first and second drafts to the researcher for both of the post writing tasks. First drafts embodied their peers' feedback and the second drafts were the revised versions. To compare the difference between these before and after measurements, a Wilcoxon matched-pairs signed-ranks test was performed. It was aimed to determine if there was any statistically significant difference between the first and second drafts of the two post-writing performance tasks. In Table 5, the results indicate that the revisions led to improvement in students' essays.

Table 5.

Writing skill development from first draft to second draft

Draft	Mean	SD	z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Post writing task 1-1st draft	81.68	5.694	-6.864^{b}	.000
Post writing task 1- 2nd draft	91.03	5.909		
Post writing task 2 – 1st draft	91.29	5.979	-6.788^{b}	.000
Post writing task 2- 2nd draft	96.66	3.875		

(b) Based on negative ranks
Wilcoxon signed ranks test

To see the effect of peer feedback on students' written texts, scores of pre-writing task and post-writing tasks were compared. Table 6 revealed that there was a statistically significant difference among scores of three tasks. Therefore, it can be remarked that peer feedback led to significant improvement in students' written texts.

Table 6.

Writing skill development from pre-writing task to post writing task

Task	N	Mean	SD	Sig (2-tailed)
Pre-writing	61	82.13	5.422	.000
Post-writing task 1	61	91.29	5.979	.000
Post-writing task 2	61	96.66	3.875	.000

Discussion

The current study set out to examine Turkish EFL students' written texts before and after using peer feedback. Moreover, the present study aimed to investigate Turkish EFL students' perceptions of peer feedback in their writing classes.

Turkish EFL students' perceptions about peer feedback

To answer the first research question, responses to the prequestionnaire and post questionnaire were analyzed. Students' perceptions concerning appraisal of peer feedback as an instructional method changed positively but did not change statistically significantly before and after using peer feedback. Under this category, students believed that comments reflected by the teacher carry more weight than peer comments do (Liou & Peng, 2009; Paulus, 1999). The reason behind this might be that students did not believe their classmates to be eligible to give solid comments on their compositions. This finding collaborates with Kaya (2020) who investigated that students had negative emotions about peer feedback because. The reason behind this was that they believed they and their peers did not have the ability to evaluate an essay.

Perceptions with respect to affective strategies and critical thinking skills from pre-questionnaire to post-questionnaire changed negatively. Students felt anxious while giving feedback to their peers. Similarly, Kaya (2020) and Kaya and Yaprak (2020) investigated that providing peer feedback was stressful for students because some thought that this might affect the bond of their friendships.

Writing development

To answer the second research question, students' written texts were analyzed considering three aspects. In the present study, three writing assignments were assigned. The first one was without any peer feedback training and peer feedback intervention. After the treatment of peer feedback training, students gave feedback to their peers and revised their first drafts in second and third tasks.

Firstly, types of peer comments on second drafts were compared with those of the third assignment. It is evident that students' use of suggested error correction codes increased in all types in the last written text (from 775 to 845 as in Table 3). Increasing number of correction codes in the last written text can be interpreted as students becoming more actively involved in the feedback process as the class progressed. That is to say, the majority of the students did not have any experience on peer feedback before the present research. As the class went on, they received training on how to give peer feedback and they had a chance to apply what they have learnt. This leads them to feel more comfortable with the assignments and peer feedback

process. Similarly, Liou and Peng (2009) detected in their study that students made more comments in the last writing task. Moreover, it seems that students mostly focused on spelling, capitalization, punctuation and APA style in their peers' written texts. These changes can be considered as local changes. Compared with Liou and Peng's (2009) and Ryoo and Wing's (2012) studies where revisions were classified into two categories, local changes were more dominant in this study. These two studies intended to analyze peer comments considering local and global writing problems in EFL students' peer comments. They spotted that comments concerning global writing problems were used more than local writing problems in EFL learners' written peer feedback.

Secondly, students' scores of 1st and 2nd drafts of written texts which were written after the treatment were compared to see if there were any statistically significant differences. The results signify that the revisions improved in students' written tasks as it is seen in Table 4. True to claim that peer feedback is useful for writing performance development (Ciftci & Kocoglu, 2012; Ting & Qian, 2010).

Finally, comparisons between peer feedback before and after treatment (i.e. pre-writing task and post writing tasks) designate that students were more successful in revising their written texts. As certified in several studies (Crinon 2012; Hu 2005; Liou & Peng, 2009; Min, 2005; Min, 2006; Rahimi 2013; Yang & Meng 2013), training students about how to give peer feedback has a positive impact on students' comments and revised draft scores. An explanation for this can be that students learnt not only how to give peer feedback in this process but also how to use their peers' comments in their revised drafts. Moreover, their scores represented that students could learn from interactions and improve their writing skills accordingly.

Conclusions

The findings of the current study have substantial implications for both educational researchers and EFL writing instructors as it is found that peer feedback has significant improvement in students' written texts. The results suggest that training on peer feedback can be involved in EFL writing classes as suggested by Min (2005) and Liou and Peng (2009) as well. Students may then be able to give purposeful feedback to their peers to be used in revised written tasks. The results, which showed improvement in students' second drafts after receiving peer feedback, provided evidence for the importance of collaborative learning theory. The findings highlight the importance of interaction by collaboration and negotiation of meaning (Liu & Hansen, 2002).

Furthermore, the questionnaire could not investigate a significant change in pre and post questionnaire. Nevertheless, this can be a momentous implication for the field underlying

that EFL students may not be aware of the importance of peer feedback even feedbacks affect their scores positively. Therefore, EFL instructors need to do more to break down the prejudices of students.   In order to constitute positive perception toward peer feedback, instructors may explain the importance of peer feedback in more detail with some examples from their own experiences. Moreover, they may indicate some samples of essays written before and after peer feedback to demonstrate the improvement with the help of peer feedback.

Further research can be done with students from different proficiency levels and findings might be compared to see the differences between a number of proficiency levels. Retrospective interviews could be done to see how students decide to give feedback on specific points and how they decide to use the feedback coming from their peers.

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