THE EFFECTS OF PEER FEEDBACK ON THE WRITING ANXIETY OF PROSPECTIVE TURKISH TEACHERS OF EFL

İKİLİ ÖĞRENCİ GERİBİLDİRİMİNİN İNGİLİZCE ÖĞRETMEN ADAYLARININ YAZMA KAYGISI ÜZERİNDE ETKİLERİ

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ÖZ

Ana dili İngilizce ve/ya İngilizcenin ikinci dil olarak öğretildiği ortamlarda yapılan çalışmalar yazma kaygısının sadece öğrenci motivasyonu ve akademik başarısını değil, öğretmenlerin de yazma öğretimine yönelik tutumlarını ve yazma öğretiminde kullandıkları yöntemleri olumsuz yönde etkilediğini göstermektedir. Bu çalışma ikili öğrenci geri bildiriminin (peer feedback) Türk İngilizce aday öğretmenlerinin yazma kaygıları üzerine olan olası etkilerini araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Çalışmaya 86 İngilizce öğretmeni adayı katılmıştır. Sekiz hafta süren çalışma boyunca, ikili öğrenci geri bildirimi üzerine eğitim verilen deney grubu aday öğretmenleri, ikili gruplar halinde çalışmış, birbirlerinin yazdıkları kompozisyonlara geribildirim vermiş ve yazdıkları kompozisyonları öğretmenlerine teslim etmeden önce verdikleri geribildirimleri birbirleriyle tartışmışlardır. Kontrol grubundaki öğretmen adayları ise yazdıkları kompozisyonlara sadece öğretmenlerinden geribildirim almışlardır. Veriler, çalışma öncesi ve sonrasında uygulanan, Cheng (2004) tarafından geliştirilmiş 'İkinci Dilde Yazma Endişesini Ölçme Anketi' (Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory) ve yine çalışmanın sonrasında deney grubu öğrencilerinden tesadüfi örnekleme yöntemi ile seçilen 20 öğrenciyle yapılan mülakatlar ile toplanmıştır. Nicel verilerin sonuçları deney grubundaki öğrencilerin kontrol grubundaki öğrencilere göre çalışmanın sonunda istatistiksel açıdan anlamlı ölçüde daha düşük yazma kaygısı duyduklarını göstermiştir. Nitel veriler ise öğretmen adaylarının çoğunluğunun ikili öğrenci geri bildiriminden faydalandıklarını göstermiştir. Öğretmen adayları arkadaşları sayesinde yazılarındaki hataların farkında olduklarını, yazıları için arkadaşlarının farklı fikirler verdiklerini ve yazılarına başka bir boyuttan bakmalarını sağladıklarını belirtmişlerdir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Yazma kaygısı, ikili öğrenci geri bildirimi, aday öğretmenler, öğretmen geri bildirimi.

ABSTRACT

Studies done in L1/L2 English settings have revealed the negative effects of writing anxiety on both learner motivation and academic achievement and teachers' attitudes towards writing and the practices they use in their own classes. The present study aims to find out the effects of peer feedback on the writing anxiety of Turkish prospective teachers (PTs) of English. A total of 86 PTs of English participated in this study. During the eight-week study, PTs in the experimental group, who had been given a training on peer feedback, were asked to work in pairs in their writing class, give feedback on each other's essays and discuss their feedback with each other before handing them to their instructors. On the other hand, PTs in the control group received only teacher feedback on their essays. Data were collected by means of the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) (Cheng, 2004) given at the beginning and end of the study and by means of interviews carried out with 20 experimental group PTs at the end of the term. Results of the quantitative data showed that the peer feedback group experienced significantly less writing anxiety than the teacher feedback group at the end of the study. The interview results revealed that the participating PTs benefited from the peer feedback process as with the feedback of their friends they became aware of their mistakes. Moreover, during the process they received opinions from their friends to elaborate on, and this collaboration helped them look at their essays from a different perspective.

Key words: Writing anxiety, peer feedback, prospective teachers, teacher feedback.

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INTRODUCTION

Anxiety, among other affective variables, has stimulated particular interest in the field of language acquisition and learning in the last decades. Although most discussions of foreign language anxiety have centered on the difficulties caused by anxiety with respect to activities such as speaking and listening, recent studies have provided validation for regarding writing anxiety as a specific type of anxiety, unique to the language-particular skill of writing (Burgoon and Hale, 1983; Daly and Wilson, 1983; Bline, Lowe, Meixner, Nouri and Pearce, 2001).

According to Thompson (1980), writing anxiety is a "fear of the writing process that outweighs the projected gain from the ability to write" (p.121). Tsui (1996), further believes that learning to write in the foreign language involves as much anxiety as learning the other skills, because writing is predominantly product-oriented, and it requires individual work, i.e., students feel they are deprived of help, support and encouragement. As a result, learners suffer from a "distress associated with writing" and develop "a profound distaste for the process" (Madigan, Linton, and Johnson, 1996: 295).

As writing anxiety research has been mostly restricted to the school context, studies on the effects of writing anxiety on decisions and perceptions about writing have been mainly concerned with student populations. In contrast to the abundance of studies on L1 writing anxiety, research on L2 writing anxiety has been quite scant. Daly and Miller (1975) in their study found that anxious students failed to attend class when writing assignments were due and did not enroll in courses requiring writing. Students with high writing anxiety also considered writing as unrewarding or punishing and approached it with negative attitudes (Daly and Shamo, 1978). Writing anxiety has also proved to impede students in their academic work. The writing of high-anxious students, compared to low-anxious ones, tended to be less profound, lower in quality, and less competent with respect to syntactic structure (Daly, 1977, 1978).

Research has also demonstrated the important role teachers play in cultivating students' notions about and attitudes toward writing (Palmquist and Young, 1992). A number of studies have explored how teachers' writing anxiety influences their teaching practices, again in L1 settings. For example, Claypool's (1980) study assessed how secondary school teachers' writing anxiety was related to the frequency with which they assigned writing tasks. She reported a significant negative correlation between teachers' writing anxiety and the number of writing assignments they made. In another study, Gere, Schuessler and Abbott (1984) investigated how teachers' writing anxiety was correlated with what they considered important and relevant about writing, and writing instruction. The results showed that teachers with high writing anxiety were more rigid than the low anxious ones about style and self-expression. Moreover, a significant negative correlation was found

between teachers' writing anxiety and their use of a variety of instructional techniques in the teaching of composition writing.

Finally, Daly and his colleagues conducted two studies investigating the relationship between teachers' writing anxiety and their classroom practices (Daly, Vangelisti, and Witte, 1988). The results of these two studies revealed that teachers' writing anxiety affected the way they evaluated students' written products. Compared to teachers with high anxiety, low anxious teachers appeared to be less bound by rigid rules, to emphasize creative expression and effort more, and to worry less about mechanical structure. Teachers' writing anxiety was also found to be negatively related to their use of exercises and activities that demanded writing.

Based on the results of the studies discussed so far, we may assume that writing anxiety would affect prospective teachers' practices of and attitudes towards writing instruction in a similar way. Thus, by learning about their anxiety level and the underlying reasons of it, teacher educators may help prospective teachers overcome their anxiety before it is firmly established. However, to our knowledge, there has been only one study done on the writing anxiety of prospective teachers in an EFL setting (Atay and Kurt, 2006). The results of this study showed that the majority of the Turkish prospective teachers of English had high and average writing anxiety. Many of them indicated inability to organize their thoughts and produce ideas as the major difficulties they had during the L2 writing process. They further reported that their writing teachers and their own past L2 writing experiences had an effect on their writing anxiety. A major finding of the study was that the majority of the prospective teachers indicated that they felt relieved when they shared their anxiety with their friends.

Thus, the aim of the present study is to investigate the effects of peer feedback on the writing anxiety of Turkish prospective teachers (PTs) of English.

Peer Feedback

The use of peer feedback in L1 settings as well as in ESL/EFL writing classrooms has been supported as a potentially valuable aid for its social, cognitive, affective and methodological benefits (Mendonça and Johnson, 1994; Villamil and de Guerrero, 1996). Peer feedback is seen as a way of giving more control to students since it allows them to make active decisions about whether or not to use their peers' comments as opposed to a passive reliance on teachers' feedback (Mendonça and Johnson, 1994; Mittan, 1989).

Peer feedback, with its potentially high level of response and interaction between reader and writer, encourages a collaborative dialogue in which two-way feedback is established and meaning is negotiated between the two parties (Rollinson, 2005). In peer feedback sessions students not only

compose their own texts but read the texts written by other students, adopt the role of interested readers and commentators, and help each other in the elaboration of better texts. This collaboration increases a range of social and communication skills, including negotiation skills and diplomacy, verbal communication skills, giving and accepting criticism, justifying one's position and assessing suggestions objectively (Topping, 2000).

Peer feedback has also proved to have an impact on affect, increasing motivation through the sense of personal responsibility, and improving self-confidence (Topping, 2000). Since student reviewers soon perceive that other students experience the same difficulties in writing that they do, peer feedback also leads to a reduction in writer apprehension and an increase in writer confidence. Responding to peer work involves students in each other's writing, so that they can see similar problems and weaknesses in their own writing (Grabe and Kaplan, 1996).

Peer-feedback is based on the socio-cognitive approach to learning according to which "knowledge is best acquired through negotiated interaction" (Grabe and Kaplan, 1996: 380) and cooperative learning. The sociocognitive view suggests that students will develop as writers more effectively as they engage in transactions over their own texts and the texts of others while negotiating real intentions with a real audience.

Many of the claims about the effects of peer feedback on learners' writing anxiety rest on limited empirical research. Thus, the present study aimed to fill in this gap in the literature as it examines the effects of peer feedback on the writing anxiety of Turkish PTs of EFL. The main research question addressed was whether there would be a significant difference between Turkish PTs who received peer feedback on their writing in English composition classes and those who did not receive in terms of their writing anxiety.

METHOD
Participants
A total of 86 PTs enrolled at the English Language Teaching Department of a highly competitive state university in Istanbul participated in this study. The participants had an average age of 19.34 (Sd =0.62) and all had studied English in primary and/or secondary school as a compulsory foreign language for 4-6 years before starting their undergraduate studies. The participating PTs were all native speakers of Turkish and none of them had stayed in English speaking countries more than a week. In order to enter the four-year degree program they either scored higher than 550 on the TOEFL exam or passed the proficiency exam prepared by the testing office of the university. Thus, they could be considered to have a high level of English proficiency. At the time of the study, there were 196 PTs in four classes and upon entering the department the students were randomly placed into their classes. The two groups for the

present study were selected randomly. The experimental group had 44 students whereas there were 42 students in the control group.

Students take Writing I and Writing II courses in the first and second semesters of the first year respectively, and an Advanced Writing Skills course in the second year.

Procedure

The present study took place in the second term of 2005-2006 academic year and lasted for 8 weeks. As mentioned above, the study aimed to find out whether receiving peer feedback on their essays would reduce the writing anxiety level of Turkish PTs of EFL. Thus, the study was conducted in the Advanced Writing Skills course, a three-hour per week course taken by all 2nd year students of the teacher education program. During the course, students proceeded with the following activities, typically: Reading an article on language learning and teaching chosen by the teacher/researcher, answering some teacher-prepared comprehension questions based on the article, discussing issues relevant to the article read, and finally, writing a specific type of an essay, i.e. argumentative essay, definition essay, etc. on the relevant topic. Before the writing phase, the teacher explained the rules of the relevant essay type focusing on its structure and format. The length of the essays was expected to be around 4-5 paragraphs. Students started writing in class and continued at home if it was not finished. They brought their first drafts the following week. Each essay was checked using the checklists developed and piloted by the researchers. For each type of essay, the researchers developed a different checklist focusing on the features of each genre, structure and format (see Appendix for a sample checklist). Then, the PTs rewrote their essays based on the feedback they received and handed in the final paper one week later. The experimental and control groups differed in the type of feedback they received on their essays.

Feedback in the experimental group: According to Berg (1999), training is a prerequisite for successful use of peer feedback. In the present study, experimental group students had two training lessons on peer feedback before the first peer feedback session and each session lasted two hours. The sessions proceeded through the following stages: First the instructor introduced the students to the overall format of the peer checklist. The students were told that they would find differences on the checklists for different types of essays. In order to familiarize the students with the process of peer check, the instructor used the checklist for a descriptive essay and explained each item on the checklist in detail. For example, in the first item the students had to check the appropriateness of the opening paragraph, i.e., whether it contains a general introduction to the topic and it ends with a specific thesis statement. Then, students received a sample essay and were asked to check the essay in terms of

the requirements of its genre, and vocabulary, grammar and punctuation mistakes, following the checklist. As the final step, there was class discussion on the corrections and comments of the students. The students were observed to be very enthusiastic about giving and receiving feedback with their peers and the discussions revealed their understanding of the procedure.

In the second training session, the same procedure was repeated, however, this time the students were asked to work in pairs. The pairs had the same essay. Student A was asked to check the paper following the checklist and give feedback, and student B was supposed to correct the paper accordingly. During the correction phase the pairs had to collaborate with each other and the teacher observed the students and provided help when necessary. The aim of these two training sessions was to familiarize the participating PTs with the process.

The study started after the training. PTs in the experimental group were asked to work in pairs when they brought their first drafts. Each peer editor was responsible for checking the paper of his/her classmate using the checklist they had been introduced to in the training session. During the study, the instructor went over the checklist developed for each type of essay at the beginning of the relevant lesson. After each essay was given feedback, it was returned to the author, and the corrections and suggestions were discussed between the members of the pair. Meanwhile, the instructor monitored the pairs but was not involved in the actual editing of the essays. The students started with their revisions during class time in collaboration with their peers; if not finished, they did the rest outside class. The revised versions of the essays were submitted to the instructor for final evaluation in the following week. The teacher evaluated the essays using the checklists developed and graded them accordingly.

Feedback in the control group: PTs in the control group, on the other hand, submitted the first draft of their essays to the instructor who gave feedback on each essay using the abovementioned checklists. After the PTs revised their essays based on the feedback they received from their teachers, they submitted the revised versions the following week, and the instructor evaluated them using the checklist.

During the 8 weeks, the students in both groups wrote five essays and the same procedure as described above was repeated.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data for the present study were collected by means of the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) adapted from Cheng (2004) and interviews. The SLWAI aims to measure the degree to which an individual feels anxious when writing in an L2 and contains 22-items, all of which are answered on a five-point Likert Scale, ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. The inventory included items such as "I feel my heart

pounding when I write English compositions under time constraint" or "While writing English compositions, I feel worried and uneasy if I know they will be evaluated." The Cronbach alpha coefficient reported in Cheng's (2004) study was .91 and it was found to be .84 for the present study. The interviews, structured in design, were conducted to triangulate the data collected by the inventory and they focused on subjects' attitudes towards peer feedback. The PTs were specifically asked whether or not they found peer feedback helpful for revision; whether or not they liked peer feedback; and whether or not they thought their peers were reliable feedback givers. For each question they were asked to give their reasons for their responses.

For the purposes of the study, data collected from the above mentioned sources were analyzed by means of a combination of qualitative and quantitative strategies. Lynch (1996) calls this combination a mixed study design and claims that it provided the most thorough information possible as data is validated by means of triangulation.

The SLWAI was given to the PTs in both groups once at the beginning and once at the end of the study and a t-test was applied to the data to find out the differences between the groups regarding their writing anxiety levels. The significance level was set at $p<.05$. The interviews were conducted with 20 PTs randomly selected from the experimental group at the end of the study. The interviews, 5 to 10 minutes in length, were audio-taped and the recorded data were analyzed by means of pattern coding as suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) (see Table 1 for the design of the study).

Table 1: Design of the Study

Data Collection & Instruction	Date	Control group (n= 42)	Experimental group (n= 44)
Pre-SLWAI (1)	2/28/2005		
Instruction (8)	3/07/2005	Writing	Writing
	3/14/2005	an	an
	3/21/2005	essay	essay
	3/28/2005	and	and
	4/04/2005	receiving	receiving
	4/11/2005	teacher	peer
	4/11/2005	feedback	feedback
	4/18/2005		
Post-SLWAI (1)	4/25/2005		
Interviews (1)	5/02/2005		

RESULTS

Results of the inventory: The t-test results showed no significant difference between the groups in terms of their writing anxiety level at the beginning of the study. While the mean of the pre-SLWAI scores of the

experimental group subjects was 74.63, it was 76.09 for the control group (p<.551). However, there was a significant difference between the groups at the end of the study (p< .007). The mean post-SLWAI scores of the experimental group decreased to 65.56 while of the control group decreased to 73.73 (see Table 2). Although the writing anxiety levels of the PTs in both groups showed a tendency to decrease, the rate was at a significantly higher level in the experimental group.

Table 2: Differences between the Groups in terms of their SLWAI Scores

Group	Test	X[a]	sd	df	T	p[b]
Experimental	Pre	74.63	11.70			
(n = 44)	Post	65.56	14.3			
				84	- 2.772	.007
Control	Pre	76.09	10.82			
(n=42)	Post	73.73	7.98			

Note. N (n): # of students
[a] The total scores are out of 110.
[b] p<0.05

Results of the interview: The first question asked the PTs whether they found peer feedback helpful for revision and why/why not. 15 out of 20 students reported that they found peer feedback helpful while the remaining 5 students stated it was not. The students who said 'yes' gave the following reasons: They said their peers could identify their mistakes (8 out of 15), and gave them opinions to elaborate in their essays (7/15). Furthermore, the peers helped each other to look at their essays from a different perspective (5/15) and clarify the parts that were unclear (5/15). They also helped each other in using more appropriate vocabulary (4/15) and correcting the grammar of their sentences (4/15).

In the second question, the PTs were asked whether or not they liked peer feedback. While 16 of the PTs said 'yes,' 4 students said they did not like peer feedback. The PTs who said they liked peer feedback gave the following reasons: They said they felt less anxious (8/16), self-confident (6/16), and free (4/16). They stated that the informal discussions they had with their peers were very enjoyable and they could ask many questions to their peers without any fear of being graded (9/16).

The students who gave 'no' as the answer stated that they did not enjoy the peer feedback sessions because they thought their peers did not take it seriously (3/4). They said that during the feedback sessions they did not have effective discussions so they were bored (1/4).

The third question asked the PTs whether or not they thought their peers were reliable feedback givers. Fifteen PTs found their peers reliable in giving feedback while the rest thought the opposite. The PTs who thought

their peers were reliable stated that their friends' comments were so helpful that they received high grades from their teacher after they did the corrections (8/15). They also helped them see the mistakes in their essays and gave very useful opinions (6/15). 9 out of 15 students also mentioned that the checklist they used in receiving and giving feedback guided them and made the peer feedback process easier and more effective.

The students who thought their peers were not reliable feedback givers gave the following reasons: They said their peers gave overall comments such as 'good' or 'well done' (3/4) and they also stated that they did not think the feedback they received from their peers was very correct (2/4).

DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to find out the effects of peer feedback on the writing anxiety of Turkish PTs of English. Results of the study have shown that the peer feedback group experienced significantly less writing anxiety than the teacher feedback group.

As aforementioned, research has claimed that the social dimension of peer feedback enhances the participants' attitudes towards writing and has an impact on affect by increasing motivation through personal responsibility, greater variety, and interest (Topping, 1998, 2000; Rollinson, 2005). Grabe and Kaplan (1996) also suggest peer feedback be used to reduce writing anxiety and to increase writer confidence. The findings of the present study seem to confirm these suggestions. The PTs who shared their feedback with each other were reported to have a lower level of anxiety than the students who did not.

As suggested by many researchers (Leki, 1990; Reid, 1994), PTs in the present study benefited from the peer feedback training they had as they were trained carefully, given detailed guidelines, and assisted in giving appropriate feedback.

The interviews with several PTs also revealed that they benefited from the peer feedback process as their friends 'picked out the mistakes' they were not aware of, gave them 'opinions to elaborate on' in their essays, and 'helped them look at their essays from a different perspective'. There were others who indicated that many things came to mind when they were discussing their own essays with their friends. They enjoyed participating in peer feedback sessions. Moreover, as they were discussing their paper with their friends, they felt 'free', 'less anxious' and 'self-confident', in discussing their point of view. On the other hand, a number of students complained about the person they were paired with who did not 'take peer feedback seriously' and wrote overall comments like 'good' or 'well-written' on their essays. The PTs who had difficulties during the process seemed in need of a longer and perhaps more individualized type of training.

Based on the results, the study has a number of implications for teacher education programs. To begin with, PTs should not only be provided with theoretical knowledge on peer feedback and but also be asked to practice it themselves. Through implementing peer feedback, they would realize its effects on establishing an authentic collaborative environment in the classroom setting. In this learning environment, where students are encouraged to give feedback to each other's writing, every student writer's contribution should be valued and self-confidence should be built up.

The study had its limitations too. First of all, it was difficult to draw strong generalizations due to the limited number of participants. Further research with a greater number of EFL PTs in various contexts and in classes of different proficiency levels is needed to find out the probable effects of peer feedback on their second language writing anxiety. Second, there is a need for longitudinal studies which observe English composition students throughout a year to determine the effect that peer feedback has on the PTs in terms of preparing them for higher level writing courses and in reducing their anxiety.

In conclusion, in spite of its limitations, the study was beneficial in understanding the effects of peer feedback in reducing Turkish PTs' L2 writing anxiety. The study suggests the use of peer feedback as a complementary practice to teacher feedback, and not as a substitute, especially with learners at higher proficiency levels.

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APPENDIX

A Sample Essay Checklist

Name:

Class:

Editor's name:

Definition Essay Checklist
(Sample items)

1. Is it a good opening that provides a general introduction to the topic? Does it end with a thesis statement?
   Comments:...
   ....

2. Is it a well-written thesis statement summarizing the central idea of the paper?
   Comments:...
   ....

3. Are definitions in the main body given effectively, in a logical order (from the narrowest to the broadest)?
   Comments:...
   ....