The Effect of Teacher Correction vs. Peer Correction on Iranian EFL Learners' Correct Use of Prepositions in Essay Writing

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Abstract

This study investigated the effect of teachers' error correction vs. peer correction on Iranian EFL learners' correct use of prepositions in essay writing. To fulfill the purpose of this study, 90 intermediate female EFL learners from 200 candidates of one institute in Tehran, aged between 16-28 were chosen by cluster random sampling. After the administration of Nelson general language proficiency and writing pre-test, 50 learners who were at the same level of written English proficiency were randomly divided into two experimental groups of 25. Next, 12 sessions treatment in which the participants received two correction types of feedback i.e. teacher correction and peer correction started. Then, the participants were required to write a composition as posttest. The result of the independent t-test revealed that peer-correction is more effective than teacher correction and the differences between the two groups were statistically significant. The findings suggested that peer-correction was much more effective than the traditional teacher-correction. The findings of the present study may be beneficial for materials developers in designing syllabi that are more adaptable with those peer correction methods which help language learners to improve their writing's errors properly.

Key Words: *Error Correction, Essay Writing, Preposition*

Introduction

Writing is an important skill in school environment, community, and workplace. Students use writing as an essential tool to learn. Through writing, students demonstrate knowledge, express opinions to readers and receive feedback. According to Khoii and Tabrizi (2011), writing is believed to be a rational activity. It is also a skill that many teachers find difficult to teach. As English language experts, the researchers have noticed that writing in English as a foreign language constitutes an obstacle for most students. Based on Chiang (2004), teacher's correction and feedback is mostly vague, unclear and confusing, focusing on the form. Teacher feedback may not be able to stimulate learner to be independent. Moreover, students may feel embarrassed over excessive correction which may lead them to be motiveless. According to Riddle (2006), by applying peer-feedback, students may feel more comfortable when they correct by their peers due to their closer affective relationship. Beside, preposition is a complex area which the learners have difficulty in using them correctly. The importance of using appropriate prepositions cannot be ignored. Most of the times, the wrong use of prepositions changes the meaning of a sentence. On the other hand, teacher and peer correction and feedback have been very beneficial in this regard. Therefore, to come up with a more comprehensive picture, the present study aims to

investigate the effect of teacher correction vs. peer correction on Iranian EFL learners' correct use of prepositions in essay writing.

Literature review

Writing is difficult task and EFL/ESL students have many problems in essay writing. According to Spivey (1997), students in writing essay tasks use a meaning-making process that involves organizing ideas of what they understand from the passages, selecting from texts, and integrating ideas based on inferences from them. Then in writing, they use cohesion markers to make connections within and across texts to communicate their ideas while writing. Khoii and Tabrizi (2011) claim that students had many problems with constructing correct sentences, using grammar correctly and writing coherent sentences, and they get low scores on their writing tasks. Beside, propositions are complex area which the learners have difficulty in using them correctly in their writing. The importance of using suitable propositions in writing cannot be ignored. Most of the times, the wrong use of propositions changes the meaning of a sentence. So, while writing students may commit errors and could not use propositions in their writing correctly.

Keshavarz (2003) states that, past few decades there has been an important change in foreign language methodologies and teaching materials and a significant shift of approaches toward students' errors. Committing errors is one of the most unavoidable things in learning process. Students in the process of learning language benefit from the errors that they make by obtaining feedback to make new attempts that successively approximate their desired objectives. Mitchell and Myles (as cited in Keshavarz, 2003) claims that errors could reveal a developing system of the student's L2 language and this system is dynamic and open to changes and resetting of parameters. Recently, responding to learners' errors is a critical and imperative question in oral or more importantly written forms. Ellis (1994) notes that investigating feedback can be studied from two perspectives: "the teachers' provision of feedback and student's response to this feedback" (P.98).

To revise learners 'errors first of all, it should be defined. According to Gass and Selinker (2008) "Errors can be taken as red flags" (p.102) they can provide windows onto the state of the learner's knowledge of the second language. They should not be viewed as a product of imperfect learning or a reflection of faulty imitation. Rather, they are to be viewed as indications of a learner's effort to impose some regularity on the language he or she is exposed to. In recent years, error correction and especially grammatical error correction through peers and teachers has been broadly investigated. According to Riddle (2006) peer-feedback has some advantages. Students may feel comfortable when they correct by their peers due to their closer affective relationship. Tsui and Ng (2000) notes that by peer corrective feedback, writing errors of students can be substantially improved. Moreover, as Rollinson (2005) states, due to the higher

feeling of closer linguistic affection among peers than students and teachers, the process of error correction is more effective through peer review.

Wakabashi (2013 p.177) suggests that "peer feedback is primarily a variety of input that is given from one learner to another". Peer feedback enhances students thinking skills through communication with each other. Olga and Maria (1998) in their study stresses that learners use their peers comment more than their teacher feedback, as the students spend more time in negotiation with their peers than instructors which influences them to be critical thinkers. On the other side in teacher correction, teachers provide necessary revision on students' errors (Riddle, 2006). Chiang (2004), teachers' error correction and feedback is mostly vague, unclear and confusing, focusing on the form. Teacher- feedback may not be able to stimulate learner to be independent. Moreover, student may feel embarrassed over excessive correction and lead them to be demotivated.

Some studies have focused on the role of error correction on student writing. Kassim and Ng (2014) conducted a recent study that explored the effect of corrective error correction on students' accuracy in using prepositions in their written work. The researchers found that both treatment groups outperformed the control group and that no significant difference existed between the performances of the two treatment groups. Yastibas and Yastibas (2015) also investigated the effect of peer feedback on writing anxiety in Turkish EFL students. The results indicated that the students believed using peer feedback in writing classes decreased their writing anxiety, increased their confidence, and improved their writing by collaborating with and learning from each other. The results also indicated that the use of peer feedback in writing classes reduced their writing anxiety in terms of cognitive, somatic, and avoidance anxiety. Sukumaran and Rozita (2014) examined students' perspectives on the use of peer feedback in an English as a second Language writing class. The findings from this study revealed that the participants of the study had a positive perspective on the use of peer feedback and on the use of an online peer feedback tool.

Yaghoubi and Ghanei (2015) in another study examined the effect of peer feedback on cohesion improvement in writing skill among learners. This study focused on using peer feedback as a teaching tool in order to improve cohesion in writing. The results revealed that peer feedback can significantly improve the cohesion in writing among upper intermediate EFL learners. It also showed that there is a statistically significant difference between the males and females in benefiting from peer feedback. Although a huge bulk of research has been carried out in the field of writing, further localized studies are required to consider the variables which help learners to overcome difficulties in writing process. Therefore, to come up with a more comprehensive picture, the present study aims to investigate the effect of teacher correction vs. peer correction on Iranian EFL learners' correct use of prepositions in essay writing.

Q: Does peer error correction have more effect than teacher correction on Iranian EFL learners' correct use of prepositions in essay writing?

H: Peer error correction has more effect than teacher correction on Iranian EFL learners' correct use of prepositions in essay writing.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

The population of this study was about 200 English learners, age 16-28, studying at one institute in Tehran. First, 90 female intermediate students were selected by cluster random sampling. Then, Nelson homogeneity test was given to all candidates; those who were in the same level of general proficiency of the language were included in writing pretest. Fifty students who were almost at the same level of the writing according to Nelson test and pretest scores were assigned to two experimental groups of 25 by cluster random sampling.

3.2. Instruments

3.2.1. Nelson Homogeneity Test: In order to have a homogeneous sample and a uniform data and thus to be able to generalize the results, a homogeneity test was administered which included a 50-item Nelson English language proficiency test.

3.2.2. Writing Pretest and Posttest Test. For the pretest and posttest, the participants were required to write a composition using special proposition (to, in, on, at, by, for, before, ago, since, past, until) on the selected topic ("write about the usefulness of internet" for pretest and "write about using useful social network sites" for posttest) by the researcher. The time allocated to writing for pretest and posttest was 45 minute. After the administration of writing tests, two scorers corrected learners' compositions based on their correct use of proposition. Three experts were confirmed the validity of both pretest and posttest i.e. they confirmed that the topic is suitable with the level of the learners.

3.3. Procedures

In order to reach the goals of current study first, from among 8 intermediate classes, 4 classes include 90 students were selected by cluster random sampling. Next, Nelson homogeneity and pre-test of writing were given to all candidates as the proficiency test and pretest. Learners were required to write a composition with the selected topic by using special prepositions. After that, according to learners' scores, fifty of them almost at the same level of writing were assigned to two experimental groups of 25 by cluster random sampling: experimental group 1 received peer correction as treatment and excremental group 2 received

teacher correction as treatment. The treatment lasted 6 weeks. The classes were held 2 times a week. Learners were required to write an essay with the selected topic each week of the treatment at home, using those special prepositions and brought their assignments to the class for correction. In group 1, peer correction group, the learners in a group of 3 and 4 corrected their composition with the help of each other i.e. they shared their writing with each other and wrote comments on committed   errors and also they negotiated why for example using this preposition is not correct in this way. Actually, they were involved in the process of their writing analytically. But, in group 2, teacher-correction group, the teacher   provided feedback and made all the necessary revisions i.e. teacher reviewed students writing and gave them comments based on their errors according to correct use of prepositions in their essay writing. After 12 sessions of the treatment, the participants were asked to write a composition using those special preposition as posttest. Their writings were assessed by two scorers according to correct use of prepositions. Then posttest scores of two experimental groups were analyzed.

4. Results

4.1. Nelson General Language Proficiency Test

Table 4.1

Descriptive Statistics; NELSON Test

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Homogeneity	90	28.97	7.562	57.179
Kr-21	.80			

The Nelson general language proficiency test was administered to 90 subjects. Based on the mean of 28.97 plus and minus one standard deviation of 7.56 in Table4. 1., 50 subjects were selected to participate in the main study. The KR-21 reliability index for the Nelson test was .80.

4.2. Reliability of the Pretest and Posttest of writing

Table 4.2

The Cronbach's alpha *Reliability Indices for Reliability of Pretest and Post test*

Group	Cronbach's alpha *Reliability*

Pretest	0.83
Posttest	0.85

The estimated values of Cronbach's alpha Reliability for pre-test and post-test were (α= .33) and (α= .0.85) respectively which were both higher than the least possible amount required (i.e. .70) and was considered acceptable.

4.3. Inter-Rater Reliability; Pretest and Posttest of Writing

Table 4.3
Inter-Rater Reliability Indices for Pretest and Posttest

		PostR PreR2 2
PreR1	Pearson Correlation	.654**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	50
PostR 1	Pearson Correlation	.878**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	50

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The inter-Rater reliability index for the pretest and posttest of writing indicated that; There were significant agreement between the raters on the pretest and posttest of writing. For the pre-test the result was (r (48) = .65, p = .000 representing a large effect size) and for the post test the results was (r (48) = .87, p = .000 representing a large effect size).

4.4. Pretest of Writing

Table 4.4
Descriptive Statistics; Pretest of Writing by Groups

	Group	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pretest of Writing	Peer Feedback	5 14.84	1.951	.390
	Teacher Feedback	5 14.36	1.890	.378

Based on the results displayed in Table4.4 it can be claimed that the peer feedback (M = 14.84, SD = 1.95) and teacher feedback (M = 14.36, SD = 1.89) groups had close means on the pretest of writing.

Table 4.5

Independent Samples Test, Pretest of Writing by Groups

| | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
	F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.441	.510	.883	48	.381	.480	.543	-.612	1.572
Equal variances not assumed			.883	47.952	.381	.480	.543	-.612	1.572

The results of the independent t-test (t (48) = .883, p = .381, r = .126 representing a weak effect size) (Table4.5) indicated that there was not any significant difference between the two groups' mean scores on the pretest of writing. Thus it can be claimed that they enjoyed the same level of writing ability prior to the main study. It should be noted that the assumption of homogeneity of variances was met (Levene's F = .441, p = .510). That is why the first row of Table 4.5, i.e. "Equal variances assumed" was reported.

4.5. Posttest of Writing

An independent t-test was run to compare the peer feedback and teacher feedback groups' means on the posttest of correct use of prepositions in writing in order to probe the only research question (Does peer error correction have more effect than teachers' error correction on Iranian EFL learners' correct use of prepositions in essay writing?) posed in this study. Before doing that the results of descriptive statistics were presented in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6

Descriptive Statistics; Posttest of Writing by Groups

	Group	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Posttest of	Peer Feedback	5	18.92	1.038	.208
Writing	Teacher Feedback	5	16.04	1.172	.234

Based on the results displayed in Table4.6 it can be claimed that the peer feedback group (M = 18.92, SD = 1.03) had a higher mean on the posttest of using prepositions in writing than the teacher feedback group (M = 16.04, SD = 1.17).

Table 4.7

Independent Samples Test, Posttest of Writing by Groups

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.039	.844	9.200	48	.000	2.880	.313	2.251	3.509
Equal variances not assumed			9.200	47.306	.000	2.880	.313	2.250	3.510

The results of the independent t-test (t (48) = 9.20, p = .000, r = .799 representing a large effect size) (Table4.7) indicated that there was a significant difference between the two groups' mean scores on the posttest of writing. Thus the hypothesis was supported. The peer feedback group significantly outperformed the teacher feedback group on the posttest of using preposition in writing. It should be noted that the assumption of homogeneity of variances was met

(Levene's F = .039, p = .844). That is why the first row of Table4.7, i.e. "Equal variances assumed" was reported.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Analysis of students' writing revealed that participants in both treatment groups had a decrease in the number of errors in immediate revised texts after receiving corrective feedback. Based on the results of the independent Sample T-test, it was indicated that there was a significant difference between the two groups' mean scores on the posttest of writing. Thus the hypothesis was supported suggesting that peer feedback group significantly outperformed the teacher feedback group on the posttest of using preposition in writing. These finding are consistent with the findings of previous studies (Berg 1999; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz 1992; Zeng, 2006; Kamimura 2006, Jiao, 2007) who concluded peer feedback can improve EFL/ ESL writing performance.

Many other studies also have confirmed the positive effects of peer feedback towards the development of SL/FL writing and their language learning process. For example, research results appearing in Lee (1997), Mendonca and Johnson (1994), Min (2006), Rollinson (2005), Tsui & Ng (2000), Wakabashi (2013) showed that peer readers can provide useful feedback, and that the student writers can revise more effectively by incorporating the peers' comments in their writing.

The study has gone some way towards enhancing our understanding of the effects of teacher correction and peer correction strategies on intermediate learners' writing. The findings of this study complement those of earlier studies. The findings of this research provide insights for learners in demonstrating the importance of employing peer feedback to write better. The practical implication of this study is the contribution to materials and syllabus design to indicate which of peer feedback and teacher feedback strategies are most likely to be instructed to students.

In this study grammatical inaccuracy i.e. correct use of preposition in writing was taken as the main feature for analysis. Further research could include the effect of peer and teacher feedback on other important elements of writing such as content and organization and other area of language such a vocabulary. The research question of this study can also be investigated in relation to students at other levels of proficiency so that the results could be generalized.

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