



RESEARCH ARTICLE

On the effectiveness of receiving teacher and peer feedback as a mediator on Iranian English as a Foreign Language learners' writing skill: Mobile-mediated vs. direct instruction

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Abstract

This study was an endeavor to explore the effect of receiving teacher and peer feedback on Iranian English as a foreign language (EFL) learners' writing skills via mobile texting. A placement test was administered to homogenize them, as a result, 62 of them were selected and randomly assigned into equal groups of experimental and control (31 Ss in each). After that, a writing pretest was administered to both groups at the beginning of the term to ensure they had the same language background. Then, the treatment started and the experimental group received the required feedback from two sources, i.e., teacher and peers via mobile texting, while the control group received instructions directly from their teacher. Data analysis revealed that the learners who received teachers' and peers' feedback via mobile texting outperformed the ones who were instructed through the conventional method. The results also indicated no difference between the performance of male and female learners.

Keywords: Feedback, Writing skill, Mobile-mediated, Direct instruction, English as a foreign language context.

Introduction

In recent years, the role of feedback in second/foreign language instruction has received much attention (Chen & Nassaji, 2018). In Li's (2010) words, feedback is considered as the teacher's responses to a student's ill-formed language utterances. In fact, it refers to any indication that the students produced incorrect target language utterances, the provision of the targeted form, and some explanations concerning the error (Ellis, Loewen, & Erlam, 2006). Feedback plays a dominating role in interactions and contributes

to second/foreign learning either implicitly or explicitly. It provokes students' cognitive processes, attention and noticing, regardless of continual dialogues engaged in interaction (Rassaei, 2014).

Written feedback (WF), also known as error correction, is extensively used and appreciated by language teachers. It is a useful device to provide negative feedback and decrease students' writing errors (e.g., Evans, Hartshorn, & Tuioti, 2010). However, the role of WF has become controversial since Truscott (2007) referred to WF as "ineffective or harmful" (p. 328) in improving students' long-term writing ability. An opposing group of researchers declared that WF can develop students' writing abilities by tapping into their implicit knowledge and can serve as an instructional tool to facilitate second language acquisition (SLA) (Bitchener & Knoch, 2008; Ellis, Sheen, Murakami, & Takashima, 2008). A series of modulating variables have been identified, including the research design, populations, pedagogical contexts, and lengths of WF treatment. Among the variables, the explicitness of WF types has drawn great attention from researchers for its rich potential to mediate students' engagement and learning outcomes. Nevertheless, it is still not obvious which type of WF and under what conditions is more conducive to SLA (Ferris, 2010).

There is an increasing interest in employing technologies in English language classes due to their advantages for language learners. More importantly, using technologies

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as mobile devices to improve writing skill has already been attested too (Mohsen, 2022; Sadiku & Krasniqi, 2018). On the other hand, teachers usually provide feedback on various aspects of English as a foreign language (EFL) writing, including the writing content, coherence and cohesion, the complexity of structures, the range of vocabulary, and so on. The popularity of the cellular telephone among students from elementary school to college has become increasingly evident. For many students, the cell phone is just as important as pencils, notebooks, and textbooks because one of the most widely used features of cell phones is the text messaging service. Text messaging has become vital to students' social lives (Harley, Winn, Pemberton, & Wilcox, 2007) because today's youth have grown up using computers and the internet. This generation of learners is technologically literate and as a result avid users and consumers of wireless technology (Oksman & Turtiainen, 2004). Students use text messaging so frequently that many people inside and outside academia question whether text messaging language shortcuts, referred to as textisms or textese, influence students' academic writing competencies (Wood, Kemp, & Plester, 2016; Bauerlein, 2011). Almost the unspoken comment is that the recreational use of texting may ultimately lead to addiction and a lowering of an individual's ability to shift between text types according to social context (Carrington, 2010).

Whether text-message communication interferes with students' formal writing abilities is a complex question because writing is a complex process. Writing involves perhaps more subskills than any other academic task, and writing well requires students to employ multiple physical and mental processes in one concentrated effort not only to convey information and ideas but also to do so in an academically appropriate style and format (Levine, 2010). It is logical to know whether text messaging use can diminish student writing ability or enhance student writing ability, perhaps do neither or do both; but before these relationships can be studied, a paradigm for writing evaluation must be established. However, it has been observed that learning writing has often been a great problem for Iranian EFL learners for some reasons (Hashemnezhad, 2012). This deficiency can be seen even among language learners who have studied English for years in language institutes. One major reason for this deficiency is that writing is one of the most forgotten skills in the educational system of Iran, where there is no place for writing to be taught, discussed and even practiced. Even the textbooks do not include topics and ideas related to the improvement of writing skill among the learners.

Considering the difficulties of teaching writing, Chastain (2008) and Brown (2001) have discussed that teaching writing has been under the influence of two elements: teacher and learner. The roles attributed to any of these

elements are of great importance in the area of language teaching. Almost all teaching approaches and methods have been under their influence. Historically based on the objectives and the teaching context, various roles have been given to the learner. It may vary from the passive role of the learner to an active participant who has the right to contribute to all aspects of language learning. When the role of the learner is ignored and deemphasized over the teacher's role, the outcome is not always satisfactory. All the shortcomings discussed above may lead to a breakdown of traditional teaching methods where the teacher is the authority, manager, and controller of class activities while the essential role of the learners is neglected.

Considering the above discussion, this study tried to investigate the effect of receiving teachers' and peers' feedback via mobile texting on the EFL students' writing skill. It also examined the effect of direct conventional teaching instruction on the EFL students writing skill. Moreover, the study analyzed the difference between the performance of male and female EFL learners in improving writing skills. In order to meet the research objectives, the following questions and hypotheses have been designed.

1. Does receiving teachers' and peers' feedback via mobile texting have a meaningful effect on the Iranian EFL learners' writing skill?
2. Does direct conventional teaching instruction have a meaningful effect on the Iranian EFL learners' writing skill?
3. Is there a statistically meaningful difference between the performance of male and female EFL learners in improving writing skills?

H01. Receiving teachers' and peers' feedback via mobile texting does not have any meaningful effect on the Iranian EFL learners' writing skills.

H02. Using direct conventional teaching instruction does not have any meaningful effect on the Iranian EFL learners' writing skill?

H03. There is no meaningful difference between the performance of male and female EFL learners in improving writing skills.

Material and Methods

Selecting the participants who could be a true representative of the whole group was one of the most important tasks to follow by the researchers. The population of the study was composed of advanced EFL learners in a language institute in Kerman, Iran. 69 students of both genders were selected from four advanced classes who have already passed the upper-intermediate level. All were native speakers of Persian who participated in the class for 4.5 hours a week. They were selected based on the convenience sampling method, a type of nonprobability sampling in which people are sampled simply because they are "convenient" data sources for

researchers. The Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was used to ensure the participants' homogeneity. After taking the test and drawing the result, seven students whose scores fell one standard deviation above and below the mean were excluded from the study. The other remaining 62 made up the research population and were randomly classified into two groups. The first 31 were selected and made up the experimental group (EG) and the other 31 made up the control group (CG), aged 18 to 23. [Since the population of the study had already studied in the same institute and received almost the same type of instruction and materials, they could establish suitable participants with almost the same level of motivation. Additionally, the selected students were already familiar with writing English short paragraphs. They were instructed how to produce short and simple paragraphs. This is why they were motivated enough to participate in the study and implement the suggestions and instructions of their teacher.

Three instruments were used to collect the data of this study. The first instrument used Oxford Placement Test (OPT) to homogenize the participants. It was a 60-item multiple-choice test of the two sub-skills (grammar & vocabulary) necessary for EFL learners' writing skill. OPT test was administered at the beginning of the course when the students were supposed to start the study. The second instrument was a pretest of writing in order to determine the writing level and performance of the subjects of the study before the treatment. The third instrument was administering a posttest after the treatment to check the students' achievement in writing skill. The given topics for both groups (CG & EG) were the same and extracted from the students' textbook; American English File 5. For the pretest, both groups were asked to write on this topic: Is technology harmful or useful to humans? What are the advantages and disadvantages of using technology in people's lives? Explain and support your ideas. (Write 150-200 words on this topic).

After a 15-session term during which the treatment was used and the tests were taken, the posttest was taken using this topic for both groups: How can individuals protect the environment? What are the encouraging ways for people to be more environmentally friendly? Explain your ideas and giving reasons in support of your answer. (Write 200-250 words). It is worth noting that, the scoring checklist was provided consists of three main parts as: arrangement of ideas and example (AIE), coherence and cohesion (CC), and sentence structure vocabulary (SSV). Moreover, each part provides the necessary factors for giving score. Regarding the scoring checklist, two raters scored writings to ensure the objectivity of the scoring.

To collect the study's data, the researchers used placement and writing tests. For conducting this study, at first four intact classes of 69 students of advanced level were chosen by the researchers from the language institute

where one of the researchers was teaching English for some years. The research lasted for one term (15 sessions), being similar and equal for both groups. The first few sessions were given to practice writing skill and from time to time, writing papers were discussed and presented to the students. For several sessions before the experiment began, the learners in both groups received the necessary instructions to write a standard paragraph by focusing on the form, structure, choice of words, and writing mechanics. Enough exercises were provided to master each section for both groups. In later stages and as a part of class activities, the two groups followed two different approaches in receiving the required feedback. The learners in the CG received instructions on their writing problems and errors directly from their teacher. The teacher was their source of information and feedback provider while the procedures for the EG was completely different. The feedback for the EFL learners in the EG was provided from two sources: teacher and peers via texting.

Before everything, the learners in the EG were encouraged to use their cell phones to text the topics and then as the next step they had to provide their peers with their writings on the phones. In other words, they sent their writings to their peers via their cellphones and asked them to give the required feedback by focusing on the errors they had committed. Therefore, they were asked to read the written texts that were sent to them by their peers and then give them suitable feedback by noting the possible errors that their peers might have committed. Besides, the learners were supposed to send their writings to the teacher and the teacher had to give their own interpretations on the errors they might have committed. Therefore, each student received feedback on the errors from peers and teachers. Also, each one submitted almost eight topics and writings to other members of the group and received the required feedback. Eventually, all the participants wrote the final draft for the teacher in order to be confirmed.

To examine the research hypotheses, the researchers used both descriptive and inferential statistics. Data of the study was a combination of the pre/posttest scores of writings, and mean, mode, median, and independent t-tests were used to analyze the difference between the means of the two groups regarding the score. The independent samples t-test compares the means of two independent groups in order to highlight whether there is statistical evidence that the associated population means are significantly different. The other parameter used the coefficient of correlation to estimate inter-rater reliability.

Result

The data related to the first question is presented in Tables 1 to 4. The mean for the pretest of writing tasks for the 31 students in the CG is estimated to be 15.25 which changes to 15.95 for the posttest for the same group. The data in the

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of pre and post test for the CG

CG	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation
Pretest	31	10.25	17.88	15.25	2.5412
Posttest	31	11.89	17.88	15.95	2.0324
Valid N (Listwise)	31				

table shows the degree of homogeneity among the given scores and the standard deviations. In fact, the raise shows the effect of feedback that the teacher provided for the CG. The mean shows some degree of improvement.

Table 2 presents the t-test data of the pre and posttest for the CG. Since the p-value is estimated to be .285, much higher than .05, no meaningful relationship can be observed between the pre- and post writing tests of the learners in the CG. In fact, it means the treatment has not been effective enough to show a meaningful relationship between the two variables.

In addition, Table 3 presents the data of the EG. It shows the result of pre and post writing tests for the EG comprising 31 participants. The mean for the pretest of writing was estimated to be 15.35. it was increased to 16.55 for the posttest. It can show the raise in the writing level of the learners from pre to posttest and after receiving the treatment that was provided commentaries by the teacher. In fact, the increase can prove the effectiveness of the treatment that the teacher implemented in the form of notes, suggestions and comments in this study.

Moreover, the data in Table 4 shows if any relationship can be observed between the treatment that provided the learners with teacher commentaries. Clearly, the p-value is calculated to be .000, which is lower than .05. it shows that there is a meaningful relationship between the two variables of the treatment and the writing improvement for the learners in the EG. In other words, it can be concluded that the use of teachers' commentary has been effective for the learners in the EG.

Table 2: Paired samples t-test for the CG

Paired Differences		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
Upper				
Pair 1				
Pre-CG-	.25432	-1.253	30	.285
Post CG				

Table 3: Descriptive statistics of pre and post test for the EG

EG	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation
Pretest	31	10.85	17.88	15.35	1.8541
Posttest	31	12.01	18.55	16.55	1.2356
Valid N (Listwise)	31				

Table 4: Paired samples t-test for the EG

Paired Differences		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
Upper				
Pair 1				
Pre-EG-	-1.5421	-7.235	30	.000
Post EG				

Data of Inter-rater Reliability

The data in Tables 5 to 9 show the correlations analysis of the pre and posttest scores for the learners in both groups. The data shows whether or not the scores provided by two independent raters were reliable and consistent. First Cronbach's Alfa for the two pre and post tests of both groups prove that they are reliable enough to trust the scoring procedures that three scorers employed. Second, the intra-class reliability proves that they are all above .85, which is high enough to show the scoring reliability of the two raters.

Independent T-test

The independent t-test is a parametric test that compares the means of two groups, such as a control group and an experimental group, to determine if the difference between the groups' means is statistically significant or due to random chance. The present work compared the male and female students' performance regarding gender in terms of their writing skills (Table 9). The researchers used an independent t-test regarding the assumption of the variance equality (*p-value* in Levene Test = 0.3). As Table 9 shows, the significance level of this test is .067 (*p-value* = .067) which is more than .05 ($\alpha = 0.05$). Thus no significant difference found between the mean score of male and female students' writing performance ($t = 2.65, df = 60, p > 0.05$). It means that after receiving teachers' and peers' feedback via mobile texting males' mean score ($M1 = 14.25, SD1 = 2.225$) is approximately same with the females' mean score ($M2 = 14.23, SD2 = 2.213$). Therefore, based on data analysis of the following table, there is no significant difference between the performance of the female and male students regarding their mean scores. In other words, the students' performance of both groups was the same after the intervention regarding their writing skills.

Discussion

Feedback occurs when two parties engage in an instructional procedure in which one side is viewed as a knowledge giver and the other as a knowledge receiver of the subject matter. Feedback occurs more often when the feedback provider desires a single correct form, action, or performance. In general, the feedback provider is not only an instructor or peer but can also be a parent, oneself, a book, and/or experience. Text messaging has brought convenience and quickness to our society. Text language could be seen as

Table 5: Correlation coefficient for the pre test in CG

	<i>Intraclass correlation^b</i>	<i>95% Confidence interval</i>		<i>F test with true value 0</i>	
		<i>Lower bound</i>	<i>Upper bound</i>	<i>Value</i>	<i>dfⁱ</i>
Single Measures					
Average	.823 ^a	.688	.958	18.202	30
Measures	.941 ^c	.921	.984	18.202	30

Table 6: Correlation coefficient for the post test in EG

	<i>Intraclass correlation^b</i>	<i>95% Confidence interval</i>		<i>F test with true value 0</i>	
		<i>Lower bound</i>	<i>Upper bound</i>	<i>Value</i>	<i>dfⁱ</i>
Single measures					
Average	.844 ^a	.641	.880	12.415	30
Measures	.923 ^c	.885	.955	12.415	30

Table 7: Correlation coefficient for the pre test in EG

	<i>Intraclass Correlation^b</i>	<i>95% Confidence interval</i>		<i>F test with true value 0</i>	
		<i>Lower bound</i>	<i>Upper bound</i>	<i>Value</i>	<i>dfⁱ</i>
Single Measures					
Average	.848 ^a	.641	.881	12.655	30
Measures	.925 ^c	.887	.956	12.655	30

Table 8: Correlation coefficient for the post test in EG

	<i>Intraclass correlation^b</i>	<i>95% Confidence interval</i>		<i>F test with true value 0</i>	
		<i>Lower bound</i>	<i>Upper bound</i>	<i>Value</i>	<i>dfⁱ</i>
Single measures					
Average	.723 ^a	.662	.885	12.951	30
Measures	.927 ^c	.881	.957	12.951	30

a book of shorthand. Users generally shorten words by dropping vowels or endings or using single letters, numbers, symbols or combinations to replace letters, syllables, or whole words (Durkin, Conti-Ramsdent, & Walker, 2010). Text messages also offer students the ability to undertake silent communication (Katz & Aakhus, 2012).

To discuss the first hypothesis, the pre and post-writing test data can clarify the point. Based on the data that were presented earlier, the first hypothesis is rejected. In other words, learners' and teachers' feedback affected the EFL learners' writing performance, and the learners benefited from texting the required feedback given to them by their peers and their teacher. on the contrary, direct conventional instruction supported the idea that teaching of writing without resorting to feedback from the teacher and learners can be effective too, but not as effective as the texting procedures. The data that were achieved through pre and post-writing tests showed that the selected procedure for the EG was effective enough to support the use of texting feedback in the writing class, thus the second null hypothesis cannot be accepted here. Considering the third hypothesis, the researchers applied an independent t-test, and no significant difference was found between the mean score of the male and female learners' writing skill. In fact, after the implementation of receiving teacher and peer feedback, the male's and female's mean score was approximately same. Therefore, findings revealed that the third hypothesis, that there is no meaningful difference between the performance

of male and female EFL learners in improving writing skills, was rejected. In other words, it has been proved that the male and female participants had the same performance in the posttest.

It is worth noting that this project's findings are generally consistent with the findings of Tafazoli *et al.* (2014), which focused on feedback in ESP courses made by using a computer. They concluded that the computer-mediated feedback process seemed to be influential in enhancing the grammatical accuracy of the ESP students. The results also support the findings of Samaee *et al.* (2021) who assessed the impacts of scaffolded and explicit feedback on Iranian EFL students' correct use of articles in oral productions. Their study revealed the effect of scaffolded and explicit feedback on students' oral productions. Moreover, the results of the current study are compatible with Sharghi *et al.* (2023), reported the positive impact of peer feedback and CALL on EFL students' writing and their views. Similarly, the research findings partially follow a study by Zhao (2010), as the students used more teacher than peer feedback in their redrafts without understanding its significance or value.

However, the results are not in line with a study by Amirghassemi *et al.* (2013). They carried out an experimental study to analyze the effect of different feedback in improving Iranian EFL learner' written accuracy, and no difference found between the student's performance in the two groups. Furthermore, Bitchener and Knotch's (2008) study investigated the effectiveness of three types of written

Table 9: Independent t-test for comparing Students' writing performance

Writing skill				<i>p</i> -value of leven	<i>t</i> -test	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i> -value of <i>t</i> -test
Group	Total number	Mean	SD				
Male	28	14.251	2.225	0.3	2.65	60	0.67
Female	34	14.232	2.213				

feedback, but to them it is still not possible to make firm conclusions about which options are the most beneficial to ESL learners. Their outcomes showed no difference in effect upon accuracy between the three treatment options, suggesting that the provision of error correction alone may be sufficient for low-intermediate students.

Conclusion

By conducting this study, it was found that students' and teachers' feedback had effect on the EFL learners' writing performance, also, they benefited from texting the required feedback that was given to them by their peers and their teacher. The study also suggested that direct conventional instruction without feedback from the teacher and learners can be effective too, but not as effective as the texting procedures. Besides, no meaningful difference was found between the performance of male and female EFL learners.

Based on the study achievement, texting has many benefits as a means of communication between friends and family. First, as it is discussed, texting has become a way to maintain friendships among adolescents and contributes to their sense of well-being. Second, texting allows users ample time to read, write, and edit messages while affording more informal, relaxed, and private forms of communication (Durkin *et al.*, 2010; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008). Third, texting allows adolescents to always stay connected with their parents or guardians. Therefore, texting and instant messaging can be a way for parents to keep track of their adolescents (Osit, 2008; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008). The results of this study indicated that texting could be used to provide peers with the required feedback, etc. In fact, texting has become a medium for teaching and investigating topics or ideas within the classroom environment (Reich, 2008). As a result of constant connection and interaction with technology, today's students think and process information differently than previous generations (Prensky, 2001). To increase overall participation in class, teachers are encouraging the use of texting in the classroom as a teaching tool. Students can text rather than raising a hand and wait to be recognized. This use of texting could have the potential to increase class participation (Reich, 2008). All the students in the classroom can participate by sending a text, while only a few can be called upon at one time.

The present study bore some implications and ideas about the use of teacher and peers' commentary in writing class. As already discussed, the results achieved through the pre and posttest of writing showed that the learners

in the EG outperformed the learners in the CG. It can show the effect of using peer and teacher feedback in the writing class for the EG learners who improved their writing development more satisfactorily. The main objective of this study was to explore the effect of peer and teacher feedback via texting on EFL learners' writing performance. Because the data were derived from a representative sample of learners in an EFL language institute, inferences could be made about the potential effects of the used procedure on larger populations of second language learners studying in higher educational EFL contexts. This section's purpose is to suggest how findings from this work may be used to generate real-world applications in second language writing instruction. The achievement of the study indicates the idea that teaching writing using certain feedback strategies may assist the learners to be better EFL achievers in writing and other skills. A range of other relevant contributing factors may have brought about the growth in writing. Perhaps one reason for the increased growth in writing among learners was learners' meaningful participation in the activities and tasks they were supposed to do.

The implications of this study may be best applied to higher educational EFL settings with advanced language learners. Adaptations could be made to suit the needs of learners of varying levels of English language proficiency, native language backgrounds, ages and environments of study to effectively promote writing skills. The research outcomes can provide language teachers with an analytical view about various types of corrective feedback which have effect on EFL learners' writing skills. More importantly, the present work presents guidelines for language teachers to select the appropriate type of corrective feedback, and theoretically, it helps teachers worldwide to grasp a more comprehensive view of their field. This study can guide novice teachers who want to select the best type of feedback in the language classes.

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