

## EFL students' beliefs towards usefulness of corrective feedback in cooperative learning environment

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### Abstract

The current study aimed to find out English as a foreign language (EFL) students' beliefs regarding the usefulness of corrective feedback (CF) in a cooperative learning (CL) environment. This study was a qualitative research design in which a narrative approach was used. The data were collected using interview questions as the research instrument. The researchers had a close observation, prepared notes, and made a record of interview responses from each student to explore and understand their beliefs towards CF provided by the instructors in the CL environment. The findings of this qualitative study revealed that EFL teachers get motivation and inspiration from EFL learners to give a suitable CL environment to second language learners which made the provided CF more effective. In the CL environment, the results indicate that EFL learners realised that they can find solutions to their problems in CL, and in their interviews, they stated that they would not be able to find solutions to their errors individually.

Keywords: Cooperative learning, corrective feedback, English as a foreign language, perceptions;

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## 1. Introduction

The teaching of English as a foreign language (EFL) in Pakistan is a challenging and demanding social activity with the ultimate goal to train EFL students to develop social values, abilities, knowledge, and skills so that they use them to integrate into society (Juchniewicz, 2008). It is general agreement on the point that the best teaching includes effective communication between teachers and learners and among students also. Useful learning occurs in the classroom from effective cooperation among learners. Hence, the teacher's role can be pivotal in creating effectiveness for the language-learning environment (Reis-da-Luz, 2015). Especially when these learners are taught with positive emotional stimuli, they may recall the newly learned information in a better way (Nielson & Lorber, 2009). In this supportive environment, the learners can be stimulated and motivated for learning and actively collaborate with their teachers in the classroom. The learners are largely mobilised by their inquisitiveness and motivated by an extreme need to interact with and explore their conducive environment. Therefore, understanding and the importance of providing feedback in cooperative strategies gives motivation to the learners (Koca, 2016).

Instead of embracing the learner's diversity, many of the EFL teachers attend to learners' diversities by applying classroom collaborative activities which are very attractive to the learners. Hence, even if they are working in a group or alone, they are developing their language individually and even in competition with other students. Johnson and Johnson (1999) perceive the classroom practices to be still overcome by an individual structure, which stresses each of the learners working alone to achieve the goal independently and from a competitive structure, which can match the EFL learners against each other in winning or losing situations to decide who is the best among them. In many EFL classrooms, Pakistani EFL teachers change the students' seating order to peer learners, but do not change the ways the learners respond to each other during learning. Therefore, the cooperative learning (CL) strategy, one of the buzzing words in such a new paradigm of teaching, may yield a positive effect through cross-ability groupings which can enhance the complementary learners' strengths (Bell, 1991).

The main focus of corrective feedback (CF) in a CL environment is to use small cooperative groups in the classroom which helps the language instructors to better students' learning. Teachers encourage the students in the classroom to engage them by assigning them their groups to review the homework on their own, review the daily class worksheets, join in suitable discussions, and do some hands-on activities. Nayan, Shafie, Mansor, Maesin, and Osman (2010) were of the view that the CL strategy in teaching and learning could be used as it would enable language learners to be involved in the learning process with interest when they can do so. They would understand and correct certain concepts or preserve knowledge in their subconscious. Apart from this, language learners use their already acquired knowledge when teachers' virtual teaching has some connectivity with the real world. Language learners' personal experiences and prior knowledge assist them in acquiring and improving comprehension of the CL strategy.

A communicative environment is the main requirement for learning a foreign language in which the students can interact regularly to develop their language skills (Sharan, 2011). But, the problem of classes replete with a larger number of students in developing countries like Pakistan is a great hurdle for EFL learners to improve their skills. Owing to the large size, teachers have to use the traditional method of teaching English. Consequently, students hardly find any opportunity to communicate or to engage themselves in peer response activities to create a self-corrective and CL environment. As a result, they lack in their communicative performance.

Furthermore, due to the competitive system of examination in Pakistan, the students take learning English no more than just as unfriendly. They are engaged in defeating one another to get superiority

by obtaining higher marks. And the result is that constructive and friendly cooperation which not only can enhance their self-learning, self-teaching, and self-cooperation cannot emerge. Because, CL can foster the learners' communicative and social-interpersonal skills (Du, 2012). To handle this situation, the teachers need to apply a structured group learning technique that engages language learners in user interaction. A CL environment is considered the most widely accepted in the EFL context (Panhwar, Umrani, & Chandio, 2017). Johnson and Johnson (1999) advocated for healthier and more active learning of language that would increase students' cognitive and interpersonal skills. The classroom setup is needed to be substituted with one that develops cooperation, interdependence, and interaction between students. Learning becomes more effective if teachers provide preferred CF as perceived by the learners to help students improve their interpersonal communication skills.

### 1.1. Literature review

In the traditional grammar method, conscious presentations and manipulation of forms are required with several drills and practice. The researchers suggest that the learners should pass by 'encounter, process and use' the forms of the target language in different ways, so that the structure of language may become a part of their linguistic performance. It is the general observation that, when L2 learners are exposed communicative environment of grammatical forms already been made aware of overtly, they get a longer-lasting familiarisation with the form and their accuracy is improved (Nassaji & Swain, 2000). A relevant theory is the 'Consciousness-raising theory' which tells that EFL instructors should only emphasise diverting their students' attention to the important features of the structure of language. He should not expect the learners they should master from focusing immediately (Ranalli, 2001).

Exposure is considered to be significant in the successful EFL learning process without looking at whether it functions through deliberate hypothesis testing (DeKeyser, 2007), parameter resetting (White, 2003), or frequency tallying (Ellis, 2009). Nevertheless, input in language acquisition alone is not sufficient to develop native-like proficiency and competency. First, performance is intended to be higher as compared to learners' receiving metalinguistic instructions in addition to exposure (Erlam, 2003; Klapper & Rees, 2003; Norris & Ortega, 2000). Second, adult learners in engaged situations hardly acquire native-like proficiency in some cases, spending a long time in the target-language-speaking countries (Long, 2003).

#### 1.1.1. Cooperative learning

A CL environment is referred to as a 'set of instructional strategies 'that utilises a small team of students to establish peers' cooperation and interactions to study their academic subjects' (Sharan, 1990, p. 341). CL' evidently does not imply simply putting together all students in small groups and assigning them activities to perform, but rather a conducive learning environment wherein EFL teachers may guarantee their improvement in L2 acquisition (Brown, 2008). Therefore, language teaching activities in peer groups can reinforce SL learners' academic standards, communication skills, and motivation for motivation. Through this strategy, EFL learners may have opportunities to demonstrate better performance by using their logical critical thinking (Wentzel & Wakins, 2002).

Students are more involved in the language classroom and can come up with more positive learning outcomes helping the students to acquire the SL with self- CF. When a teacher uses strategy in the language classroom, it has an impact on SL learners' achievement. Bernaus and Gardner (2008) claimed that the more the teacher has a controlling strategy over his students, the less autonomy they feel, and also the more informative the teacher is in terms of the CF given, the more competent the students feel. Students at all levels may have better chances to receive needs with various

learning characteristics to be used by the teachers effectively with collaborative instructions in the class. Therefore, students can get more opportunities to practice their problem-solving strategies, communication, and social skills.

Teaching and learning through cooperative strategy play important roles in improving students' learning abilities. Osman, Nayan, Mansor, Maesin, and Shafie (2010) stated that CL means the practice of learning in a friendly environment which is usually formed with a diverse and accepting group of learners who generally have similar interests or issues in common. These learners have to produce discoveries or explore some possible solutions for problems in the tasks given assigned by the teachers. When the learners work in CL, the EFL learners find conducive collaboration to develop their experience and oral skills conflicts towards their tasks and goals.

Students try to explore and share their knowledge, experiences, and thoughts with their other fellows. For a few students who feel shy, CL is an encouragement to give their opinions and provides a lot of opportunities in the L2 learning environment. This is also a great help to escalate students' participation. Benjamin (2000) was of the view that EFL learners' learning output becomes better when there is reflection and cooperation between students and teachers and within students too. Ahlstrom (2003) said that teachers and students should be engaged in having dialogues, probing themes, and forming new understandings about the world in groups. Real-life materials are very helpful for teachers to explore and fulfil the students' requirements, to reflect in CL between the teachers and the learners. This indirectly includes regular evaluation by observing students' performances in the EFL class. When teachers are eager to test new strategies in the activities of L2 learning class, the learners can get an advantage from the creation construct new knowledge practically. Ocker and Yaverbaum (2002) stated that various research studies were on CL and many revealed that when EFL learners were provided the opportunity to work in cooperation, they performed in a better way. The earlier studies investigated that student encounter, process, and use a form of the target language, and providing CF is very useful, be it oral or written. The experience is lively and teachers can produce students with a better academic performance by using a supportive learning environment (Brown, 2008).

#### *1.1.2. Peer review and peer coaching*

Peer reviews and peer coaching give instructors opportunities to share their ideas and they can develop their teaching skills. By this technique, they encourage learners to form a conducive learning environment and create a functional system in which they can meet all sorts of issues and challenges occurring on the part of parents' involvement, government policies, and learners' difficulties. Little (2005) explained that when peer review and peer coaching occur in connection with providing CL, it helps teachers improve students learning by providing CF to the learners so that they can share their correct learning achievements. Identifying and regarding linguistic and cultural diversity assists the teachers and the learners to construct a bendable program for the CL environment. Perez (2004) also described that schools are just like active agents to evolve culture and govern personal knowledge to coincide with public knowledge. It means that students get an opportunity to enhance their collaboration by sharing their cultural context under their teachers' cooperation and corrective instructions.

EFL learners utilise their previous knowledge by decoding and encoding. They are also able to construct new social and cultural information in the learning environment because each has a different educational and family background. Students may have different levels of understanding and thinking. In this regard, peer review and peer coaching provide a cooperative environment. Besides, teachers' providing CF in such an environment proves a feather in the cap. When CF is

provided by the teacher during students' peer reviewing and coaching, it may further help the teachers to expedite students' learning. Bowman and McCormick (2000) stated that peer review and peer coaching provide opportunities to refine teaching skills through immediate feedback and experimentation with alternate strategies.

### 1.2. Purpose of study

Understanding the language learners' beliefs towards CF in a CL classroom is an effective strategy for language teachers not only to offer a suitable curriculum and learning environment but also to develop students' academic progress. The current study aimed to find out EFL students' beliefs about the usefulness of CF in a CL environment. The following research question was considered:

**RQ1-** What are Pakistani EFL adult learners' Beliefs about CF in a CL environment?

## 2. Materials and methods

To obtain adult learners' learning experience, the qualitative research design was used with a narrative approach.

### 2.1. Participants

Bachelor students from the fourth semester of the Khwaja Fareed University of Engineering and IT Rahim Yar Khan situated in the southern Punjab of Pakistan. 40 students (15 female and 25 male students) enrolled as full-time students in the department of Humanities were selected through a convenient sampling technique. Students were divided into eight groups and were engaged in interdependence, group evaluation, and face-to-face interaction strategies for cooperative purposes for 8 weeks. They were assigned tasks to write about their personal experiences topics such as (a) writing about an important event in their life, what happened and why it was so important (b) about their close friend, when they met him, how friendship became stronger (c) about favourite holiday in life, where did you go what you did and how you enjoyed (d) about a special day with your family or friends, what you did and why it was so special for you. The researcher himself provided oral CF to each student wherever possible.

### 2.2. Instrument

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all the research participants. The data collection proceeded through face-to-face interviews. Daily five interviews were conducted for eight successive days and each interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes for 4 weeks consecutively. During the interviews, the researchers prepared notes and recorded all conversations the interviews to observe individual differences in responses to find out their beliefs towards the use of CF in the CL environment. The researchers remained neutral during data collection so that impartiality and an element of impropriety could be avoided. The most notable point in the research interview questions was that the participants expressed their views about the research project openly. The respondents signed the consent form before their interviews

### 2.3. Data analysis

The researchers analysed collected data from self-observation, interviews, and note-taking. Analysis techniques used in the study are: assigning labels to code, coding the data, comparison, and contrasting data. The researchers described in their own words the participants' answers to the questions and experiences by comparing and contrasting the individual differences and similarities of respondents' interview data. Creswell (2009) is of the view that the researcher is required to give protection to his research participants so that data does not provide any identifiable information

about them. Hence, each participant has been given a pseudonym in this study to protect their confidentiality. The results after the analysis of observations, recordings, and interviews were sent to the participants by email to ensure that the information provided by them were used for research purpose only.

#### 2.4. List of abbreviations

EFL: English as a foreign language  
CL: Cooperative learning  
CF: Corrective feedback

### 3. Results

Most of the adult learners in the university stated that they got better and more effective feedback from their peers and learning experiences in the CL approach. Students were given a short film of a scenario to watch carefully, then they joined the question discussion and critique session. They were asked to write down the scenario they watched. During the activity in the CL environment, the teacher provided assistance to each group with CF and gave directions for the discussion, and helped them with oral and written feedback. The students also cooperated in the group.

After the feedback, they were able to show better performance in speaking and written prompts. One student opined that she found CF in cooperative strategy very useful. He further added that she was able to learn in a better way with the teacher's assistance and monitoring as well as from her fellows' cooperation. The research proved that the more support, monitoring, and CF the students were provided in group cooperation by the instructor, the better the approach students acquired. The students were observed considering the peer evaluation, face-to-face communication in groups, and CF from the instructor as effective tools which were used in the CL strategy.

All the participants of the study believed that group tasks written and spoken both developed their thinking ability more than individual learning strategies as used in a traditional environment. CF in CL makes foreign language learning very interactive and interesting as compared to traditional learning strategy. It produces interesting social connections between learners and instructors. The participants also told that during group tasks, there emerged in them a sense of responsibility and they were more determined and motivated for learning English. They tried to lose face with their bad performance.

### 4. Discussion

On the whole, findings gave reflections of most studies which also revealed the significance of providing CF and CL strategy which includes (1) students not only learning efficiently in CL but also getting assistance from teachers in improving teaching skills through CF directly and indirectly during classroom lectures. (2) Learning in peer groups also makes foreign language learning easier. In addition, (3) Instructors can provide a supportive learning strategy to motivate the students for producing effective output in EFL class.

Most of the students expressed that getting CF from the teacher in the EFL class made their written and spoken language tasks easier as all the work became more interesting with peer cooperation in groups. Two participants stated that they improved their writing and speaking skills. They were also seen not afraid of speaking English and producing any writing draft. Three participants expressed that the CL strategy helped in their learning and facilitated catching up with their fellows and made them more productive as compared to their previous situation. Several other studies were



attempted on the CL strategy and revealed that when students were placed to work in collaboration, their performance was improved and they became better learners (Brown, 2008; Ocker & Yaverbaum, 2002).

## 5. Conclusion

Providing CF both oral and written in the CL environment in the current study revealed that students realised that they were able to improve their written and spoken abilities in group tasks which they could not do in isolation. So, they learned how to improve in a collaborative environment, how to evaluate and respond to each other's work, and how to perform peer review activities. The students felt very satisfied with peer coaching, peer evaluation, and peer reviews. They worked and came up with effective learning strategies for EFL classroom activities.

Besides, when the researchers helped their students to work in cooperation, they were able to get more likely to know the students' needs to assist them in their learning. Moreover, students' participation and teachers' facilitation in terms of providing CF wherever necessary, improved the students' communicative skills and logical thinking in the cooperative social network. Most importantly, peers also acted as friendly tutors in the CL environment.

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