

The Impact of Peer Corrective Feedback on Pronunciation Development of Intermediate EFL Learners

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Abstract

The concept of peer correction in foreign language teaching has been a dominant concern in recent years due to the increased consideration of learner-centered curricula. The researchers have concluded that active engagement happens when learners have to think and correct each other. The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of peer correction on the pronunciation improvement of Iranian EFL learners in oral productions. To do this, two research questions were raised, and 60 participants were carefully chosen from among English language learning students at a private language school. By assigning a PET test, they were divided into two groups. In the peer correction group (experimental group), the participants corrected each other's pronunciation errors, and for the control group, learners' errors were corrected by the teacher. This process continued for 20 sessions. A pre-test and a post-test were administered. The results showed that there is a significant difference in the pronunciation of the peer correction group compared to the other group, and the peer correction group outperformed the teacher correction group. It can be concluded that there is a direct relationship between using the peer corrective feedback method of correcting pronunciation and learners' pronunciation improvement in EFL classes.

Keywords: error correction, peer correction, teacher correction, pronunciation improvement

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1. Introduction

As English becomes extensively used as an international language, it is essential for learners to converse in English more fluently. The ability to pronounce English correctly has become a more key skill than ever. Learners tend to be unwilling to learn pronunciation because it is hard to correct. Peer interaction or cooperative learning is an extensive concept in today's language classrooms. It applies to cooperative learning, group discussion, pair work, team performances, and so forth. Since learners' performance arises in group work, they provide feedback and exchange ideas. Accordingly, peer feedback can increase opportunities to practice speaking. In so doing, learners can recognize other classmates in the role of the teacher, which is helpful in motivating students to teach in order to learn. Therefore, the flawed pronunciation of a learner can be successfully improved by peers through feedback.

The students' errors are so various and frequent that they require ongoing teacher feedback. Thus, different methods to correct errors have been proposed. The purpose of this study is to find the effect of peer correction on students' pronunciation improvement. Since most of the educational classes are carried out based on the teacher-centered feedback approach, it seems that the education method of peer correction can be an appropriate solution to help students gain awareness of their positives and negatives in a way that the peers can express those points left unnoticed to language learners in a safe atmosphere.

The main question regarding the errors learners make is whether they should be allowed or handled wisely using common correction strategies or techniques. Teachers can benefit from knowing the likely errors that learners make (Ellis, 2008), and all learners need their teachers and classmates' help in the correction process because, as Long (1996) states, feedback provided through verbal interaction can facilitate second language (L2) learning by connecting form and meaning; however, it should be noted that correction of errors can be done based on learners' preferences.

For this reason, error correction strategies serve a research purpose in various language teaching contexts as a major field of interest for teachers and researchers. It can be presumed that the situation may be a bit complicated in an English language teaching (ELT) context in which students are trained to become English teachers, and at times it could be very different

from an English as a foreign language (EFL) and English as a second language (ESL) context, but still, many similarities can be observed. In this sense, whether to correct vocabulary and pronunciation errors or not and how to correct these errors have always been important issues for instructors teaching at ELT departments; thus, this is an area which needs to be investigated in the Iranian context so that suggestions can be put forward for more effective treatment of such errors.

Learning at all levels requires the interactive efforts of the instructor and learners. It is a moment of exchange of ideas and/or opinions between the teacher and his/her students. Piaget (1970) argues that social interaction promotes learning. In the words of Buckholdt and Wodarski (1978), students learn easily in interactive groups because peers can simply code one another's language without stress. Peer feedback is very important in the learning process because peer disagreement readily yields social and cognitive conflicts, which make peers become aware of views other than their own. This allows them to reassess the validity of their own point of view and learn to justify their own opinions and communicate them to others (DiPardo & Freedman, 1988).

Piagetian and Vygotskian frameworks view learning from different but related angles. While Piaget (1970) asserts that although social interaction plays a great role in the learning process, it is only secondary to development, Vygotsky (1978) argues that the social environment is central to the learning process. In Piaget's view, development leads learning, but in Vygotsky's, learning leads development through the mechanism of social interaction. Damon (1984) observes that Piagetian and Vygotskian approaches to peer instructional interaction might appear contradictory, but they are actually mutually complementary to each other.

In the same vein, the formal instructional approach to teaching, whereby a teacher does almost all the tasks, and the peer group approach, which involves students' interactive efforts, are complementary to each other. Inasmuch as teachers' instructions in the learning process cannot be ruled out, it is important to note that the response group comprising peers, in the modern pedagogy, is veritable. A peer-based interaction is, therefore, significant to pedagogical

activities because students feel freer to express themselves when they are with their peers alone than when their teacher is present (Buckholdt & Wodarski, 1978).

2. Literature Review

Pronunciation teaching is an indispensable part of any language teaching course. Self-reliance with pronunciation permits learners to interact with native speakers, which is vital for all aspects of linguistic improvement. Poor pronunciation, however, can make learners perform less than their deserved social and academic potential. “Labor mobility and the existence of international employment opportunities have heightened the need to communicate and to be understood” (Mitra et al., 2003, p. 2). Good pronunciation is closely linked with clear oral communication; therefore, it is advisable to place students in a meaningful and contextual situation and include them in carrying out the real-life tasks. Recently, as the curricula of ELT have moved towards communicative competence and task-based language teaching, a new determination for teaching pronunciation has arisen (Celce-Murcia, 1987), because poor pronunciation will lead to problems in oral communication, no matter how well a speaker’s control of vocabulary or grammar might be. Saito (2021) conducted research and the results generally revealed that pronunciation-center corrective feedback simplifies the development of accuracy. Specifically, the potentials of the pronunciation center can be maximized when L2 learners have enough phonetic knowledge, conversational experience, and perceptual awareness of target sounds.

Methods of ELT have traditionally attributed a primary role to feedback, whether generated by learner, peer, computer, or a teacher, and whether occurring through error correction, self-editing, peer feedback, or conferencing (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). The importance of feedback developed with the expansion of learner-centered approaches to instruction in North American L1 composition classes during the 1970s. The “process approach” puts greater attention to supporting writers through multiple drafts by providing feedback and suggesting revisions during the process of writing, rather than at the end of it.

Feedback refers to the feedback that learners get regarding the language they produce (VanPatten & Benati, 2010). Feedback is a natural part of language that we use to clarify the meaning of what we say, and to help ourselves and others understand what we mean, by asking

questions (Ferm Lange, 2009). The form and model of the feedback that the learner receives is more than just the teacher's marginal notes, including oral interaction. The focus moves from a concern with mechanical accuracy and control of language to a greater emphasis on the development and discovery of meaning through the experience of speech production. Feedback comes to be viewed as having a powerful potential, with the potentiality for "a revision of cognition itself that stems from response" (Freedman, 1985, p. 6). Feedback and correction have mainly been investigated in the writing classes. For example, Hyland and Hyland (2006) state that providing feedback to students has come to be recognized as one of the ESL writing teacher's most important tasks. It can be in the form of written commentary, error correction, teacher-student conferencing, or peer discussion. It offers the kind of individualized attention that is otherwise rarely possible under normal classroom conditions. Feedback, as viewed by Magno and Amarles (2011), necessitates the existence of gaps between what has been learned and the target competence of the learners, and the efforts undertaken to bridge these gaps. The role of feedback and correction, however, has not been properly addressed in the area of speech production and pronunciation improvement of foreign language learners.

Ahangari (2014) studied the effect of self, peer and teacher correction on pronunciation improvement by asking them to tell a story about pictures. In the self-correction group, each member had to correct their pronunciation errors independently, in the peer correction group, the participants in pairs corrected each other's pronunciation errors, and for the third group, their errors were corrected by the teacher. This procedure lasted for 15 sessions. A pre-test and a post-test were administered. The results showed that the pronunciation of the self-correction group improved more than the other two groups, and the peer correction group outperformed the teacher correction group.

2.1. Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study is to find out if peer correction has any effect on students' performance in pronunciation improvement. The paucity of research in this realm makes this particular study hard to conduct but significant. The main purpose is to delve into ELT classrooms to discern how EFL learners correct peers, and whether peer correction is a better method of correction than teacher correction.

2.2. Research Questions

Based on the objectives of this study, the following research questions and the subsequent null hypotheses are formed:

1. Does peer corrective feedback have any positive effect on the pronunciation improvement of Iranian EFL learners?
2. Does shifting from a teacher-oriented approach to a student-oriented one positively affect the process of learning vocabulary pronunciation?

3. Method

3.1. Participants

For the purpose of this study, 60 male and female EFL learners were randomly selected from the Navid language institute in Shiraz. Male learners equaled female learners in number. All the students were native speakers of Persian, ranging from 18 to 25 years of age. The selected participants were randomly assigned to two classes of equal size, about 30 students in each class. The students had to study the *Top Notch* series through an intensive course. The participants in the experimental group were presented with the principles of peer corrective feedback during the teaching course while the control group participants were taught based on the traditional method of teacher and self-correction.

3.2. Instruments

In order to obtain measurable data, the following instruments were utilized:

Preliminary English Test (PET): This test, which is a language proficiency test designed for people who can use everyday written and spoken English at an intermediate level, was administered to homogenize the participants at the beginning of the study. PET is one of the standardized tests in the series of Cambridge ESOL. This test is divided into three sections:

Reading-Writing, Listening, and Speaking. All sections were administered in this study, and each question carried one mark. The allocated time for this test was around two hours: 1

hour and 30 minutes for reading and writing, 30 minutes for listening, and 10-12 minutes for speaking.

Post-test: At the end of the treatment, the researcher used the speaking section of another PET test, with exactly the same characteristics discussed above under PET, as the speaking post-test.

Rating scale: The analytic rating scale of the PET speaking test was used in order to rate the participants' pre-test and post-test performances. The rating scale included five criteria, each carrying three marks, i.e., from 0 to 3. The criteria included grammar and vocabulary, discourse management, pronunciation, interactive communication, and global achievement. According to the goals of this study, special focus was on pronunciation, and its scores were used to compare the level of students' pronunciation improvement.

3.3. Data Analysis

Data analysis procedures for this study were comprised of quantitative data analyses using *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences* (SPSS). The results answered research questions of this study through some descriptive statistics, which represented Means and Standard Deviations of different variables under investigation as well as correlation and a series of t-test analyses, which were used to determine whether differences between the sample means are statistically significant or not.

4. Results

The participants of this study were carefully chosen from among 60 EFL students based on their proficiency scores. Then they were divided into two identical groups. In order to check their homogeneity, a one-way ANOVA was run on their proficiency scores. As it is clear from Table 1, the mean scores of the two groups are approximately the same (68.73, 66.80). The descriptive statistics of the experimental group and the control group are demonstrated in Table 1.

But in order to be sure whether there is any significant difference between the mean score of the two groups or not, the data were analyzed through a one-way ANOVA; the results of which are shown in Table 2.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics for the PET test

Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
peer correction	30	68.73	3.731	63	75
teacher correction	30	66.80	3.256	61	73
Total	60	67.76	3.493	62	73

Table 2

One-way ANOVA for the PET test

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
PET	Between Groups	30.533	2	15.267	.945	.397
	Within Groups	678.267	42	16.149		
	Total	708.800	44			

As the results of the ANOVA test in Table 2 show, there has not been a significant difference among the two groups regarding their proficiency level ($F(2, 42) = 0.945$, $p = 0.397$). The data obtained from the performance of the participants in the narrative tasks were put into SPSS, and a one-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test (Table 3) was run to test the normality of scores dispersion. Assuming zero shows the normality of the variables' dispersion. If the significance level is under 0.05, then the null hypothesis will be rejected and the result of the dispersion normality is not acceptable.

Table 3

One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test

	Group	N	Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Pre-test	peer correction	30	.506	.960
	teacher correction	30	.635	.814
Post-test	peer correction	30	.703	.706
	teacher correction	30	.496	.967

Based on the results of the One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test, shown in Table 3, the normality of the scores in pre-test and post-test was assured, and the following tests were computed for answering the research questions. The first part of the data analysis referred to the first research question of the study, which aimed at investigating the relationship between peer corrective feedback and pronunciation improvement of Iranian EFL learners.

To answer the first research question, a paired sample t-test was conducted to see if there is any significant difference in the pronunciation scores of the pre-test and post-test for the peer correction group.

Table 4

Paired Sample T-Test for the peer correction group

Group			Mean	N	Std. Deviation	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
peer correction	Pair 1	Pre-test	.587	30	0.128	-8.515	14	.000
		Post-test	.876	30	0.094			

As Table 4 shows, the pronunciation mean score for the peer correction group in the post-test is higher than the pre-test, and the significance level is smaller than 0.05 ($t(14) = 8.515, p=0.000$), so we can conclude that the pronunciation measurement in the peer correction group has shown a significant increase. So the answer to the first question is Positive, and we can say that peer correction leads to more improvement in the pronunciation of the participants.

Based on the second research question, the researcher wanted to find out if there is any significant difference between the two groups regarding their pronunciation scores in the post-test. To answer this question, the researcher conducted a one-way ANOVA analysis. Assuming zero shows that there is no difference between the two variables. If the significance level is under 0.05, then the null hypothesis will be rejected. Table 5 shows the descriptive statistics in the two groups. The variances equality in the two groups is needed for testing the means. So this test is done by Levine's statistics.

As indicated in Table 5, the mean score of the peer correction group (0.876) is much higher than the mean score of the teacher correction group (0.623). In order to see whether this

difference among the groups is statistically meaningful or not, the researcher conducted a one-way ANOVA test, the results of which are shown in Table 6.

Table 5

Descriptive & Test of Homogeneity of Variances

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Levine Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Post-test	peer	30	.876	.094	2.431	2	42	.100
	correction							
	teacher	30	.623	.110				
	correction							
	Total	60	.745	.138				

Table 6

ANOVA Test for the Comparison of Groups

		Sum Squares	of df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Post-test	Between Groups	.481	2	.241	28.360	.000
	Within Groups	.356	42	.008		
	Total	.837	44			

As the results of the ANOVA test ($F(2, 42) = 28.36, p = 0.000$) in Table 6 show, the difference across the participating groups' pronunciation measurement reached significance. The values observed for the F and p value indicated that the two groups involved did not perform equally in the narrative task performance, because of the different types of corrections they had for their pronunciations. As the results of the tables indicate, the pronunciation mean score of the post-test in the peer correction group (experimental group) is significantly higher than that of the teacher correction group (control group).

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The results of data analyses demonstrated that there is a statistically significant difference in the performance of experimental and control groups. As mentioned earlier, the experimental

group was taught based on the tenets of peer corrective feedback while the control group was taught traditionally using the teacher's corrective method. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a direct relationship between using the peer corrective feedback method of correcting pronunciation and learners' pronunciation improvement in EFL classes. As such, the first research hypothesis of the study, which predicted no relationship between using the peer corrective feedback method of teaching and learners' improvement in pronunciation in EFL classes, is rejected. The results obtained highlight the potential benefits of peer corrective feedback in language classes, which can positively affect pronunciation improvement among EFL learners, because when learners receive feedback from peers, they may feel more motivated to improve as they value their peers' opinions and support. The results showed that there was a significant difference among the means of the participants of the two groups regarding their pronunciation during the narrative task performance. The peer correction group had a higher rate in comparison with the teacher correction group.

The findings of the present study are consistent with Lyster and Ranta's (1997) findings that student repair and correction lead to better language learning. They concluded that active engagement happens when there is a negotiation of form and focus on the form. The noticing hypothesis (Schmidt, 1990) claims that L2 learners cannot begin to acquire a language feature until they become aware of it in the input, and they should notice the grammatical form of their input in order to acquire grammar. In other words, providing feedback is a critical thinking skill. Learners must analyze their peers' pronunciation and articulate suggestions for improvement; as a result, it can reinforce their own pronunciation skills. In the present study, the participants who had corrected their classmates' errors paid more attention to those errors and learned them better than the other group participants. The findings support Buchanan's (2004) acknowledgement that peer assessment can promote more active engagement with the course than simply sitting back and waiting for a grade. The results are also in line with the statements of Schunk (2000, cited in Buchanan, 2004), who says that developing peer correction strategies helps students gain control over learning.

These findings are also in line with the findings of Wood (2004) at the University of Kansas. She studied the benefits of peer correction in her own class for two months and

concluded that students enjoyed looking back at their compositions and errors provided wonderful opportunities for learning and improving their written language. Yeganehfar (2000) also argues that, as far as responding to the written errors of Iranian EFL students is concerned, students' correction works much better than teacher correction. Peer correction involves the students in the process of language learning, and it renews their confidence and autonomy if they can correct each other. Peer feedback fosters a sense of autonomy in learners, encouraging them to take ownership of their learning process. This can lead to more self-directed practice and exploration of pronunciation outside of formal instruction. It makes their mistakes more memorable and less likely to occur. Students' peer correction also informs the teacher about the students' knowledge, ability and awareness. Hagège (1999) believes that correction is even more efficient when it is done with the help of children's classmates. The peer correction group showed more improvement compared to the control group, which received the teacher correction feedback. The better performance of this group as compared to the teacher's correction group is in line with Vygotsky's (1978) theory on language learning, i.e., learning is a cognitive activity which takes place in social interaction. Ganji (2006, cited in Birjandi & Hadidi Tamjid, 2011) also expresses that peer-correction seems to have a more lasting effect on the learners' performance, due to the need for more cooperation and activity on the part of the learners, while analyzing and discussing the errors in more detail. In this regard, the findings of the present study are in agreement with those of Tost (2013), who concluded that peer-mediated repeated oral reading interventions carried out by students' cooperation were effective in improving the students' pronunciation and fluency.

To maximize the benefits of peer corrective feedback, teachers can implement designed activities such as role plays, pronunciation drills with peer assessment, and guided discussions and listening to peers, where learners can exchange feedback on specific pronunciation targets.

Conflict of interest

The author(s) certify/certifies that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest (such as honoraria; educational grants; participation in speakers' bureaus; membership, employment, consultancies, stock ownership, or other equity interest; and expert testimony or patent-licensing arrangements), or non-

financial interest (such as personal or professional relationships, affiliations, knowledge or beliefs) in the subject matter or materials discussed in the present research paper.

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