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Research Paper

Corrective Feedback/Talkback in IELTS Writing Task 2: Different Feedback/Talkback Media in Focus

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Abstract

This mixed-methods study compares the amount of feedback/talkback in IELTS Writing Task 2 depending on feedback media (pen-and-paper vs. Microsoft Word) and whether learners' presence (synchronicity) or absence (asynchrony) influenced the amount of feedback/talkback. To that end, four writing situations using different feedback media were considered; each including four sessions for instruction and four sessions for giving corrective feedback/talkback to the essays from 41 IELTS candidates. Two classes used pen and paper to write their essays, while two others used Microsoft Word. Each essay was expected to receive feedback/talkback from the instructors in sessions two, four, six, and eight either synchronously or asynchronously. Having collected 160 essays, eighty for each medium, the researchers used Pearson's chi-squared test for data analysis. The results revealed that the amount of feedback/talkback in IELTS Writing Task 2 was significantly different when Microsoft Word was used than pen-and-paper, and when the process was synchronous. Furthermore, to explore the instructors' and IELTS

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candidates' perceptions of feedback/talkback media used, semi-structured interviews, focus groups and reflective essays were taken from the instructors, while the IELTS candidates were invited to two focus groups and were also urged to write reflective essays on their experiences during the course of the treatment. The qualitative phase of the study, in turn, explored the perceptions of the instructors and IELTS candidates about the feedback/talkback media in IELTS Writing Task 2 in the presence or absence of the candidates. Multiple themes emerged from the data in the qualitative analysis revealing that the perceptions of the instructors and IELTS candidates were different when different media were used, and when the process was synchronous rather than asynchronous. The implication of the study was that instructors can benefit from synchronous online media to provide a better learning environment for writing, especially in giving corrective feedback/talkback to writing practices. Moreover, giving feedback/talkback to writings in the presence of learners online is deemed to be more productive.

Keywords: Corrective Feedback, Talkback, Online Media, Synchronous, Asynchronous

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1. Introduction

Feedback has been an interesting area of research for both EFL/ESL writing and Second Language Acquisition (SLA) researchers. There have been several researchers who were interested in feedback types in writing (Ellis, 2009), amount of feedback (Song, Hoon, & Alvin, 2017), its effectiveness (Hendrickson, 1978; Leki, 1991), and learners' responses to feedback (Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010; Buckingham & Aktug-Ekinci, 2017; Teo, Khazaie, & Derakhshan, 2021). In addition, SLA researchers have had an interest in finding out how corrective feedback (CF) improves the process of language acquisition (Ellis, 2009).

However, this amount of attention from these researchers has just resulted in conflicting findings. For instance, Truscott (1996) questioned the effectiveness of feedback and his claim has been supported by evidence from some other researchers (Hendrickson, 1978; Leki, 1991; Polio, 1998). On the

contrary, there have been a large number of researchers claiming that feedback is an essential tool in order for language acquisition and improvements to take place (Bitchener, Young & Cameron, 2005; Chung, 2015; Ellis, Sheen, Murakami & Takashima, 2008; Farid & Samad, 2012; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Van Beuningen, De Jong & Kuiken, 2012).

Recently, however, many researchers have focused on responses which learners emit when they are given feedback (Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010; Buckingham & Aktug-Ekinci, 2017). Nevertheless, four gaps have been identified in the literature on feedback: firstly, despite the recent attention to learners' responses to feedback, IELTS (The International English Language Testing System) candidates' perceptions of feedback provided to their writings have not been properly explored. In addition, there is a paucity of research on the possible effects of using different media of communication in order to provide feedback. Furthermore, to date, research has been rare on whether the presence of learners while giving feedback to their writings influences the amount and type of feedback. Finally, the teachers' perceptions of the feedback which they give to learners' IELTS essay writings have not been examined adequately.

This study was thus intended to bridge these gaps: by finding out whether the online feedback/talkback given by instructors through Skype was influenced by different media in which IELTS candidates wrote their papers, by investigating and identifying different perceptions IELTS candidates had when given feedback/talkback in different media of composition and on and offline, by examining whether the presence of IELTS candidates while giving feedback/talkback affected their perceptions of feedback/talkback, and by exploring the teachers' perceptions of the process of feedback/talkback under the same situations on and offline including the use of different feedback media in the presence or absence of learners.

CF has been an established area of interest in the field of SLA and L2 writing. However, there have been controversial views regarding its effectiveness. Perhaps the most serious case against CF has been put forward by Truscott's 1996 claim "that grammar correction has no place in writing courses and should be abandoned" (p. 328). On the other hand, the research community has not been very welcoming to this claim. There have been studies that questioned this claim, and several researchers have argued that written CF (WCF) can, indeed, be very effective (Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener & Knoch, 2008; Chandler, 2003; Ferris, 2002; Shao, 2015; Sheen, 2007).

As this debate continued, some other researchers began studying the responses (Song, et al., 2017), preferences (Chung, 2015; Cohen & Cavalcanti, 1990; Radecki, 1988), emotional responses (Mahfoodh, 2017), and perceptions of EFL/ESL learners to the WCF provided by teachers (Mahfoodh & Pandian, 2011). For instance, in order to examine the number of revisions which learners were willing to make to their writings based on the WCF they received, Song et al. (2017) analyzed forty-one sets of papers in initial and final forms based on WCF given on their language and styles, rhetorical structures and formats. According to the findings, students preferred WCF on rhetorical structure and format more than language and style. The results also showed that learners were more interested in "macro issues concerning the clarity of their thesis/topic statements and the logical development of ideas than with the mechanical aspects of writing" (p. 357). In addition, Chung (2015) conducted a study on the preferences of Korean and Japanese learners of English and found that the participants preferred direct feedback more than other types of feedback.

Moreover, Mahfoodh (2017) studied the relationships between EFL university learners' emotional responses and their success in revising their papers according to the WCF received. The findings showed that the

participants' responses included acceptance, rejection, surprise, happiness, dissatisfaction, disappointment, frustration and satisfaction. He attributed some of the emotional responses to the severe criticisms on the teachers' side. In addition, the results suggested that learners' perceptions and use of feedback depended on learners' emotional responses.

In a similar strand, Evans, Hartshorn, and Tuioti (2010) investigated the attitudes of 1053 writing instructors from 69 countries towards CF they gave to their students' writing. The main findings suggested that teachers believed that they had good reasons for utilizing WCF in EFL/ESL contexts.

Nowadays due to COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent lockdown of educational institutions, the use of online technology and distance learning came to help tremendously by preventing lockdown from extending to educational activities. Teachers and students everywhere had to resort to online technologies to be able to survive (Monjezi, Mashhadi, & Maniati, 2021).

In this study, feedback/talkback is defined as any reactions (written or spoken) by teachers to any part of an essay in form of comments, corrections, recasts or marking of its parts. On the other hand, perceptions are defined as emotions, feelings, understandings and basically any reactions learners and teachers have about receiving and giving feedback.

However, despite an ever-increasing interest in feedback and learners' responses, no research has been conducted on whether the presence of EFL learners can influence the amount of feedback/talkback, learners' responses to different situations under which feedback/talkback is given and teachers' perceptions of the feedback under such situations. A qualitative study is likely to reveal L2 writing teachers' perceptions and the practice more profoundly. Thus, the following four questions stand out:

Quantitative research questions:

1. Do different media of providing feedback influence the amount of feedback/talkback by the teachers on and offline?
2. Does EFL learners' synchronicity or asynchrony influence the amount of feedback/talkback by EFL teachers?

Qualitative research questions:

3. How do learners perceive feedback/talkback to their writings in different situations (synchronously vs. asynchronously)?
4. How do teachers perceive feedback/talkback they give to learners' writings in different situations (synchronously vs. asynchronously)?

2. Methodology

2.1 Setting

The study was conducted in a private language institute in the city of Ahvaz, southwest of Iran. The language school had been operating for 6 years at the time of the study and offered specialized adult courses like IELTS, PTE (Pearson Test of English) and TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language).

2.2 Participants

The participants were 41 IELTS candidates at intermediate and upper-intermediate levels, ranging in age from 20 to 41 who were either graduates or students at different levels of higher education.

2.3 Instructors

The instructors included four EFL teachers aged from 28 to 40 two who had teaching experiences ranging from five to fifteen years. Three of them had MA degrees in TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) and one had a PhD in TEFL. Before collecting the data, both teachers and learners were informed about the research, and written consents were signed by them. The researchers assured them that their identities would be kept confidential, and in the excerpts the names are changed to meet this requirement.

2.4 Procedure

Before the classes started, the researchers had a meeting with the instructors in order to brief them on the research purposes and procedures. The classes included four IELTS courses, and each instructor had at least one class. Each course involved 32 sessions, and there were four sessions a week focusing on each of the four language skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing separately. In the four writing classes which included 9, 10, 11 and 11 IELTS candidates each, there were four sessions for instruction and four sessions for giving feedback/talkback to their essays. In sessions one, three, five and seven, the instructors taught the materials intended for IELTS writing task 2 essays. After these sessions (as an assignment), the students were expected to write four essays, a minimum of at least 250 words for each essay, based on the writing task 2 (essay) of the IELTS exam during the course of the treatment. However, the students were not expected to write their essays under the required standard time limit of forty minutes of the IELTS exam, but to submit their papers before the coming session. Each essay was accordingly expected to receive feedback/talkback from the instructors in sessions two, four, six, and eight either synchronously or asynchronously. Two classes used pen and paper to write their essays, while two others used Microsoft Word as a medium of essay writing. Accordingly, two situations were designed for each medium of composition which are presented below.

2.4.1 Pen and paper

- *Situation 1 (asynchronous)*: Learners wrote their essays using pen and paper. The image of the finished essays would be sent to the instructor using WhatsApp. Instructors, then, provided feedback asynchronously in the chat section of the WhatsApp, and learners did not observe the process.

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- *Situation 2 (synchronous)*: Learners wrote their essays in pen and paper and shared the image files of their essays with the instructor. Each learner was then assigned a time to meet with the instructor alone in Skype environment where s/he could provide feedback/talkback synchronously and discuss the essay with each learner individually, though the feedback could not be added to the essay as it was in image form.

2.4.2 Microsoft Word

- *Situation 3 (asynchronous)*: Instructors provided feedback to learners' essays written in Microsoft Word asynchronously. In effect, the essays would be sent to the instructors using WhatsApp where they could provide feedback in the review section of the Word files, while the learners were not present to observe the feedback process. After giving feedback, the instructors sent the essays back to the learners.
- *Situation 4 (synchronous)*: Instructors provided feedback/talkback to essays written in Microsoft Word synchronously. To that end, all learners would meet up with the instructor at the same time in Skype environment where s/he could give feedback/talkback to all essays one after another. All learners would observe the feedback process and each other's essays in Skype environment. Situations two and four were recorded in order for the researchers to be aware of the interactions that went on about the feedback/talkback.

2.5 Data Collection

The design of the study required different types of data to be collected.

1. *Essays*: Each participant was requested to write four essays, a minimum of at least 250 words for each, during the course of the treatment, amounting to a total of 160 essays from forty-one participants. Eighty essays were written in the medium of pen and paper, while eighty other essays were submitted in

Microsoft Word format. The essays were written according to the instructions given in task two of IELTS writing test of academic module.

2. *Recorded interactions of situations two and four*: A total of 246 minutes of recorded data was collected from situation two, and 528 minutes of data from situation four. The recordings were then analyzed in order to find the amount and type of interactions the instructors had with the learners.

3. *Semi-structured interviews with the instructors*: There was a one-hour semi-structured interview for each of the four instructors on what they felt and thought of different ways of giving feedback and how giving feedback helped them in teaching different aspects of writing.

4. *Focus groups for the instructors*: This procedure was used in order to make an interactive environment for the instructors to be able to share their ideas with their peers on different feedback/talkback media used in IELTS Writing Task 2.

5. *Instructors' reflective essays on their experience with different feedback/talkback media used in IELTS Writing Task 2*: In reflective essays, one can examine an experience or situation through self-reflection and describing their thoughts and emotions about the aspects a particular event or experience they might not be able to share as a result of forgetfulness or probably due to considering issues unsuitable for being expressed in groups (Bashan & Holsblat, 2017).

6. *Focus groups for learners*: The IELTS candidates participating in each group took part in a one-hour focus group in which they responded to questions asked about the amount and type of feedback they received on their essays, how they felt about receiving feedback, and the aspects of their writing that they thought improved accordingly.

7. *Learners' reflective essays on their experience with feedback/talkback media used in IELTS Writing Task 2*.

The use of different methods for gathering data made different types of data available for analysis. The data gathered could be considered from multiple

viewpoints: 1) mode of production: oral and written, 2) privacy: public and private, 3) personal: personal and social, 4) reflectiveness: reflective and spontaneous, 5) directedness: researcher-directed and semi-researcher-directed, 6) genre: narrative and dialogic, 7) recency: recent and non-recent. The diversity of the collected data allowed the triangulation so that the results could be validated.

2.6 Data Analysis

As this study adopted a mixed-methods approach, different types of data were collected and different methods were thus used for analyses of the data.

The first type of data to be analyzed was the amount of feedback/talkback given by the instructors to the participants in the four designed situations. Chi-square was used to compare the number of feedback/talkback given to each group and examine if there were significant differences in the number of feedback/talkback given to each group.

The qualitative analysis focused on two parts which included a) the learners' perceptions of the feedback/talkback given to their essays by the instructors, and b) the instructors' perceptions of their act of giving feedback/talkback to the essays in different situations (synchronous vs. asynchronous).

The next stage involved a qualitative analysis of instructors' interviews, focus group and reflective essays. Having transcribed the data, the researchers and two of the instructors who were familiar with qualitative research methodology examined them reiteratively, i.e., each of the instructors and the researchers examined the data. The same procedure as above was executed for the data from students' focus group and reflective essays.

In order to answer the research questions, open coding was used for content analysis of the data that came from the first and second series of interviews and focus groups. According to Boyatzis (1998, p. 93), "open coding

comprises a series of stages, namely a) exploration of the data, b) identification of the unit of analysis, c) codification for feelings, meanings, and actions, d) making metaphors for the data, e) experimentation with codes, f) comparison and contrast of feelings, actions and events, g) breaking codes into categories, h) integration of codes into more inclusive categories, and i) identification of the properties of codes.”

The collected data were read several times by the researchers in order to extract the concepts from the data. During the readings, the researchers tried to interpret the participants’ meanings and thoughts on feedback/talkback given to their essays in IELTS Writing Task 2. Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggested three procedures for doing this including naming concepts, defining categories, and developing categories which were followed in this study.

3. Findings

This study included quantitative and qualitative phases; therefore, the findings were divided into two sections. The first section presents the quantitative findings followed by qualitative ones.

3.1 Quantitative section

There were four Chi-square tests of independence in order to examine if there were significant differences in the amount of feedback among the situations.

3.1.1 Situation One (asynchronous) and Two (asynchronous)

The first Chi-square test of independence was conducted between situations one (situation 1: pen and paper asynchronous) and two (situation 2: pen and paper synchronous). The test revealed a significant difference between the two groups according to Table 1. That is, learners' essays received more feedback/talkback synchronously than asynchronously as the p value is less than 0.05.

Table 1
Situations 1 and 2

Test Statistics		
	Feedback/talkback	Situations
Chi-Square	24.500	.000
df	4	1
Asymp. Sig.	.000	1.000

3.1.2 Situation Three (asynchronous) and Four (synchronous)

According to Table 2, a significant difference was found between the two situations (i.e., situation 3 and 4) as the p value was less than 0.05. That is, learners' essays received more feedback/talkback synchronously.

Table 2
Situations 3 and 4

Test Statistics		
	Feedback/talkback	Situations
Chi-Square	20.600 ^a	.000 ^b
df	11	1
Asymp. Sig.	.038	1.000

3.1.3 Pen and Paper (asynchronous) vs. Microsoft Word (asynchronous)

A significant difference was identified between the two situations as p value was less than 0.05 (Table 3). Learners' essays received more feedback/talkback in the medium of Word Office.

Table 3
Pen and Paper vs. Microsoft Word Office

Test Statistics		
	Feedback/talkback	Situations
Chi-Square	20.000 ^a	.000 ^b
df	11	1
Asymp. Sig.	.045	1.000

3.1.4 Pen and Paper (synchronous) vs. Microsoft Word Office (synchronous)

As Table 4 shows, no significant difference existed between the two situations, as the p value is larger than 0.05.

Table 4
Pen and Paper vs. Microsoft Word Office

Test Statistics		
	Feedback/talkback	Situations
Chi-Square	16.100 ^a	.000 ^b
df	10	1
Asymp. Sig.	.097	1.000

3.2 Qualitative Section

In this section, the findings on learners' perceptions of what they received as feedback/talkback on their essays are presented. In addition, the instructors' perceptions of their act of giving feedback/talkback to the learners' essays under different situations are discussed.

A thematic analysis was performed to examine the data in terms of learners' perceptions of feedback/talkback to their essays given by the instructors. A wide range of themes emerged from the data in the qualitative analysis of the focus group and the reflective essays revealing that the perceptions of the instructors and learners were unlike when different media were used under different situations.

3.2.1 Students' themes

Three themes emerged from the learners' perceptions of feedback/talkback given to their essays by the instructors, as follows.

Theme 1: Giving feedback in class allows time and space for discussion

Participant 18 (Situation 4): "We had so many discussions when the instructor provided feedback/talkback to the essays synchronously which clarified several points."

In addition, Excerpts 1, 2 and 3 show how giving feedback/talkback helped the discussions to start and continue.

Excerpt 1 (Feedback/talkback Session):

1. Instructor 1: "What you have written expresses what you intend to say, but it sounds like Persian".
2. Participant 1: "Yes!"
3. Instructor 1: "So let's see how we can fix this. OK? I think you need to change the word order and change the place of the adverb. One more change could be the change of the verb to 'broke down'. Broke up means to be separated from another person".
4. Participant 1: "Are you sure? I think it is about going bad".
5. Instructor 1: "You might have wanted to use blow up, like my engine blew up last week".
6. Participant 1: "Oh, yes. Sorry".

Excerpt 2 (Feedback/talkback Session):

1. Instructor 2: "Now let me check this out. We don't have 'in other hand' you should have used 'on the other hand' instead".
2. Participant 2: "But I have seen it in the dictionary".
3. Instructor 2: "Are you sure?"
4. Participant 2: "Yeah".
5. Instructor 2: "Please check it on your mobile dictionary".
6. Participant 3: "I can't find it".

7. Instructor 2: "Look under 'hand'".
8. Participant 2: "I found it, wait. But I saw that before".
9. Instructor 2: "It's OK".
10. Participant 2: "But I am sure I saw it".
11. Instructor 2: "Perhaps you didn't check it carefully. Mistakes are the natural part of learning".

Theme 2: Feedback/talkback went from vague to clear

The participants who received their essays in class after being given feedback by the instructor at home (Situation 3) felt neutral about the process; however, those who received feedback/talkback in class (Situation 4) did not feel neutral and showed initial resistance to the feedback/talkback. That is, the more public the feedback/talkback was, the more discussions they had with the instructor. In effect, the more involving and interactive feedback/talkback was, the more IELTS candidates liked to discuss different issues regarding the feedback/talkback with the instructor.

Participant 4 (Situation 1): "When I looked at the piece of paper I received from my teacher, it was red, lots of comments and underlining, but I did not get most of the points."

Participant 17 (Situation 4): "The instructor and I talked a lot about my essay, and I learned many points. I realized I was using English words in Persian sentence structures, which was not good". Excerpt 3, representing focus group data, reveals how students felt about the clarity of feedback/talkback in class and their learning from that type of feedback/talk/back.

Excerpt 3 (Focus Group):

1. Researcher 1: "When do you think you could have used the feedback better?"

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2. Participant 2: "In class."

3. Participant 3: "I think I learned much more in class, when the instructor gave us feedback."

4. Participant 4: "I guess it is so different. When my paper was given to me, I went home and read the feedback several times, but some feedback was not clear. So I had to go to the instructor and asked her for explanation".

Theme 3: Attitudes to feedback/talkback can change if circumstances are opportune.

In response to the question of whether she felt any difference in the way she thought of feedback/talkback, Participant 5 (Situation 2): replied:

"No, we did the same thing over and over, why should I change?"

On the other hand, in response to the same question, one participant from situation 4 stated,

Participant 19: "It was difficult at first when you see your essay full of errors, and the instructor is going through so many errors. But little by little my errors decreased and it was less red. I think I am writing better now."

3.2.2 Teachers' Themes

The themes emerging from the data gathered on the instructors' perceptions of their act of giving feedback/talkback to the learners' essays under different situations are presented below.

Theme 1: Teachers went from correcting papers at home to clarification and negotiation in class

Theme 1 here is about how more prolific the instructors were when they gave feedback/talkback in class and their perceptions of the amount of feedback they gave to the learners' essays.

Excerpt 4: Interview with the teachers:

1. Instructor 1: "I think I gave more feedback in class. While I was checking the essays at home, I just wrote the correct forms of the erroneous parts".
2. Instructor 2: "Giving feedback personally to the learners allowed me to give more information. Most of the times learners had questions and I could answer. But when the papers were corrected at home, I just gave them back to the learners; usually without any discussion".

Themes 2: Teachers felt students tend not to make the same mistakes when they receive feedback in class

The theme number 2 shows that the instructors perceive their students not to make the same mistakes again in their writings, as Excerpt 5 represents.

Excerpt 5:

1. Instructor 3: "I think the students learned more when I gave them feedback in class. My students made fewer mistakes. Some had great progress".

Themes 3: Instructors felt more certain that their feedback/talkback was clearer in class

Excerpt 6 demonstrates that when the learners were present, the instructors were able to explain the erroneous parts and suggest ways to deal with them.

Excerpt 6:

1. Instructor 1: "I think we discussed different types of errors and how to resolve them."

Theme 4: Teachers had a more satisfying experience while teaching in class (Fun Factor)

The instructors believed that when they compared situations 1 and 4, they felt giving feedback/talkback in Situation 4 was much more interesting than that in Situation 1.

Excerpt 7:

1. Instructor 4: "I enjoy giving feedback when learners can see what I am doing because I am sure they are learning the points".

4. Discussion

4.1 Quantitative Section

The results of the quantitative analysis showed that learners' writings received more feedback/talkback synchronously than asynchronously. This happened in both media of composition, namely pen and paper and Microsoft Word. The reason for the observed increase in the amount of feedback/talkback could be attributed to the synchronous presence of the learners in the situations 2 and 4. This presence might have opened a window of opportunity for interactions between the instructors and learners so they could clarify the points and negotiate their ideas more easily. The findings of this study further suggest that learning to write should not be considered a solitary practice; on the contrary, it has to be seen within a more social context as the synchronous presence of the learners increased the amount of feedback/talkback. As Hansen (1995), cited in Colen and Petelin (2004), argued that writing can occur in an interactive and collaborative environment. This emphasizes the collaborative nature of the approach adopted in teaching writing in this study. In addition, it is further substantiated by the process view of writing describing writing as

collaborative (Holst, 1995) which was cited in Hyland (2009). The following excerpt shows how collaboration is brought about as a result of feedback.

According to Hyland (2009), collaborative writing means that focused feedback from different sources can incur benefits to writers. The current study is rather unique as almost no other studies have taken the presence of the EFL learners into account while teachers provided feedback/talkback to their writings.

The comparison of situations one and three where the media of communications were different while feedback was given in the absence of the learners showed that there was a significant difference between the two groups. In effect, learners' essays received more feedback in the medium of Word Office. Several assumptions are accordingly made below; however, more research is needed to determine more justifiable causes.

The first reason might be the learners' handwriting which is sometimes illegible to the instructors whereas Microsoft Word allows a standard handwriting which is easier to read. In addition, Microsoft Word allows instructors to write in a clean way using *review* option available in the software where learners are able to see different versions of their essays in one document. The legibility of the feedback given by the instructors can also be considered as another reason in this regard. As most of the times, learners in this study reported that they were not able to read the feedback (Situation 1).

The comparison of situations two and four where different media of writing were used while the feedback/talkback was provided synchronously in the presence of the learners showed no significant difference between the amount of feedback/talkback received by the two groups. What seems to be an issue here is that the media of writing might not influence the amount of feedback received asynchronously in the absence of the learners; however, in their presence, the amount of feedback/talkback was synchronously affected in each

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medium. Hence, it can be concluded that synchronous presence of the learners may provide a more useful strategy for the provision of feedback/talkback as this synchronicity allows both writing instructors and learners to interact, negotiate and create meanings, thus making the process more collaborative (Hyland, 2009).

Several evidence from the field of SLA research might substantiate the reason why the instructors provided more feedback/talkback in the presence of the learners. One interesting indication that might help to explain why they gave more feedback/talkback to the learners' essays is the opportunity it provided for a synchronic dialogue (Bakhtin, 1986). The concept of addressivity (Bakhtin, 1986) can be used to explain why the instructors provided more feedback/talkback. In effect, the synchronous presence of the learners in Excerpt 1 created a dialogic situation for the instructor to engage in more interactions with the learners helping them comprehend the feedback/talkback, and thus internalize the comments they received.

Social constructivism is another theory that has a bearing on the findings of this study. This theory states that learning is a social phenomenon and individuals construct realities in a social context. Vygotsky (1978) proposed two constructs that have been widely substantiated in the research literature which are scaffolding and Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Both these concepts can be included in the process as teachers give feedback/talkback to learners synchronically and make the process more collaborative.

ZPD is when a more capable individual provides some sort of assistance to the learner. This construct can be observed in the interactions between instructors and learners in this study (Excerpt 1). Therefore, theoretically, the synchronous presence of learners at the time of giving WCF creates the situation for more scaffolded feedback/talkback, and synchronous interaction within the ZPD which is very useful in the learning process (Lantolf, 2000,

2006). According to Lantolf (2006), while the learner is focused upon, the process is controlled by the instructor (who is more powerful) until the learner is ready to become responsible.

Another construct was the negotiation of meaning which is proposed in the Interaction Hypothesis by Long (1996), described as follows: selective attention and the learner's developing L2 processing ability moderate environmental input to acquisition, and these resources are used most effectively, but not exclusively, during negotiation of meaning. Negative WCF acquired via negotiation or elsewhere could be beneficial to L2 development, at least in terms of vocabulary, morphology, and language-specific syntax.

The data showed that as a result of synchronicity there was a tremendous amount of meaning negotiation among learners and instructors over different aspects of the essays which can be conducive to acquiring L2 writing skills. Excerpt 1 again shows how learners negotiate meaning and how they try to reach understanding. In Excerpts 1 and 2, the instructor points out a few issues, and the learner expresses her doubt. Then, the instructor clarifies the point by explaining the words and their meanings. The instructor guesses what might have caused the confusion and attempts to resolve it. The final sentence shows that the instructor was right and the learner was indeed confusing 'break up' with 'blow up'. Consequently, it can be said that giving feedback synchronously accompanied by talkback to learners in their presence is more useful.

4.2 Qualitative Section

In this section, the results obtained from the qualitative analyses are discussed.

4.2.1 Learners' perceptions of feedback/talkback experience

The analysis of the data from the focus groups and reflective essays on the learners' experience of feedback/talkback given to their essays revealed three

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major themes in the collected data. These themes highlighted the learners' emotional perceptions to the feedback/talkback.

The first theme to emerge was giving feedback synchronously allows time and space for discussion. The data showed that learners were more involved in a synchronic discussion of their essays when feedback/talkback was being provided in the presence of other learners which can be seen in Excerpt 1. However, learners felt more involved in medium of the Microsoft Word in feedback/talkback session in Skype environment as everyone could see what was being done.

Some learners resisted corrections because they thought they had written well (Excerpt 2). This finding was in line with Mahfoodh (2017) where he studied different responses learners made to the feedback they received. He found that comments written as feedback could lead to emotionally charged responses such as frustration and dissatisfaction. An interesting outcome was the resistance (or disagreement) on the learners' side in the first few synchronous sessions of the class. The more the students resisted, the more likely they were to engage in interactions and negotiations with the instructors in order to justify their errors and convince their instructors. Obviously, the instructors reported that some of those interactions were not reasonable and learners only were trying to save their faces (Excerpt 2).

Likewise, when Excerpt 1 was shown to the relevant student, he said that he had felt bad about the errors in feedback/talkback session. However, he maintained that during the process he realized every learner was susceptible to making errors in writing. He believed that we sometimes laughed at our own errors which could have a positive impact on the affective state of the learners when receiving CF in the presence of others, according to Krashen (1985).

Another theme that emerged from the qualitative analyses of the data was whether feedback/talkback was considered vague or not. In both media of

composition, feedback was considered to be vague by the learners when it was given asynchronously in their absence. However, learners, who received feedback/talkback synchronously while they were present, felt it was clearer and easier to understand.

Theme three is concerned with the learners' attitude to the synchronous presence of other learners in the feedback/talkback session, where everyone could see the feedback and hear the talkback being given and the paper being corrected. This created mixed feelings among learners (Excerpt 2). In situations one, two, and three where other learners were not able to see the process, they had neutral attitudes although the asynchronous feedback was not very clear in some cases (Excerpt 2); a finding which was similar to Brice's (2005) and Mahfoodh's (2017) findings.

On the other hand, in situation four where everyone present in class could see the process synchronously in Skype environment, a few of the IELTS writing learners had mixed feelings and reported being a little uncomfortable (Excerpt 1). Most others, however, stated that everyone could learn from their errors, and they could also learn from others' which can be considered a satisfying experience in the feedback/talkback session (Excerpt 3) verifying the findings of Mahfoodh (2017). At the same time, some did not care what was happening in the feedback/talkback session. Overall, after some time, the learners in situation four, felt more positive about the feedback/talkback on their essays while learners in situations one, two, and three did not have a shift in their initial attitudes.

These findings are in agreement with those of Zacharias (2007) and Mahfoodh (2017) that emotional factors are actively involved in the process of giving feedback/talkback, indicating that instructors should strive not to deter learners from continuing their learning objectives by giving discouraging feedback/talkback to their works.

4.2.2 Teachers' perceptions of their act of giving feedback/talkback in different situations

The analysis of the interviews with the instructors resulted in four major themes in the data.

The first theme revealed that the instructors thought they would only correct the essays in the absence of learners asynchronously while giving no feedback, and they preferred to give feedback/talkback synchronously when the learners were present. They also felt that the feedback given in the absence of learners did little to improve their writing which did not agree with the findings from Evans et al. (2010); however, they unanimously believed that learners had giant leaps when the feedback/talkback was provided synchronously in their presence (Excerpt 5).

An interesting claim the instructors made was on the effect of the feedback/talkback on certain errors made by learners (Theme 2, Excerpt 5). They felt learners who received feedback/talkback synchronously in their own presence tended not to repeat those errors in their future writings as the feedback was accompanied by instructions (talkback) and learners' questions concerning feedback they received were answered by the instructor supporting collaborative writing (Holst, 1995).

Instructors argued that when learners were present, they were certain that the feedback/talkback given to their essays would be understood while they reported being uncertain if the asynchronous feedback would be comprehended by learners in their absence (Theme 3, Excerpts 1 and 5). In addition, when the learners were not there, no oral instruction would be provided (Excerpt 4). In this situation, feedback included only direct feedback and providing the correct forms which are not very useful. According to Ellis (2009), this type of feedback requires very little processing on the learners' side and is devoid of any negotiation of meaning, and therefore cannot be

considered useful. However, Sheen (2007) argued that direct feedback might, in fact, enhance the process of learning certain grammatical forms.

When learners were present, instructors thought they would give more different types of feedback/talkback as they would have the opportunity to explain issues and answer related questions synchronically. On the other hand, the absence of learners, lack of audience and hence lack of dialogue resulted in fewer types of feedback items (Excerpt 6). This is in line with ZPD where learners can do an activity with the help received from a more competent individual that they could not do otherwise (Vygotsky, 1978; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

The instructors initially faced resistance when feedback/talkback was provided in front of other learners as a result of threats to learners' faces; however, the learners felt the class was more enjoyable (lower affective factors) as they discovered the purpose was to improve their writings and also everybody else is likely to make errors in writing (Theme 4, Excerpts 1 and 7). In addition, they noticed they could learn tremendously from each other's errors and the feedback/talkback received synchronously. Due to the initial resistance from learners, the instructors felt that providing synchronic feedback/talkback was more difficult in situation four; however, in the course of time, it became easier as the learners noticed the purpose and effectiveness of the practice.

5. Conclusions

This study was an attempt to make a contribution to the currently growing body of research on learners' perception of and responses to different feedback/talkback. The results of this study suggested that learners had different responses to the feedback/talkback on their essays provided by the instructors. In addition, it was found that the presence of learners while giving feedback/talkback, and the use of Microsoft Word as a medium of composition

can increase the amount of feedback/talkback given to the learners' essays. The presence of learners also led to more interactions among learners and instructors in a synchronous environment. An implication of the study is that instructors can make use of technology in order to create a more encouraging and less threatening environment for writing assignments. In addition, giving feedback/talkback to written assignments in the presence of the learners in synchronous classrooms would be more beneficial to the learners as a result of follow-up discussions which is supported by Bakhtin's Dialogism (1986) and Vygotsky's ZPD and scaffolding (1978).

This study was carried out in the IELTS preparation context which might be seriously under the influence of washback effect. Therefore, instructors might have been more interested in making learners aware of errors they had and preventing them from committing those errors again. Future studies can examine situations where there are no imminent examinations to see what happens. In addition, this study did not look into whether the feedback given under such situations was effective or not. Further studies are recommended to find out if the given feedback is, indeed, effective in the eradication of errors when preparing for high-stake examinations. Also, future studies seem necessary to find out if learners' responses and teachers' perceptions are the same in courses where learners are not being prepared for a particular test.

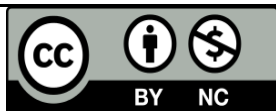
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