Usage of Video Feedback in the Course of Writing in EFL: Challenges and Advantages

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to find out the advantages and the challenges of utilizing video feedback for ELT teachers and EFL learners in the course of writing lessons. Qualitative case study was applied as the study design to gather and evaluate the data from the teachers and the learners participated in the study. The department of foreign languages of a university in Turkey was chosen to carry out the research that started at the beginning of the 2014-2015 academic year and application and gathering data procedure was completed in 5 months. Semi-structured in-depth focus group interviews with the participants were designated to achieve the purpose of the research. All 3 lecturers and 40 learners participated in the interviews that were carried out in private with the researchers. The whole data set was analyzed through the implementation of independent coding and thematic analysis approach. The results of the study show that advantages of using video feedback for writing skills have precedence over its challenges. The accessibility of feedback, user friendly nature of the software and the chance to integrate technology with teaching were the reported benefits of video feedback.

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On the other hand, the expectation of instant feedback that might become a burden for teachers was listed as the disadvantage of video feedback. Giving video feedback to learners is advantageous for both teachers and learners. Even though learners' requests for immediate feedback might be challenging for teachers, different types of solutions for this problem might be developed and more instructive, repetitive, comprehensive and clear feedback can be given to learners via video feedback.

Keywords: Video feedback; feedback; technology integration; ELT; EFL; writing.

1. Introduction

Writing is a process that needs to be practiced over time and improved with the help of teachers. Either in the first or in the second language, writing is an indispensable part of language learning that necessitates learners to receive a form of feedback to improve their writing skills. Feedback has been one of the most crucial elements of EFL writing classrooms as without feedback, learners' writings become vain and do not include any points of language teaching. However, the type of the feedback and how it is provided has become a major issue.

Since 1970s, the form of feedback have been an area of discussion and different theories have been proposed with various research done on the topic. There are several forms of giving feedback to EFL learners such as face to face correction to giving written feedback, peer feedback, direct or indirect feedback. However, the effectiveness of these various types of feedback has also been a hot topic in the area. To a number of researchers, feedback does not serve the purpose of effective learning or correction of mistakes. Moreover, it is a burden for both the learners and teachers most of the time as both decoding the feedback for learners and giving direct or indirect feedback to each piece of written material for teachers are time consuming and tiring processes [1,2,3]. Most of the time, due to constraints such as class size, more emphasis is given to the product rather than the process in student writings [4]. Therefore a more viable way that allows for more process-oriented feedback is needed to overcome the difficulties and further provide assistance to language learners.

As the link between teaching and technology gets stronger, the need for using technology as a part of English teaching and learning processes becomes unavoidable. Even if the use of technology is limited considering the whole world, its use as a part of language teaching is increasing rapidly [5]. The use of computer technology and Internet-based application made language instruction go beyond the classroom environment [6]. The fact that learners' profiles have started to be more and more technology literate makes integrating language teaching with technology a must to modernize learning process and arouse learners' interest more. As the need for technology use grows, various techniques have been developed in the area of language teaching one of which is giving video feedback to EFL learners' writings.

1.1. Video Feedback

Video feedback is a process during which learners and teachers use one of the various programs enabling both groups to communicate outside the classroom environment via computers and the internet. Learners send their writing studies to their teachers and as the teachers receive learners' work, with the help of video feedback software, they can take screen captions and highlight mistakes, record their voice via microphones connected to

their computers about any kind of corrections that are needed to be mentioned to learners. Learners can reopen video feedback anytime anywhere and study on their writings as if they do in classroom environment with their teachers [7]. Watching teachers giving feedback on screen may ease the process of understanding the feedback and correcting mistakes for learners, also enable teachers to make more corrections without writing and talk not only about grammatical mistakes, but also about the ideas discussed and structure of the essay. Therefore, the main guiding question of the study is investigate what potential advantages/challenges students and teachers in EFL context in the study identified regarding the utilization of video feedback as a part of their writing class.

2. Materials and methods

As the scope of this study is limited to the usage of video feedback from the perspectives of language teachers and EFL learners in a particular setting, a qualitative case study approach was employed. The case in this research is utilizing video feedback to improve writing skills in EFL classrooms and analyzing the outcomes from the perspectives of both teachers and learners.

2.1. The Setting and participants of the study

The research was carried out in the department of foreign languages of a higher education institution in Turkey. The department is responsible for giving English education to learners who are on their first year of higher education. With 25 lecturers and nearly 500 students, the chosen institution was an appropriate setting to carry on this research.

40 learners and 3 instructors participated in the study. The learners were chosen randomly and included both male and female upper intermediate English learners ranging from 18 to 22. All of them started on elementary level and became high-intermediate learners in the same institution which ensures that all of the learner participants were definitely on the same level as understanding video feedback and getting a point of view was crucial for this study. Three lecturers who had comprehensive knowledge and experience of using video feedback software volunteered to take part in this study.

2.2. Data collection

During a 4-month period of time, learners received video feedback from the instructors within the context of their academic writing lessons. The learners were responsible for writing one essay (beginning with drafts and delivering the product based on the feedback received) each week and sent their essays to their lecturer online. The lecturer receiving online essays captured the screen and used a software to give video feedback. All the corrections were made using the software and the lecturers also used microphones to record their voice for more comprehensive feedback. As the final step, the learners were sent a web link that directed them to the feedback by the lecturers. At the end of the period, the learners' and the lecturers' perspectives were investigated via open-ended, semi-structured in-depth focus group interviews each of which were conducted in a private setting to prevent distractions. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim afterwards. No personal information was used to serve the purpose of anonymity.

The following main questions and other related drilling questions were asked to the teachers and the learners during the interviews with the aim of obtaining their perspectives about using video feedback for writing sessions.

- What are the advantages of using video feedback in comparison with traditional feedback methods?
- What are the disadvantages of using video feedback in comparison with traditional feedback methods?

2.3. Data Analysis

An inductive thematic analysis was utilized to analyze the data gathered within the scope of this research. Themes and patterns were identified by the researchers after all the scripts of the interviews were analyzed. Using independent coding approach, all the researchers identified the main themes and categorized the data under emerging themes. Classifying the data under main themes gave way to determining the subthemes for the researchers. Independent coding approach enabled the researchers to analyze the data in depth and divide in into main themes and subthemes.

3. Results

Two main themes were set via the analysis of the interviews. The emerging themes and sub-themes are shown below:

Table 1: Themes and sub-themes

Main Themes	Sub-themes
It's accessible and easy-to-use	- Clear and intelligible feedback - Less questions to teachers to clarify the feedback - The chance to revise the feedback easily
Integrating technology in the lessons	- Use of technology appeals learners more than classical methods of giving feedback - Thanks to computers, no more illegible handwritten essays and feedback
High expectations of learners	Teachers should be able to provide feedback to learners as soon as they receive writings

3.1. Theme I: It is accessible and easy to use

A great number of the participants mentioned the accessibility of the feedback and how easy it was to use the software. All three instructors mentioned that giving feedback in front of the computer screen was easier for them in comparison with giving written or face-to-face feedback. As the teachers pointed out, writing on the essays of the learners causes a number of problems and loss of time. Some extracts from the interviews are given below.

When I write on the papers of the students, there is not enough space to mention grammar, spelling, organization, coherence, and all the possible mistakes and points to cover. However, just highlighting the mistakes and talking about them one by one in front of the computer makes it easy to cover all the points and also let me free from writing everything down. (from the interview with the teachers)

After a certain point, what I write and what is already on the paper unites and makes it impossible for me to write more or for my students to understand the feedback. (from the interview with the teachers)

As it is mentioned in the extracts above, writing on an essay might cause problems such as illegibility or limited space to mention necessary points to improve the writings of learners. This problem causes teachers to lose time on coding or shortening their feedback. After a certain point, the teachers just struggle with shortening their feedback. Less feedback means less information for learners and leaves less room for learners to learn from their mistakes. From the points of learners, decoding the feedback or not being able to read the feedback cause misunderstandings and necessitates a lot of time.

Another point that was mentioned during the interviews was that when teachers give written feedback and make corrections on the essays, learners hardly understand the reasons of corrections. Thus, they ask for further explanation which causes teachers to explain the feedback they have already given. However in videos, teachers are not only able to make corrections, but also explain the mistakes via voice records. The results of the interview with the teachers show that giving video feedback is less tiring and more instructive than classical methods.

Giving written feedback generally leads to face-to-face explanation as the students generally do not understand the feedback or they need more information about the feedback. This means doing the same thing twice and it makes me lose a lot of time on just one essay. Imagine you have a class with forty students! (from the interview with the teachers)

The learners indicated that video feedback made it possible to revise the feedback, listen to the teacher's corrections repeatedly and correct their mistakes. When they received written corrections on their essays, it was hard for them to decode the feedback or to find out the reason of the correction. Not understanding the nature of their mistakes turned writing into a mechanical activity rather than a productive one for learners. Moreover, the comments on the organization of the essay or the topic discussed in their essays helped learners to master their writing skills and changed the focus from only grammar and spelling to how to write properly. These results indicate that the learners who received video feedback were satisfied with the results from the points of

mastering the skill, clarity and accessibility compared to written feedback.

Listening to the teacher while she is correcting my mistakes and talking about the organization of my essay makes me understand the correction. If I do not understand at first, I can watch it over and over again. This helped me a lot and I try not to do the same mistakes in my second drafts or other essays. (from the interviews with the students)

3.2. Theme II: Integrating technology in the lessons

The chance to integrate technology with lessons appeals learners as learners become more technology literate compared to the past. User friendly technology arouses interest and helps learners to focus on their studies more. The aspect of technology integration helped teachers to get the attention of learners and a more successful learning process can easily be triggered when the learners are completely focused.

When learners use their computers and the internet, I feel like they are more comfortable and they focus better. (from the interview with the teachers). I can easily reach my feedback whenever I want. I do not need to worry about saving a lot of scratchy assignments. (from the interviews with the students)

Giving video feedback is also useful to focus on the lesson more than feedback. Writing lessons can easily turn into feedback sessions considering the amount of time spend on giving feedback during the lessons. However, when the learners come to classes with already received clear feedback, the focus of the lesson does not change.

When I give feedback in class, it takes hours. Consequently feedback becomes the main topic of the lesson However, thanks to video feedback, I give feedback outside the classroom and I can gain more time for the lesson itself. (from the interview with the teachers)

3.3. Theme III: Instant Feedback

Speed of the program causes learners to expect instant feedback from their teachers. Taking into consideration the number of the students that teachers have in many class settings, this expectation may be hard for teachers to meet. Even though feedback was given outside the classroom via video feedback, it still caused disturbance to have such high expectations. However setting time for assignments and feedback can be a solution for this problem.

Before we limited time with the students, they were sending their essays in the morning or at night and always asking for feedback. It made me feel under pressure. But when I limited the time for feedback, the pressure was gone. As long as the students received their feedback in time, there were no problems. (from the interview with the teachers)

4. Discussion

Development of productive skills such as writing is crucial for EFL learners and output is crucial to follow the

improvements of learners [8] and feedback becomes vital to achieve the goals of language teaching. Considering writing skill, without teacher's evaluation and feedback to learners' production, learners writing assignments can become pointless. For this reason, despite being a load of work for teachers, feedback is vital for writing lessons. The importance on production and feedback raises questions about effective ways of giving feedback and pave the way for research. Even though it is not a very recent development in the literature of ELT, video feedback is still a hot topic for researchers and not a great number of research has been done related to this topic.

The scarcity of research on the advantages and challenges of video feedback and the need for improvements in the area of feedback constituted the background of this research. Finding out the challenges and advantages of using video feedback as a part of writing lessons for learners and teachers, and also shedding light onto the utility of video feedback were the main aims of this study. Results of the study show that both the learners and the lecturers were satisfied with the usage of video feedback and they faced very few challenges in the course of application. The integration of technology and teaching, and the accessibility of feedback were two main themes of advantages identified by the researchers. The use of computers leads to legible writings and videos provide clear and extensive feedback that lessens time spent on feedback during the lesson. Students and teachers have to expend far too much time on feedback in classes [9]. This may change the nature of writing lesson into feedback session yet this dilemma might be solved via video feedback.

The only challenge that was mentioned by the lecturers was the high expectations of learners' to receive feedback immediately. Findings of this study indicate that video feedback has mutual advantages. Even though the process of giving feedback and meeting the expectations of learners might be tiresome for teachers, positive results and improvement in the quality of writing lessons overweight this challenge. Also, practical solutions might be found such as limiting time for feedback can be developed in class.

The results are consistent with the findings author in [7] noted, especially from the points of learners. Learners believe that they receive clear and comprehensive feedback to their writings and they understand the reasons behind corrections which is a good influence on learning from the mistakes. Considering results indicated by the author in [7], teachers utilizing video feedback might encounter various challenges such as time limitation of the videos, corrections, sending feedback to learners, however the participants in this study did not mention as many challenges. This inconsistency might require further research on the perspectives of teachers about video feedback.

According to the findings of this study, giving and receiving video feedback is satisfactory for teachers and learners and it can be easily adapted and utilized for writing sessions. However as the number of the participants and time was limited, a more extensive research might reveal different ideas on the usage of video feedback in the course of writing sessions.

5. Conclusion

The study provided some practical implications as to how technology can be appropriately integrated into EFL

writing classes as a means to increase efficiency and effectiveness of teacher feedback on student writings. Contrary to traditional methods such as face-to-face feedback or in-class feedback on student paragraphs or essays, the video feedback software utilized in the study allowed for a more solid feedback strategy that focus both the process and the product as well as providing a more holistic approach to feedback giving. Teachers, going beyond the borders of time and space, were able to address not only grammar and vocabulary mistakes but also issues related to the content and organization.

Still, further studies are needed to test what potential advantages or constraints might be experienced in technology-eased feedback methods. This and further studies can help practitioners in the area of language teaching ease their burden by adopting technology-integrated models of feedback and assist students to improve regarding writing in the target language. It is recommended that experimental research designs are manipulated also to test how students' writing performances or scores are influenced by the use of video feedback over more conventional ones.

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