

Pakistani EFL Adult Learners' Beliefs towards Corrective Feedback in Cooperative Learning Strategy

Mehmood Ul Hassan*

College of Arts and Sciences, SLCP Universiti Utara Malaysia, Malaysia

Dr. Hisham Dzakiria

Associate Professor, College of Arts and Sciences, SLCP Universiti Utara Malaysia, Malaysia

Abstract

The purpose of the study was to investigate beliefs of Pakistani EFL learners towards corrective feedback in cooperative learning environment. The study is qualitative in nature and used narrative approach. This study emphasized on each student's learning experiences with corrective feedback in cooperative learning strategy. 50 EFL students were divided into five groups. They were engaged in interdependence, group evaluation and face-to-face interaction for cooperative purpose for six week. The researcher observed that during first week some students in each group were hesitant in face-to-face and group evaluation activities. Later, in the third week they tried to play their part and increase their corrective feedback in L2 reading, writing and speaking activities. The interview questions were used to collect data from students. Observation was made, notes were prepared and interviews were recorded from each participant in order to understand their views about corrective feedback in Cooperative learning strategies. The findings of this study provided inspirations and motivation for English teachers to offer L2 learners suitable environment for corrective feedback. The results showed that students quickly realized being able to solve problems as a group that they could not solve as individuals. Students were satisfied by corrective feedback in peer coaching, and peer reviews.

Keywords: Cooperative strategies; Inspirations; Corrective feedback; Motivation; L2 reading.



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1. Introduction

Teaching of English as foreign language in Pakistan is a challenging a social activity with the ultimate goal to train EFL students develop the social values, ability, knowledge and skills so that they use it to integrate them in the society (Manan *et al.*, 2015). It is general agreement on the point that the best teaching includes effective communication between teachers and learners and among students also. The useful learning occurs in the classroom from an effective co-operation among learners. Hence, teacher's role can be pivotal in creating effectiveness for language learning environment (Reis-da-Luz, 2015). Specially, when the learners are taught in positive emotional stimuli, they may recall their newly learned information in a better way (Nielson and Lorber, 2009). In this supportive environment, the learners can be stimulated and motivated for learning and actively collaborating with their teachers in the classroom. The learners are largely mobilized by the 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 for the learners. Hence, even if they are working in a group or being 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* emphasizing on each of the learners working alone to achieve the goal independently. This can match the EFL learners against each other in winning or losing situations to decide who the best among them is. 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, Cooperative Learning strategy, one of the buzzing words in such a new paradigm of teaching, may yield positive effect through cross-ability groupings which can enhance the complementary learners' strengths (Bell, 1991).

The main focus of corrective feedback in cooperative strategy 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 groups to review the homework on their own, review the daily class worksheets by joining in suitable discussions, and doing some hands-on activities. Nayan *et al.* (2010), contend that cooperative Learning strategy in teaching and learning could be used as it would enable the language learners to be involved in the learning process with interest and when they are able to do so. They would understand and correct certain concepts or preserve knowledge in their sub-conscious. 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 the comprehension in the cooperative learning strategy. This is the main requirement for learning a foreign language in which the students are able to interact regularly to develop their language skills (Sharan, 2010). But, the problem is that classes are replete with larger number of students in Pakistan which causes great hurdle for EFL learners to improve their skills. Owing to the large size, teachers have to use traditional method for teaching English. Consequently, students hardly find any opportunity to communicate or to engage themselves in peer response activities to create self-corrective and cooperative learning environment. As a result, they lack in their communicative performance. Furthermore, due to the competitive system of examination in Pakistan, the students take learning of English no more than an unfriendly activity. They are engaged in defeating one another to get superiority by obtaining higher marks. And result is that, constructive and friendly cooperation which not only can enhance their self-learning, self-teaching, and self-cooperation cannot be emerged. Because, cooperative learning can foster the learners' communicative and social-interpersonal skills (Du, 2012). To handle this situation, the teachers need to apply structured group learning technique which engages language learners in useful interaction. Cooperative learning strategy is considered the most widely accepted in EFL context (Panhwar *et al.*, 2017). Johnson and Johnson (1999), advocated for healthier and active learning of language that would increase students' cognitive and interpersonal skills. The classroom set-up is needed to be substituted with the one that develops cooperation, interdependence and interaction among students. Learning becomes more effective if teachers provide prefer corrective feedback as perceived by the learners to help students improve their interpersonal communication skills.

Hence, understanding the language learners' beliefs towards corrective feedback in Cooperative Learning classroom is an added strategy for language teachers not only offering a suitable curriculum and learning environment but also developing students' academic progress.

1.1. Literature Review

In traditional grammar method, conscious presentations and manipulation of forms are required with a number of drills and practice. The researchers suggest that the learners should pass by "encounter, process and use" the forms of 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 form and their accuracy is improved (Nassaji and Fotos, 2004). A relevant theory is "Consciousness-raising theory" which tells that EFL instructors should only emphasise on diverting their students' attention to the important features of the structure of language. He should not expect the learners that they should master in form focusing immediately (Ranalli, 2001).

Exposure is considered to be significant in successful EFL learning process without looking 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 compare to learners' receiving metalinguistic instructions in addition to exposure (Erlam, 2003; Klapper and Rees, 2003; Norris and Ortega, 2000). Second, adult learners in engaged situations hardly acquire native-like proficiency in some cases, in spite of spending long time in the target-language speaking countries (Long, 2003).

1.1.1. Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning is referred to as 'set of instructional strategies' "that utilizes a small team of students to establish peers' cooperation and interactions to study their academic subjects (Sharan, 1990). Cooperative Learning' evidently does not imply simply putting together all students in small groups and assigning them activities to perform, 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. Through this strategy, EFL learners may have opportunities to demonstrate better performance by using their logical critical thinking (Wentzel and Wakins, 2002). Students are more involved in language classroom and can come up with more positive learning outcomes helping the students to acquire the SL with self-corrective feedback. When a teacher uses strategy in the language classroom, it has impact on SL learners' achievement. Bernaus and Gardner (2008), claimed that the more a teacher has controlling strategy over his students, the less autonomy they feel, and also the more informative the teacher is in terms of the corrective feedback 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 have practice for their problem-solving strategies, communication and social skills.

Teaching and learning through cooperative strategy plays important roles for improving students' learning abilities. Osman *et al.* (2010) presented that collaboration means to practice in a safe environment which is made up of an accepting and diverse group of people who have a common interest or issue and these people need to make discoveries or find possible solutions to given tasks. When students work collaboratively, SL learners have chances to enhance their oral skills and experience conflict on goals and tasks. Students share and explore their knowledge and ideas with the rest of the classmates. For some shy students, cooperative learning encourages them to express their opinions, creates more opportunities for them to expose to SL environment, and helps them to increase classroom participation. Benjamin (2000), stated that students learning outcomes are improved when teaching and learning are reflective and collaborative. Ahlstrom (2003), stated that students and teacher should engage in

dialogue, investigating themes as equals and creating new understanding of the world together. Real-life material helps teachers to figure out and address students' needs, reflect collaboration between the learners and their teachers, and indirectly include regular evaluation by observing students' performances in the classroom. When teachers have the freedom and eagerness to try new things and strategies in the material and activity of language classrooms, students can profit from the creation and develop new knowledge in a practical way. Ocker and Yaverbaum (2002) presented that numerous studies have been carried out on cooperative learning and many have shown that when students were given the opportunity to work collaboratively, they were able to perform better.

The earlier studies investigated that students encounter, process and use form of target language and providing corrective feedback is very useful, be it oral or written. The teachers can produce students with better academic performance by using supportive learning environment (Brown, 2008).

1.1.2. Peer Coaching

Peer coaching provides teachers opportunities to share ideas, to strengthen their teaching skills, encourage one another to create a better learning environment for their students, and develop a functional school system in order to meet all kinds of challenges from government policies, parents' involvements, and students' learning difficulties. Peyton (2005), stated that when peer coaching is used in conjunction with collaborative teaching, it enhances teacher improvement and students learning by providing ongoing opportunities for educators to share their unique knowledge bases and expertise, allowing exploration of new ideas and expansion of professional skill repertoires. Recognizing and respecting linguistically and culturally diversity helps teachers and learners to create flexible schedule for collaborative activities. Support and facilitate individual needs by valuing students' culture background. Perez (2004), stated schools, acting as agents for the culture, control the extent to which personal knowledge may enter into the public knowledge of school curriculum. In other words, students are able to increase their participation by sharing a personal cultural context through teachers' collaborative instruction.

SL learners use their prior knowledge to decode and encode knowledge. Students are also able to develop new cultural and social information in the practice because they come from different family and educational background. Students have various levels of intelligences and produce distinct thinking. Peer coaching supports collaborative teaching; in other words, collaborative teaching also supports peer coaching. When effectively using peer coaching, it helps teachers to identify the area of teaching which they want to improve and develop. Bowman and McCormick (2000), presented that peer coaching provides opportunities to refine reaching skills through immediate feedback and through experimentations with alternate strategies as a result of the informal evaluation.

2. Methodology

In order to obtain adult learners' learning experience, the qualitative research design was used with narrative approach. Bachelor students from 4th semester of 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 department of Humanities were selected through convenient sampling technique. Students were divided into eight groups and were engaged in interdependence, group evaluation and face to face interaction strategies for cooperative purpose for eight weeks. They were assigned tasks to write about their personal experiences topics such as (a) writing about an important even in your life, what happened and why it was so important (b) about your close friend, when you 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 special day with your family or friends, what you did and why it was so special for you. The researcher himself provided oral corrective feedback to each student wherever possible.

2.1. Instrument

Semi-structure interviews were conducted from all the research participants. The data collection was proceeded though face to face interviews. Daily five interviews were conducted for eight successive days and each interview lasted between 30-45 minutes for four weeks consecutively. During the interviews, the researchers prepared notes and recorded all conversations of the interviews to observe individual differences in responses in order to find out their beliefs towards usefulness of corrective feedback in cooperative learning environment. The researchers remained neutral during data collection so that impartiality and element of impropriety could be avoided.

The most note-able 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

2.2. Data Analysis

The researchers analyzed 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 contrast of 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 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 emails in order to ensure that the information provided by them were used for research purpose only.

3. Findings

3.1. Research Question

What are Pakistani EFL adult learners' Beliefs about corrective feedback in cooperative learning environment?

Most of the adult learners in the university stated that they got better and effective feedback from their peers and learning experiences in cooperative learning approach. Students were given a short film of scenario to watch carefully, then they joined the question discussion and critique session. They were asked to write down about the scenario which they watched. During the activity in cooperative learning environment, the teacher provided assistance to each group with corrective feedback and gave directions for the discussion and helped them with oral and written feedback. The students also cooperated each other in the group. After the feedback, they were able to show better performance in speaking and written prompts. One student opined that she really found corrective feedback in cooperative strategy very useful. He further added that she was able to learn in a better way with teacher's assistance and monitoring as well as from her fellows' cooperation. The research proved that the more support, monitoring and corrective feedback the students were provided in group cooperation by the instructor, the better approach students acquired. The students were observed considering the peer evaluation, face to face communication in group and corrective feedback from instructor as effective tools which were used in cooperative learning strategy. All the participants of the study believed that group tasks written and spoken both developed their thinking ability more than individual learning strategy as used in traditional environment. Corrective feedback in Cooperative Learning makes foreign language learning very interactive and interesting as compare 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 by their bad performance.

On the whole, findings gave reflections of the most studies which also revealed the significance of providing corrective feedback and Cooperative Learning strategy which includes (1) students not only learn efficiently in Cooperative Learning but also get assistance from teachers in improving teaching skills through corrective feedback 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 their effective output in in EFL class. Most of the students expressed that getting corrective feedback 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 cooperative learning strategy helped in their learning and facilitated in catching up with their fellows and made them more productive as compare to their previous situation. A number of other studies were attempted on Cooperative Learning strategy and revealed that when students were placed in to work in collaboration, their performance was improved and they became better learners (Brown, 2008; Ocker and Yaverbaum, 2002).

4. Conclusion

Providing corrective feedback both oral and written in cooperative learning environment in the current study revealed that students realized that they were able to improve their written and spoken abilities in group tasks which they could not do in isolation. So, they learnt how to improve in collaborative environment, how to evaluate and response on each other's work and how to perform peer review activities. The students felt very satisfied in peer coaching, peer evaluating and peer reviews. They worked and came up with effective learning strategies into 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 corrective feedback wherever necessary, improved the students' communicative skills and logical thinking in cooperative social network. Most importantly, peers also acted as friendly tutors in the cooperative learning environment.

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