



A Tellecollaborative Approach to Written Corrective Feedback

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Abstract

Smartphones have become more sophisticated allowing several apps to be built in or installed on them. This has facilitated connectivity as well which has paved the way for more interaction especially among student community through social media like Viber, What's up, Telegram and so on. Thus, taking this opportunity, teachers have started to use these devices as a means of instruction in many parts of the world particularly for L2 learning. This has raised a question about the effectiveness of using these apps as teaching tools for language learning. This mixed method study attempted to 1) investigate the impact of using Telegram on providing feedback and improving writing accuracy in L2 and to 2) discover students' perceptions toward using this app for writing purpose. For this purpose, two advanced classes taking a general English course at a language institute were selected. The intact classes, 15 female participants in each, were divided into two groups: One of them as a control and the other as an experimental group. Having posted their writing on Telegram, the students in experimental group received feedback from their peers and finally the teacher. The control group received feedback on paper. Both independent and paired-t test were used to analyze the data. The results revealed that the experimental group using Telegram significantly outperformed the control group ($p \geq .5$). Data were triangulated with focused group interview regarding student perceptions of the feedback received through Telegram. Two themes emerged from focused group interview, usefulness and satisfaction, which will be discussed in the paper. This study may cast a light on usefulness of integrating technology into L2 classes to accelerate learning among today's technology-oriented generation.

1. The study

1.1. Aims

This study was designed to investigate the extent to which written corrective feedback through Telegram can help advanced L2 learners gain greater mastery over targeted linguistic errors, measured by improved accuracy in the writing of new texts over a 10-week period. Thus, a mixed method design was used to answer the research questions: a pre-test at the beginning of the 10-week period, and a post-test at the end of week 10. For the purpose of triangulation, opinion surveys were administered at the end of the course regarding students' perceptions of the feedback received through Telegram. I wanted to know whether or not provision of written corrective feedback via Telegram would help advanced learners further increase their level of accuracy. Furthermore, what the students' ideas would be toward using Telegram for improving writing. Therefore, the following questions were formed:

1. Does advanced learners' accuracy vary according to written CF provided via Telegram?
2. What are the students' perceptions of using Telegram in ESL classroom to improve writing?

1.2. Context and participants

The study was conducted in Iran Language Institute, one of the most popular English schools in Iran. The participants were females with the age range of 17-25 and came from middle and high social class. They were high school or university students and were taking an advanced course.

1.3. Target structures

All linguistic forms and structures received written CF. The decision to focus on all errors was based on the idea that focusing on one or only a few error categories at a time may be necessary for research purposes but it may not be practical for the classroom, for in the first place, students expect the teacher to correct all of their errors. Second, when the other errors are not corrected, they may be fossilized and as a result become difficult to be eradicated later on.



1.4. Instruments

The learners wrote paragraphs on different topics including different paragraph types i.e., narrative, descriptive and expository. All writings in pre, and post-test were of the same type of narrative. The experimental group used their cell phones or iPads to post their writings on Telegram.

1.5. Data collection

The classes in this institute last 21 sessions held twice a week for about three months. The study started from session five in order to familiarize the learners with paragraph, its organization and types in the beginning sessions. First, on session five (week three) both the control and experimental group were administered the pre-test. They wrote a narrative paragraph of 150 words in the class. From session six on, the control group wrote a paragraph on paper and the experimental group posted their writings on telegram every other session. The control group received feedback from the teacher each time they wrote the paragraph and the experimental group received feedback first from their classmates and then the teacher. The learners in the experimental group were taught to number each sentence in the paragraph so that it would be easy for other students and the teacher to address the mistakes while giving feedback. The learners in the experimental group posted their writings on telegram in turns to avoid confusion. After correction was done with the first one, the others posted theirs in turn. The teacher was watching the students while they were giving feedback to their peers. If they were right, she affirmed, otherwise she corrected them, too. The students were able to correct each other as well while providing feedback. Finally, a post-test was given on session 18 to detect any differences in each groups' writing accuracy. After final exam, the students in experimental group were asked to participate in focused group interview in Telegram. I followed Kruger's [7] guidelines to give structure to the focus group interview. The questions addressed the learners' ideas toward using Telegram for correction purpose including both the negative and positive aspects. Sometimes the interview was synchronous when the learners were on line and sometimes asynchronous with students logging on to make comments as and when they wanted to. Overall it lasted about three days.

1.6. Data Analysis

To answer research question one, error-free clause/c was conducted to evaluate the accuracy of each writing. As Wigglesworth [11] has reported error-free clauses (EFC) are the most precise measure of writing accuracy that we currently have. This may be because writing will almost always produce more clauses than T-units. Thus, the clause may afford greater discriminating power than the larger T-units. So first, the total number of clauses in each sample was established. Then, each clause was evaluated to determine if it had any syntactic, punctuation, spelling, or lexical errors. The total number of EFC was then divided by the total number of clauses (EFC/C), resulting in a ratio score. Descriptive tests for each of the two groups were calculated. An independent and paired-sample t-test was used to analyze data. A paired t-test was used to compare the results of pre and post-test in each group and an independent-sample t-test was utilized to compare the results in control and experimental group (see Table 1).

Table 1

	<i>Mean (out of 30)</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>p-value</i>	<i>t-statistic</i>	<i>df</i>
Control group	.6833	.0901	15	.0001	4.5249	27
Experimental group	.8214	.0725	14			

The qualitative data pertaining to focused group interview was content analyzed and coded. As the study was small-scale and the data were manageable, the coding procedure was conducted manually. The whole data were read repeatedly to find the patterns and themes. Two main themes emerged as a result of coding: Satisfaction and usefulness.



2. Results and discussion

Comparing the results of paired t-test, it was found that both groups improved their writing accuracy, however, the results of independent t-test found there was significant statistical difference between groups, $t(4.5249)$, $p \leq 0.0001$. There are therefore good reasons to think the correction method via Telegram ($M = .8214$, $SD = 0.725$) is more effective than the traditional pen and paper method ($M = .6833$, $SD = .901$).

The results of the qualitative study, that is, the focused group interview also provided evidence for the success of Telegram for correction purposes among the students in this institute. Nearly all the students in the class made comments. The results of coding procedures led to two main themes: Satisfaction and usefulness.

2.1. Satisfaction

Almost all of the students expressed their satisfaction with using Telegram to receive feedback. They found writing on Telegram faster than paper and pen, which saved them a lot of time on top of other activities. They also admired the ease and availability of the device. One of the students stated, "I always put my writing homework off or even forgot to do it because I didn't have time to do it, but writing on Telegram was not time consuming because I had my mobile phone available everywhere, even on the bus going back home". These learners noted that they could easily get connected to the internet on their mobile phone and the speed was high enough to get in touch with other members. One of the learners said

"It is so easy for me to use because I have my phone every place with me and I have internet on my phone too and the speed of telegram is high and I can use it easily even without DSL. I mean just connecting with GPRS is enough, and we can share our idea with each other even when we miss the class."

2.2. Usefulness

Besides being satisfied with the process, the learners found it useful as well. The learners stated that they had access to everyone's writing in addition to their own, which provided a good chance to see their classmates' mistakes and avoid repeating them in their own writing, which worked as a reminder for them. They also thought that it gave them the opportunity to share their ideas and learn more from peers. One of them found the practice as a fun activity and said, "I usually think of writing as something boring but with this method I was waiting eagerly for the teacher to assign writing homework. You know I'm good with my fingers." Some of the learners noted this method of correction not only helped them review and remember the grammar points they had already studied but they learned new structures, words and expressions, which helped them in final exam too. The learners were of the idea that this method of correction caused a kind of active involvement and they thought of themselves as somebody. Furthermore, it caused competition among learners because everyone wanted to be the first to provide feedback. Almost all of them highlighted that this method improved their relationship with their classmates and the teacher at the same time since they were in touch all the time. One of the learners stated, "I was embarrassed to talk in the class because I was afraid of making mistakes and losing face in front of others but now I feel closer so I can participate in class activities more". Best of all, they said, the teacher paid more attention to their mistakes and was always there to help and remind. Nearly all of them recommended it for the following writing classes as well.

3. Conclusions

What comes out of the quantitative and qualitative method in this study is evidence of efficiency of integrating technology into L2 classes especially for tasks that are considered boring on the part of learners. Furthermore, as Evans et al.[3] noted for corrective feedback to be effective, it should meet some criteria: Manageability, timeliness, meaningfulness, constancy. Considering manageability, I had the learners in this study write a paragraph of 100 words so that they would have enough time to spend on correcting each other. Second, as the learners and I were in touch most often, it provided the opportunity for close interaction and consequently timely feedback. Besides, since the learners were able to see each other's writings and give feedback on 15 writings every time they had writing assignment, they would be corrected and could correct the others over and over which would meet the criteria of



constancy. What is more, making use of learners' habits for learning purposes may change their distractive and frustrating habits to a beneficial activity of learning.

However, doing this study we faced some limitations. In the first place, the size of the samples was small because they had been assigned to each class according to their registration. As a result random sampling was impossible too, which makes generalization of the results impossible. Therefore, future study with a bigger sample is required to solidify the positive effect of mobile phone and social networks on learning. Second, there was no time to carry out a delayed post-test to find out the long term effect of this method of correction. Finally, the study was limited to females. It can be done with males too.

The bottom line is no single method or strategy will lead to learning. Technology and innovative approaches to learning have contributed to the variety of ways learning may happen. Nonetheless, it requires a bit of originality and effort on the part of us, as teachers, to sugar the pill and facilitate learning.

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