

An Investigation of the Role of Peer Feedback in Enhancing Grammatical Accuracy in Writing: Teachers' and Students' Perceptions

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Abstract:

Peer feedback is one of the most commonly used concepts and recently applied techniques to enhance students' written performance. The current study aims at scrutinizing teachers' and students' perceptions of the implementation of peer feedback to enhance students' grammatical accuracy in writing. To realize this aim, a mixed-methods approach is followed wherein a questionnaire is administered to first-year students at the Department of English at M'sila University, in addition to an interview conducted with teachers in charge of the written expression module. The results obtained revealed that peer feedback is not implemented among first-year EFL students at M'sila University. They also revealed teachers' awareness of the significance of peer feedback as an instructional pedagogy to enhance students' written productions. Therefore it is recommended that students need to be trained on how to give and receive feedback to yield better outcomes.

Keywords: EFL, grammatical accuracy, peer feedback, perceptions, writing.



I. Introduction

Writing is an essential skill to master in English as a foreign language (EFL) and English as a second language (ESL) not only to express one's thoughts and ideas, but also as a means of communication. In this regard, teachers as well students are constantly trying various ways and techniques to improve students' writing levels. This aim is likely to be realized when students produce a written work that is grammatically accurate. By virtue of that, responding to students' grammatical errors, as stated by Truscott (1996), is a way to improve students' ability to write accurately. Typically, improving students' writing accuracy is an essential factor for effective writing. In as

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much as the effectiveness of any piece of writing is determined by its grammatical accuracy.

The instructional benefits of grammar have long been acknowledged. Significantly, language learning goals would have never been achieved without a rich command of grammatical knowledge (Richards and Renandya, 2002, as cited in Mart, 2013). In fact, learning any language requires mastering its grammar system. For this reason, Zhang (2009) points out that it is quite exact that putting grammar in the forefront in ESL/EFL, because language knowledge of grammar is the fundamental of English language, as it sets the basis for the four language skills. Swain (1995) and Lyster (1993) argue that grammar instruction, in addition to a communicative-oriented environment, is a necessary condition to significantly improve students' performance (cited in Rauber and Gil, 2004)

During the course of developing their writing accuracy, students incessantly receive corrective feedback on their written productions (Ellis, 1994 as cited in Rauber and Gil, 2004). Feedback is, thus, one of the techniques employed to enhance second language (L2) learning in general and L2 writing in particular (Hyland, 2013). It is one of the strategies that can assist learners overcome grammatical imperfections in writing.

In the current teaching/learning practices of the 21st century, the development of the learners' communicative competence has been recognized as the ultimate aim behind the process of teaching and learning a foreign language (Štajduhar, 2013). Correspondingly, with the shift in the teaching paradigms from traditional teacher-centered to learner-centered classrooms, it would be reasonable to expect a corresponding shift regarding various language assessment techniques and feedback practices. One such innovation which represents a move away from teacher-centered culture and promotes learner-centeredness is peer feedback.

The current study is intended to investigate teachers' and students' perceptions regarding the implementation of peer feedback as an instructional pedagogy to enhance students' grammatical accuracy in writing.

II. Literature Review

Research in second language acquisition (SLA), as well as foreign language teaching (FLT), has evidenced that FL learners face a difficulty while learning from input solely (Lyster and Ranta, 1997; Nassaji and Kartchava, 2017). Consequently, they still do not yet produce an error-free output. In this sense, FL learners cannot develop native-like accuracy, be it oral or written, based on mere exposure to fragments of grammatical input. Researchers and theorists, henceforth, set up to find out ways and strategies

that can assist learners in manipulating the language accurately by overcoming the errors they come across in the process of L2 learning (Bitchener and Ferris, 2012). This fact could be realized through pursuing learners with corrective feedback.

The concept corrective feedback (CF) is an umbrella term used to cover each of negative feedback, error treatment, error correction, and negative evidence (Chaudron, 1986; Lyster and Ranta, 1997; El Tatawy, 2002; Sheen, 2011; hen, et al., 2016). These different labels reflect researchers' different standpoints and concerns. Corrective feedback can occur in instructional settings as it can take place in natural settings (Sheen, 2011).

One of the earliest definitions of corrective feedback is attributed to Chaudron (1977) "any reaction of the teacher which clearly transforms, disapprovingly refers to, or demands improvement of the learner's utterance" (p. 31). This definition represents the groundwork for most recent investigators wherein Chaudron includes both explicit and implicit corrections in addition to teacher's reactions. Similarly, Kartchava, et al. (2018) clearly refer to CF as tutor's reactions to learners' language errors. This process is likely to bring about new understandings of the target language and changes in linguistic competence.

The issue of CF has long been considered by SLA theoreticians and researchers. According to Behaviourists, errors should not be tolerated because, in their view, forming new target- habits would inevitably be negatively influenced by these errors. What is noteworthy is that if incorrect responses occur, CF needs to be provided. The aim of CF is therefore to prevent errors rather than to treat them (Bitchener and Ferris, 2012).

The contribution of CF in L2 development from the cognitive perspective lies in its role in drawing learners' attention to form. The latter, in turn, facilitates learners' noticing of the differences between their incorrect utterance and the target structure (noticing the gap; Schmidt and Frota, 1986) or the shortage of their output (noticing the hole; Doughty and Williams, 1998; Swain, 1993). Significantly, the provision of CF will lead to an adjustment in the linguistic output (Kartchava, et al., 2018).

On the other hand, Interactionist perspective' main concern lies in the role of oral interactions between learners and their interlocutors. Through the negotiation of meaning, learners and their interlocutors tend to modify their utterances. Learners' errors frequently result in communication difficulties. For the latter to be resolved, Interactionists suggest some conversational patterns such as repetition, confirmation checks, comprehension checks, and

clarification requests. Accordingly, Interactionists advocate the provision of CF to learners on their utterances. They argue that within meaningful interactions, attention will be directed to learners' problematic structures, and consequently CF eventually takes place.

Based upon the Vygotskian theory, socio-cultural view provides a different view concerning the role of interaction in SLA. Socio-cultural theory is based on the claim that L2 development occurs as a result of social interactions between individuals namely L2 learners and the target language speakers who are more knowledgeable than they are, that is to say, teachers and more advanced students (Bitchener and Ferris, 2012). According to Lyster, Saito, and Sato (2013), CF in the view of Socio-cultural researchers provides learners with dialogically negotiated assistance as they move from other-regulation to self-regulation.

In order to increase the chance of feedback to be processed by learners themselves, students become widely encouraged to step out of their usual roles of being just feedback receivers. In this regard, students become more involved in the process of feedback through providing peer feedback on their production (Štajduhar, 2013). Peer feedback is thought of to provide students with varied feedback. In addition, it allows for more social interaction between students (Burkert and Wally, 2013). Conceptually, peer feedback is a communication process through which learners engage in reflective criticism and enter into dialogues related to performance and standards of other students' work (Liu and Carless, 2006, p.280). Through these dialogues, students learn in depth while contemplating their peers' works, in addition to holding the responsibility of helping their peers to make progress (Štajduhar, 2013).

Peer feedback has been largely investigated within the socio-cultural theory (SCT) developed by Vygotsky (1978) where the social elements is an essential part of cognition and learning. In that, higher thinking skills are shaped by social interaction. According to Vygotsky (1978), learners are ready to process information about a specific form and respond to intervention by others. For him, this is a sign of the existence of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) (cited in Moser, 2020).

In terms of evidence, peer feedback is likely to be classified into two types, input providing and output promoting. While input providing peer feedback tends to supply learners with positive evidence that contains linguistic information about what is acceptable in the target language, output-promoting peer feedback does not supply learners with a target-like form. Rather, it creates opportunities for learners to self-correct or adjusts their

output by pointing at the comprehension and other language issues (Iwashita and Dao, 2021).

In second as well as foreign language contexts, peer feedback has been prompted for many reasons. According to Falchicov (2001), peer feedback is advantageous in the sense that it enhances and supports learning through students' active engagement in articulating evolving understanding of subject matter. Similarly, Jonassen, et al. (1995) point out that peer feedback enables the inter-change of ideas among students. In this respect, peer feedback tends to promote the socio-cultural view to learning which favours the active participation and interaction of learners in order to construct knowledge (cited in Štajduhar, 2013). What is more, Moser (2020) holds that peer feedback provides more control to learners.

Dao and Iwashita (2021), on the other hand, view the benefits of peer feedback from various perspectives; educational, cognitive, and socio-cognitive. Educationally, providing peer feedback improves learners' overall output, leading therefore to the transformation of their L2 knowledge. Additionally, it raises students' awareness of language forms, particularly when learners are trained and encouraged to attend to their peers' speech, to detect errors and, hence, provide feedback. Eventually, students' inter-language is likely to be restructured. Cognitively, oral interaction through the process of peer feedback is a way to receive and process information. In other words, being processed in contextualized practice, peer feedback facilitates learners' proceduralization and automatization of language forms, which fosters their L2 accuracy, comprehension, and production. Lastly, the socio-cognitive view holds that students co-construct their L2 knowledge when various forms of assistance or scaffolding are provided by each other.

Numerous research studies highlighted the importance of responding to students' writing in a variety of ways including peer feedback. In this regard, Williams (2005) stated that "all writers can benefit from having a real audience to write for, especially if the readers can provide helpful feedback. A readily available audience in the classroom is the writer's classmates, or peers" (p. 93, quoted in Altstaedter and Doolittle, 2014).

Prior research studies indicated that grammar is a crucial aspect for any good piece of writing and that students can advance their proficiency level by producing written work that is grammatically accurate (Baleghizadeh & Gordani, 2012). In this regard, numerous studies highlighted the important role of peer feedback as part of the writing process (Omaggio Hadley, 2000; Shrum and Glisan, 2005 as cited in Altstaedter and Doolittle, 2014).

Suseno (2014) investigated the role of feedback to overcome grammatical problems of academic writing in EFL classrooms. The results obtained revealed that individual feedback and classroom discussion prove to be an effective strategy to improve students' writing particularly in the aspect of grammar. Similarly, Altstaedter (2016) investigated the impact of trained and untrained peer feedback on students' writing quality. The results demonstrated that students' participation in peer feedback process yielded significant impact on writing quality. These results indicate that the incorporation of peer feedback into foreign language writing instruction helps students improve the quality of writing. These results could show the benefits of incorporating peer feedback in foreign language writing instruction, as it allows students' to focus on writing as a process and improve the quality of their writing.

In a subsequent study which was conducted to investigate how providing and receiving peer feedback impact students' written performance, Huisman, et al., (2018) compared the writing performance of undergraduate students who either provided or received written peer feedback in the context of authentic academic writing task. The results of the study indicated that both providing and receiving peer feedback led to improvements of writing performance. Moreover, Kuyyogsuy (2019) conducted a mixed-methods research which aimed at investigating the effects of peer feedback on students' English writing ability in L2 writing class. The results of the study showed that students made a significant progress in their writing ability. That is, students' engagement in the process of peer feedback results in an effective written product. Kuyyogsuy (2019) concludes that for peer feedback to be effective, training is a crucial factor to enable students to improve their written performance with better grammar use. Within the same line of thought, Suriany, et al., (2019) conducted a study which aimed at investigating the effect of peer feedback on students' writing skill. The results of this study revealed that the students who received peer feedback outperformed those who received teacher's feedback.

In an attempt to investigate teachers' as well as students' perceptions regarding the role of peer feedback in enhancing grammatical accuracy in writing, the current study seeks to answer the following question:

-What are teachers' and students' perceptions of the implementation of peer feedback in EFL writing classrooms?

III. Research Methodology

1. Research Design

Since the aim of this study is to investigate teachers' as well as students' perceptions as far as the role of peer feedback in enhancing grammatical accuracy in writing is concerned, we opted for a mixed-methods approach to data collection and analysis as the best method to get an in-depth understanding of the situation in question. According to Creswell (2014), mixed-methods research is an approach to inquiry which involves the combination or integration of qualitative and quantitative data in a single research study. While qualitative data tends to be open-ended without predetermined responses, quantitative data, on the other hand, tends to include closed-ended responses such as found on questionnaires or psychological instruments.

2. Data Collection Instruments

The primary data gathering tools in this study were a questionnaire, administered to students, and an interview, conducted with teachers. According to Brown (2001), as cited in Dornyei (2003), "questionnaires are any written instruments that present respondents with a series of questions or statements to which they are to react either by writing out their answers or selecting from among existing answers" (p.06). Alongside, interviews are considered as a method of collecting data involving the presentation of oral-verbal stimuli and reply in the form of oral-verbal responses (Kothari, 2004, p. 97). The implementation of the interview and questionnaire techniques together would help in-depth understanding of the respondents' perceptions and views. Therefore, more valid conclusions would be reached and formulated.

3. Participants

The participants who were selected to take part in this study were first-year EFL students at the Department of English at M'sila University. The number of participants who were randomly selected to answer the questionnaire was fifty (50) students. Additionally, five (05) teachers in charge of the written expression module at the same university took part in the interview.

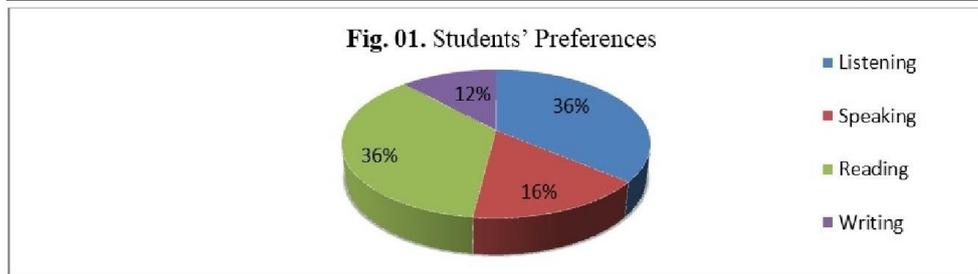
IV. Results

1. Results of Students' Questionnaire

This section displays findings of students' perceptions of the role of peer feedback in enhancing grammatical accuracy in writing.

Table 01. Students Preferences

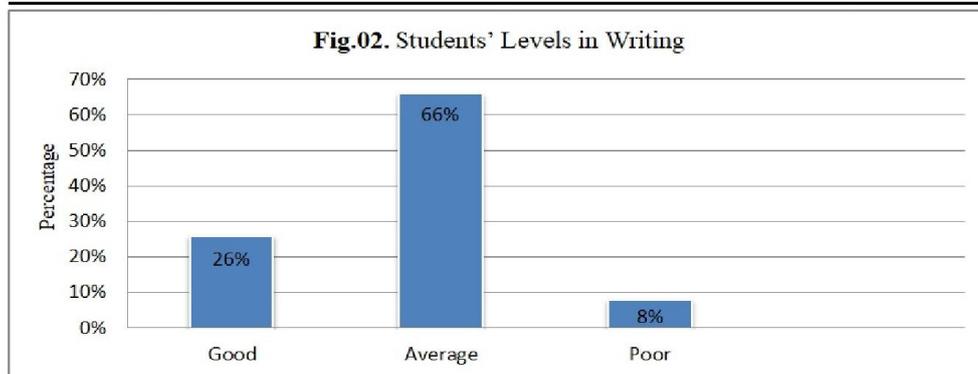
Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Listening	18	36%
Speaking	08	16%
Reading	18	36%
Writing	06	12%



The results displayed on table 1 and figure 1 above pertained to the students' preferences regarding the different language skills. Among the participants, (36%) opted for the listening skill. Quite similarly, (36%) of students chose the reading skill. (16%) chose the speaking skill while (12%) chose the writing skill. The results obtained reveal students' inclination to receptive skills. That is, listening and reading. In this sense, it could be inferred that students regard writing as an intricate, complex and mostly a difficult skill to master. These results also denoted that students are faced with difficulties which are likely to influence their written performance.

Table 02. Students' Level in Writing

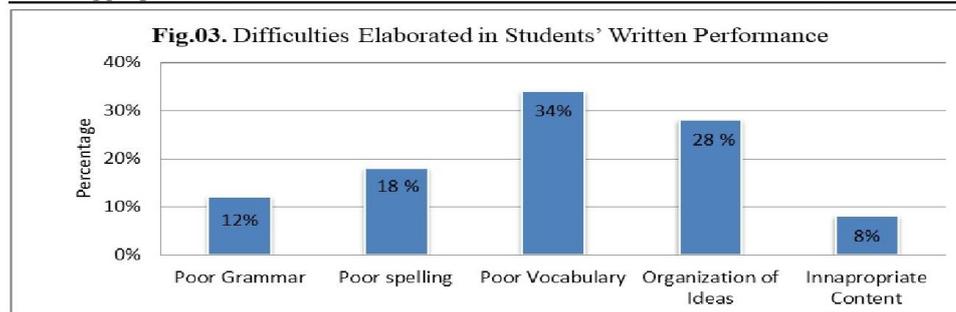
Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Good	13	26%
Average	33	66%
Poor	04	08%



As for students' level in writing, students were required to estimate their level in writing. Table 2 and figure 2 indicate that two thirds of respondents (66%) consider their level in writing average, (26%) consider their level good, and (8%) perceived that their level is poor. The results obtained can clearly show that students are conscious of the quality of their written productions. They can also indicate students' awareness towards improving their writing quality.

Table 03. Difficulties Elaborated in Students' Written Performance

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Poor Grammar	06	12%
Poor Spelling	09	18%
Poor vocabulary	17	34%
Organization of ideas	14	28%
Inappropriate content	04	08%



From the illustrating table 03 and figure 03, learners point out at different areas of difficulty frequently elaborated in their writings. The results obtained demonstrated that (34%) of respondents' writing difficulties is attributed to poor vocabulary, (28%) to organization of ideas, (18%) to poor spelling, (12%) to poor grammar, and (08%) to inappropriateness of content. Notably, it can be seen that grammatical accuracy is paid less consideration in comparison to other areas such as spelling and vocabulary.

Table 04. Reasons of Students' Poor Written Performance

Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Inefficient Instruction	08	16%
Lack of Practice	23	46%
Lack of Feedback	19	38%

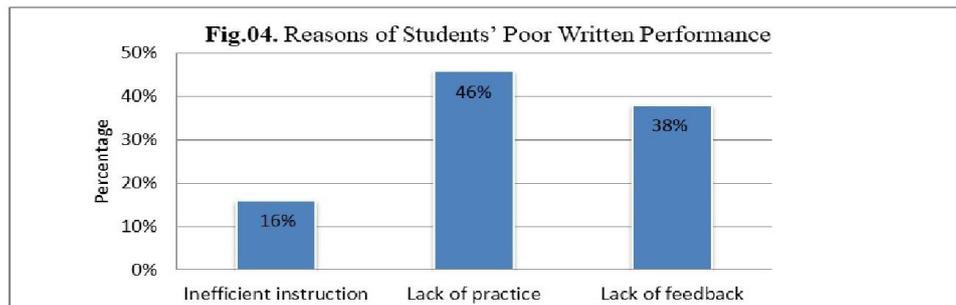
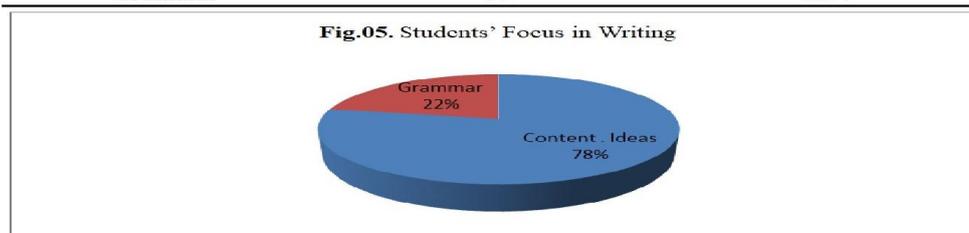


Table 04 and Figure 04 above clarify the various reasons students imputed for their poor writings. (46%) of respondents reported that the reason behind their poor writing is lack of practice, be it inside or outside classroom. (38%) consider that their weak level of writing is due to lack of feedback while (16%) consider that inefficient instruction is the reason behind their poor writings.

Apparently, students seem to be aware of the role of feedback in addition to practice in enhancing the written competence.

Table 05. Students' Focus in Writing

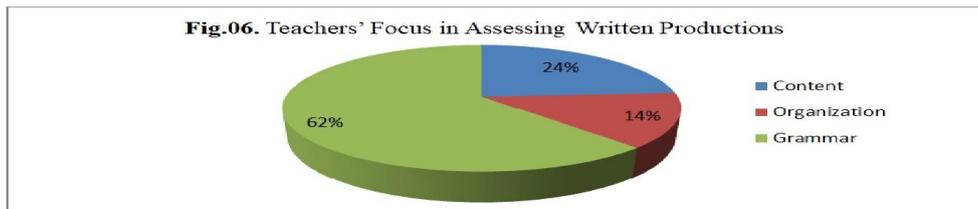
Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Content / Ideas	39	78%
Grammar	11	22%



The data reported on table 05 and figure 05 above indicated that students' focus when generating a piece of writing is on ideas and content (78%). However, form is paid less consideration (22%). These results asserted that students' ultimate aim to convey their messages through writing, therefore they fail to express themselves accurately.

Table 06. Teachers' Focus in Assessing Written Productions

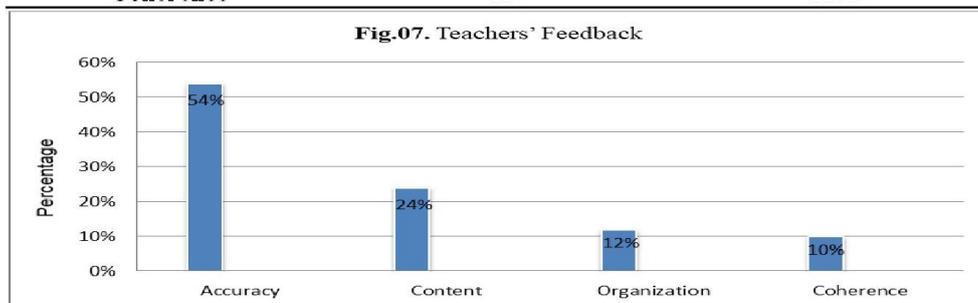
Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Content	12	24%
Grammar	31	62%
Organization	07	14%



In response to the question which asked about which aspect teachers focus on in assessing written productions, table 06 and figure 06, indicate that (62%) of respondents report that teachers focus more on grammar when assessing students' writings. (27%) opted for organization, and (11%) opted for content. In this regard, it is apparent that teachers held much promise to grammatical aspects. In that, the effectiveness of a written text is determined by its grammatical accuracy.

Table 07. Teachers' Feedback

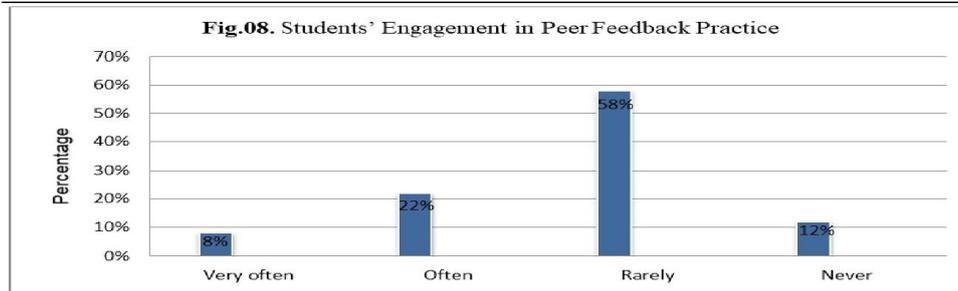
Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Accuracy	27	54%
Content	12	24%
Organization	06	12%
Coherence	05	10%



Data displayed on table 07 and figure 07 report students' views regarding teachers' feedback on their writing. Coincidentally with data obtained from table 06, (54%) of respondents reported that teachers' feedback main focus is on grammatical accuracy. (24%) of respondents held that teachers' feedback tackles content. Students' responses clearly support the claim that in addition to an appropriate content, having a good command of grammar is an essential element of a good writing. Besides, results indicated that teachers are cognizant of the importance of grammatical accuracy in written productions. (12%) opted for organization, and (10%) admit coherence.

Table 08. Students' Engagement in Peer Feedback Practice

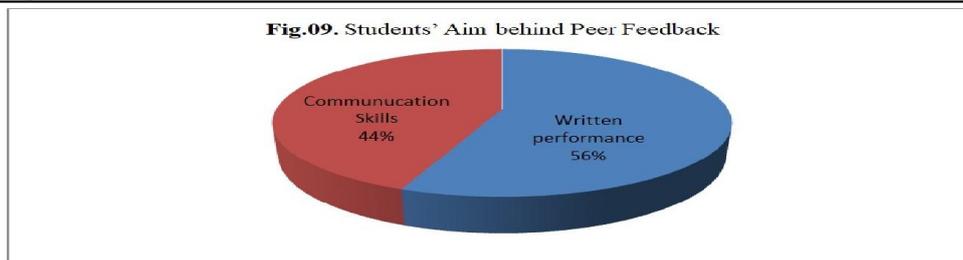
Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very Often	04	08%
Often	11	22%
Rarely	29	58%
Never	06	12%



On the basis of the data displayed on table 08 and figure 08, students' engagement in peer feedback practice is reported in the following way: (58%) of students report that they are rarely engaged in peer feedback practice, (22%) reported often, (12%) never, and (08%) very often. These data clearly show that teacher's feedback is highly practiced in comparison to peer feedback. These results indicate teachers' ignorance of how much effective feedback when it is processed by students themselves.

Table 09. Students' Aim behind Peer Feedback

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Improve Written Performance	28	56%
Improve Communication Skills	22	44%



As far as students' aim behind peer feedback is concerned, table 09 and figure 09 demonstrated that (56%) of students held that their primary aim is to improve their written performance while (44%) tend to improve their communication skills.

2. Results of Teachers' Interview

Regarding teachers' responses, (02) teachers out of (05) supported the traditional product approach to teaching writing. They justified their choice by the fact that the process approach is time-consuming and does not work

with overcrowded classes. However, the other (03) teachers support the process approach. Yet, they make use of a combination of both approaches. Teachers affirmed that the process and the product approaches to teaching writing are correlated and that the former is a path towards the latter.

As far as students' level in writing is concerned, there was a consensus among teachers between moderate into under average levels. Teachers agreed on a number of weaknesses students elaborate in their writings including: poor spelling, lack of vocabulary, grammatical (mainly tenses) and syntactical problems, lack of ideas which might be attributed to lack of reading and practicing writing. In addition, (01) teacher referred to mother tongue interference as one of the problems that appear in students' writings.

When teachers were asked about whether students focus in their writings on content or on grammatical accuracy, they all confirmed that students tend to focus on the content and ideas disregarding the grammaticality of their writings. Nonetheless, when teachers come to assess students' written productions, all teachers accorded on the aspects of sentence structure, grammatical accuracy, and organization of ideas.

Concerning grammatical errors, all teachers asserted that grammatical deficiencies affect, in a negative way, the quality of students' writings. In the same respect, teachers argued that students have to receive feedback on their grammatical errors. Subsequent to this point, teachers were asked whether they provide feedback to learners or engage students in the feedback process, three (03) of them acknowledged the importance of teachers' feedback, and that they rarely rely on students to give feedback to their peers. However, (02) teacher asserted that peer feedback is pivotal particularly within the new teaching realms characterized by students actively taking part in their learning as well as in the classroom instruction including the feedback process.

Lastly, in response to the question which seeks to investigate teachers' concerning the role of peer feedback in overcoming grammatical deficiencies in writing, (01) teacher convincingly held positive attitudes regarding the role of peer feedback in writing. Yet (04) teachers claimed that students are not yet trained enough to give feedback to their peers; and therefore it will not be effective.

V. . Discussion

Based upon the results elicited by the questionnaire and the interview in order to get insightful understanding of students' as well as teachers' perceptions regarding the importance of peer feedback as an instructional pedagogy in enhancing grammatical accuracy in writing, it is educed that

despite the status grammar holds an important status in EFL curricula, students at the Department of English at M'sila University bare little consideration to the importance of grammar in foreign language writing instruction. On the contrary, teachers tend to focus on the grammatical aspect as the effectiveness of any piece of writing is, to a greater extent, determined by its grammatical accuracy. This view corroborates with Shintani and Ellis (2015) who assume that any improvements in grammatical accuracy will eventually lead to improved accuracy in new pieces of writing. Consequently, teachers tend to evaluate students level in writings as an average to under average.

In terms of weaknesses and difficulties students encounter in their writings, students noted that in addition to poor spelling and poor grammar, they lack vocabulary to develop an appropriate content. Similarly, teachers point out that students lack vocabulary which is mainly caused by the lack of reading. In this regard, Adas and Baki (2013) argued that English language students have limited vocabulary, and therefore, they end up repeating the same words resulting in poor content which lacks the criteria of creativity. Moreover, language transfer be it French or Arabic is another factor which affects students' writing quality.

As far as the reasons behind unsatisfactory written performance are considered, the findings obtained from students' questionnaire showed that the majority of students attribute this to the lack of practice. Yet, teachers indicated that besides the lack of practice, students lack reading. This is consistent with the view of Peter and Singaravelu (2020) who state that lack of content in writing points to the fact that students lacked reading.

The findings obtained from both teachers and students revealed that the assessment of students' written works is form-oriented. This fact does not mean that teachers' feedback is restricted solely to grammar. Genuinely, teachers tend to make students write accurately by shedding the light on the grammatical errors students commit without neglecting the content. In support of this view, Shintani and Ellis (2015) state that feedback can focus on organization, content or linguistic form. Furthermore, results have also indicated that the feedback that students receive is teacher-centred. Students affirm that they rarely engage in peer feedback practice and that most of the feedback their received is from their teachers. Considering students' answers, it can be inferred that they have never been trained on how to give and receive peer feedback. Therefore, teachers claimed that students are not trained enough to give feedback and eventually feedback will not be effective. In this respect, Kuyyogsuy (2019) asserts that for peer feedback to

be effective, training is a crucial factor to enable students to improve their written performance with better grammar use.

It is noteworthy that corrective feedback can be more effective when it better occurred in an interactional atmosphere (Okyar and Ekşi, 2019). In peer feedback process students tend to engage in a communicative activity with minimal or no intervention from the part of the teacher. Peer feedback can be more effective when students hold a positive and a supportive attitude to their peers. It also assists in informing students about their accurate and inaccurate productions (Okyar and Ekşi, 2019). In this respect, the results obtained from both teachers and students demonstrate their positive attitudes regarding the role of peer feedback in enhancing students' written performance.

VI. . Conclusion

The current study attempts to investigate teachers' and students' perceptions regarding the role of peer feedback in enhancing grammatical accuracy in writing. The study is premised on the assumption that, firstly, the grammatical aspect in writing is neglected by EFL students who mostly tend to focus on content and communicating ideas. By virtue of that, students frequently receive feedback from their teachers in order to revise their writing and ultimately write accurately. Secondly, teachers tend to provide feedback to their students on their grammatical errors disregarding the role of peer corrective feedback which takes place in student-student interactive activities. In this regard, Jackson (2015, p. 700) argues that "while the learners in the teacher feedback group benefited primarily from the high quality and quantity of feedback, the learners in peer feedback group may have benefitted from additional factors, including self-corrections, and group discussions about linguistic forms" (quoted in Okyar and Ekşi, 2019).

This study has been carried out through a mixed-methods approach to data collection and analysis. The results obtained revealed that students face various difficulties when they write. Teachers attribute these difficulties to the lack of reading and the lack of practice inside or outside the classroom settings. Results also showed that students' main focus in writing is on content whereas the grammatical aspect is purely neglected. As a result, students tend to produce inaccurate pieces of writing. Significantly, teachers' feedback is rather form-focused. Overall, the results obtained clearly indicated that peer feedback is not implemented in EFL writing classes although it is highly established in literature that peer feedback is an effective way to improve students' writing accuracy. Nonetheless, both teachers and students held positive attitudes towards peer feedback to be implemented in writing classes. Therefore, an interventional study is recommended in which

peer feedback is applied as an instructional pedagogy to teaching writing in general and to improve students' writing accuracy in particular. Furthermore, it would be useful to better train students on how to give effective peer feedback at the outset of the writing course.

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