

## **Emotions related to identifiable/anonymous peer feedback: A case study with Turkish pre-service English teachers**

**Fatma Kaya**

*Dicle University, Turkey*

Although peer-feedback has been extensively studied in the field of foreign language pedagogy, research related to how students are involved in the process emotionally is limited. The purpose of the present study was to investigate emotions experienced by undergraduate students enrolled in ELT (English language teaching) at a state university as peer-feedback givers, while providing identifiable and anonymous peer-feedback. A qualitative case study method was adopted, with participants interviewed twice, once after providing peer-feedback on an identifiable paper, and again after providing peer-feedback on an anonymous paper. Both positive and negative emotions were reported by the participants, and to analyse the qualitative data, thematic analysis was employed. While they had various emotions related to the self and the peer, they reported mainly negative emotions related to identifiable peer-feedback. Lastly, they experienced positive emotions related to anonymous peer feedback.

### **Introduction**

Peer feedback including online peer feedback, receiving/providing peer feedback and peer feedback training has been extensively explored in the field of foreign language pedagogy (Al Abri, Al Baimani & Al Bahlani, 2021; Sivaci, 2020; Lira-Gonzales & Nassaji, 2019; Fithriani, 2019; Kuyyogsuy, 2019; Lee & Evans, 2019; Zhang & Yu, 2019; Cao, Yu & Huang, 2019; Berggren, 2015), and it has been acknowledged that peer feedback plays an important role in promoting learner success, especially L2 writing. Therefore, it has become an instructional practice favourably exploited by educators, particularly in higher education (Huisman, Saab, van Driel & van den Broek, 2018). It refers to a collaborative practice in which learners criticise each other's work both positively and negatively and provide suggestions on each other's work (Yu & Hu, 2017). Nelson & Schunn (2009) made a distinction between cognitive and affective feedback. Cognitive feedback is related to the work itself being assessed and consists of the following processes: summarising, specifying, and explaining. Affective feedback, on the other hand, refers to specific processes such as criticising and praising where the reviewer uses affective language.

Although being a popular issue, studies related to peer feedback were far from understanding students' emotions in peer feedback processes. Emotions, the main foci of the present study, are an integral part of language learning and teaching. However, they have been relatively ignored in the field of foreign language teaching, as issues related to cognition have been primary concern for the researchers in the field (Richards, 2020). According to Dewaele (2015:13), learning is possible through emotions as "they are at the heart of foreign language learning process". Emotions are closely related to experiences, practices, purposes and psychological state (Prior, 2016). As stated by Richards (2020), emotions refer to sociocultural products, which means social context and relations also shape them in addition to characteristics of an individual.

## Literature review

### Peer feedback and L2 writing

According to the research, peer feedback is necessary for students' developing L2 writing as learners become motivated and self-confident strategic writers thanks to peer feedback (Hojeij & Baroudi, 2018). It is intended to promote learner agency and active involvement in the learning process (Li, Liu & Steckelberg, 2010). Hyland (2003) highlighted that students' awareness about what readers seek in a text increases, and they are involved in real communication. Studies in the field reported various benefits of peer feedback. Increased awareness about issues related to the text and beyond the text including genre, reader, content organisation and grammar and successful performance related to the issues mentioned above with regard to L2 writing were among the major benefits of providing or receiving peer feedback, or both (Berggren, 2015; Lee, 2015; Yang, 2016; Huisman et al, 2018; Nawas, 2020). As stated by Phielix Prins, Kirschner, Erkens & Jaspers (2011), peer feedback urges students to reflect on their written work while evaluating the feedback they have received from the peer. On the other hand, students take charge and gain experience in interfering with and solving issues related to writing while providing peer feedback (Patchan & Schunn, 2015).

Despite the fact that numerous benefits were reported with regard to peer feedback, several drawbacks were observed, such as students' negative perceptions related to reviewers' ability to revise, students' providing feedback only related to structure, students' being preoccupied by personal issues and grading (Zaccaron & Xhafaj, 2020; Fithriani, 2019; Fithriani, 2018; Kuyyogsuy, 2019; Saeli & Cheng, 2021; Noroozi, Biemans & Mulder, 2016). Challenges and concerns experienced during peer review processes led to the conclusion that lack of training could be the main reason for encountering drawbacks during a peer review process (Rahimi, 2013). Therefore, training on peer feedback was considered to be essential to get the greatest benefit from peer assessment (Rahimi, 2013; Hojeij & Baroudi, 2018; Kuyyogsuy, 2019; Zhang & Yu, 2019).

Lastly, anonymity is another issue discussed in the relevant field (Lu & Bol, 2007; Rotsaert, Panadero & Schellens 2018; Dijks, Brummer & Kostons, 2018; Zaccaron & Xhafaj, 2020). In their study, Lu & Bol (2007) found that anonymous peer feedback led to better results as students involved in anonymous peer feedback attempted to revise more critically. On the other hand, according to Rotsaert et al. (2018), students are deprived of real communication which is sincere and mutual while practising anonymous peer feedback because of anonymity despite its enabling a secure environment for peer feedback.

### Emotions in foreign language pedagogy

Since emotions are among the factors influencing academic success of L2 learners, and enable us to have a thorough understanding of reasons behind their practices in the learning process, their investigation in L2 research is of great importance (Cheng, Hou & Wu, 2014). After being mostly ignored for decades, studies related to the emotions have

been increasing recently thanks to positive psychology, as it has urged researchers to investigate different emotions experienced in second language classes (Dewaele & Li, 2020). The vital roles of emotions in language teaching and learning, and how they are related to cognitive issues have become widely recognised (Barcelos & Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2018). Emotions refer to trait and state emotions: while trait emotions are “habitual and recurring”, which means not changing easily in the course of time, state emotions are affective reactions to “a given situation at a specified point of time” (Pekrun, 2006:317). According to Dewaele & MacIntyre (2014), L2 learning may be fostered through both negative and positive emotions, as they revealed that L2 learning anxiety was less in advanced level students compared to students in lower levels, whereas it was vice versa in the case of L2 learning enjoyment.

According to Cheng et al. (2014), social interactions are potentially guided by students’ emotions in an instructional setting, and emotions called forth by peer feedback as a social process are worth noting. Studies related to emotions in feedback mostly focused on teacher written feedback and students’ emotional reactions to the written teacher feedback (Mahfoodh, 2017; Zhang, 2017; Han & Hyland, 2019). These studies revealed that based on teacher comments there were various feelings students reported having. In his study, Mahfoodh (2017) found that students experienced both negative and positive emotions related to teacher feedback and teachers’ assessment, with negative comments being among the reasons for negative emotions. Similarly, Zhang (2017) claimed that teacher evaluation including comments and score caused the student to experience various emotions like happiness and frustration. Students’ emotional reactions to receiving peer feedback, or providing peer feedback, were also explored in several studies (Fan & Xu, 2020; Yu et al., 2019; Lee & Evans, 2019).

Despite an increasing number of studies related to emotions in L2 teaching and learning, including emotions regarding teacher written feedback, emotion research related to providing peer feedback is also needed as it is becoming an indispensable practice in L2 writing classes. As stated above, one of the issues raised about peer feedback is whether students are competent enough to give peer feedback and therefore, studies on peer feedback training have been conducted (Rahimi, 2013; Hojeij & Baroudi, 2018; Kuyyogsuy, 2019; Zhang & Yu, 2019). However, training may not be enough to assess whether students really become competent and how they deal with the problems they faced during training and peer feedback practices. Therefore, understanding students’ emotions while providing peer feedback could inform us about their learning (peer feedback) process, help teachers or researchers to address the issues related to peer feedback training and practices, and increase the effectiveness of the training. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate undergraduate students’ emotions related to identifiable peer feedback and anonymous peer feedback, seeking to answer the research questions:

1. How do participants feel about providing peer feedback on an identifiable paper?
2. How do participants feel about providing peer feedback on an anonymous paper?

## Method

The researcher carried out a case study as it can attain to a richer understanding about an issue in question (Duff, 2014), and it has the potential to shed light on especially complicated issues including emotions in L2 learning practices (Olave-Encina, Moni & Renshaw, 2021).

### Context and participants

The study was conducted at a state university in Turkey which is situated in an EFL (English as a foreign language) context. Relying on the curriculum promulgated by Turkey's Council of Higher Education, students are exposed to basic skill courses (listening, speaking, reading and writing) accompanied by grammar and vocabulary knowledge courses from the first year of a foreign language teacher training program. During later years of the program, courses including principles of foreign language teaching and testing, English literature, language teaching and literature, linguistics, and critical reading/writing are taught. Students are also required to attend practicum courses to observe how teaching is performed in real contexts, and perform some teaching. Students are expected to gain necessary skills and knowledge to teach English as a foreign language to students who are at varying levels. While students are expected to attain high proficiency in correct and flexible English usage and are expected to be equipped with some international professional standards including agency and critical thinking at the end of the training, student failures in English proficiency exams and teachers' claimed role in this failure stands as a major problem (Öztürk & Aydın, 2019).

This study was conducted during an L2 writing class in which students were expected to improve their L2 writing skills. Peer feedback is not a common practice in this educational context as students only performed it in speaking class. They are not familiar with peer assessment; however, considering its potential for contributing to students' L2 writing skills which was widely acknowledged in the relevant literature, the instructor attempted to integrate peer assessment into the writing class. Moreover, the instructor aimed to ensure active student participation through engaging students in their learning process for ultimate success in L2 writing. Since emotions have great potential to inform us about success of language teaching and learning (Barcelos & Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2018), this study focused mainly on students' emotions in order to understand possible negative and positive experiences students had in peer feedback concerning L2 writing.

In this case study, participants included twelve undergraduate students enrolled in the ELT (English language teaching) department at a state university. Nine participants were female while three were male. Only volunteering students took part in the study. This study was conducted in 2020-2021 academic year during the L2 writing class the students attended, wherein they were required to write academic essays and provide peer feedback in the class.

## **Data collection and analysis**

For the current study, data were collected from two rounds of semi-structured interviews with the participants, and their peer feedback papers were also employed as supplementary materials, as students were asked interview questions based on their peer feedback practices. The study was conducted during the writing class in which students were introduced to academic writing and were required to write academic essays. Students were also exposed to a 4-week peer feedback training for the purpose of preparing them to give informed peer feedback, as they did not have any previous peer feedback experience. During the training, the instructor modelled peer feedback based on a checklist which included criteria related to structural issues and content issues (Kaya & Yaprak, 2020). In order to familiarise students with feedback criteria, each criterion was introduced and modelled one by one by the instructor. Starting with training on providing peer feedback related to grammatical issues, students were also exposed to training on how to evaluate an essay in terms of organisation and content.

After receiving training on how to write an argumentative essay, students were given their first essay assignment, an argumentative essay about a topic which they chose within a week. Following the writing assignment which was completed before class hours, students were asked to exchange their essays with each other and provide peer feedback in written form based on the criteria they were presented during class hours. The same procedure was followed for the second peer feedback session: after receiving training on how to write a response essay, students were asked to write a response essay assignment. Completing their assignments, they sent their essays to the instructor. The instructor erased names of the students from their papers, and numbered them in order to ensure that the second peer feedback would be anonymous. Anonymous papers with numbers as identifiers were sent to the students by the instructor. Participants gave their second peer feedback on an anonymous paper. Both essays and peer feedback forms were written in English. Students were warned not to exceed the word limit (700 words) for the essay assignments; however, there was not a limit for peer feedback forms although they were warned about being clear and concise. After each peer feedback session, students were interviewed about their emotions related to the feedback they provided. Interview questions were adapted from Han and Hyland (2019).

In order to analyse the data obtained from semi-structured interviews, thematic analysis was employed. Both interviews were related to emotions experienced while providing peer feedback and consisted of questions like “How did you feel while providing peer feedback related to grammar? Or “How did you feel while providing peer feedback related to essay structure? After first familiarisation with the data, thematic analysis was adopted following the steps mentioned by Braun & Clarke (2006). Following continuous familiarisation with the data, initial codes were created using an inductive approach. After deciding on the themes, each code was assigned to the themes. In order to ensure that codes were reflected successfully in themes generated, they were revised and refined. For inter-rater reliability, the interview data were analysed by a colleague and similar results were obtained. Six major themes were extracted from the data with regard to the emotions triggered by providing peer feedback: positive emotions evoked by successful

performance of the self, negative emotions evoked by the unsuccessful performance of the self with regard to providing peer feedback, positive emotions evoked by successful performance of the peer, negative emotions evoked by unsuccessful performance of the peer with regard to essay writing performance, negative emotions related to identifiable peer feedback, and positive emotions related to anonymous peer feedback.

## Findings

### Emotions related to identifiable peer feedback

In the first peer feedback session, participants gave feedback on a friend's paper. After providing feedback, learners were interviewed about the emotions they experienced related to identifiable peer feedback. Participants reported various emotions evoked by their performance or peer's performance, or both. A total of 23 positive emotions (i.e. happy, relaxed, proud, lucky) associated with the self were reported by the participants. They had positive feelings because of their success in evaluating:

I trust myself in grammar and I think I am capable of evaluating a paper in terms of grammar. Seeing that I could do this made me happy (P1).

Although I did not trust myself while providing peer feedback, I felt proud and happy at the end because I realised that I was able to provide suggestions related to the parts in which I was confident (P3).

I was happy to be able to give suggestions to help my friend for the improvement of his essay (P7).

Evaluating my peer's essay made me feel lucky because it enabled me to notice smaller details in essay writing, which led me appreciate the work of the peer (P5).

15 positive emotions were recorded associated with the peer (i.e. happy, relaxed, satisfied, joyful, and inspired). The reasons for experiencing positive emotions were mostly about the peer's successful writing performance. The participants had positive feelings because the essay they evaluated was successful in terms of grammar, essay structure or content or more than one of them:

I think paying attention to issues related to organisation is vital for success in writing and the essay was successful in terms of the organisation, there was not much to criticise and this made me feel satisfied with his performance (P2).

I felt relaxed because I liked the essay; the argument and the supportive ideas were persuasive and successfully presented by her (P3).

I felt inspired when I read the essay since my friend used the language accurately in the essay (P11).

On the other hand, 6 negative emotions (unhappy, tense, disappointed, worried, and diffident) were reported associated with the self. The main reasons for negative emotions associated with the self were participants' inability about providing peer feedback

especially with regard to organization and content. One of the participants (P3) claimed that she was tense while evaluating the content as she did not know much about the issue discussed in the essay and was not sure about the correctness of her feedback. Another participant (P9) was diffident because she had concerns related to quality of the feedback she gave.

In addition, 13 negative emotions (unhappy, tense, and disappointed) were experienced associated with the peer, and disappointment was the most frequently stated feeling related to the peer. One participant (P8) claimed that he was disappointed when he read the essay as he was not expecting his friend to make so many grammatical mistakes. Another participant (P7) indicated that he felt disappointed as the peer did not support his argument successfully. Lastly, another participant (P2) was unhappy:

... seeing that he made simple grammatical mistakes made me unhappy and tense because normally he is a successful writer and has a good command of grammar, and I cannot understand how he made such mistakes. (P2)

Finally, they had concerns about the relationship with the peer (n=3). One participant (P1) stated that he was tense while evaluating the peer's essay since it was difficult for him to be objective about the essay of a friend. Similar reasons were also mentioned by two other participants.

### **Emotions related to anonymous peer feedback**

Following the second peer feedback session which was anonymous, participants had a second interview in which they were asked how they felt while providing peer feedback on an anonymous paper. As in the first interview, positive and negative emotions were reported by the participants related to the self and related to the peer. Besides, feelings related to anonymity were identified. To start with, 25 positive emotions (happy, relaxed, proud, and confident) were recorded related to the self. They had positive emotions because of their success in providing peer feedback especially related to structural issues. One participant (P3) stated that she was happy and proud while providing feedback in terms of grammar since she was good at grammar and loved it. Similarly, P5 claimed that she was happy while evaluating the essay structure as she was good at issues related to essay structure. One another participant (P6) indicated that he was able to give suggestions and this made him feel confident.

14 positive emotions (happy, satisfied) reported by the participants were associated with the peer. The primary reason behind the positive emotions was the peer success in writing as stated in the first interview sessions. The participants were happy or satisfied as the essay they evaluated was successful with regard to one criterion or more than one criterion included in the peer feedback checklist.

As in the first feedback session, negative feelings were experienced by the participants associated with the self and with the peer during anonymous peer feedback session. 11 negative emotions associated with the self (stressful, incapable, upset, and guilty) were reported by the participants. One participant (P1) was stressed:

I was tense while evaluating the paper because I could not find any mistake to point out at first, after some repetitious reading, I was able to find several mistakes but I had concerns related to correctness of the feedback I provided. (P1)

Another participant (P9) claimed that she felt incapable while evaluating the essay with regard to content as she was not good at content evaluation and was not familiar with the issue discussed in the essay. Lastly, P9 felt guilty:

... providing peer feedback challenged me a lot. I was not sure about correctness of my evaluation. In addition to the inability, giving suggestions related to the paper made me feel guilty. (P9)

Moreover, 7 negative emotions related to the peer (upset, angry, disappointed, and bored) were recorded. While several participants were disappointed or upset because of poor performance of the peer, most of the negative emotions associated with the peer included harsh criticism targeted at the peer because the major reasons for the poor performance of the peer were related to negligence or not exerting enough effort for the essay, according to the participants:

I got angry while evaluating the essay because the writer did not pay attention to issues related to essay structure which is vital for academic writing. I think if the writer does not care about organisational issues, he/she should not attempt to write an academic essay (P3).

I was bored while reading the essay as the argument was not impressive and supporting ideas were not interesting or persuasive (P7).

Realising that the essay was not successfully organised in accordance with the genre made me feel disappointed. The instructor put emphasis on organisational issues during the class. Despite this, the writer did not care about essay organisation (P10).

Simple grammatical errors I encountered in the essay made me unhappy. We all care about grammar. After years of training we received, we should not make such simple mistakes. However, it is still possible to encounter such mistakes as in the paper I evaluated (P8).

Lastly, positive emotions associated with anonymous peer feedback were reported by participants (n=4) for similar reasons:

I was free while providing suggestions; I could do this without refraining from the writer since I did not know him/her. This made me happy (P8).

It was great not to know who the writer was. I was able to provide objective peer feedback and this made me happy (P10).

I was happy to be able to free and objective while providing peer feedback since it was anonymous (P7).

## **Discussion and conclusions**

In order to answer the research questions, two round of interviews were conducted to understand how students felt about identifiable feedback and anonymous feedback, as peer feedback providers. The author also referred to students' peer feedback papers as supplementary materials. Emotions (positive or negative) reported by the participants were associated with themselves or with the peer in identifiable and anonymous feedback. Furthermore, emotions evoked by relationships with the peer and anonymity were also reported. Positive emotions associated with the self in both identifiable and anonymous feedback were evoked by perceived success of the provider's peer feedback performance. They had positive feelings because they carried out the peer feedback assignment or several parts of the assignment successfully, which was related to their perceived ability for the task. It was also confirmed by Lee & Evans (2019) as they found that peer feedback helped students to notice their own capacity, and upon realising this, they were content with the process of providing peer feedback. Similarly, positive emotions associated with the peer in identifiable and anonymous feedback were about the peer's success in L2 writing or several aspects of L2 writing.

The participants had negative emotions related to the self in both identifiable and anonymous peer feedback, which was related to their perceived inability in evaluating an essay. Perceived inability in evaluating a peer's essay was also observed in Kaya and Yaprak (2020), and Yu and Lee (2015). Yu and Lee (2015) found that students did not trust themselves in providing peer feedback as they were not competent enough to do that. In the study by Fan & Xu (2020) focusing on emotions of students as peer feedback receivers, positive or negative emotions were reported by the participants depending on their L2 writing performance. On the other hand, the reasons for negative emotions related to the peer were different in identifiable and anonymous peer feedback sessions in the present study. Although negative emotions were evoked by a poor performance of the peer in both feedback sessions, the drives behind the emotions were different, as observed in the interview sessions. While participants approached peer mistakes with more sympathy and attention, refraining from offensive statements in identifiable peer feedback, they directed harsh criticisms towards peers for their mistakes in anonymous peer feedback, because negligence was perceived as the major reason for mistakes.

However, it should be noted that this tendency towards peer mistakes in anonymous feedback was explicitly revealed in the interview sessions. In peer feedback sessions, they were relatively careful about wording. Especially in identifiable peer feedback sessions, learners refrained from harsh and offensive statements. This finding corroborates with findings by Kaya & Yaprak (2020) and Cheng et al. (2014). The latter found that learners avoided harsh and offensive statements in identifiable peer feedback sessions in online settings, even when they had negative feelings.

Identifiable peer feedback caused a lot of stress among some of the participants. While some participants succeeded in being objective, some others could not do so because they were worried about their relationship with the peer. This fear affected their performance, and also led to experiencing negative feelings among the participants. Similarly, Kaya and

Yaprak (2020) and Rotsaert et al. (2018) found that the participants had concerns about their relationship with the peer and were not free about providing genuine feedback in identifiable peer feedback sessions. As for anonymity, although harsh criticisms were directed towards the peer, anonymity promoted positive feelings among several participants. Thanks to it, they were free and relaxed, and were able to maintain objectivity. This finding was also confirmed in the studies conducted by Rotsaert et al. (2018) and Lu and Bol (2007).

As can be seen in this study, emotions have a considerable role in peer feedback process on the part of peer feedback provider. Although it requires L2 writing competence and content knowledge, which also evoke several positive or negative feelings in students, students also experienced various emotions associated with the peer and anonymity. Considering the positive emotions experienced by participants related to anonymous peer feedback, it could be encouraged in L2 writing classes, to familiarise and engage students in peer feedback practices before familiarising them with identifiable peer feedback, since “interpersonal burden” is felt highly in the current setting (Rotsaert et al., 2018). Considering the fact that peer feedback has a social dimension including both provider and receiver, more studies should be carried out related to emotions experienced by feedback providers as most studies have focused on feedback receiver emotions (Fan & Xu, 2020; Yu et al., 2019). Since incompetency was the main reason for negative feelings associated with the self, in further studies, comprehensive peer feedback training and emotions could be investigated together, using both qualitative and quantitative methods, to better assess how training may guide student emotions.

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**Dr Fatma Kaya** currently works as a research assistant at Dicle University, Turkey. She obtained her PhD in English language teaching (ELT) and her research interests are second language writing, second language teacher education and applied linguistics. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4040-0194>  
Email: [fatma.hayta@dicle.edu.tr](mailto:fatma.hayta@dicle.edu.tr)

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