Peer Feedback, Learners' Engagement, and L2 Writing Development: The Case of a Test-preparation Class

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Abstract

This study explored 12 upper-intermediate and advanced learners' affective, behavioral, and cognitive engagement with peer feedback in TOEFL iBT preparation classes in an Iranian English-as-a-foreign-language context. The data were collected from textual analysis of original and peer-reviewed drafts of student writing, qualitative interviews, and focus group discussions. The analysis of the interviews showed that the learners' affective engagement with feedback was mostly negative because they tended to trust their teachers as reliable sources of grammar knowledge. However, this distrust toward peers was not observed for content-related feedback. Next, the analysis showed that the learners' negative affective engagement usually led to negative behavioral engagement with peer feedback, meaning that the majority of the learners did not review the provided peer feedback on grammar-related issues. However, the content-related peer feedback was reportedly used in the peer-reviewed drafts. Also, the learners who showed positive behavioral engagement with feedback tended to report positive cognitive engagement (e.g., allocation of attentional resources) with it, as well. Finally, the analysis of the differences between the original and peer-reviewed drafts showed that peer feedback potentially resulted in significant improvements in the quality of student writing. These improvements were, however, limited to content-related and word choice issues.

The second language (L2) writing literature provides a plethora of theoretical, empirical, and pedagogical recommendations for peer feedback. Ferris (2014) lists a number of "best practices" (p. 7) for L2 writing teachers, focusing on the benefits of peer feedback in improving learners' accuracy gains. Lee (2019) also argues for abandoning teacher-dominated, comprehensive error correction in L2 writing, urges teachers to provide feedback that is focused and selective, and

advocates the incorporation of learner-centered methods of providing feedback. Motivated by this empirical and conceptual support, many studies (e.g., Hanjani & Li, 2014; Hu, 2005; Min, 2006; Tsui & Ng, 2000; Paulus, 1999) have examined the effectiveness of peer feedback in increasing L2 learners' writing proficiency, but have reported inconclusive results. In her comprehensive review, Chang (2016) aims to shed light on this inconclusiveness and suggests that the effectiveness of peer feedback is not fully understood, partly because learners' perceptions about, reactions to, and actual behavior toward peer feedback are under-explored.

The available literature concludes that learner-centered variables, such as learners' individual differences (Ferris et al, 2013), learners' attention to feedback (Zheng & Yu, 2018), and learners' engagement with feedback (Han & Hyland, 2015), can determine the efficacy of feedback. Here, we focus on learners' engagement with feedback, a framework that has received some empirical attention following the conceptual model proposed by Ellis (2010). In this model, Ellis postulates that, to increase the efficacy of corrective feedback, learners should engage with it positively, and that this engagement has three facets: affective, behavioral, and cognitive. He operationalizes affective engagement as learners' emotional and attitudinal reactions to feedback, behavioral engagement as incorporation of feedback in future writing, and cognitive engagement as allocation of cognitive resources to processing and using feedback. We use this operationalization in the present study.

Peer Feedback in L2 Writing Studies

The existing literature (e.g., Chang, 2016; Ferris, 2014; Lee, 2019) encourages researchers to provide empirical evidence for the effectiveness of peer feedback to further support its incorporation in the L2 classroom. In a study, Tsui and Ng (2000) explored the effectiveness of peer feedback among 27 learners in Hong Kong. The results from textual analysis, questionnaires, and interviews showed that the learners did not incorporate the majority of their peers' comments in revised drafts because they did not trust the peers' proficiency. This lack of trust negatively affected the efficacy of peer feedback, as opposed to teacher-generated feedback. Yang et al. (2006) compared the efficacy of peer feedback with teacher feedback in a Chinese English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) context. The data collected from 12 learners showed that the learners viewed peer feedback as less reliable than teacher feedback, so they rarely incorporated peer feedback in future revisions. The authors, therefore, highlighted the importance of peer feedback in increasing learner autonomy and reducing dependence on teachers. Additionally, Min (2006) investigated the role of peer feedback in increasing writing improvements made by 18 Chinese EFL learners and concluded that training peers can improve the efficacy of peer feedback. Although the above studies emphasize the benefits of peer feedback, they identify an important hindrance in using this feedback: lack of trust in peers.

Relevant to our study, some L2 writing research has explored the role of learners' perceptions in the effectiveness of peer feedback. For instance, Zhang (1995) investigated 81 English-as-a-second-language (ESL) learners' affective reactions to peer feedback and reported that these learners showed mostly negative reactions to peer feedback but strongly preferred teacher feedback. In addition, Chang (2016) reviewed 108 scholarly articles on peer feedback and concluded that learners preferred teacher feedback over peer feedback, and that their perceptions about peer feedback grew more positive only when peer feedback was complemented by teacher-generated commentary. Liu and Wu's (2019) results also confirmed that learners generally preferred to receive peer feedback only if it is provided along with teacher feedback. These studies show that, in both EFL and ESL contexts, teacher-generated feedback is generally preferred over peer

feedback. However, we still do not know whether these negative perceptions affect the working of peer feedback, and ultimately, learners' improvements in L2 writing.

Learner Engagement with Written Feedback

Several studies have reported that L2 learners hold specific perceptions about peer feedback (see Chang, 2016, for a comprehensive review). Ellis (2010) suggests that these perceptions can influence learners' engagement with feedback. Using Ellis' framework about engagement with feedback, Han and Hyland (2015) examined four learners' engagement with feedback. Utilizing data from interviews and student writing, the authors concluded that the learners' perceptions shaped their engagement with teacher feedback affectively, behaviorally, and cognitively. Specifically, the results confirmed that the learners' negative affective reactions to feedback influenced whether they attended to and used this feedback in future revisions. Han (2017) also studied the effects of learners' feedback-related perceptions on their engagement with feedback. Collecting data from six EFL learners in China, Han showed that these learners' positive perceptions about feedback generally facilitated the attention to and incorporation of feedback in future revisions. In another study, Zheng and Yu (2018) explored the effects of learner engagement with feedback on the working of teacher feedback. The data collected from sources such as interviews and textual analysis showed that, although the learners' positive perceptions generally led to higher chances of feedback success, this relationship was limited by the learners' proficiencies. Overall, these investigations suggest that learners' perceptions about feedback can impact the efficacy of feedback. However, the existing studies have only focused on teacher-generated feedback, thereby leaving a sizable gap in the exploration of the effects of learner engagement with feedback on the effectiveness of peer feedback.

Chang (2016) identifies several shortcomings in the peer feedback literature. She notes that "Our limited understanding of writer's decision-making process in peer feedback adoption and non-adoption has to be advanced. More qualitative studies are needed" (p. 108). First, she claims that more research is still needed in many L2 contexts, so we focused on the under-researched context of Iran. Second, Chang states that learners' perceptions about peer feedback should be further scrutinized because these perceptions may affect the efficacy of peer feedback. Therefore, we examine Iranian EFL learners' perceptions about peer feedback. Third, Chang points to the scarcity of research on learners' rationale for incorporating peer feedback, so we explore the patterns of our learners' behavioral and cognitive engagement with feedback. Although several studies (e.g., Han & Hyland, 2015; Zheng & Yu, 2018) have investigated the efficacy of corrective feedback in light of learners' engagement with feedback, the relationship between learners' engagement with feedback and efficacy of peer feedback has received insufficient empirical attention. Therefore, we aimed to explore whether the effectiveness of peer feedback in an Iranian EFL context is influenced by learners' engagement with this type of feedback.

The Present Study

In the present study, we argue that the current inconclusive literature on peer feedback may be rooted in individual learners' patterns of engagement with feedback. Therefore, we set out to answer the following questions:

1. How do Iranian EFL learners engage with peer feedback affectively, behaviorally, and cognitively?

2. Does these learners' positive engagement with feedback lead to improvements in their writing?

Methodology

Study Context

This study was conducted in an English institute in Iran because of first author's previous teaching experience there. Although this institute offered both general English and test preparation classes, we only focused on the preparation classes for the Internet-based Test of English as a Foreign Language (the TOEFL iBT). During the data collection, the institute offered three Pre-TOEFL (upper-intermediate) and two TOEFL (advanced) classes. The Pre-TOEFL classes were taught by five teachers, and the TOEFL classes were taught by three instructors, a total of eight. Hereafter, we do not differentiate between the Pre-TOEFL and TOEFL classes, unless we report any important differences caused by learner proficiencies. The total enrollment in these classes was 85 students. The classes were textbook-based and taught in English.

During 10-week-long semesters, the classes met four times a week for 90-minute sessions, twice on Thursdays and twice on Fridays. The two Thursday sessions were on listening and speaking, and the two Friday sessions were on reading and writing. Specifically, students received 90 minutes of in-class instruction on the writing section of the TOEFL iBT. The standardized curriculum stipulated that students needed to write at least 20 essays on the *Independent Section* and 20 essays on the *Integrated Section* of the TOEFL iBT each semester. This, however, did not include in-class and homework assignments. It should be noted that, in this project, we only worked with the independent essays (essays, hereafter) because the integrated essays involved writing, listening, and reading skills. Although the teachers were not given specific guidelines on how to provide feedback, they were all required to utilize both teacher-generated feedback and peer feedback when addressing different aspects of student writing.

Participant Recruitment and Participants

The main criterion for recruiting learners was experience in using (learners) and incorporating (teachers) feedback in L2 writing. Eight teachers were invited to participate in the study and asked to recruit their 85 students. In the end, 12 learners and teachers volunteered to take part in the study, all of whom reported Farsi as their first language (L1) and English as their L2. The sample included eight student writers (four women and four men), willingly enrolled in the TOEFL classes. Prior to data collection, the learners took a placement test which was a mock TOEFL iBT test (Phillips, 2012) where the speaking section was replaced with an in-person interview rated by an experienced teacher. The learners with a minimum score of 70/120 were placed in the Pre-TOEFL classes, and the learners with the minimum score of 90/120 were placed in the TOEFL classes. For our data collection, we assumed these classes to be homogenous because of their placement results. Table 1 provides some background information on the learners. All names are pseudonyms.

Table 1. Background Information on the Learners.

Personal information			English and academic backgrounds		
Name	Gender	Age	Proficiency level	Years studying English	Academic major
Ebi	M	23	Advanced	5	M.S. in Sciences
Iman	M	22	Upper intermediate	6	B.S. in Sciences
Maral	F	28	Upper intermediate	9	M.A. in Humanities
Mazi	M	35	Advanced	15	Ph.D. in Engineering
Minoo	F	31	Advanced	10	B.A. in Arts
Moe	M	29	Upper intermediate	12	Ph.D. in Hard Sciences
Nasi	F	26	Advanced	13	M.S. in Engineering
Soha	F	30	Advanced	10	MBA

Four teachers (two women and two men) were also recruited. Table 2 presents some background information on these teachers. All names are pseudonyms.

Table 2. Background Information on the Teachers.

Personal background			Academic background	Teaching background
Name	Gender	Age	Education	TOEFL teaching years
Fati	F	33	M.A. in TEFL	9
Naser	M	38	M.A. in TEFL	13
Pooneh	F	34	Ph.D. in TEFL	10
Sohrab	M	30	M.A. in TEFL	9

Note: TEFL stands for Teaching English as a Foreign Language.

At the time of the data collection, Naser and Pooneh were teaching the Pre-TOEFL classes, and Fati and Sohrab were teaching the TOEFL classes. As part of their employment process at the institute, all teachers were required to take the TOEFL iBT and have a minimum writing score of 28/30. Overall, we assumed that the teachers had the proficiency and experience in providing feedback on student writing.

Peer Feedback in the Study Context

The four teachers utilized peer feedback in their writing classes in a standardized fashion. According to the course curriculum, the learners wrote two 300-500-word-long essays every week, and the teachers began providing teacher-generated feedback in the fourth week of the semester. Therefore, this study focused on the first three weeks of the semester, when peer feedback was the only official source of feedback. We worked with a total of six essays written by each student during the first three weeks (two essays per week), thereby a total of 48 by the eight students. The following points summarize how peer feedback was utilized by the teachers:

- The eight learners were randomly assigned to a new pair every week to provide and receive feedback on their essays;

- Every week, 40 out of 90 minutes were allocated to providing and receiving peer feedback; the learners spent approximately 10 minutes on each individual essay;

- The learners were asked to focus on one essay at a time, following these guidelines:

  a. The peer would read aloud the essays;

  b. The pair would stop by the end of each sentence and/or paragraph to discuss any issues;

  c. The learners were allowed to use Farsi when providing peer feedback;

- The learners were allowed to provide feedback on content, organization, grammar, word choice, and/or mechanics;

- The learners were allowed to provide oral and/or written peer feedback, and to record/take notes of their peers' feedback;

- Although the teachers monitored the learners, they did not interfere in the process of providing and receiving peer feedback; also, the teachers did not provide any instructions to the learners as to whether they should use their peers' feedback;

- The learners kept and turned in (within one day) one copy of their original essays and one copy of their peer-reviewed essays; therefore, the total number of the essays we analyzed was 96: 48 original and 48 peer-reviewed essays.

Data Collection and Analysis

Semi-structured, qualitative interviews were utilized to tap into the participants' perceptions, preferences, and practices regarding peer feedback. Interviews have been used in L2 writing studies (e.g., Hyland, 2013) in order to explore perceptions, practices, and rationales. Because our study was aimed at examining learners' engagement with feedback, we considered qualitative interviews as the most appropriate means of investigating these variables. Before the interviews, we asked the eight learners to review their six original and six peer-reviewed essays, take notes of any changes between these drafts, reflect on the peer feedback in terms of writing areas (e.g., content and grammar), modality (i.e., written and oral), and drafts (i.e., original and peer-reviewed). We also asked the teachers to review these learners' six original and six peer-reviewed drafts, note any changes between the original and peer-reviewed drafts, see whether the essays changed based on the provided peer feedback, and reflect on any improvements the learners made in L2 writing (e.g., content, organization, and grammar).

We should reiterate that, in our study context, peer feedback was the only official source of feedback during the first three weeks, and only after the fourth week the teachers were allowed to provide teacher-generated feedback on student writing. We conducted the interviews after the third week, over the course of six days. The interviews were conducted in Farsi, at the participants' convenient time, and at a nearby public coffee shop. During the interviews, we asked the learners to reflect on 1) what reactions they had toward the received peer feedback, 2) what they did with the received peer feedback, and 3) whether they incorporated any cognitive resources to processing and using peer feedback. In addition, we asked the teachers to think about their learners' 1) reactions to the provided peer feedback, 2) use of any of their peers' feedback in the revised drafts, and 3) L2 writing improvements. We collected approximately 4 hours of interview data from the 12 participants.

The interviews were first transcribed in Farsi and then translated into English by the first author. The data analysis was similar to that in Hyland (2013), since we developed the coding scheme from the exploration of individual responses. 20% of the data were co-coded by a native speaker of Farsi who was experienced in collecting and analyzing interview data. The two coding schemes were only different in a few thematic categories, so the final coding scheme reflected what both coders agreed on. The final scheme included the following categories:

- Affective engagement with feedback
    - Value placed on peer feedback, compared with teacher feedback
    - Preferred writing areas (e.g., grammar and content) on which peer feedback was provided
    - Preferred modes of peer feedback (e.g., oral and written)
    - Preferred drafts on which peer feedback was provided
- Behavioral engagement with feedback
    - Whether the learners reviewed the received peer feedback and incorporated it in their revised drafts
- Learners' cognitive engagement with feedback
    - Whether the learners allocated cognitive resources (e.g., focal attention and memorization) to processing and using peer feedback

To assess the learners' behavioral and cognitive engagement and their L2 writing development, the four teachers were asked to grade the original and peer-reviewed student essays, a total of 96, to determine whether 1) the learners had behaviorally and cognitively engaged with peer feedback, and 2) they had made any developments in various areas of L2 writing. The teachers were asked to grade these essays individually within two weeks and take notes of any differences between the two drafts. They were instructed to use the official Educational Testing Services (2014) rubric for the TOEFL iBT's *Independent* writing task. However, for ease of grading, each draft was graded out of 50 instead of 5, as the rubric stipulates. The authors were not involved in the process of grading the essays.

After two weeks, the first author led a focus group with these teachers to discuss the differences between the original and peer-reviewed essays. The analysis showed that the teachers showed strong agreement when grading the 96 essays ($r = .77$ to $r = .93$) and their tallying of the instances of incorporated peer feedback in the 48 peer-reviewed essays ($r = .93$ to $r = .98$). For the final analyses, we used the means of these individual grades and tallies. During this focus group session, the teachers discussed any differences between the original and peer-reviewed drafts to assess the learners' behavioral and cognitive engagement with peer feedback.

Findings and Discussion

Here, the findings for the learners' affective engagement are first presented. Then, the learners' behavioral and cognitive engagement with peer feedback are described. Finally, the findings on the learners' developments in L2 writing are presented. Whenever necessary, we insert our personal interpretations using brackets in the interview transcripts.

Learners' Affective Engagement with Peer Feedback

Value placed on peer feedback. As our analysis showed, all the learners ($N = 8$) valued teacher-generated feedback more highly than peer feedback and perceived their teachers as more reliable sources of feedback. Peer feedback was, nevertheless, regarded as potentially useful by half of the learners ($n = 4$) because peer feedback could promote peer learning ($n = 3$), was a less stressful

means of receiving feedback (*n* = 3), and led to longer-term learning (*n* = 1). However, these four learners only sought peer feedback in conjunction with teacher feedback. In Excerpt 1, Minoo, an advanced learner, brought up her "reliance" on teachers and mentioned that teacher-generated feedback was more valuable than peer feedback to her:

> *Excerpt 1: I want to receive comments from my teacher. The TOEFL is an important test, so I need to get feedback from a source I trust… It is good to receive comments from my classmates, too. It is more relaxed and puts less pressure on me. It allows me to correct the issues when I submit the essays to my teacher… Peer feedback can also help students learn from each other. (Minoo, interview transcripts, p. 14)*

In Excerpt 2, Soha agreed with Minoo. She pointed to the higher value of teacher feedback since she perceived this source of feedback as more reliable. She, however, claimed that providing and receiving peer feedback can lead to "deeper" learning. See Excerpt 2:

> *Excerpt 2: Feedback from teachers is better… My teachers have a lot of experience in teaching these TOEFL classes, so they know how my essays will be graded when I take the TOEFL… I like to give and receive peer feedback, too. I think when I am personally engaged [with feedback], I can learn better and more deeply… The reason is I look for the nature of issues and find solutions by myself… Overall, teacher comments are better. At the end of the day, this [the TOEFL iBT] is an important test so I cannot 100% trust my classmates. (Soha, interview transcripts, p. 21)*

The fact that our learners valued teacher feedback more highly than peer feedback, and that they perceived peer feedback useful only in conjunction with teacher feedback has been reported in both ESL and EFL contexts (e.g., Chang, 2016; Liu & Wu, 2019; Zhang, 1995; Zhao, 2010). Our findings, therefore, suggest that our learners' affective engagement with peer feedback, especially when it was not provided in conjunction with teacher feedback, was probably negative because they placed less value on peer feedback and perceived it as less reliable than teacher-generated feedback.

Preferred L2 writing areas in peer feedback. Our analysis showed that the majority of the learners (*n* = 7) preferred to receive peer feedback on issues related to content development, but only one (*n* = 1) believed that peer feedback was useful in increasing her grammatical accuracy. Also, two learners (*n* = 2) thought that peer feedback was beneficial in improving the organization of their essays. In Excerpt 3, Iman explained why he preferred to receive feedback on content from his peers, because he thought that idea development was not as difficult as grammatical accuracy. However, he tended to trust his teachers to correct his grammatical errors, because his peers were not proficient enough to do so:

> *Excerpt 3: I think it is a good idea to get comments from my classmates when it comes to content, brainstorming, and supporting ideas. These are some things that we [learners] can help each other with. Developing ideas for an essay is not as difficult as using grammar correctly… I prefer [to receive grammar feedback] from my teachers. I do not think my peers have the proficiency to give me accurate [grammar] feedback. If they did, they would not be here to learn. (Iman, interview transcript, p. 4)*

Agreeing with Iman, Nasi believed that her peers could provide useful feedback on generating and organizing ideas for her essays. However, Nasi showed her distrust toward her peers regarding their grammatical competency. See Excerpt 4:

> *Excerpt 4: I think it [peer feedback] can be useful. For example, when I am thinking about the ideas to include in my body paragraphs, it is good to get the opinion of a classmate.*

Because all of us are at the same [proficiency] level, we can give good comments to each other regarding the development of ideas and organizing them… I prefer to get grammar corrections from my teachers. For example, my teachers have been teaching these [the TOEFL] classes for a long time, so it is obvious to me that they know how to correct grammatical errors. (Nasi, interview transcript, p. 19)

These findings suggest that the learners were skeptical of their peers' proficiency when it came to grammatical competency, a finding confirmed in Chang's (2016) review. The above findings are also in line with what Paulus (1999) found because both her study and ours show that learners are willing to receive peer feedback on content, but not grammar issues. Overall, we think that our learners' affective engagement with peer feedback was more likely to be positive, if such feedback was provided on content-related issues. However, grammar-centered peer feedback probably led to our learners' negative engagement from an affective perspective.

Preferred modes of peer feedback. Our analysis showed that the learners (*n* = 7) predominantly preferred to receive oral feedback from their peers, but written feedback from only their teachers. These learners preferred oral feedback, as opposed to written peer feedback, because of its perceived higher clarity (*n* = 6), higher quality (*n* = 4), and higher usability (*n* = 2). For instance, Mazi claimed that, by having verbal communication with his peers, he could ensure that the comments were of high enough quality. He also added that peer feedback was more effective if delivered verbally, since his peers and Mazi could discuss the errors in more depth, thereby increasing the effectiveness of feedback. See Excerpt 5 for these perceptions:

Excerpt 5: I prefer oral feedback from my classmates. This way, I can talk to them directly and on the spot to make sure that they have understood the issues in my writing and corrected me accurately. I do not want them to misunderstand my writing and give me some feedback that can even confuse me more… Talking to them also helps me see if their comments are useful at all… By talking to them in person, we can discuss my issues in more depth and focus on the root of them." (Mazi, interview transcript, p. 13)

Agreeing with Mazi, Soha believed that peer feedback was more effective if delivered orally. She stated that oral communication with her peers can increase the quality and clarity of the feedback. See Excerpt 6:

Excerpt 6: If I get comments from my classmates orally, I think it is better. [Why?] Because we can discuss any issues and comments together. If I only get written comments and read them later, they may be confusing. I may not know what my classmates mean by some comments… Also, I have bad experiences with some peers who gave me inaccurate feedback, so by talking to them in person, I can decide if they are correcting me accurately at all. (Soha, interview transcript, p. 23)

Ebi was the only learner (*n* = 1) who thought that written peer feedback was more effective because he could refer back to this feedback at his own convenience to review both the issues and corrections. See Excerpt 7:

Excerpt 7: I think peer feedback is better if it is written on my essays. This way, I can refer back to it later… If it [peer feedback] is only verbal, I cannot remember all of the comments. (Ebi, interview transcript, p. 2)

These findings show that our learners' affective engagement with oral peer feedback was probably positive. We think this was the case partially because the learners were allowed to use their L1, Farsi, when providing oral feedback. Therefore, they may have felt more confident and expressive when commenting on their peers' writing, a finding also reported by Levine et al. (2002) in an

Israeli EFL context. Overall, peer feedback modality, as Chang (2016, p. 99) states, "has long been neglected in L2 peer review research". Therefore, we hope to have added meaningful insights into how L2 learners may affectively engage with feedback modality and how their perceptions about specific modalities might impact the working of peer feedback.

Preferred drafts for receiving peer feedback. As our analysis showed, the learners ($N = 8$) preferred to receive peer feedback on the initial drafts of their essays, but sought teacher-generated feedback on the later/final drafts. They all believed that teacher commentary was necessary to confirm the accuracy of peer feedback. For example, Maral thought that peer feedback allowed her to locate and correct some errors, but she preferred to receive teacher-generated feedback on final drafts as some form of confirmation for the validity of peer feedback. See Excerpt 8:

> *Excerpt 8: Getting feedback from my classmates is better before [receiving feedback from] my teacher. This way, I can see some of my errors and correct them before I turn in my essays to my teacher… But for the final draft, I prefer to get comments only from my teacher. (Maral, interview excerpt, p. 9)*

These findings show that the learners sought their teachers' comments after receiving peer feedback. This finding can be explained by the learners' strong preference for teacher feedback but distrust toward their peers' proficiency. The fact that the learners preferred to receive their teachers' confirmation on peer feedback is highlighted by Chang (2016) and Lee (2015). In our study context, the learners received peer feedback before teacher feedback, so their affective engagement with peer feedback was likely positive.

Learners' Behavioral and Cognitive Engagement with Feedback

Here, we discuss whether the learners incorporated their peers' feedback in their peer-reviewed drafts, and if so, which cognitive resources they allocated to processing and using this feedback. In doing so, we first analyze the instances of behavioral and cognitive engagement with peer feedback, as evident in the 48 peer-reviewed essays. Next, we elaborate on the learners' own perceptions about their behavioral and cognitive engagement.

First, the results on the learners' behavioral engagement with peer feedback are presented: Whether/to what extent they incorporated their peers' comments in their peer-reviewed essays. It should be reiterated that the majority of our learners ($n = 7$) preferred peer feedback on content-related issues, so we hypothesized that their affective engagement with peer feedback on content issues was likely positive. Here, we aimed to see whether such positive affective engagement led to the incorporation of peer feedback in the peer-reviewed drafts. Table 3 presents the means for the peer comments on the 48 original drafts and the percentage of the incorporated peer comments in the 48 peer-reviewed essays:

Table 3. Peer Comments on Original Drafts and Incorporated Comments in Peer-reviewed Drafts.

	Content	Organization	Grammar	Word choice	Mechanics
Mean of peer comments on original drafts	6.48	2.25	13.19	8.97	2.73
Percentage of incorporated comments in peer-reviewed drafts (mean)	61% (3.94)	16% (0.35)	19% (2.48)	55% (4.88)	14% (0.38)

Table 3 shows that the learners incorporated the highest percentage of peer comments on content issues, followed by word choice. However, the learners did not incorporate the majority of the comments on issues related to grammar, organization, and mechanics. The learners' positive behavioral engagement with peer feedback on content and word choice issues occurred probably because of their positive affective engagement with this feedback. This result is different than Tsui and Ng's (2000) who showed that many learners held unfavorable perceptions about peer feedback on content. Our results show that positive affective engagement can promote positive behavioral engagement with peer feedback, at least specific aspects of feedback; therefore, the learners were encouraged to review the peer feedback provided on content-related and word choice issues and incorporate it in their peer-reviewed drafts. These results on the patterns of engagement with peer feedback on areas such as content, organization, and grammar have not been reported in the literature (Zheng & Yu, 2018). Although Chang (2016) concludes that the effects of peer feedback on content and organization are generally greater than those on grammatical accuracy, our study was focused on the role of learner engagement with feedback to explain why peer feedback may be more effective in improving L2 learners' content development, but not grammatical accuracy.

After showing that the learners' positive affective engagement with feedback on issues such as content development can lead to positive behavioral engagement, the interview data were analyzed to examine the patterns of the learners' cognitive engagement with peer feedback. Here, we aimed to show whether positive affective and behavioral engagement was accompanied by positive cognitive engagement with peer feedback. For instance, Mazi believed that content development was within his peers' proficiency because this area was not specific to L2 writing. However, he thought that grammatical considerations were language-specific, so he cast doubt on his peers' grammatical proficiency in English. Therefore, he tended to pay more attention to the peer feedback provided on content issues and word choice problems. See Excerpt 9:

> *Excerpt 9: I think there are a lot of similarities between Farsi and English when it comes to backing up your ideas and developing some content for your essays. So, because all of us [learners] have experience writing things in Farsi, I think my classmates can comment on my content, how well I have supported my points in the writing, and whether I have used good words to convey my thoughts… But aspects like grammar are specific to English, and I do not think my peers can find and correct all my [grammatical] errors… Based on what I said, I used more of their [peers] comments on content and word choice, but not grammar… I reviewed their feedback carefully and revised some aspects of content development and word choice when I gave my teacher the revised drafts. (Mazi, interview transcript, pp. 12-13)*

Excerpt 9 shows that Mazi's affective engagement with peer feedback on content was positive, and this led to his positive behavioral (incorporation of feedback) and cognitive engagement (focal attention) with this feedback. On the other hand, Moe claimed that he used very few comments from his peers, irrespective of the feedback area, and showed his negative behavioral engagement with peer feedback. See Excerpt 10:

> *Excerpt 10: I am not sure [about the quality of feedback] when I receive feedback from my classmates. I do not want to change things in my essays if I am not sure if the comments are of quality and accuracy for me to use them… Because I was not sure if the comments are accurate, I usually changed very few things based on them… I usually read my essays one more time before submitting them to my teachers but did not spend any time or energy on the feedback from my classmates. (Moe, interview excerpt, p. 18)*

In Excerpt 10, Moe indicated that he was not sure of the "quality and accuracy" of his peers' comments; this was why he did not review the peer feedback he received, thereby not allocating cognitive resources to processing and using this feedback. The existing research on feedback has shown that learners tend to distrust their peers' commentary on their writing. Tsui and Ng (2000) concluded that only 60% of their learner participants considered using peer feedback. Similarly, Yang et al. (2006) reported that their learners were considerably less likely to incorporate peer feedback, as opposed to teacher feedback, in future revisions and generally perceived peer feedback as less reliable than teacher feedback. Paulus (1999) also pointed out that learners usually incorporated more teacher comments than peer feedback in future revisions. Chang (2016) concluded that learners' preference for teacher-generated feedback is universal. Again, our findings explain when peer feedback is more likely to succeed by analyzing the patterns of engagement with feedback. We also show that patterns of affective, behavioral, and cognitive engagement with peer feedback are usually intertwined and work together closely.

The analysis of the interview data was also aimed at uncovering the reasons behind the learners' somewhat negative behavioral and cognitive engagement with peer feedback, especially when provided on grammar issues. We present our findings in the following subsections:

Lack of trust in peers' proficiency. The analysis showed that the learners' ($N = 8$) did not trust their peers' grammar competency, so they showed negative behavioral and cognitive engagement with grammar-focused peer feedback. For instance, Moe pointed out that he did not fully trust his peers because he assumed their proficiency to be similar to that of his. He added that this lack of trust caused him to not pay close attention to and use many of his peers' grammar comments. See Excerpt 11:

> *Excerpt 11: Obviously, we are all classmates here, so I do not see a reason why my classmates know more than me, especially when it comes to grammar. I think all of us are in the same [proficiency] level, so I usually ignore many of my peers' comments if I am not sure whether they are accurate… Because of this, I usually do not pay close attention to many grammar corrections… Mostly because I do not trust what they say. (Moe, interview transcript, p. 19)*

This lack of trust in peers has been reported in the existing literature. Wang (2014) reported similar findings because her EFL student participants did not tend to trust their peers' proficiency. Tsui and Ng (2000) also showed that L2 learners tended to trust their teachers more than their peers. Here, we suggest that our learners' lack of trust in their peers' proficiency, especially their grammatical competency, can lead to their negative behavioral and cognitive engagement with peer feedback. As mentioned before, this finding can explain why peer feedback may achieve less-than-satisfactory outcomes in the L2 classroom.

Dependence on teachers as reliable sources of knowledge. As the analysis showed, all the learners ($N = 8$) preferred to rely on their teachers, perceiving them to be reliable sources of L2 grammar ($N = 8$). In Excerpt 12, Nasi showed her dependence on her teachers for receiving grammar feedback on her essays:

> *Excerpt 12: My teachers know a lot about different aspects of writing, so they are a good resource I can use to improve my writing… This is even more important when we talk about grammar. Of course, my teachers have lots of experience, so they can provide corrections that help me write according to the standards of formal writing… When I receive feedback from my classmates, especially grammar, I may not review them at all… I do not pay lots of attention to grammar-centered peer feedback. (Nasi, interview transcript, pp. 20-21)*

Excerpt 12 shows that Nasi's behavioral and cognitive engagement with peer feedback was probably negative because she did not trust her peers' grammatical competence. This tendency to rely on teachers, rather than peers, has been reported in the literature. For example, Chang (2016) concluded that student writers usually trust their teachers more than their peers, thereby incorporating more teachers' comments than peer feedback in future revisions. However, we add a new angle to the importance of this sense of distrust toward peers and conclude that our learner participants' reliance on their teachers probably leads to their negative behavioral and cognitive engagement. Specifically, our learners may have engaged with grammar-focused peer feedback more negatively than feedback on content and word choice.

High-stakes nature of the TOEFL iBT. The learners ($N = 8$) also brought up the high-stakes nature of the TOEFL iBT to justify their somewhat negative behavioral and cognitive engagement with peer feedback. For instance, Soha mentioned the high-stakes nature of this test to justify why she did not attend to and incorporate many of her peers' comments. Specifically, she stated that the TOEFL iBT was important to her academic career, so she could not take the risk of using feedback which she did not deem as "valid and accurate." See Excerpt 13:

> *Excerpt 13: The TOEFL is a very important test, and I know writing is one-fourth of the total score. Although I have respect for my classmates, I do not want to use some comments which I am not sure are valid and accurate… I totally understand if my classmates would not want to use my feedback on their essays either. This is an important test for all of us… As a result, I did not use many of the peer comments I received when I submitted the revised draft to my teacher… And no; I did not pay a lot of attention to the corrections I got from my classmates either. (Soha, interview transcript, p. 23)*

Excerpt 13 shows that Soha's negative behavioral and cognitive engagement with peer feedback was partially justified by the high-stakes nature of the TOEFL iBT. To our best knowledge, the effects of testing contexts on learners' engagement with feedback has not been previously investigated. This finding is aligned with our previous two findings about the learners' negative behavioral and cognitive engagement with feedback. In other words, because these learners viewed the TOEFL iBT as a high-stakes test, they tended to rely on their teachers, rather than their peers, for feedback, especially grammar-centered feedback. Therefore, these learners behaviorally and cognitively engaged with peer feedback negatively, especially with grammar-centered comments.

Effects of Learner Engagement with Peer Feedback on L2 Writing Development

Here, we report on whether the learners made any improvements in their peer-reviewed drafts. Table 4 presents the grades for the original and peer-reviewed drafts, while taking into consideration content development, proper organization, grammatical accuracy, appropriate word choice, and correct mechanics. We assumed that the effects of self-learning after receiving peer feedback were constant among all the learners. All grades are out of 50.

Table 4. The Learners' Grades for the Original and Peer-reviewed Drafts.

	Mean	SD	F	df	Sig	Partial effect size
Original drafts	34.50	5.32	8.27	1, 95	= .005	.09
Peer-reviewed drafts	36.48	6.12				

As Table 4 shows, the learners made significant improvements in their peer-reviewed drafts, compared with their original drafts. As presented in Table 3, the learners incorporated the highest

percentage of peer comments provided on content development (61%) and word choice (55%) issues. We therefore assume that the overall improvements the learners made were probably because of the improvements in the areas where a higher percentage of peer comments were incorporated.

To shed light on the reasons behind the specific areas of improvement between the original and peer-reviewed drafts, we analyzed the interviews conducted with the four teacher participants. We summarize these findings in the following:

- Peer feedback as effective in improving learners' content development ($N = 4$)
- Peer feedback as effective in improving learners word choice ($n = 3$)
- Peer feedback as somewhat effective in increasing learners' grammatical accuracy ($n = 1$)
- Peer feedback as ineffective in improving learners' organization and mechanics ($N = 4$)

For instance, Fati stated that the learners improved their content development in the peer-reviewed drafts. These improvements were not, however, observed in grammatical accuracy, because Fati believed that EFL learners in Iran did not generally trust their peers' grammatical competency. See Excerpt 14:

Excerpt 14: In my opinion, these students generally improved their content development after peer feedback. They got better at stating their main ideas and supporting them by details and examples… Not much change in grammar, though. I did not see many errors that were corrected in the drafts that were peer-reviewed… My experience is that students in Iran do not usually trust their classmates. They always want to get feedback from teachers. (Fati, interview transcript, p. 26)

While Sohrab agreed with Fati regarding the positive effects of peer feedback on the learners' content development, he believed that some learners improved the grammatical accuracy of their peer-reviewed essays, as well. Nonetheless, Sohrab claimed that only the more "open-minded" learners could benefit from grammar-centered peer feedback, and that most students tended to rely on teachers for grammar correction. See Excerpt 15:

Excerpt 15: I think peer feedback was useful because students improved their content. Things like presenting and supporting ideas got somewhat better in the peer-reviewed drafts… Peer feedback on grammar was also useful in some essays. But [using] grammar [peer] feedback depends on learners' mentality. Generally speaking, those learners who are open-minded can benefit more from this type of feedback because they do not just want to rely on their teachers. (Sohrab, interview transcripts, p. 35)

Overall, the quantitative results show that the learners significantly improved the quality of their essays in the peer-reviewed drafts. The findings from the teacher interviews indicate that these improvements were, however, limited to content development and word choice, and that the teachers did not generally report significant improvements in grammatical accuracy, organization, and mechanics: a finding supported by the higher percentage of peer comments on content development and word choice.

The above findings can be explained by the patterns of our learners' engagement with feedback. As our analysis suggests, whenever the learners affectively engaged with peer feedback positively, they were more likely to behaviorally and cognitively engage with it positively. For instance, our learners showed positive affective engagement with peer feedback on content-related issues but not grammatical errors; therefore, they were more likely to attend to and incorporate peer feedback on content development, as opposed to grammatical accuracy, in their peer-reviewed drafts. Similar to our findings, Han (2017), Han and Hyland (2015), and Zheng and Yu (2018) have also shown

that learners' positive engagement with feedback can improve their L2 writing quality. However, our study is the first investigation into the relationship between learner engagement with feedback and the efficacy of peer feedback.

Conclusion

The current study aimed at exploring the effectiveness of peer feedback in an Iranian EFL context. In doing so, we collected data from eight learners and four teachers, and showed that positive affective engagement with peer feedback can lead to positive engagement with peer feedback from behavioral and cognitive perspectives. Using our findings, we can propose two pedagogical implications. First, we think that L2 teachers need to familiarize themselves with learners' perceptions about feedback. This familiarity can in turn lead to better understanding learners' preferences for feedback sources (e.g., teacher and peer feedback). As our findings suggest, if learners hold favorable perceptions about a feedback type, they are more likely to incorporate it in their future revisions. Second, teachers may be able to change learners' negative perceptions about peer feedback. Our findings indicate that learners tend to rely on teacher-generated feedback, thereby dismissing the usefulness of peer feedback. In situations like this, teachers can explain to their students the benefits of peer feedback.

Our data were collected from a limited number of participants, but we hope to have provided important insights into the working of peer feedback in light of learner engagement with feedback. One shortcoming of our study is that we only focused on learners as student writers, not as reviewers; therefore, any potential gains these learners may have obtained after reviewing their peers' writing was not investigated here. Relevant to this shortcoming, Chang (2016) states that "More studies are needed to better understand the benefits of peer review to the reviewers, in particular their improvement in local (e.g., grammar, vocabulary, punctuation) and global (e.g., content, coherence/cohesion, organization) writing areas" (p. 108). Therefore, in a future study, we aim to explore whether learners engage with peer feedback positively if they are trained to transfer the strengths and weaknesses of their peers' writing to their own.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Learners' Perceptions about Peer Feedback

1. Can you provide some information on yourself and your academic and professional background? What types of English classes have you taken? Please discuss.

2. Do you ever receive feedback from your peers in your classes? Do you like it? Can you compare it to the feedback from your teachers? Please discuss.

3. If you receive feedback from your peers, what aspects of your writing are usually addressed? Please discuss.

4. What is the best time to receive feedback from your peers? When you are working on your rough drafts? Before you receive feedback from your teachers or after it? Please discuss.

Appendix 2: Teachers' Reported Practices Regarding Peer Feedback

1. Can you provide some information on yourself and your academic and professional background?? What types of English classes have you taught? Please discuss.

2. Do you ever incorporate peer feedback in your classes? Do you like it? Can you compare it to the feedback you provide on student writing? Please discuss.

3. If you incorporate peer feedback in your classes, what aspects of student writing are usually addressed? Please discuss.

4. What is the best time to incorporate peer feedback? When students are working on their rough drafts? Before they receive feedback from you or after it? Please discuss.