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# Iranian teachers' and students' preferences for correction of classroom oral errors: Opinions and responses

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## Abstract

The aim of the present study was to investigate the teachers' and students' perceptions regarding the role they believe error correction plays in learning a new language. A questionnaire was administered to 429 Iranian foreign language students and 31 of their teachers. Data comparisons using the multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) showed agreement between teachers and students on most of the questions. However, there were some discrepancies between teachers and students specifically relating to the frequency for giving and receiving spoken error correction. Considering the danger of disagreements in teacher and student perceptions, it is significant for the teachers to identify their students' preferences with respect to the factors considered to improve the language learning and attempt to manage the contrasts between student perspectives and pedagogical practice.

*Keywords:* oral error correction; teachers; students; correction; perceptions.

## Resumen

El objetivo del presente estudio fue investigar los profesores y estudiantes las percepciones con respecto al papel que creen que el juego de corrección de errores en el aprendizaje de un nuevo idioma. Se aplicó un cuestionario a 429 estudiantes iraníes de idiomas extranjeros y 31 de sus profesores. Comparaciones de datos utilizando el análisis multivariado de varianza (MANOVA) mostró de acuerdo entre los profesores y los estudiantes en la mayoría de las preguntas. Sin embargo, existen algunas discrepancias entre los profesores y los estudiantes se refieran específicamente a la frecuencia para dar y recibir la corrección de errores hablado. Teniendo en cuenta el peligro de los desacuerdos en el maestro y percepciones de los estudiantes, es importante para los maestros para identificar las preferencias de los estudiantes con respecto a los factores considerados para mejorar el aprendizaje de idiomas y tratar de manejar los contrastes entre las perspectivas de los estudiantes y la práctica pedagógica.

*Palabras clave:* corrección oral del error; profesores; estudiantes; rectificación; percepciones.

IN ANY EDUCATIONAL setting, error correction (EC) plays an important role in encouraging students' learning and is considered an invaluable tool for facilitating the process of acquisition. It also assesses the learning of learners and helps the teachers to understand how useful their teaching methodology was in maintaining a strategy to improve the quality of the educational system. Therefore, in both the first and second language learning system, EC is considered to be one of the important parts of teaching/learning programs.

Lightbown and Spada (1999) pointed out the usefulness of EC. Swain's (1995) study also claimed that correcting errors helps the students learn better, "whether the feedback is explicit or implicit (p. 48)". Some believe in recasts to provide the students with feedback. Long (1996) has also confirmed that feedback helps learning a second language. The findings from most of the researchers corroborate the effective role of EC as a mediator in educational systems. There have been numerous investigations to find out which types of EC employed by teachers are more useful.

## Literature Review

Some researchers are of the opinion, based on their research results, that for foreign language learning (FLL) to be successful, carrying out the EC is necessary and beneficial. By using different types of EC and allowing the students to observe that process, promotion in learning happens (Havranek, 2002). There is a special argument that errors which affect communication should be corrected (Katayama, 2007). Employing suitable types of EC and doing EC encourage the students to learn the language and continue their communication in the target language (Ancker, 2000; Burt, 1975; DeKeyser, 1993; Hendrickson, 1978; McDonough, 2005; Schmidt, 1990).

In most cases, although the teachers do attempt to correct their learners' errors, they do not hear the correct forms from their students very soon. The EC is fruitless for FLL (Kim, 2004). Some researchers, on the other hand, believe that error correction destroys the natural learning of the language and prevents exposure to a target language naturally; thus, it should be abandoned because it will be ineffective (Chaudron, 1977; Krashen, 1987; Salikin, 2001; Truscott, 1999). In order to perform well, it is not important how much correction occurs; rather the performance of the learners is more important (Allwright & Bailey, 1991). Based on Affective Filter Hypothesis, EC damages the process of FLL (Mitchell & Myles, 2004).

Over the past decades, there were some studies about the teachers' attitudes toward the EC (Yoshida, 2008). The results showed that from 210 teachers, 30% of them agreed that the EC was necessary (Schulz, 2001; Liao & Wang, 2008). However, the results diverge according to the teachers' preferences. Some teachers preferred recasts (Rod & Jiang, 2009), others were inclined towards explicit feedback (Lyster & Ranta,

1997), some mentioned that teachers' and peers' EC were in favour (Lewis, 2005), and yet others believed that the timing of EC depends on the sensitivities of learners, the situation of learning, and the purpose of the activities (Kelly, 2006).

In addition to the teachers' attitudes towards the EC, there were many studies about students' opinions about the EC. According to the results of research studies, from among 89 English students, the majority had positive attitudes towards the EC (Ellis, 2007; Salikin, 2001). For FLL, the students preferred elicitation, clarification request, repetition and metalinguistic correction (Panova & Lyster, 2002). The students wanted their errors to be corrected when their communication encountered a hindrance (Liao & Wang, 2008; Nicholas, Lighbown, & Spada, 2001).

In the process of language learning and especially in the process of EC, learners are specifically important. However, this importance was considered only after the 1960s. Teachers should adopt a teaching methodology that accepts the central role of learners and as a result they should familiarise themselves with their students' learning styles and attitudes because they determine if the EC was appropriate or not (Ellis, 2007; Firwana, 2001). Research studies point to the fact that the students had a higher preference for the EC (Katayama, 2007; Timson, Grow, & Matsuoka, 1999).

The issue of recognising the differences between the opinions of students and teachers on EC has been a controversial issue in teaching and learning. Students' attitudes toward the type and success of EC can pave the way for their achievement (Schulz, 2001). If students and teachers' expectations about EC can converge, then teachers would have a better chance of guiding their students to successful language learning; otherwise, the mismatches can create dissatisfaction (Brown, 2009; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). Foreign language scholars need to pay due attention to these beliefs or perceptions when organising classroom activities, considering that the teaching practices need to be viewed in the students' minds as conducive to language learning. Teachers' perceptions about the way languages are acquired also play an important role since they form the teacher's willingness to examine different approaches. Musumeci (1997), for example, ascribed the failure of previous educational approaches and innovations to the difficulty of modifying the beliefs of all the individuals involved in the instructional enterprise.

In spite of the undeniable significance of the teachers' and learners' perceptions of the error correction and its different aspects, only a few studies (e.g., Plonsky & Mills, 2006) have been conducted in this area. The present study attempts to comprehend whether there are any significant differences between teachers' and adult EFL learners' preferences in the error correction. The study would be significant in terms of pedagogy since the plans could be adjusted by the beliefs of the teachers and learners who have the major roles in the learning process.

## Research Question

In order to attain the purpose, this study investigates and seeks answers to the following research question:

> Are there any significant differences between Iranian male and female teachers' and adult EFL learners' preferences for different categories of error correction in Kerman Jahad Daneshgahi Centre?

## Methodology

### Participants

The participants of this study included both foreign language teachers and adult EFL students making a total of 460 participants. The study aimed to investigate the possible differences in their EC preferences. The research context included five English centres (C) and one French centre. There were 101 (23.5%) students in C1, 24 (5.6%) students in C2, 143 (33.3%) students in C3, 103 (24.0%) students in C4, 26 (6.1%) students in C5 and 32 (7.5%) students in C6.

### Students

The total number of the students was 29 males and females. Their ages were from 18 to 60 years old, with 65.7% of them adolescents and 35.2% adults. There were 161 (37.5%) males and 268 (62.5%) females. Their first language was Persian and the target language was either English (92.5%) or French (7.5%). Participants' learning experience included 1 year (38.2%), 2-5 years (38%), 6-9 years (15.9%), and more than 10 years (7.5%). Different proficiency level learners, that is beginning (17%), lower-intermediate (17%), intermediate (45.7%), and upper-intermediate (12.6%), took part in the study.

### Teachers

A total number of 31 teachers took part in the present study. From the total, 12 (38.7%) were males and 19 (61.3%) were females. Their ages were between 25 and 40 years old, with 34.5% adolescent and 65.5% adult teachers. Teachers' teaching experience ranged from 1 year (9.7%) to 2-5 years (54.8%), 6-9 years (29%), and more than 10 years (9.7%). Additionally, they had 1 year (9.7%), 2-5 years (61.3%), 6-9 years (22.6%) and more than 10 years (6.5%) of oral skill teaching experience.

All the instructors should have passed different written and oral examinations to become employees in the JD language centres. They should have had at least one certificate in TOEFL, IELTS or TESOL, and also passed teacher training course (T.T.C.). According to the centre's regulation, the teachers should have had acceptable experience of teaching. Of all the trainers, 30 were teaching English and one of them

was a man who was teaching French. They taught foreign languages in the oral classes which were dissimilar in levels of proficiency.

**Instrument**

Fukuda's (2004) questionnaire forms consisted of one form for the students and one form for the teachers. Each type of the questionnaire had seven categories. One form was used for the teachers with 25 items and the other form was administered to the students with 26 items. From the first to the end of the sixth category in each form, there were 22 items which were aimed at the exploration of teachers' and students' judgements about the giving and receiving of spoken error correction, frequency of giving and receiving spoken error correction, time of spoken error correction, types of errors which need to be corrected, types of spoken error correction and sources for providing spoken error correction. In the present study, only the sections of "giving and receiving spoken error correction", "frequency for giving and receiving spoken error correction" and "types of spoken errors that need to be corrected" were included. Each of the above mentioned items in the questionnaire forms had been designed based on a 5-point-Likert-scales ranking in "strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree" or "always, usually, sometimes, occasionally, never" also, "very effective, effective, neutral, ineffective, very ineffective". In addition to these sections, the seventh part of the questionnaire requested information about the respondents' demographic characteristics, the statistics of which are reported in the sections above.

Prior to conducting the main study (i.e., in the pilot study), the reliability analysis of the questionnaire was computed using Cronbach's alpha method. The results of the reliability for the whole questionnaire turned out to be 0.6 which is considered to be an acceptable level. In addition, since only three parts of the questionnaire were used in the present study, the reliability index of the three sections were estimated as follows: giving and receiving spoken error correction ($\alpha = 0.64$), frequency for giving and receiving spoken error correction ($\alpha = 0.62$) and types of spoken errors that need to be corrected ($\alpha = 0.59$).

**Analysis**

The independent variable of the study included the participants, namely the teachers and learners. The dependent variable was the error correction with 7 categories of "reception of feedback", "frequency of feedback", "serious errors", "less serious errors", "frequent errors", "less frequent errors" and "individual errors". A significance level of 0.05 ($p < 0.05$) was set. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21 for personal computers (SPSS Inc., 2007) was used to compute descriptive statistics and perform inferential statistics. To analyse the relevant data, a multivariate analysis of

variance (MANOVA) was used for the research question and its subcategories. Since the independent variable of the study included only two levels of teachers and learners, the post-hoc test could not be run.

## Results

MANOVA was carried out to investigate the differences between the preferences of adult EFL learners and their teachers about error correction in terms of giving and receiving spoken error correction, frequency for giving and receiving spoken error correction and types of spoken errors that need to be corrected. The results are shown in Tables 1 and 2 below. Table 1 indicates the results of descriptive statistics and Table 2 shows the results of MANOVA.

|  | Participants | Mean | SD | N |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | students | 1.86 | .790 | 429 |
| giving and receiving spoken error | teachers | 2.00 | .894 | 31 |
| correction (item 1) | Total | 1.87 | .797 | 460 |
| frequency for giving and | students | 1.67 | .869 | 429 |
| receiving spoken error correction | teachers | 2.00 | .775 | 31 |
| (item 2) | Total | 1.69 | .866 | 460 |
| correcting serious spoken errors | students | 1.71 | .931 | 429 |
| (item 7) | teachers | 1.81 | .910 | 31 |
| | Total | 1.71 | .929 | 460 |
| correcting less serious spoken | students | 2.79 | 1.109 | 429 |
| errors (item 8) | teachers | 2.68 | .871 | 31 |
| | Total | 2.79 | 1.094 | 460 |
| correcting frequent spoken errors | students | 2.04 | 1.151 | 429 |
| (item 9) | teachers | 2.13 | .885 | 31 |
| | Total | 2.04 | 1.135 | 460 |
| correcting infrequent spoken | students | 2.66 | 1.130 | 429 |
| errors (item 10) | teachers | 2.87 | 1.088 | 31 |
| | Total | 2.67 | 1.127 | 460 |
| correcting individual spoken | students | 2.02 | 1.128 | 429 |
| errors (item 11) | teachers | 2.39 | 1.145 | 31 |
| | Total | 2.35 | 1.132 | 460 |

Table 1. Descriptive statistics results for EC.

The results of the descriptive statistics show that the mean score for the second

category such as 'frequency for giving and receiving spoken error correction' is higher for the teachers than the students. In other words, the teachers want to give corrective feedback on their students' spoken errors more frequently.

| Source | Dependent Variable | Type III Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. | Partial Eta Squared |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Corrected Model | reception of feedback | .547[a] | 1 | .547 | .861 | .354 | .002 |
| | frequency of feedback | 3.212[b] | 1 | 3.212 | 4.310 | .038 | .009 |
| | serious errors | .290[c] | 1 | .290 | .336 | .563 | .001 |
| | less serious errors | .399[d] | 1 | .399 | .333 | .564 | .001 |
| | frequent | .243[e] | 1 | .243 | .189 | .664 | .000 |
| | infrequent | 1.291[f] | 1 | 1.291 | 1.016 | .314 | .002 |
| | individual | 3.875[g] | 1 | 3.875 | 3.038 | .082 | .007 |
| Intercept | reception of feedback | 431.312 | 1 | 431.312 | 679.101 | .000 | .597 |
| | frequency of feedback | 388.691 | 1 | 388.691 | 521.544 | .000 | .532 |
| | serious errors | 356.742 | 1 | 356.742 | 412.771 | .000 | .474 |
| | less serious errors | 865.764 | 1 | 865.764 | 722.623 | .000 | .612 |
| | frequent | 501.843 | 1 | 501.843 | 388.982 | .000 | .459 |
| | infrequent | 884.326 | 1 | 884.326 | 696.156 | .000 | .603 |
| | individual | 561.771 | 1 | 561.771 | 440.442 | .000 | .490 |
| Participants | reception of feedback | .547 | 1 | .547 | .861 | .354 | .002 |
| | frequency of feedback | 3.212 | 1 | 3.212 | 4.310 | .038 | .009 |
| | serious errors | .290 | 1 | .290 | .336 | .563 | .001 |
| | less serious errors | .399 | 1 | .399 | .333 | .564 | .001 |
| | frequent | .243 | 1 | .243 | .189 | .664 | .000 |
| | infrequent | 1.291 | 1 | 1.291 | 1.016 | .314 | .002 |
| | individual | 3.875 | 1 | 3.875 | 3.038 | .082 | .007 |
| Error | reception of feedback | 290.886 | 458 | .635 | | | |
| | frequency of feedback | 341.333 | 458 | .745 | | | |
| | serious errors | 395.832 | 458 | .864 | | | |
| | less serious errors | 548.723 | 458 | 1.198 | | | |
| | frequent | 590.887 | 458 | 1.290 | | | |
| | infrequent | 581.796 | 458 | 1.270 | | | |
| | individual | 584.166 | 458 | 1.275 | | | |
| Total | reception of feedback | 1903.000 | 460 | | | | |
| | frequency of feedback | 1657.000 | 460 | | | | |
| | serious errors | 1746.000 | 460 | | | | |
| | less serious errors | 4122.000 | 460 | | | | |
| | frequent | 2512.000 | 460 | | | | |
| | infrequent | 3872.000 | 460 | | | | |
| | individual | 2513.000 | 460 | | | | |
| Corrected Total | reception of feedback | 291.433 | 459 | | | | |
| | frequency of feedback | 344.546 | 459 | | | | |
| | serious errors | 396.122 | 459 | | | | |
| | less serious errors | 549.122 | 459 | | | | |
| | frequent | 591.130 | 459 | | | | |
| | infrequent | 583.087 | 459 | | | | |
| | individual | 588.041 | 459 | | | | |

a. R Squared = .002 (Adjusted R Squared = .000)
b. R Squared = .009 (Adjusted R Squared = .007)
c. R Squared = .001 (Adjusted R Squared = -.001)
d. R Squared = .001 (Adjusted R Squared = -.001)
e. R Squared = .000 (Adjusted R Squared = -.002)
f. R Squared = .002 (Adjusted R Squared = .000)
g. R Squared = .007 (Adjusted R Squared = .004)

Table 2. MANOVA results for EC.

MANOVA showed a significant difference between the teachers and learners' preferences only in the item of 'frequency for giving and receiving spoken error correction' ($F = 4.31$, $p < 0.03$). But, there were not any significant differences between the preferences of these two groups of participants about the other items. This finding is in line with those of descriptive statistics showing that teachers ($M = 2.0$, $SD = 0.77$) prefer the application of error correction more frequently than the learners ($M = 1.67$, $SD = 0.86$).

## Discussion

The results of the research question which investigated the differences between the preferences of adult EFL learners and their teachers about error correction in terms of giving and receiving spoken error correction, frequency for giving and receiving spoken error correction and types of spoken errors that need to be corrected showed significant differences in one category. The results of MANOVA showed that there were significant differences between teachers and learners only in the "frequency for giving and receiving spoken error correction" category and for the other items there were no difference between teachers and learners. For the other items, there was convergence between the teachers and learners.

The findings of previous research have also showed the disagreements that exist between teachers and learners and also among teachers themselves about the conditions of error correction. These differences are especially pronounced when different teaching methodologies are practised in the language classroom since they adopt different procedures. Based on audio lingual school, for example, negative assessment is to be avoided as far as possible since it functions as "punishment" and may inhibit or discourage learning. Meanwhile, the humanistic school is based on the assumption that "assessment should be positive or non-judgmental" because it "promotes a positive self-image of the learner as a person and language learner," and also based on skill-learning pedagogy "the learner needs feedback on how well he or she is doing" (Ur, 1996, p. 243).

But because of these positive and negative effects, researchers and language educators disagree about whether errors have to be corrected, what errors should be corrected, how to correct them and when to correct them (see for example, Hendrickson, 1978; Hyland & Hyland, 2006). Timing of feedback has been a disputing subject among many teachers and researchers. Some believe that error correction should be provided frequently when the aim is promotion in accuracy. It seems correction of errors at this stage may improve the quality of learning in later use of language. However some others believe in delayed correction when the aim of the lesson is fluency in order not to deter reluctant activity or damage self-confidence of the students.

The strong preference for error correction expressed by students in the present study reiterated the findings of researches with EFL/ESL participants (e.g., McCarger, 1993; Wipf, 1993). It is interesting to surmise the possible causes of this difference between teachers and learners. These beliefs could possibly be the result of the ways language is instructed or evaluated (e.g., the use of grammar-focused instruction and discrete-point tests) or both; preferences can be related to a belief among students about the efficacy of grammar study which has been passed from one generation to another; or that these preferences can be based on real personal experiences that persuaded most of students that their success in learning could be achieved by rule consciousness and error correction. It seems clear that students share certain beliefs about the functions of formal education. They perceive the teacher as a specialist whose role is to provide feedback and explain the knowledge.

Although certain concordances are expected from the members of a profession with respect to the procedures for forming knowledge and skills in their discipline, foreign language teachers as a community show considerable differences in their beliefs. Their sources of beliefs are complicated, stemming from their in-service and pre-service development, their professional experience, and also their language learning experience regarding the way they were instructed.

To select an appropriate error correction strategy, teachers have to consider social and situational context. It has to regard the level, age, needs, skill, time, material and all other factors that may play some role in the teaching-learning processes.

Language learning can be hampered if students hold specific beliefs about the role of error correction and if their expectations cannot be met. It is the teacher's own decision to examine or not his/her students' realizations of the factors they assume to improve language learning and to ascertain whether student preferences or pedagogical practices are to be changed to prevent conflicts between the two. If teacher attitudes and actions do not coincide with student expectations, there can be a decrease in learner motivation and teacher credibility.

Hattie and Timperley, (2007) pointed out that "the main purpose of feedback is to reduce discrepancies between current understandings and performance and a goal." Therefore teachers have to ensure "that feedback is targeted at students at the appropriate level, because some feedback is effective in reducing the discrepancy between current understandings and what is desired, and some is ineffective."

Fox (1993) suggests that teacher assistant trainers in preparation programmes can require teacher assistants to inspect their own assumptions about language and language acquisition and how they can be extended to teacher development in general. In spite of the methodological views of those responsible for teacher development, if there exists incompatibility between the orientation they provide and the opinions and convictions

of those who will practise the actual teaching, it will reduce their efforts.

## Conclusion

The study has clear implications for the teachers of all levels to consider the beliefs and perceptions both of themselves and their learners about error correction and consider the appropriate situations and timing to provide the feedback. In this way, they can reduce the contradictions between the learners' actual needs and the educational goals. This is specifically important for teachers of younger learners and newcomers whose perceptions and beliefs need to be respected and employed in the process of learning to better form their perspectives of language learning. In this way they can have a better understanding of their learning needs and purposes and can better adapt their linguistic resources for the learning task.

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