

## English language Teachers' and EFL Students' perceptions of oral errors and corrective feedback in a rural institution.

### Percepciones de profesores de inglés y estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera sobre los errores orales y la retroalimentación correctiva en una institución rural.

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#### Abstract:

This study explores the perception that English language teachers and students hold of errors and corrective feedback in oral communication. To collect data for this qualitative study semi-structured interviews were conducted with two English language teachers and five beginner English language students. The findings in this study provide evidence that teachers hold general knowledge about error correction and know how to provide corrective feedback. However, there may be factors that limit the implementation of corrective feedback in the workplace. As regards the decision-making process about corrective feedback, students and teachers keep different perspectives.

#### Keywords:

Corrective feedback, perceptions, errors, teachers, students

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#### Resumen:

Este estudio explora la percepción que profesores y alumnos de inglés tienen de los errores y la retroalimentación correctiva en la comunicación oral. Para recopilar los datos de este estudio cualitativo se realizaron entrevistas semi-estructuradas a dos profesores de inglés y cinco estudiantes de inglés principiantes. Los resultados de este estudio demuestran que los profesores tienen conocimientos generales sobre la corrección de errores y saben cómo proporcionar retroalimentación correctiva. Sin embargo, puede haber factores que limiten la aplicación de la retroalimentación correctiva en su lugar de trabajo. Con respecto al proceso de toma de decisiones en relación con la retroalimentación correctiva los estudiantes y maestro mantienen perspectivas diferentes.

#### Palabras Clave:

Retroalimentación correctiva, percepciones, errores, maestros, estudiantes

### Introduction

It seems that the importance of error and corrective feedback in a foreign language classroom has obtained higher recognition in the last decades. Besides, correcting oral errors made by students is considered one of the most arduous tasks in language acquisition (Amara, 2015).

Considering the relevance of corrective feedback on foreign language teaching, the purpose of this paper is to explore the perceptions that English language teachers and beginner English language students hold of corrective feedback in oral communication.

The organisation of this research consists of five sections; the first chapter provides a general description of the whole study. The second section provides previous studies conducted on this investigation. The third section describes the methodology that supports this study, including the overview, worldview, setting, participants, instruments, and data analysis. In the next section, the results of this research are presented. The last section concludes with a discussion of the investigation.

### Literature review

In the process of language teaching, there are some processes that limit the understanding of the language, such as errors. Brown (2000) defines errors as the linguistic variations forms made by non-native speakers, and in which, under the same context, are not made by native speakers. Xie & Jiang (2007) claim that errors are

the result of the incorrect use of a second language. Hence they represent a negative stimulus for students. For that reason, they should not be allowed to occur. Similarly, Corder (as cited in Amara, 2015) states that;

*Correcting learners' errors is substantial in three different ways: First, they tell the teacher about the progress of the learner, and therefore what remains to be learnt. Second, they supply evidence of how a language is acquired and what strategies the learner employs in learning a language. Thirdly, they are indisputable to the learning process because making errors is regarded as a device the learner uses in order to learn. (p.58)*

Nevertheless, other authors such as Krashen (as cited in Ines, 2017) state that some errors do not have to be corrected, especially when students are in the first stages of learning. Similarly, Brown (2000) claims that it is thought by many students that errors need to be corrected, but this is not always true. For this reason, inside the classroom, teachers are constantly questioning when and how errors have to be corrected.

### **Corrective feedback**

Error correction should not be seen as a constraint but rather as a support for better language learning. According to Amara (2015), Language learners have their own opinions on how and whether they wish to have their errors corrected by their teacher in the classroom setting. As a result, the implications on how, when, and when errors should be corrected were raised in different questions and objectives, since error correction equally involves students and teachers.

According to Lightbown and Spada (as cited in Astia, 2018)

There are two ways to conduct the corrective feedback: (1) explicit corrective feedback that is language teacher interrupts the student's utterance by giving a metalinguistic explanation, and (2) implicit corrective feedback that is language teacher interrupts student's utterance by giving some language input with no metalinguistic explanation. These kinds of feedback might be found during the English classroom communicative activities (p. 112)

### **Previous studies**

Various research studies have been conducted to analyse teachers' and students' perceptions of errors and corrective feedback.

Saeb (2017) conducted a study to explore Iranian EFL teachers' and students' perceptions and preferences of oral corrective feedback. Also, a comparison between teachers' and students' perceptions was made. This study was conducted with Eighty-six EFL students and twenty-eight teachers. A qualitative and qualitative

methodology was chosen for this research study. The data for this research was gathered using questionnaires. The results regarding what kind of errors need to be corrected showed that most teachers correct errors that interfere with communication while students thought that all errors need to be corrected. Regarding the amount of corrective feedback, teachers claimed to provide students with enough corrective feedback while students said the contrary. Regarding views about the different types of oral corrective feedback. Students preferred explicit correction with metalinguistic explanation while teachers used elicitation the most.

Tomczyk (2013) in the qualitative study Perceptions of Oral Errors and Their Corrective Feedback: Teachers vs. Students. The author demonstrated that perceptions toward corrective feedback between teachers and students are similar. In terms of how necessary it is, both teachers and students agreed that errors have to be corrected to not commit the same error repeatedly in the future. "As regards the types of errors, out of the three main sorts of errors (grammatical, pronunciation, and lexical ones), grammatical and pronunciation errors tend to be the most important" (Tomczyk, 2023, p.927). The author emphasises that the process of decisions about the treatment of errors depends on the methodologies and specific activities done in classes. Nevertheless, Both teachers and students favoured delayed correction arguing that the flow of communication must not be disrupted. The author also mentioned that the techniques used by teachers are repetition and gestures to indicate an error has been made. Regarding attitudes that students hold towards corrective feedback, most of them claimed to be satisfied with the teacher's correction but at the same time, they felt nervous and angry.

Similarly to the previous studies mentioned above, Bakti, & Sugianto (2019) in their quantitative study 'The students' perception towards oral corrective feedback in speaking class', the most significant findings revealed the following: 1) it was shown a positive perspective in using oral corrective feedback, 2) Most students agreed to the lecturer gives corrective feedback to every error that made by them, 3) students preferred immediate corrective feedback, 4) most students agree that they feel fine when the lecturer gives corrective feedback, 5) most students agree that they have learned a lot from oral error correction, 6) recast, repetition, explicit correction, and asking for clarification are the most common strategies used by teachers, 7) The lecturers have their method in giving corrective feedback to their students.

In the study 'Perceptions of English instructors and learners about corrective feedback' Harmandaoğlu, Balçikanlı, & Tevfik, (2016) examined the perceptions of instructors and learners about corrective feedback in learning English as a foreign language (EFL). The findings

of the study showed 1) learners feel cheated if the teacher does not correct the errors, 2) there are a small number of learners and instructors who are not so favourable about corrective feedback, 3) a small number of learners do not seem to like error correction in the class, 4) the instructor should be the one who gives corrective feedback, 5) both most instructors and learners would prefer teacher correction to peer correction. The authors also highlight the similar opinions that teachers and students hold.

Skenderi (2022) conducted a study to examine students' perceptions of three types of corrective feedback, such as explicit correction, elicitation, and recasts. The findings revealed that most of the students had positive attitudes towards Corrective Feedback. Besides, they like to be explicitly corrected and feel like they learn more when they are corrected when making a mistake. Finally, students also showed that they didn't feel frustrated, embarrassed, or interrupted when being corrected in the classroom.

### Methodology

This section provides specific information about the worldview, the design, the setting, the participants, and the instruments to carry out this study. This study was conducted using interviews, which involved collecting data using teachers' perceptions. A step-by-step description of the data collecting and analysis procedures followed to develop this research is also provided.

A unique feature of this study is focusing only on the qualitative element, where the most significant aspect is to highlight the participants' opinions based on their own experiences regarding the main objective of this research. Besides, this study was carried out in a rural context where the English level of the students was not good. Since the main objective of this research is to explore the perceptions that English language teachers and beginner English language students hold of corrective feedback in oral communication the following research question was set:

1. What are the perceptions that teachers and students hold of Corrective Feedback in oral communication?

#### Worldview, approach, design

In this study, a constructivist worldview in which the main objective is to rely on the participants' views of the situation was adopted. According to Creswell (2013) "In social constructivism, individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. They develop subjective meanings of their experiences—meanings directed toward certain objects or things" (p.24). Since there was a concern about exploring knowledge and perspectives this worldview was the most suitable for the research.

Concerning the information previously stated, a qualitative research approach was undertaken. "Qualitative research focuses on the events that transpire and on outcomes of those events from the perspectives of those involved" (Teherani, Martimianakis, & Stenfors, 2015, p. 669). Since the main focus of this research is to explore knowledge and perceptions English teachers and students hold towards effective learning, using interviews was considered an appropriate data collection procedure.

#### Research context

This study was conducted in a public high school institution in a rural context in Tlaxcala. Where English as a foreign language is a mandatory subject. However, it is essential to mention that students only take two-hour English classes each week. Which evidenced a lack of English instruction at the institution. Besides, only three English teachers are in charge of around 3 to 5 groups from six different technical majors.

#### Participants

A written invitation was sent to all the English language teachers in the Institution. Which represents three teachers in total. However, only two participants decided to take part in the study. Both teachers were males whose ages ranged between 32 and 48 years with at least three years of experience of English teaching in the institution mentioned above. They held a Bachelor's degree in Language Teaching.

A sample of five students aged from 18 to 21 years approximately, four females and one male were selected from a group of 34 students from the first-semester group of English Language class. Four of them claimed to be low English-level proficiency students. Only one student felt confident with English since particular instruction was received in the past. The selection of the participants was made through their volunteering, availability, and willingness to participate in the research. In addition, a consent form was signed by all the participants to take part in this study.

#### Research instrument

The data was collected using semi-structured interviews. This instrument was selected to collect the information necessary to provide the researcher with background knowledge about the participants regarding error correction, including their thoughts and opinions about corrective feedback during oral communication.

Both teachers were required to answer a thirty-minute interview with 15 open questions included in the English language. The interviews were online through a session on Google Meet. Since they had to travel immediately after finishing classes. Permission to record the session was required. On the other hand, students were required to answer a face-to-face interview with 21 open questions.

The interviews were made in their mother tongue which is Spanish. Students' interviews were administered in the library of the institution at the end of the classes.

Permission to record the interview was also provided by all the participants. Besides, one month and twenty days were the time required to administer the instrument to all the participants. This is because piloting was done before with two teachers and two students to ensure the accuracy of the instrument. What is more, the dates to carry on the interviews were decided by the participants. The data from the pilot study were not used in the target study.

The interview guide designed for teachers is divided into four parts. Questions 1 to 4 are intended to explore the general knowledge that teachers have regarding errors and mistakes. Questions 6 to 9 are designed to know if teachers hold a positive tendency toward corrective feedback or not. Questions 10 to 13 tended to describe the decision-making and strategies to provide effective corrective feedback. Lastly, questions 14 and 15 are related to how teachers perceived students' attitudes of receiving corrective feedback.

The interview guide for students is divided into two sections. Half of the questions were intended to explore students' perceptions of errors and the rest of them explored students' perceptions of corrective feedback.

### **Data analysis**

After gathering data a qualitative data analysis was done. "The term 'qualitative data analysis' is used to denote deductive categorization to inductive pattern finding" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 242). In order to categorise the information the transcription of teachers' interviews and translation and transcription of students' interviews were stated into a database. Then, the identification of similar claims was done using a color-coded technique.

### **Findings**

The results in this section include data from the instrument described above and aim to provide an overview of the perceptions that English teachers and students hold towards oral errors and corrective feedback.

Accordingly, the first section presents the general knowledge that teachers and students hold of errors and identifies the errors that are committed the most in their context. Following this, teachers' and students' perceptions of corrective feedback and the strategies to provide effective corrective feedback. Then, teacher's and students' attitudes toward corrective feedback. Finally, other factors that impact on corrective feedback in that specific context.

#### **Knowledge of errors**

It was identified that teachers held similar perspectives on the definition of error and the types of errors committed

the most in speaking activities. According to (Corder as cited in Amara 2015) differentiates between a mistake which is a performance error due to a random guess or slip and an error that refers to peculiarities in the interlanguage of the learner manifesting the learner's system of operation while learning is fundamental to comprehend how the language works in our mind and how errors can boost or pause the language learning process. Also, the identification of errors plays a significant role when learning a second language. That is why teachers must distinguish them from mistakes and be conscious about their treatment. In this study, the participants are aware of this and it is clearly stated in the following statements.

Errors are much more likely to happen when students are learning a new language, but not when they have already mastered it. I unquestionably distinguish errors from mistakes. A mistake is made only once, or maybe twice, but attended by an effective correction they no longer have to happen. However, an error is something that the students have not been able to understand and therefore, it occurs more frequently. To me, it is essential to treat errors with more intricate and effort than mistakes. (Teacher 1)

They are not the same. And the ones who study English for pedagogical purposes are very aware of this. I would say that the errors are related to an evident lack of language proficiency. For example, the students who start learning the language will make many errors because they ignore many elements of the language, such as vocabulary or grammatical structures. On the other hand, we can say that if they make a mistake, it is due to other reasons, such as distraction or that their concentration was not very good, but it will never be due to a lack of knowledge. And it is something that they can correct themselves. (Teacher 2)

Additionally to this, students also demonstrated to have their perceptions of what an error is. Bakti & Sugianto (2019) claimed that students' awareness regarding errors not only raises the expectations of improvement but also makes students more confident when developing a second language skill. Besides, students' perceptions turned out to be quite similar to the teachers' definitions.

I make mistakes a lot in classes. But it's because sometimes I don't understand anything the teachers explain. For example, once I participated, the teacher corrected something and I didn't even know what he was correcting me. But he made me repeat it, and I never knew what it was. (Student 1)

Yes, we always make mistakes, and in my case, it is not so regular because before participating or speaking I like to be sure that what I am going to say is right. Sometimes I write what I want to say on my phone so I can see my mistakes, and correct them. And that's how I learn even better. (Students 2)

I don't like making mistakes. Of course, I do, but it's because I'm human and don't know everything. But I am very rigorous with myself, for example in English, I am not that good but I always ask my doubts so as not to make so many mistakes and even more so when we have to speak. (Student 4)

The treatment of errors each student above mentioned supported the idea about language deficiencies or mastery and how being aware of what is being learned impacts the number of errors that students make. According to Amara (2015)

Non-native speakers, L2 learners not only make mistakes, they also commit errors and as they have only an incomplete knowledge of the target language, they are not always able to correct the errors that they make. Thus the learners' errors reflect a lack of underlying competence in the language that they are learning. (p. 59)

Thus, students' awareness is meant to include learning competency and proficiency in the target language to foster learning and develop student's critical self-exploration and thinking regarding the errors made and the treatment they need. In light of the information mentioned above, recognizing the different errors made when learning a second language is vital for students and teachers.

In this study it was identified that errors are most common when doing oral activities and teachers and students mentioned that pronunciation, vocabulary, and syntax errors are the most prevalent ones.

I have identified that students have many problems with pronunciation. I assume it is due to the previous lack of English language instruction. Many of them are having their first approach to the language in this class. And they generally tend to pronounce the words as they see them written. (Teacher 1)

The biggest problem with oral activities could be the lack of vocabulary knowledge. And more with words that are similar to Spanish. For example with the word usually. Most of the time they use it wrong. In very extreme cases, students who have almost no knowledge of the language use words similar to Spanish when they do not know how to say something. (Teacher 2)

Another frequent problem is the difficulty for them to formulate statements correctly. But that's because of the level they are at so I guess that's very normal (Teacher 2)

When I speak, neither the teacher nor my classmates hardly understand me. But the pronunciation is different. Then some letters are pronounced the same as how they are written and others are not. (Student 2)

Pronunciation is very difficult for me. I feel like English words have a lot of T's and sometimes I can't pronounce them well. I think I make many mistakes using the wrong words, once for example, I said exit, to say that it was a success and they told me later that it had another meaning. And I said it a lot until they corrected me. (Student 4)

In oral activities, it is very difficult to know how to say what I want to say correctly. So I think about what I want to say and then I translate it in my mind. But when I don't have time to think I say the wrong things. (Students 1)

The statements demonstrated that the most common type of error is related to pronunciation, lexis, and syntax.

Teachers' and students' perceptions of corrective feedback.

Regarding teachers' and students' perceptions of corrective feedback, I identified differences in opinions about when and how to correct errors between teachers and students is evident. For example, teacher 1 and 2, and student number 4 gave their opinion in favour of corrective feedback, while the rest of the students preferred not to receive that correction.

There are times and ways to correct errors. I prefer to do it as much as I can. I think making students aware of what they are not doing well is important for them to improve. (Teacher 2)

It is necessary. Omitting it can represent more disadvantages than advantages, especially when students are beginners. Failure to correct errors can lead students to think everything they say is correct. And later it will be more challenging to correct those errors. (Teacher 1)

I prefer to be corrected each time I make a mistake. Because, sometimes I say something that I think is right like what I told you before about the word exit. And it turns out that it is not like that. (Student 4)

On the contrary, students 1, 2, and 3 stated that they do not consider corrective feedback necessary.

I think it is normal for us to make mistakes and that is why we are learning. And I don't think it's good that the teacher is constantly telling us that we did it wrong. (Student 1)

I don't like being told I'm wrong. And even less in front of everyone. I think that what we have to learn about the language we are learning little by little without needing to be corrected all the time. (Student 3)

Although I think it is important to receive feedback. I don't think it has to be all the time. Only on occasions where the errors are significantly serious. (Students 2)

Both teachers showed different opinions about the preferred strategies they use to provide oral corrective feedback.

To me, correction in pairs is ideal. Students react better when their classmates point out their mistakes than when we teachers do it. That technique is the one I use the most. (Teacher 1)

Another strategy that I use a lot is written correction. During oral activities, I never interrupt my students. Unless they require help, that way I intercede. But usually, I only take notes and at the end of his presentation, I give feedback in writing and individually. (Teacher 1)

While the students are communicating an idea, I wait until the end to mention the errors. Usually what I do is tell the students the sentences exactly as they said them, I ask them to analyse them and detect where they were wrong. (Teacher 2)

Another strategy that works very well for me is that for example. The student says: I eat pizza yesterday. I repeat. I ate pizza yesterday. I strongly focused on intonation to highlight the word or structure where they made the mistake, and I asked the students to repeat their sentences correctly. (Teacher 2)

The statements showed that the strategies preferred by both teachers are to use peer and self-correction and delay correction. This way they do not interrupt the communication of their students and give more effective feedback at the end of speaking activities.

Teachers' and students' attitudes toward corrective feedback.

Other significant findings related to teachers' and students' attitudes toward corrective feedback are that teachers claimed that showing a positive attitude toward corrective feedback made students feel more comfortable and willing to receive it. Students' statements also reinforced this idea.

I try to give feedback as carefully as possible because some students are more sensitive than others, and feel uncomfortable when they are corrected. But that has more to do with each person's personality. I always let them know that making mistakes is not a bad thing, on the

contrary, they can learn much more if they make many mistakes and are corrected appropriately, and I have noticed that this gives them more security. (Teacher 1)

I ask them beforehand if they would like to receive their feedback personally or in front of the entire group, and depending on their answers, this is how I do it (Teacher 2)

Teachers have to be kind when they correct us. It happened to me once that a teacher laughed because he couldn't pronounce a word. And I don't know with what intention he laughed, but my classmates also started laughing, and he didn't say anything to them. (Student 1)

It doesn't make me feel bad to be corrected. Generally, my teacher is very kind when he gives us feedback. In addition, he answers any question, and if we have a question he explains it to us very well. (Student 4)

### **Other findings**

Finally, some factors related to their workplace that do not allow teachers to give corrective feedback as efficiently as they would like were identified. That is due to the very short class time, the educational program, and the number of groups of which they are in charge.

This process of correcting errors is very complex, not only because depending on the methodology or the type of errors that are discussed, we must make decisions and correct those errors. If not, it is also because the institution lacks English teachers, and there are only three of us for many groups, so even if I wanted to give individual feedback, that would take up a lot of my time. And time is what I have the least. (Teacher 2)

The reason for giving written feedback is to avoid wasting time clarifying it after each presentation. Here, we only have a two-hour class for each group and an entire program to accomplish, so the time needs to be increased. So if the students have any questions, they can write to me by email, and I will clarify their doubts, but outside of working hours. (Teacher 1)

These statements made me reflect on the limitations that teachers sometimes do not have control over and do not necessarily belong to pedagogical knowledge but rather to the social problems of each context.

### **Conclusion**

This study explored the perception that English language teachers and students hold of errors and corrective feedback in oral communication. It is known that within the teaching of a foreign language; both teachers and students play a crucial role in effectively mastering the

language. Nevertheless, during class; errors and corrective feedback play a significant role in the learning process. Hence, the objective of this research was to explore English language Teachers' and EFL Students' perceptions of oral errors and corrective feedback in a rural institution.

Some authors claim that error correction is an essential part of learning. Corder (as cited in Amara, 2015, p.58) states that correcting learners' errors is substantial in three different ways: First, they tell the teacher about the progress of the learner, second, they supply evidence of how a language is acquired and thirdly, they are indisputable to the learning process because making errors is regarded as a device the learner uses in order to learn. Similarly, Xie & Jiang (2007) state that by correcting errors, more students can develop successful linguistic competencies.

In future research it is expected to later inform regarding the perception teachers and students hold about errors and the implications that they involve. Based on this research I propose to reflect on the way of perceiving corrective feedback in a rural context. Also, it would be better for future researchers to study social elements that do not allow corrective feedback to be effective. All in all, the perception of corrective feedback is a crucial part of the learning process and it is inevitable for students not to make mistakes, for this reason, it is better to reinforce the way to correct them instead of avoiding them. In this way, students will develop their ability to learn a foreign language to the highest.

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