

Students Attitudes Towards Oral Corrective Feedback: A Case Study from Oman

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Received:05/15/2023

Accepted:09/17/2023

Published: 09/24/2023

Abstract

Understanding students' attitudes toward oral corrective feedback is pivotal. This case study explored English Language Omani students' attitudes toward teachers' oral corrective feedback strategies to check the congruence between teachers' and students' preferences. We raised the following questions: What types of oral corrective feedback are used by teachers and preferred by students? Observational data were collected from two Omani English teachers to discern the types and frequencies of Oral Corrective Feedback utilized. Additionally, semi-structured interviews with six students were conducted to gain a holistic view of their perspectives and preferences. Classroom observations were quantitatively scrutinized for data analysis, whereas the interview data underwent a grounded theory procedure. The data demonstrated that teachers predominantly employed the 'recast' type of feedback. Notably, students showcased a generally positive attitude towards Oral Corrective Feedback. They preferred the 'repetition' and 'elicitation' feedback types. Moreover, internal factors, like personal motivation and language proficiency, and external factors, such as curriculum challenges and teacher personalities, emerged as significant influencers of their attitudes and choices. The study unearthed an incongruence between students' preferences and the teachers' actual Oral Corrective Feedback practices. This incongruence suggests potential impediments to the effectiveness of feedback in facilitating optimal learning experiences. There is a need to bridge the gap between teaching practices and student preferences to improve learning outcomes and feedback.

Keywords: Oral Corrective Feedback, teaching practices, congruence, teachers' perceptions, Students' preferences

Cite as: AlGhafri, M., Mirza, C., & Gabarre, C. (2023). Students Attitudes Towards Oral Corrective Feedback: A Case Study from Oman *Arab World English Journal*, 14 (3) 406-417.
DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol14no3.26>

Introduction

Oral Corrective Feedback (OCF) is instrumental in enhancing students' proficiency in the English language. Specifically, feedback in this context pertains to the deliberate remarks and insights teachers provide in their classrooms to both encapsulate students' performance and highlight areas needing improvement (Al Ghaithi, 2023; Askew & Lodge, 2000; Cameron, 2001; Çoban, 2021; Ha, 2023; Köroğlu, 2022; Lewis, 2002; Rassaei, 2019).

However, a divergence has been noted in the extant literature between students' preferences for OCF and the feedback approaches adopted by teachers. Several studies have indicated that teachers often grapple with implementing the most appropriate OCF strategies in their classrooms, primarily due to the myriad subtypes within the OCF spectrum (Ellis, 2009). There is a growing consensus among researchers suggesting that, for OCF to be genuinely beneficial, it should align with the student's specific learning needs (Al Ghaithi, 2023; Ammar & Spada, 2006; Çoban, 2021; Ellis, 2006, 2009; Ha, 2023; Lewis, 2002; Lyster & Saito, 2010).

A significant body of research has scrutinized the dynamic between teachers' OCF strategies and the perceptions held by students. A recurrent theme from such studies indicates that students generally favor error corrections (Katayama, 2007). However, this positivity varies based on the specific feedback type provided by the educators (Lochtman, 2002). Recent developments in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) show an emerging correlation between educators' pedagogical beliefs and their actual classroom practices concerning OCF.

While an abundance of both experimental and observational studies underlines the efficacy of OCF in facilitating second language acquisition, there remains a research gap concerning the interplay between teachers' beliefs and their OCF practices, especially within the Omani educational context. Given this backdrop, the present study investigates students' perceptions of OCF within the Sultanate of Oman. Therefore, this paper investigates the congruence between teacher and student preferences. It is hypothesized that incongruence hinders effective learning. The study purports to:

- Examine teachers' OCF practices.
- Examine students' attitudes towards OCF.
- Identify the factors that influence students' attitudes.

We raise the following research questions:

- What types of oral corrective feedback are used by teachers?
- What are students' attitudes toward oral corrective feedback?
- What factors influence students' attitudes?

The present study operationalizes OCF as "the reactive information that learners receive regarding the linguistic and communicative failure of their utterances" (Mackey, 2007, p. 14).

This report seeks to provide an overview of the existing research on OCF, outline the methodology employed in our current study, analyze our findings, and offer recommendations for improving and enhancing OCF teaching practices based on the insights we have gained.

Literature Review

Ellis (2006) and Lewis (2002) state that Oral Corrective Feedback (OCF) is a pedagogical practice that offers learners specific insights regarding their performance during the process of acquiring a second language. Chaudron (1988) concludes that "feedback is a complex phenomenon with several functions" (p. 35). At its core, they further add that OCF serves as a

mechanism enabling learners to pinpoint their linguistic errors, thereby facilitating improved language acquisition (Lewis, 2002). Essentially, Ellis (2006) states that OCF is a responsive action to students' incorrect verbal expressions, necessitating an initial identification or discernment of these errors before feedback can be dispensed. Within the same realm of thought, Ferris and Hedgcock claim that: "teacher feedback also provides the opportunity for instruction to be tailored to the needs of individual students through face-to-face dialogue in teacher-student writing conferences and through the draft-response-revision cycle, during which teachers help students through their written commentary at various points" (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005, p. 185).

Within academic circles, there is a prevailing sentiment that OCF is indispensable in second language acquisition. One of the chief merits of OCF is its capacity to aid students in rectifying erroneous linguistic assumptions, thereby preventing the extrapolation of these mistakes in broader contexts (Ancker, 2000; Carrol & Swain, 1993; Nassaji & Swain, 2000). A converging theme in several studies underscores the recognition by both educators and learners of the instrumental role OCF plays in language acquisition (Ammar & Spada, 2006; Ellis, 2009; Lyster & Saito, 2010).

However, alongside these endorsements, OCF has its detractors and complexities. One facet of contention stems from some educators' concerns that the interjection of OCF might disrupt the natural flow of communication. Contrastingly, some educators harbor anxieties that leaving students' mistakes unaddressed might lead to the permanent embedding or 'fossilization' of these errors (Gu nette, 2007). An often-overlooked dimension of this debate is the students' attitudes toward OCF, which, when not gauged correctly, could impact its efficacy (Havranek & Cesnik, 2001). Adding to this discourse, Tayebipour (2019) conducted a study that unearthed a pronounced disparity in performance between student cohorts receiving feedback and those not.

The realm of OCF in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching has garnered significant scholarly attention, with research projects spanning various geographical contexts and pedagogical settings.  oban (2021) embarked on a study to understand the congruence between Turkish EFL instructors' professed beliefs and their tangible classroom practices concerning OCF. While many educators acknowledged the merits of OCF, there was a perceived need for its judicious application, given the potential implications on learners' affective dispositions. A noteworthy observation was the prevalence of recasts, owing to their implicit character, even though many educators opined that elicitation was the most potent feedback mechanism. A discernible gap emerged between educators' convictions and their pedagogical strategies, especially concerning the nature of errors addressed in the classroom.

Similarly, Ha (2023) scrutinized Vietnamese EFL instructors' perspectives and pedagogical methods concerning OCF. While there was an overarching consensus on the benefits of OCF, a discrepancy was evident: while prompts were largely considered superior to reformulations, the latter found frequent application in classroom settings. This disparity can be attributed to various contextual considerations and the intricate interplay of varied belief structures with classroom methodologies. Moreover, a consistent observation underscored the imprecision inherent in the linguistic formulations employed in feedback by educators.

Al Ghaithi (2023) discerned a quantifiable positive influence of interactional corrective feedback on EFL students' writing prowess. Correspondingly, survey findings illuminated students' emphasis on the invaluable nature of such feedback emanating from educators.

Rassaei (2019) compared the ramifications of dynamic versus non-dynamic OCF concerning EFL learners' mastery of English wh-questions across three distinct instructional

sessions. Intriguingly, the dynamic feedback paradigm showcased superior outcomes for L2 development compared to its non-dynamic counterpart. A meticulous assessment of interactions during these sessions further elucidated the unique advantages of dynamic feedback in bolstering L2 acquisition.

Yüksel (2021) explored the harmony, or lack thereof, between EFL university instructors' stated beliefs and their classroom feedback practices. While there were palpable inconsistencies between educators' declared beliefs and their on-ground actions, there was notable alignment regarding specific feedback tenets, such as the timing and agency of error correction. However, despite discernibly ineffective OCF methods, educators staunchly defended their pedagogical choices, especially those with pronounced belief-practice incongruities.

Saeb (2017) delved into the perceptual differences between educators and learners concerning feedback quantity, modalities, and error correction priorities. Notably, students exhibited a marked preference for explicit corrective feedback, in contrast to their educators. To reconcile these divergent feedback perceptions and enhance error correction efficacy, 'meta-correction' was proposed as a pedagogical innovation within the Iranian EFL context.

While many experimental and observational studies underscore the effectiveness of OCF in facilitating learning, there still needs to be a research gap concerning the interplay between teachers' beliefs and their OCF practices, especially within the Omani educational context. Therefore, the present study examines students' perceptions of OCF within the Sultanate of Oman. Consequently, this paper examines the congruence between teacher and student preferences. Incongruence is hypothesized to hinder effective learning.

The academic discourse posits that the efficacy of OCF is intricately tied to its typology (Harmer, 2000; Ellis, 2009; Lyster et al., 2013). Taxonomies of corrective feedback abound in the literature, with illustrious scholars like Ellis (2009) and Lyster et al. (2013) delineating six primary feedback categories: recast, repetition, clarification request, explicit correction, elicitation, and paralinguistic signal. An illustrative summary encompassing definitions and exemplars of these feedback varieties is encapsulated in Table One.

Table 1. *Corrective feedback strategies*

Corrective feedback Strategy	Definition	Example
1. Recast	The corrector incorporates the content words of the immediately preceding incorrect utterance and changes and corrects the utterance in some way (e.g., phonological, syntactic, morphological, or lexical)	L: I went there two times. T: You've been. You've been there twice as a group?
2. Repetition	The corrector repeats the learner's utterance, highlighting the error through emphatic stress.	L: I will showed you. T: I will SHOWED you. L: I'll show you.
3. Clarification request	The corrector indicates that he/she has not understood the learner's words.	L: What do you spend with your wife? T: What?
4. Explicit correction	The corrector indicates an error has been committed, identifies it, and corrects it.	L: On May. T: Not on May, In May. We say, "It will start in May."
5. Elicitation	The corrector repeats part of the learner's utterance but not the erroneous part and uses rising	L: I'll come if it will not rain. T: I'll come if it?

	intonation to signal that the learner should complete it.	
6. Paralinguistic signal	The corrector uses a gesture or facial expression to indicate that the learner has made an error.	L: Yesterday I go cinema. T: (gestures with right forefinger over left shoulder to indicate past)

Note 1. Adopted from Ellis (2009, p. 9)

Method

With its exploratory nature, this research employed a mixed-methods approach (Creswell, 2013) to delve into students' attitudes towards Oral Corrective Feedback (OCF). With a primary objective to shed light on and elucidate the intricacies of the topic, and as advocated by AlAbri (2022), the study embraced an interpretive framework aimed at yielding qualitative insights into the phenomenon at hand.

Participants

For the study, six Grade 10 students, purposefully selected based on Patton's (2002) sampling approach, were brought into the research ambit. These students hailed from secondary schools in Oman in the AY 2021-2022, with their age bracket falling between 16 and 17 years old. Gender distribution was meticulously maintained, ensuring equal representation of male and female participants. To further enrich the study's scope, classroom observations of two educators were conducted, capturing real-time pedagogical methods and interactions. Rigorous measures, as advocated by Mirza et al. (2023), were instituted to uphold the privacy and anonymity of the participants.

Research Instruments

In data collection tools, semi-structured interviews formed the bedrock of capturing students' perspectives and attitudes towards OCF. Parallely, the educators' classroom practices were scrupulously observed, focusing specifically on their deployment of OCF. For this, the study relied on a lesson observation checklist, an adaptation of Ellis's (2009) work (as referenced in Table One above).

Research Procedures

A multi-pronged strategy was employed as the research moved towards the analysis phase. The observational data, capturing classroom dynamics, underwent a quantitative content analysis to decipher the various types of OCF employed. Descriptive statistical tools were then harnessed to tabulate the frequency with which each OCF type surfaced in the observed lessons. On the other hand, the rich qualitative data procured from the student interviews were subjected to Charmaz's (2006) grounded theory analytical framework. This involved a three-part process consisting of initial, focused, and theoretical coding, following the methods of Charmaz (2006) and Glaser (1978). By adopting such a comprehensive approach, the research not only illuminated students' attitudes but also juxtaposed them against actual classroom practices, providing a holistic understanding of the OCF landscape in the context of Omani secondary schools.

Results

Observations

In the classroom observations, a predominant reliance on the recast strategy by teachers to provide feedback became evident.

Table 2. *Types and frequency OCF from lesson observation*

Oral corrective feedback types	Frequency (Teacher 1)	Frequency (Teacher 2)	Mean
Recast	73.6	34.4	54
Clarification request	7	24.1	15.5
Elicitation	8.7	10.3	9.5
Peer correction	0	27.5	13.7
Repetition	3.5	3.4	3.4
Explicit correction	5.2	0	2.6
Paralinguistic signal	1.7	0	0.8

As delineated in Table Two, the average frequency of the recast technique stands at 54. The clarification request follows with an average frequency of 15.5. Furthermore, elicitation is observed to be moderately employed, with a mean frequency of 9.5. Although not universally adopted, peer correction has a noteworthy mean frequency of 13.7. Strategies such as repetition and explicit correction have comparably lower averages, resting at 3.4 and 2.6, respectively. The least frequently used strategy appeared to be the paralinguistic signal, which exhibited a mean of 0.8. This distribution of feedback strategies provides invaluable insights into the prevailing classroom feedback dynamics.

Interviews

Positive Attitudes

The interview results unveiled the students' predominantly positive stance towards Oral Corrective Feedback (OCF). The participants expressed that OCF benefits their learning journey primarily by heightening their cognizance of linguistic errors. As demonstrated in the following excerpt:

"Students should receive OCF. Many students make errors, for example, when pronouncing some words, so they must be aware of these errors, which must be corrected as quickly as possible."(Extract 1 - Student 1)

Moreover, the students emphasized that OCF is pivotal in fostering a culture of self-improvement. It empowers them to rectify their mistakes autonomously, which is crucial for linguistic development. This sentiment is echoed in the subsequent quote:

"I am with correcting errors because if a person does not learn from his errors, he will not progress. If I do not know my error, I will continue with it, but I can correct it through feedback."(Extract 2 - Student 3)

Another intriguing insight was the communal dimension of OCF. The students perceived it as a catalyst that amplifies classroom interactions and collaborative learning. As one student insightfully observed:

"The teachers should give us OCF because this encourages students to speak with each other, and it also encourages collaboration."(Extract 3 - Student 1)

Additionally, there is an undercurrent of gratification associated with OCF. Students often experience a sense of accomplishment and validation when errors are identified and rectified. An instance of this sentiment is captured in the statement below:

"I was making mistakes when pronouncing a word, and my teacher corrected my mistake. I felt delighted that my mistake was corrected."(Extract 4 - Student 2)

Lastly, OCF emerged as a potent factor in enhancing students' self-esteem and encouraging active classroom participation. As one of the students eloquently expressed:

"Oral corrective feedback encourages me to participate more in the classroom, and that helps me to be self-confident and makes me eager to deal with my errors."(Extract 5 - Student 5)

The overarching theme suggests that OCF is perceived as a corrective tool essential in enhancing self-awareness, fostering collaboration, and boosting student self-confidence.

Preferences

Delving deeper into the nuances of the student preferences concerning Oral Corrective Feedback (OCF) types, the results elucidated their inclination toward specific methods: elicitation, repetition, and explicit correction. Their perspectives on these feedback types are articulated in the subsequent extracts:

"Elicitation, where the teacher repeats part of the sentence that I have said and stops to let me identify the error myself; correction raises my motivation."(Extract 6, Student 4)

"I prefer repetition, in which the teacher does not correct the error but only repeats the sentence and raises the voice in error, so I correct the error myself. I like this type, especially for my pronunciation errors."(Extract 7, Student 3)

"As the curriculum is difficult, I prefer explicit correction. My teacher is always helpful. He always provides clear, explicit corrections."(Extract 8, Student 1)

Nevertheless, it is essential to juxtapose these student preferences against the backdrop of actual classroom practices. Notably, while a considerable fraction of students elucidated a predilection for repetition and elicitation as OCF methods, classroom observations painted a contrasting picture. The most prevalent feedback strategy wielded by educators, as gleaned from the observations, was the 'recast' method. This disparity between student preferences and actual teaching techniques underscores a potential area for pedagogical introspection and recalibration. It suggests that aligning feedback mechanisms with student inclinations might enhance the overall effectiveness and receptivity of OCF in educational settings.

Underpinning Factors

Upon conducting an in-depth interview with the student participants, many factors influencing their attitudes and preferences regarding Oral Corrective Feedback (OCF) emerged. These factors can be broadly categorized into two domains: internal and external.

Internal Factors

The internal determinants predominantly revolved around the students' motivation and their proficiency in the language. Their comments elucidated a strong preference for the 'elicitation' method of OCF. This approach, where a teacher repeats part of a student's utterance and pauses to allow the student to self-identify the error, significantly boosted the learners' motivation. Students poignantly noted:

"Elicitation is where the teacher repeats part of the sentence that I have said and stops to let me identify the error myself. This type of correction raises my motivation.

"(Extract 6 - Student 4)

"Elicitation: I like this type of OCF because it suits my language level. I think this helps me to progress more."(Extract 9 - Student 3)

External Factors

On the external spectrum, three principal factors surfaced from the data: the nature of the error, the teacher's persona, and the intricacies of the curriculum. A preference for the 'repetition' technique of OCF was noted among students, particularly when addressing specific errors like pronunciation. As one student explained:

"I prefer repetition, in which the teacher does not correct the error but only repeats the sentence and raises the voice in the error so that I correct the error by myself. I like this type, especially for my pronunciation errors."(Extract 7 - Student 3)

The curriculum's complexity was also pivotal in students' inclinations towards OCF types. Some expressed a predilection for 'explicit correction,' attributing it to the challenging nature of the curriculum and the proactive assistance from their educators. One student articulated:

"Because the curriculum is difficult, I prefer explicit correction. My teacher is he. He always provides clear, explicit corrections."(Extract 10 - Student 1)

It becomes evident that students' attitudes and preferences towards OCF are multifaceted and shaped by internal and external dynamics. Recognizing these variables can be critical in tailoring effective pedagogical strategies for language instruction.

Discussion

Observational data revealed that 'recasts' were the predominant OCF method used by teachers in response to the first research question regarding OCF types. Supplementary OCF techniques like clarification requests, elicitation, peer correction, repetition, explicit correction, and metalinguistic explanations played a peripheral role in classroom feedback. This phenomenon mirrors the trends highlighted in prior studies such as Al-Harrasi (2007), Lin (2009), Panova and Lyster (2002), and Yoshida (2008). The consistency in findings underpins the pervasive preference for recasts in pedagogical settings. Another layer of this phenomenon emerged in juxtaposing teachers' articulated beliefs with their demonstrative practices, as documented by Çoban (2021) and Ha (2023). Even though educators acknowledged the efficacy of elicitation, the frequency of recasts superseded it. Such discrepancies between belief systems and demonstrative practices were further underlined by researchers like Al-Harrasi (2007), Çoban (2021), Ha (2023), Köroğlu (2022), Saeb (2017), and Yüksel (2021), highlighting the roles of contextual nuances and varied belief systems.

Regarding students' attitudes towards OCF, the narrative was overwhelmingly positive. They favored OCF techniques such as repetition, elicitation, and explicit correction, emphasizing the benefits of heightened error awareness, proactive error avoidance, facilitated self-correction, and enhanced classroom dynamics. The resonance of these findings with earlier studies, including those by Al-Harrasi (2007), Al Ghaithi (2023), Lin (2009), Rassaei (2019), Tayebipour (2019), and Yoshida (2008), testifies to the persistent favorability of OCF across diverse learner groups.

The study unearthed internal and external determinants to answer the third research question about discerning the factors that shape students' attitudes. These findings harmonize with insights from Lyster and Saito (2010), who spotlighted the influence of variables such as curriculum design, activity context, linguistic competence, and demographic attributes like age and gender on OCF preferences. Consequently, the third objective of the present study, which contemplates the study's overarching conclusions, reveals a prominent incongruence between student preferences and teachers' practices. The consistency of this observation, supported by prior research from Brown (2009), Fukuda (2004), Lee (2008), and Yoshida (2008), reinforces the prevalent gap between instructional methodologies and learner expectations regarding OCF, which might have negative impacts on practical learning.

Finally, it becomes evident that multifarious dynamics characterize the landscape of OCF. The findings of the present study are in line with findings from other studies like Al Ghaithi (2023), Çoban (2021), Ha (2023), and Rassaei (2019). While certain practices and preferences consistently emerge across studies, they are invariably molded by individual, pedagogical, and contextual factors. The intricate balance between teachers' practices, students' preferences, and influential determinants provides a comprehensive perspective on the OCF discourse, necessitating a holistic and nuanced approach to feedback in the language classroom.

Conclusion

The present study purports to examine the congruence between teachers' practices of OCF and students' preferences. The findings from this investigation underscore a prevailing conundrum in the pedagogical domain related to Oral Corrective Feedback (OCF). While teachers evinced a commendable understanding of OCF's merits, a palpable lacuna surfaced regarding their cognizance of students' OCF inclinations. The findings also, which ponder on the overarching conclusions derivable from the study, show a pronounced discordance between student preferences and teachers' practices emerges as a central theme. The consistency of this observation, corroborated by precedent studies from Brown (2009), Fukuda (2004), Lee (2008), and Yoshida (2008), reinforces the prevalent gap between instructional methodologies and learner expectations regarding OCF. This observation is a scholarly point of note and holds paramount pedagogical implications. The efficacy of OCF, as Han (2001) posits, hinges significantly on teachers' ability to align their feedback strategies with the aspirations and requirements of the students. The innate power of OCF in galvanizing learners' motivation and receptiveness gets markedly amplified when delivered in sync with their preferences.

Recommendations

From an educational policy and strategy standpoint, these revelations beckon a reevaluation of teacher training curricula. Current professional development paradigms, while proficient in instilling the virtues of OCF, may require augmentative modules that foster a deeper teacher-student rapport, emphasizing the imperative of discerning and catering to students' OCF

predilections. In doing so, the educational ecosystem can evolve towards a more tailored, receptive, and efficacious deployment of oral feedback, thereby accentuating the holistic learning journey for students. For effective learning, we recommend promoting current professional development training to emphasize aligning teachers' OCF with their students' preferences.

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