

## The Effect of Gender, Experience, Context and Proficiency on Teachers' and Learners' Perception of Corrective Feedback

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**Abstract:** *The current study investigated the effect of educational setting, teachers' gender and experience, along with learners' proficiency level on the application of corrective feedback. Corrective feedback is one of the controversial issues which have received the researchers' attention recently. To conduct this research, 60 EFL teachers and 80 EFL learners were selected through convenient sampling. Teachers were selected by considering gender (male and female), experience (experienced and inexperienced), educational setting (private institutes and universities) while learners were selected by considering their proficiency level (high and low). Affective and Effective Responses Feedback questionnaire was administered to the participants to collect data. The data were analyzed by using descriptive and inferential statistics. The results showed that gender, experience, educational setting and proficiency level did not affect the participants' response regarding the corrective feedback. This finding may be due to unfamiliarity of the teachers and learners with oral and written corrective feedback which makes it necessary to highlight it in teacher training courses. Curriculum designers and book developers should pay attention to the instruction of correction strategies and corrective feedback in material development.*

**Key Words:** *Corrective feedback, Proficiency, Gender, Experience*

### Introduction

Historical background of error correction is long and controversial in second language acquisition (SLA). Brown (2007) believed that during the past few decades, there has been a change in classroom instruction with emphasis on form of language to the function of language in a communicative situation. Making an error is an inseparable part of learning. Moreover, the way errors are corrected is an important issue for teachers; therefore, they do not let errors be fossilized and in this way, they help learners successfully develop their interlanguage. Thus, it is necessary for teachers to describe error and error analysis and know what types of errors should be corrected.

Corrective feedback is a response to a learner's utterance that contains an error. According to Ellis, Loewen, and Erlam (2006), the responses are: a) To indicate that some errors have been occurred; b) To provide the correct form of target language; c) To provide metalinguistic information about the nature of error. Moreover, they believe that the responses will not necessarily target one of the purposes above that is the responses may target all purposes stated.

Long (1996) and Ellis et al. (2006) believed that corrective feedback has two types: explicit feedback (grammatical explanation or overt error correction) or implicit feedback, which includes confirmation checks, repetitions, recasts, clarification requests, silence, and even facial expressions indicating confusion.

### **Research Questions**

Based on the background stated earlier, this study aims to seek answers to the following research questions:

1. Does university EFL teachers' gender affect their use of corrective feedback?
2. Does university EFL teachers' teaching experience (experienced versus novice) affect their use of corrective feedback?
3. Does proficiency level of the EFL learners affect their perception about the role of corrective feedback in developing productive skills?
4. Does context of learning (university and private institute) affect the instructors' use of corrective feedback?

### **Significance of the study**

The importance of this study is because of the following reasons. First, in pedagogical view, it helps EFL learners and teachers become familiar with different types of oral and written feedback, and its importance in second language (L2) learning and to know what types of corrective feedback helps learners the most in their learning. Since most English as foreign language (EFL) teachers and learners are not familiar with different types of corrective feedback and its benefits in L2 learning, this study helps them to get more information about corrective feedback and become aware of this contributing factor in learning and teaching. Second, it helps EFL learners and teachers identify the best time for teacher-correction, peer-correction, or self-correction as well as the best time for giving feedback. Moreover, it helps identify who is the ideal choice to provide feedback.

### **Literature Review**

#### 2.1. Schools of thought in Second Language Acquisition (SLA)

There have been arguments about the role of corrective feedback in second language acquisition (SLA) for several years. Such arguments led to different theories about corrective feedback as follow: a) Nativist theory: Nativists believed that adults just correct the meaning of children's utterances; however, they will not correct grammatical errors. This theory also mentioned the significance of Chomsky's (1975) Universal Grammar. Chomsky believed that language is acquired via Universal Grammar. He continued that language learning happens in the learner's interlanguage due to the positive effect of linguistics; b) Cognitive theory: In 1990s, Nativists challenged with both experimental and theoretical research studies and have shown that direct teaching of grammar, error correction, and focus on form might foster SLA (Ellis, 1993, 1994; Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994; Long, 1996; Doughty & Varela, 1998; Schmidt, 1993 and 1995); c) Sociocultural theory: recently, SLA researchers have considered corrective feedback in the view of sociocultural theory. From this view, Aljaafreh, and Lantolf (1994) believed corrective feedback should focus on social relationship. Therefore, the result of corrective feedback is learning not determining its different types.

### **Theoretical studies about CF**

Researchers do not have similar ideas about the role of corrective feedback in SLA. For example, Krashen (1982) believed error correction is a serious mistake. He mentioned two viewpoints about error correction. At the first viewpoint, he believed that the effect of error correction is immediate; learners are defensive and try to use simple structures in order to decrease their errors whereas in the second viewpoint, he believed that only learned knowledge is taken into account and acquired knowledge has no role.

At first, Krashen (1994) believed feedback may be harmful and makes students anxious. By exposing to the right types of input and attitude, target language emerges naturally. According to what stated so far, there are two issues about errors correction including a) What types of errors should be corrected? b) Is it better to focus on corrective feedback (correcting all or a great number of errors produced by a learner) or leave it unfocused (the teacher does not correct all types of errors but he/she corrects just one or two types of them as an example)? To answer these issues, researchers presented different views. Burnt (1975) focused on correction of global rather than local errors. According to Corder (1967), errors not mistakes should be corrected. Lyster (1998) mentioned two characteristics for teachers who correct students' errors such as impression and inconsistency. Lightbown and Spada (1990) believed corrective feedback that is received by learners in communication is related to their correct utterances in communication.

### **Empirical studies**

The studies done by Tomasello and Herron (1989), Lightbown and Spada (1990), and White (1991) revealed that corrective feedback is very effective when it is accompanied with metalinguistic cues. Chaudron (1988) believed that the corrections should be clear, consistent, and focus on specific domains of errors that are useful in corrective feedback. His view echoes

Fanselow's (1977) recommendation which highlights giving explicit information in providing corrective feedback. On the other hand, Seedhouse (1997) recommended direct and overt CF for learners.

### Types of oral feedback

Lyster and Ranta (1997) defined six different kinds of CF including direct correction, recast, clarification request, meta-linguistic feedback, elicitation, and repetition. Furthermore, there are two more types of feedback including translation (Panova and Lyster, 2002) and paralinguistic sign (Ellis, 2007) as follow:

**Explicit correction:** is the teachers' feedback in which they explicitly correct the error utterances and provide the correct form of it. For example:

Student: I go to a zoo last Sunday.

Teacher: No! You should say "I went to a zoo last Sunday."

**Recast:** the teacher reformulates the whole or part of an erroneous utterance in the correct form. For example:

Teacher: What is the baby doing?

Student: The baby is cry.

Teacher: Yes, the baby is crying.

Long (1996) defined recast as an utterance that retells what students say, but one or more parts are changed, and these changing parts may be subject, verb, or object. His definition is in accordance with Lyster and Ranata (1997) and Spada and Frohlich's (1995) definition of recast in which the teacher reformulates all or part of the sentence minus the error. On the other hand, Otha (2001) said that recast is an immediate subsequent to erroneous utterance that may phonologically, morphologically, syntactically or semantically be in contrast with learner's utterance, but it is based on learners' erroneous utterances and its meaning does not change. On the other hand, Chaudron (1997) believed recast is repetition with change in some error parts. The teacher repeats students' error utterances in the correct form.

**Teacher Clarification request:** When teachers do not understand students' utterances or when utterances are partly ill formed, teachers ask students to reformulate or repeat their utterances. It is called teacher clarification request according to Spada and Frohlich (1995). Examples of such feedback phrases are "I don't understand", "Pardon me!", and "Could you repeat?" For example:

Student: Sunday I see movie.

Teacher: Could you repeat.

**Metalinguistic feedback:** it is explanation of errors, which occur in students' utterances, but the teacher does not correct them. Lyster and Ranta (1997) believed metalinguistic feedback could be in different forms such as commenting on the students' error, giving some information, or asking questions. For example:

Student: John buy some fruits.

Teacher: No, not buy.

Metalinguistic feedback can provide a grammatical description of ill-formed utterance or definition of a word if there is a lexical error. The following example is a metalinguistic feedback that provides the grammatical information:

Student: I go to a zoo last Sunday.

Teacher: Use past tense.

We can say that a metalinguistic question is similar to metalinguistic information. However, instead of providing correct form, the teacher tries to elicit correct forms from the student. For example:

Student: I go to a zoo last Sunday.

Teacher: Past tense?

**Elicitation feedback:** in which the teacher applies three methods in order to elicit the correct utterance from students. In the first technique, the teacher asks students to complete the teacher's partly utterance. For example:

Student: Tomorrow I bring the book.

Teacher: No, tomorrow I.....

In the second technique, the teacher asks questions to get the right utterance from the students. For example:

Student: I go to a zoo last Sunday.

Teacher: How do we say "go" in past tense?

The third technique is used when the teacher asks students to reformulate their initial utterances. For example:

Student: I goed to a zoo last Sunday.

Teacher: goed?

**Repetition feedback:** the teacher repeats students' wrong utterances in a way that she/he raises his/her voice to show there is an error in their utterances. For example:

Teacher: What is the baby doing?

Student: The baby is cry.

Teacher: The baby is cry? [Italic fonts show the increase of the teacher's voice].

**Translation:** In this technique, the learner uses his/her native language (L1). To some extent, it is similar to recast and teacher provides the correct form of the learner's L1 utterance while the student's L1 utterance may be grammatical or ungrammatical. The teacher responds in L1 because it is difficult for students to produce in the target language. For example:

Teacher: Where did you go last Sunday?

Student: I Saya pergi zoo. (in L1)

Teacher: You went to a zoo. (L2 translation)

Note: In Malaysian language, saya means "I" and pergi means "go", so the learners used the verb that is used in Malaysian language (native language) along with the subject in both target and native language simultaneously.

**Paralinguistic sign:** it is a kind of non-verbal CF in which teachers use facial expressions and gestures. Moreover, teachers may increase their voice intonation to show that a problem exists in students' utterances. For example:

Student: I go to a zoo yesterday.

Teacher: [show a signal such as pointing to his/her thumb at the back as an indicator to use past tense].

Scholars consider confirmation check, repetition, recast, clarification request, silence, and facial expression as implicit feedback. Rob et al. (1986) believed there was not any significant difference between explicit and implicit error correction in the learner's writing. On the other hand, Truscott (1999) said direct error correction is not useful because of its superficial or temporary changes in the learners' performance and may lead to negative affective reaction whereas Lightbown and Spada (1999) believed that corrective feedback or other indication of incorrectness in the learners' use of the target language is in different forms.

### **The role of evidence**

Evidence has an important role in conversion of input into acquisition and it is the object of many studies in SLA. Long (1996) provided a more comprehensive view about feedback. He

stated that environmental input could be divided into two categories: positive evidence and negative one. He defined the positive evidence as evidence, which provides a model of what is grammatical and acceptable in the target language for learners whereas negative evidence provides learners with direct or indirect information about what is unacceptable. This information is known as corrective feedback. Both negative and positive evidence have their own role in language learning, but there is a difference between L1 development and L2 learning.

### **Who should correct errors and when?**

Askew and Lodge (2000) considered the relationship between the teacher and learners as dynamic not just one-way transmitting of knowledge. Moreover, Holley and King (1971) believed classroom is an unnatural situation in which structural errors are corrected while the focus of learners who learn L2 in a natural environment is on intelligibility. Error correction by the students themselves or their classmates is more useful than error correction by teachers.

### **Self- correction**

In English Language Teaching (ELT), learners who believe in correction can improve their learning as mentioned by Chaudron (1988). Brown (2007) defined corrective feedback as teacher's response to what learners say that is called 'repair' or 'call attention' to errors they made. When an error happens in an ELT class, teacher, learner, or others might correct it. According to Sultana (2009), in self- correction, learners try to correct their errors. It occurs when teachers know there is an error in what learners said, in learners' pronunciation, in learners' vocabulary choice, etc., and correct it at once (Lam, 2006). The concept of the learner autonomy is related to self-correction. It encourages learners to correct their mistakes to become independent and activate their linguistic competence as stated by Makino (1993). Self-repair occurs when the feedback provided by the teacher does not produce right utterance, and promotes students to respond. The forms of feedback that help students repair their utterance are clarification requests, metalinguistic feedback, elicitation, repetitions, and paralinguistic cues. Some examples of error feedback sequences are provided below.

Example 1:

Student: Sunday I see movie.

Teacher: Could you repeat? (Clarification request)

Student: Hmmm... I saw a movie..... (Self-repair)

Example 2:

Student: John buy some fruits.

Teacher: No, not buy. (Metalinguistic)



Student: Sorry! Bought! (Self-repair)

According to Edwards (2000), Rief (1990), and Sultana (2009), nowadays there is collaboration in learner-centered classrooms and teachers pay attention to the autonomy of learners so self-correction is necessary.

### **Peer correction**

In peer correction, learners correct their classmates' error in face-to-face interaction and help them to have a high self-confidence, so they become independent. Although the teacher's corrective feedback moved from observation to experimental situation, research studies about the role of corrective feedback in L2 learning is remaining. Traditionally, teachers tried to survey negotiation of meaning in which peer interaction and interaction between learners and native speaker or teachers of L2 were investigated. Peer correction helps learners develop their L2. Varonis and Gass (1985) believed that the attention of L2 learners is more on communication breakdown rather than their interaction with native speakers. According to Pica et al. (1996), it leads to feedback in a peer interaction.

### **Learners and teachers' view about error correction**

Studies have shown that students are in favor of CF. Teachers give learners the opportunity to self-correct errors. If the learners fail to do it, the teacher asks other students to correct errors. Both SLA researchers and language educators have paid careful attention to CF, but they do not agree on the types of errors that should be corrected along with the way and the time to correct errors. Teacher's reason for providing CF developed in twenty years. Some of the researchers investigated different aspects of CF including teacher's reason (Chaudron, 1986), rationale (Fanselow, 1977), priority of CF and attitude (Nystrom, 1983), and awareness, beliefs, and perception (Long, 1977). Some other different aspects that are involved in CF include goal, requirement, and result.

Chaudron (1988) said learners believe error correction improves their learning and teachers specifies the best type and time of giving CF. On the other hand, Brown (2007) said that CF has to be "optimal" to be effective. It means if teachers correct all of the errors, learners are demotivated and a few error corrections lead to fossilization. Furthermore, Scrivener (1994) believed teachers determine time as well as the type of errors that need correction. It depends on the aim of the study, for example, if accuracy is important, errors should be corrected immediately, but if fluency is important, delayed error correction is suggested. Allwright (1975), Chaudron (1977), and Long (1977) stated some problems in using or not using CF in teaching foreign languages including: incongruity, ambiguity, and the way teachers correct errors.

According to Chaudron (1998), the important role of the teacher is provision of CF to the learners. Some researchers (Allwright, 1975; Chaudron, 1977, 1986; Fanselow, 1977; Long,



1977; Gaskill, 1980; Nystrom, 1983; Day, Chenoweth, Chun, and Luppescu, 1984) believed CF that was used for twenty years described how teachers should give feedback to their students. It also specified the appropriate time for error correction. After that, the focus has shifted and the researchers turned to the teacher's CF and its effect on learners' outcome (Tomasello and Herron (1989), Carroll, Swain, and Roberge (1992), Carroll and Swain, (1993), Spada and Lightbown (1999), Lyster and Ranta (1997), Doughty and Varela (1998), and Lyster (1998, 2001).

Russell (2009) considered Krashen, as one of the main supporters of "hand-off" approach in correcting errors. Krashen (1981, 1982) described errors in his Monitor Model. This model includes five hypotheses that affected teaching of language from three decades before. The acquisition Hypothesis differentiates between acquisition and learning. The former is subconscious process and is the same as the way a child learns a language and the latter is a conscious process that means the learner knows the rules and structures of a language. He believed acquisition is more important. He believed error correction should be minimal in classroom while errors should not be corrected in L2 acquisition. According to the Natural Order Hypothesis, learners get the rules and structures in a fixed order without any change through instruction. In Monitor Model Hypothesis, conscious learning means paying attention to the rules and grammatical forms of language, which are monitors that edit the output. In Input Hypothesis, Krashen mentioned (i+1) which denotes the input received by the learners should be higher than their current knowledge in order to develop competence. The Affective Filter Hypothesis pointed that anxiety increases the learner's effective filter, which hinders learners' fluency.

Furthermore, Ellis (2007) believed CF is a bridge between the teacher and SLA researcher's concern. The teacher's concern is about the way errors are corrected, how the errors are corrected, and when to correct errors whereas SLA researcher's concern includes whether CF is effective in the learner's IL development, and what the most effective type of CF is. However, there is no agreement between teachers and SLA researchers about how effective CF is, and how it promotes acquisition.

## **Methodology**

### **Participants**

Convenient sampling was used to select the participants. The researcher selected those who were available because it was difficult and time-consuming to select participants with specific characteristics. The participants of this study were thirty teachers in Iran Language Institute (ILI) in Darab, Shiraz, and Tonekabon; Navid Language Institute (NLI) in Darab and Shiraz; Zaban Sara in Jahrom, and Kish institute in Nooshahr. They all were teaching in upper-intermediate and advanced levels, both male and female in equal number. Furthermore, thirty university professors who were teaching writing, listening, and speaking courses in Islamic Azad University and Payame Noor University, both male and female in equal number, participated in this study. Moreover, 80 EFL learners in upper-intermediate and advanced levels, both male and

female in Islamic Azad university, Payame Noor university, ILI, NLI, Zaban Sara and Kish institutes were chosen for this study.

### Instrument

The present study employed a ready-made questionnaire called Affective and Effective Responses Feedback (AERF) developed by Titong (2011). The questionnaire includes 17 questions about oral corrective feedback, that was administered to teachers in the institutes and university professors to fill out and express their ideas about oral feedback that they provided to their students. Another questionnaire, which consists of 17 questions about oral corrective feedback, was administered to EFL learners; at the same time, the researcher administered an Oxford Placement Test (OPT) in order to determine their proficiency levels and to identify whether the difference in their level of proficiency has any effect on their idea about corrective feedback? After that, EFL learners were divided into two groups of high and low based on their level of proficiency. The data were collected in 2 months.

### Data Analysis

The aim of this study was to survey EFL teachers and learners' view about corrective feedback and its different types. To this end, descriptive and inferential statistics, including mean and independent sample t-test, have been applied to answer research questions

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To answer the first research question (Does university EFL teachers' gender affect their use of corrective feedback?), independent sample-test was used.

**Table1**

**T-test for the application of corrective feedback by male and female university EFL teacher**

		Number	Average	T	df	Probability
Using	Male	30	113.70			
CF	Female	30	108.79	1.810	54	0.076

CF= Corrective Feedback

Table 1 shows that there is not any significant difference between the use of corrective feedback by male and female university professors ( $t= 1.81$ ,  $sig. = 0.07$ ) since the probability is 0.076 and it is more than 0.05 ( $p > 0.05$ , significant level). Therefore, it is revealed that university professors' gender did not have any significant effect on the application of corrective feedback by university professors.

**Table 2**

**T-test for the application of corrective feedback by novice and experienced university EFL teacher**

		Number	Average	T	df	Probability
Using CF	Experienced university professors	48	110.96	0.127	58	0.899
	Novice university professor	12	111.44			

As illustrated in Table 2, probability is 0.899 and it is more than 0.05. Therefore, it is concluded that university professors' experience did not affect their application of corrective feedback.

**Table 3**

**T-test for perception of EFL learners about corrective feedback with regard to their proficiency level**

		Number	Average	T	df	Probability
Using CF	High proficiency level EFL learners	32	110.65	0.156	73	0.875
	Low proficiency level EFL learners	43	110.21			

As depicted in Table 3, the probability is 0.875 and it is a more than 0.05, so it indicates that the learners' proficiency level did not change the perception of the learners about the corrective feedback they received from their teacher.

**Table 4**

**T-test the application of corrective feedback with regard to context of teaching (private institutes and university)**

		Number	Average	T	df	Probability
Using CF	University	30	113.79			
	Private institute	30	110.48	0.470	58	0.640

As Table 4 shows, the probability got from t-test is 0.640 and it is more than significant level of testing (0.05). It reveals that the context of teaching did not affect the use of corrective feedback by instructors in private institutes and universities. Therefore, the environment in which teachers teach English (private institutes or universities) had no role in the application of corrective feedback.

### Conclusion

As was found in earlier part, teachers' experience did not show any effect on their perception about the application of corrective feedback. However, Mukundan and Pouriran (2012) 's study showed that experienced teachers significantly focused on form in comparison with inexperienced teachers. Moreover, our finding is in contrast with Evans, Hartshorn and Tuioti (2010)'s study. They believed experienced practitioners operated better than inexperienced ones. In line with the study done by Evans, Hartshorn, and Tuioti (2010), Norouz Kermanshahi and Pishghadam (2012) found that teachers' teaching experience had an important role on their error correction. Baleghizadeh and Rezaei (2010) also found that novice teachers have limited knowledge of corrective feedback.

The current study also revealed that teachers' gender did not have any effect on their perception about the application of corrective feedback. This view is supported by Zarei (2011) who did not find any relationship between males and females in their choice of correction strategy. Furthermore, the current study could not find any evidence to prove that learners' proficiency level will affect their perception about corrective feedback. This view is not supported by Bitchener, Cameron, and Young (2005). They believed that upper intermediate L2 writers have the ability in improving the accuracy of linguistic features by regular exposing to oral and

written CF. Zarei (2012) reported differences between male and female learners in using correction strategies. Females had higher tendency toward error correction even for unfrequen errors in comparison with males. Ahangari and Amirzadeh (2011) also believed that there is difference between learners' proficiency level and their application of CF.

Moreover, the current study depicted that learning environment has no role in the way errors are corrected. The result of this study is not aligned with Ajideh and Aghdam (2012) who found context as a contributing factor in treating learners' errors. As was stated earlier, experience, gender, educational setting and proficiency level did not show any significant role in perception of the learners and teachers. This finding may be due to unfamiliarity of the teachers and learners with oral and written corrective feedback. Therefore, it is necessary to highlight corrective feedback and its different strategies in teacher training courses. Curriculum designers and book developers should pay attention to correction strategies and corrective feedback in material development. In addition, Convenient sampling used in the study may be one of the reasons for such findings because convenient sampling may not produce representative results. It would be a good topic for further research if the researchers apply other sampling procedures and compare the results to see if the findings in this study are confirmed or rejected. Moreover, this study only applied questionnaire. Questionnaires need to be validated and short. As the questionnaire used in this study was a bit long, it may make respondents tired. Tiredness may cause carelessness in answering the questionnaire. So it is suggested to other researchers to provide a shorter version of the questionnaires applied in the present study and replicate the study to see if the findings differ.

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