Perceptions of Oral Corrective Feedback. A Comparative Study of Beginner vs. Intermediate EFL Undergraduate Students

Percepción sobre realimentación oral correctiva en inglés. Estudio comparativo entre estudiantes universitarios principiantes e intermedios

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the preferences of college English as a Foreign Language learners regarding oral corrective feedback (OCF), an important component of language acquisition. The research followed a cross-sectional design with a qualitative approach. The study aimed to determine the overall perception of B1 level students about OCF, the types of errors they considered worthy of correction, and their preferences for types of oral correction. Findings were compared to the results of a previous study conducted by the researcher in 2023 with A1 learners. Data revealed that intermediate-level students, similar to beginners, have a very positive perception of the importance of OCF in language development. Further, the learners appreciated correcting all types of errors, with a higher emphasis on pronunciation-related ones. In both cohorts, the preferred type was explicit correction, while the least liked were indirect methods. These findings provide valuable insights for instructors and researchers in the field.

Keywords: oral corrective feedback, perception, frequency of feedback, type of feedback, EFL students

RESUMEN

El propósito del estudio fue comparar la percepción de estudiantes universitarios principiantes e intermedios acerca de la realimentación oral correctiva que reciben en las clases de inglés. Mediante una investigación transversal de carácter cualitativo, se escogió una muestra de alumnos de nivel B1 a quienes se les interrogó sobre la importancia de la corrección, los tipos de error que merecen corrección y preferencia en tipos de corrección. La comparación de resultados de 2023 con principiantes y esta cohorte arrojó hallazgos similares: la percepción es altamente positiva y los estudiantes desean que todos sus errores sean señalados; en el caso del nivel superior, hay un énfasis en el área de pronunciación. Los tipos de corrección preferidos en ambos niveles fueron los directos y claros, siendo los tipos de corrección indirectos menos favorecidos. Los hallazgos aportan a la escaza información existente sobre la perspectiva estudiantil beneficiando a docentes e investigadores.

Palabras clave: corrección oral, realimentación, percepción, tipo de corrección, frecuencia de corrección

INTRODUCTION

Language instructors and linguists have extensively discussed and researched the provision of feedback and error correction in language teaching. Teachers are concerned with correcting learners' errors and the appropriate timing and method (Ellis, 2017b). Second language acquisition (SLA) researchers seek to test various theories of L2 acquisition that offer differing perspectives on the impact of corrective feedback (CF) on the acquisition process and wish to determine which type of CF is most effective (Ellis, 2017b).

Ever since Hendrickson published his article on error correction, there seems to be consensus on the benefits of error amendment by professors because it creates awareness of the language functions and reinforces correct linguistic forms (as cited in Ellis, 2017a). The discussion arises on the complexity of the phenomenon and the ample variety of ways to address the issue because some of the errors committed by English learners can be construed as more serious than others, especially those that impair communication (Khansir, 2022).

Teachers tend to be cautious in the amount and way in which they indicate deviations in the usage of language, fearful not to cause anxiety in the learners who are struggling with a new language, aware of the effects of the affective filter on the acquisition of language (Krashen, 2009). Instructors tend to be more concerned with avoiding interruptions in communication (Quinto, 2020). Given this quandary, numerous descriptive studies have dealt with this issue over the last fifty years, exposing two general features of teachers' error correction-imprecision and inconsistency (Ellis, 2017a). Clearly, there is a grey area in the management of errors in the EFL classroom, and trainers generally rely on their own preferences or experts' suggestions for providing oral feedback and often struggle to define what errors to correct, when to correct, and how to do so.

Considering its importance, empirical research has described the most common types of error correction, teachers' perspectives on OCF, and the correlation between pedagogical practices and error correction. Some studies have even revealed a disparity in the facilitators' opinions as opposed to that of their students (Burri, 2022; Gutierrez et al., 2021; Ha & Nguyen, 2021; Inci-Kavak, 2019; Katayama, 2007; Lee, 2013; Tsuneyasu, 2016). More recently several investigations have focused on the opinion of learners about OCF in different contexts (Aguilera Leyva, 2020; AlGhafri et al., 2023; Alpian Sari et al., 2022; Anaktototy & Latumeten, 2022; Aziz & Jayaputri, 2023; Fajriana Tajir et al., 2023; Halim et al., 2021; Paul & Al-Mamun, 2024); some variables that affect the attitude that learners have about error correction, such as adverse opinion about grammar instruction, negative perspective on correction and others have been identified (Loewen et al., 2009).

Despite growing interest in understanding learners' perceptions of oral corrective feedback (OCF), research in the Latin American context remains scarce, with the exception of the study by Gutiérrez et al. (2021) in Chile. This gap prompted an investigation conducted by the researcher in 2023, which focused on beginner EFL students' perceptions of OCF at two private universities in San José, Costa Rica. The findings revealed that learners hold a highly optimistic view of corrective feedback and recognize the importance of receiving immediate correction for grammar inconsistencies, vocabulary use, and pronunciation errors from their instructors. The results also demonstrated a preference for explicit correction, followed by recasts and clarification requests, suggesting that A1/A2 learners favor more direct feedback approaches and are less responsive to more subtle error correction methods, such as metalinguistic explanations or non-verbal cues.

The purpose of the current study is to investigate further, considering intermediate EFL learners (B1) in the same context, to compare their perspectives and discover if there is a connection between the level of proficiency and the way students perceive OCF.

The same research questions used in the previous study guided the investigation:

1. What is the general attitude toward oral corrective feedback among intermediate EFL students in two Costa Rican private universities?
2. To what extent do these students prefer to be corrected?
3. Which errors students consider should be prioritized in their correction (pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar)?
4. What are the students' preferences for error correction methods?
5. Do students perceive corrective feedback as effective for improving oral communication at intermediate levels?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Errors

As the perspectives on language acquisition have evolved, the overview of errors' role in the process has also shifted. Behaviorists proclaimed zero tolerance for learner errors, insisting that students had to follow structural norms and considering L1 to be the foremost source of errors (Han, 2021). When Chomsky proposed his Universal Grammar concept, errors were interpreted to create language hypotheses upon which learners progress in language acquisition. The evolving view on learner error eventually eradicated the perception that errors are a negative occurrence, considering them a window into the learning process. Corder (1967) has been credited for being the first to elaborate on the significance of learner errors (Han, 2021). He was one of the first experts to differentiate systematic errors from non-systematic errors or mistakes (Corder, 1967, as cited in Kryeziu, 2021). In general, facilitators tend to focus on errors of competence, not on mistakes or errors of performance. A significant source of inaccuracies described in the literature is interference in the mother tongue, lack of knowledge, or insufficient practice in grammar, particularly in English tenses (Amara, 2015; Khansir, 2022).

Learners' errors can be classified into multiple categories. Burt (1975 cited in Amara, 2015) made a distinction between "global" and "local" errors. The first hinders communication, and they prevent good communication. Local errors only affect a single element of a sentence, thus not impeding a message from being delivered. There are several types of errors found in learners' production: morpho-syntactic or grammar errors; phonologically induced errors, very frequent in beginner students and prone to fossilization if not addressed properly; lexical errors which frequently induce miscommunication; and discourse errors, especially on spoken discourse, which are generally addressed at the end of an oral presentation.

This study included only the first three types, given its focus on immediate oral correction. Delayed feedback was not considered.

Oral Corrective Feedback

Chaudron (1977) described corrective feedback as "any reaction of the teacher which clearly transforms, disapprovingly refers to, or demands improvement of the learner utterance" (p. 31). Therefore, corrective feedback is a response to a learner's erroneous remarks mainly in four ways described by Rahimi and Dastjerdi (2012): 1) indicating where the error occurred, 2) providing the correct structure, 3) giving metalinguistic information on the error, or 4) any combination of these (cited in Fathimah, 2019).

Part of the ongoing discussion is the value of corrective feedback (Ellis, 2017a). Some schools of thought, such as Krashen's (2009) and Truscott's (1999), insist on the futility of error correction in language acquisition, not to mention that it is excessively time-consuming. Conversely, fear of fossilization might encourage some instructors to overcorrect (Babushko & Solovei, 2020).

Furthermore, some empirical investigations have evidenced that students who receive corrective feedback while performing communicative activities improved over groups that did not (Lyster & Saito, 2010; Spada & Lightbown, cited in Ellis, 2017a.; Ugalde, 2023).

Concerning oral corrective feedback (OCF), Doughty (cited in Tesnim, 2019) insisted on opportune correction to allow learners to connect form and meaning since delayed corrective feedback would only benefit focus on form.

Types of corrective feedback

Lyster and Ranta's research (1997) on instructor responses to student mistakes in French immersion programs sparked widespread academic interest in OCF. Their work introduced key conceptual frameworks that have since become fundamental to Corrective Feedback studies, including a classification system for CF methods and the concept of learner uptake (Nikouee & Ranta, 2020).

In the current study, the following six different types of oral corrective feedback were presented to the students for their appraisal, reproducing the classification proposed by Lyster and Ranta (1997):

6. Explicit correction refers to a clear, direct indication from the professor showing the learner that there is an incorrect utterance and the subsequent provision of the correct form.
7. Recast involves the teacher reformulation of the student's utterance and correcting the error.
8. As the name indicates, a clarification request involves instructors indicating that the utterance is unclear or incorrect, usually in the form of a question.

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9. Elicitation has three variating techniques: a) teachers repeat the incorrect utterance, pausing at the error, eliciting completion by students; b) teachers use questions to elicit correct forms (e.g.: "How do you say...?"), and c) teachers occasionally ask directly to reformulate the utterance.

10. Repetition occurs when instructors repeat the incorrect utterance, emphasizing the mistake.

11. Metalinguistic correction refers to the linguistic nature of the error; facilitators make comments and provide information or questions related to the correctness of the student's production, thus relying on linguistic competence (e.g.: "An adverb is needed; you are using an adjective").

An extra method was incorporated into the questionnaire for the participants: the use of nonverbal cues. On occasions, professors use body language to indicate a deviation, maybe shaking their heads, making a gesture, or frowning their eyebrows in the hope that learners interpret the need for self-correction. Thompson and Renandya (2020) suggest that gestures can effectively indicate a pronunciation error.

METHODOLOGY

This research is descriptive, cross-sectional, and quantitative in nature. It replicated the investigation conducted by the researcher in 2023, modifying the selected population from beginner to intermediate level of language proficiency.

Participants in this case were twenty-one university EFL students ranging from eighteen to forty-two, registered in one of the courses Level 3 and Level 4 of English as a Foreign Language corresponding to level B1 in the CEFR of language proficiency. The previous study considered more than 140 similar students in the A1/A2 levels. All were taking the mandatory courses as part of the program offered by two private universities for students of diverse majors. A non-probabilistic sampling method was chosen for convenience, representing the students willing to participate voluntarily after explaining the research characteristics and agreeing to informed consent.

To prevent any misunderstanding, the instrument was applied in their native language (Spanish). The first section includes demographic information regarding age, gender, major studies, and course level.

The second section addressed the students' general opinions on correcting oral errors in the classroom and its effectiveness in improving proficiency. It contained five statements using a Likert scale ranging from completely disagree (1) to completely agree (5). The students were asked whether all errors should be corrected and if the error correction had an impact on their language development. They were also asked the frequency of correction (i.e., constantly or selectively).

The third section addressed students' opinions on OCF of grammar, phonology (pronunciation and intonation), and vocabulary. The partakers rated each item on a 5-point scale, where 1 represented never and 5 represented always regarding preferred correction frequency.

The last section requested participants to rate, using a Likert scale ranging from 1, representing poor, to 5, representing excellent, according to their preference for the types of error correction described by Lyster and Ranta (1997), plus two more options: non-verbal cues and no correction at all.

The instrument used was the same one utilized in the previous research, which was validated by expert assessment involving the collection of well-founded opinions from individuals widely recognized as specialists in the field, following the approach proposed by Escobar-Pérez and Cuervo-Martínez (2008). Additionally, a pilot study was conducted at that time with the participation of five students, each selected through non-probabilistic convenience sampling, who were not part of the study's main sample.

Data analysis included descriptive statistics to calculate the relative frequency for easier understanding of the data, using graphs to better represent the findings obtained.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Demographic data

Criterion					
Gender		Female		Male	Prefer not to say
		52 %		48 %	0
Age range	**18-21**	**22-25**	**26-29**	**30-33**	**42 +**
	47.6 %	19 %	19 %	9.5 %	4.8 %
Course taken		Level 3		Level 4	
		62 %		38 %	
N = 21					

Source: *applied questionnaire*

The majority of the sample were young adults between the ages of 18 and 21. Eighty-one percent attended Universidad Latina de Costa Rica, while 19 % attended Universidad Americana. The majors included business administration, advertisement, graphic design and digital animation, psychology, engineering, and journalism, with the mode being engineering.

Figure 1. Students' opinion about the importance of oral corrective feedback in the classroom
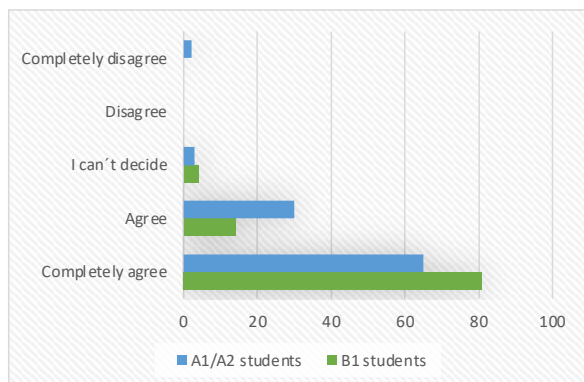
Source: *applied questionnaire. Data in relative frequency*

Figure one compares B1, who participated in this research, and A1/A2 from the previous study. Evidently, the students responded very positively to immediate oral corrective feedback, and there were no negative opinions. The more advanced students have a slightly higher positive reaction. The findings coincide with reports from several empirical studies spanning from 2019 to 2024, where scholars from different geographical areas and cultural backgrounds have found that EFL learners with different ages, genders, and proficiency levels demonstrate a positive attitude toward error correction (AlGhafri et al., 2023; Alpian Sari et al., 2022; Anaktototy & Latumeten, 2022; Aziz & Jayaputri, 2023; Babushko & Solovei, 2020; Fajriana Tahir et al., 2023; Muslim et al., 2021; Paul & Al-Mamun, 2024; Rahmawati, 2023; Roothooft & Breeze, 2016; Saeli et al., 2024; Vattøy, 2019). Shobaha (2019) even reported 100 % acceptance of correction in their investigation. Arumugam (2022), on the other hand, found that students with an advanced level of proficiency have a negative view of using OCF.

Figure 2. Students' opinions about corrective feedback contribute to the improvement of their proficiency
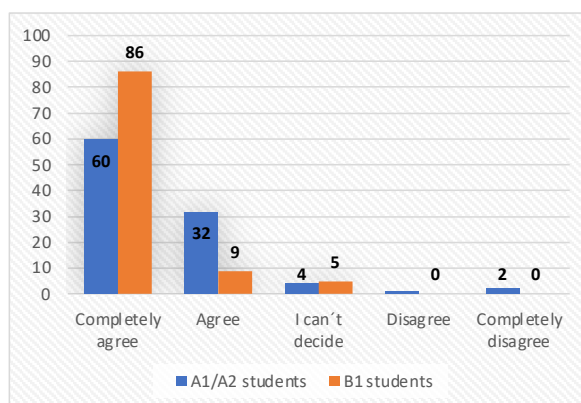
Source: *applied questionnaires. Data in relative frequency*

Similarly, the perception that proficiency is enhanced by feedback, shown in Figure 2, is equally positive in both groups, consistent with the findings of Anaktototy and Latumeten (2022), Aziz and Jayaputri (2023), Fadilah et al. (2017), Ferreiro Santamaría (2023), Gamlo (2019), Gutierrez et al. (2020), Katayama (2007), Muslim et al. (2021), Mulyani et al. (2022), Muyashoha & Sugianto (2019), Sánchez Centeno & Barbeito (2021), Skender (2022), Van Ha et al. (2021) and Wiyati & Padzilah Nur (2020).

**Figure 3. Students' opinion on always correcting errors**
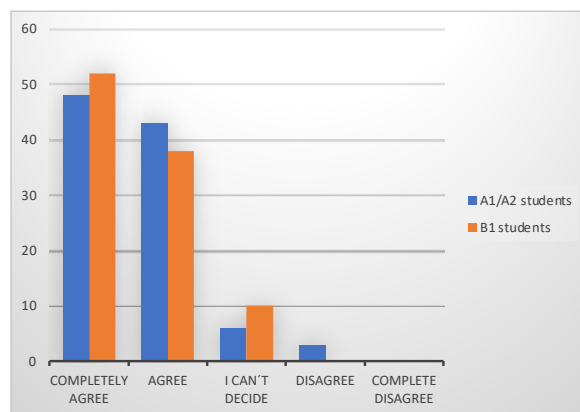
Source: *applied questionnaires. Data in relative frequency*

Regarding the frequency of correction (seen in Figure 3), in the beginners, 91 % completely agree or agree with constant OCF, while in the intermediate group, 90 % of the participants agree or agree with constant OCF, which is a considerable majority. This indicates confirmation that students expect corrective feedback and they consider it to be part of

the teaching process, consistent with Alpian & Sari (2022), Asmara et al. (2022), Gamlo (2019), Putra & Salikin (2020), and Rochma (2023).

Figure 4. Opinions on whether professors should address all errors
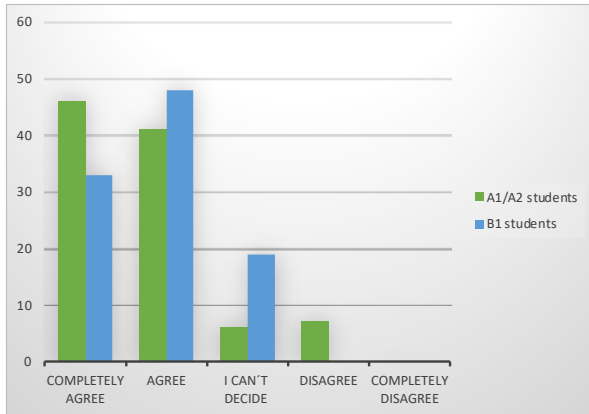
Source: applied questionnaire. Data in relative frequency

As seen in Figure 4, the majority of both cohorts agreed with the statement, "I believe all oral mistakes should be corrected", and a large portion agreed. Once again, there are a few disagreements with error correction in class at the lower level. This finding is corroborated by responses to a follow-up inquiry concerning the categories of errors worthy of correction, as depicted in figures 6 and 7. Analogous observations were reported by Park (2010) and Skender (2022), who noted that learners prefer consistent error correction by instructors. Their studies indicate that students favor correction for every error or the majority of mistakes made rather than solely when communication efficacy is compromised.

Figure 5. Students' opinion on the time of correction (immediate error correction)
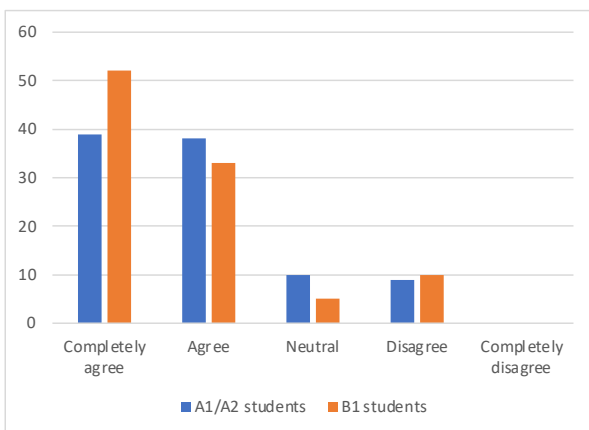
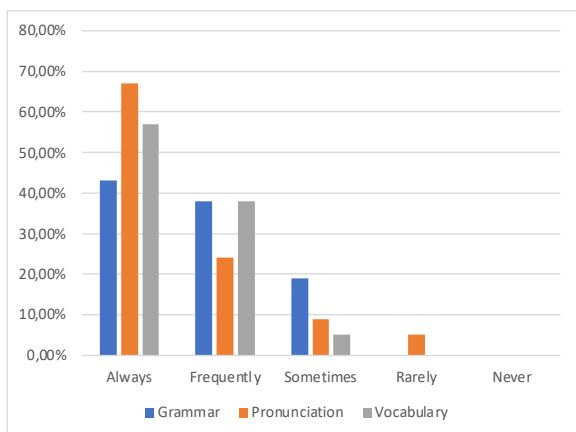*Source: applied questionnaires. Data in relative frequency*

In terms of the moment of correction, visible in Figure 5, there was an unstated hypothesis that students might prefer delayed feedback and not accept immediate correction because in high context cultures, "people typically speak sequentially…, so the speaker is rarely interrupted" (Zakirovich, 2023, p. 53). Despite this fact, of the beginner students, 39.4 % agreed utterly, and 38.7 % agreed with the teacher's immediate corrective feedback. In the more advanced group, 52 % of the participants ultimately agreed, and 33 % agreed that the correction should be immediate, with only 10 % manifesting disagreement. The findings are consistent with Alamri & Fauwzi (2016), Asmara et al. (2022), Lee (2013), and Van Ha et al. (2021). Studies by Gamlo (2019), Halim et al. (2021), Rochma (2023), Syakira & Nur (2021), and Wiboolyasarin et al. (2020) confirm this tendency, but opposite findings were described by Putra & Salikin (2020), and Syakira & Nur (2021) where the participants seemed to prefer delayed OCF. The investigation by Shobaha (2019) reported that students welcome corrective feedback anytime, whether it is delivered immediately or delayed.

Figure 6. A1/A2 Student's opinion on which errors require more attention
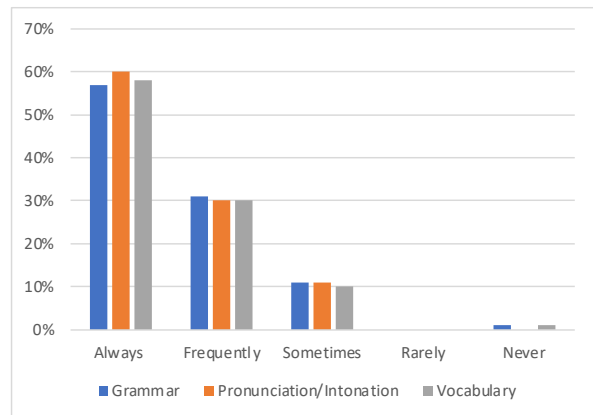
Source: applied questionnaire. Data in relative frequency

**Figure 7. B1 student's opinion on which errors require more attention**

The study participants were requested to indicate which errors they believe should be corrected, including grammar, phonology, and vocabulary. The results evidence that in the first cohort all types of errors have a very similar value, indicating that they consider all types or errors as worthy of attention, similar to findings by Katayama (2007) that suggest EFL students wanted all errors to be corrected and aligned to several other empirical studies (Ferreiro-Santamaría, 2023; Gamlo, 2019; Mawarni & Murtafi'ah, 2023; Nhac, 2022; Rochma, 2023). In the second group, even though the appraisals are quite elevated in all three categories, there is a preponderance of correction of pronunciation errors, which aligns with Arumugam (2022), Saeli et al. (2024) and Stuckel (2022), who reported that intermediate-level students responded positively when asked whether they would like to receive correction for pronunciation-related errors.

These results may indicate that once learners achieve an intermediate level, their confidence in their command of vocabulary and grammar structures is higher, and they consider that they should focus more on improving pronunciation, which resonates with Yurtbasi's (2017) appreciation of the importance of correcting segmental and suprasegmental mistakes.
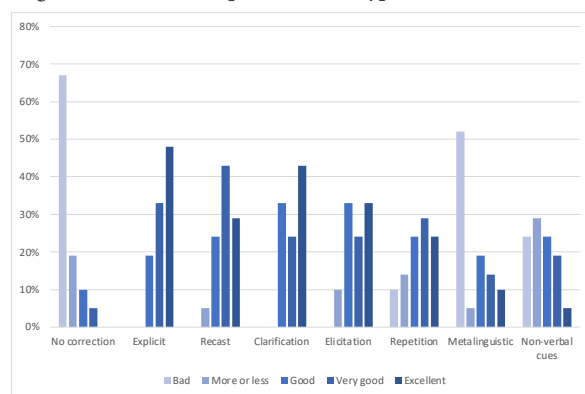
Regarding preferences on the type of error correction, the students were requested to evaluate seven categories of error correction, as classified by Lyster & Ranta (1997), which are commonly employed by academic instructors.

Figure 8. A1/A2 Learners' preference on types of error correction
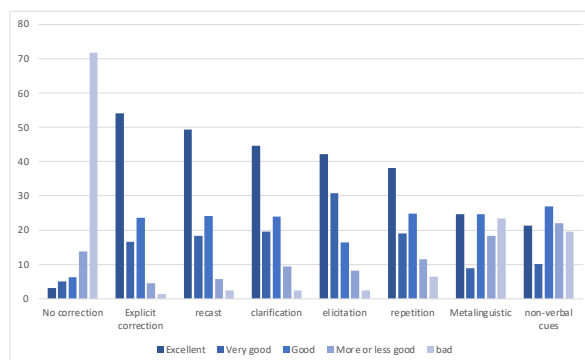
Figure 9. B1 Learners' preference on types of error correction

In the first study, the results visible in Figure 8 reveal that the three preferred methods were explicit correction (54.1 % in excellent appraisal), recast (49.4 %), and clarification (44.7 %), followed by elicitation (42.1 %). Metalinguistic feedback and non-verbal cues were valued in a low rank. Given the learners' proficiency level, it seems reasonable to expect that they would prefer more direct methods of correction and not appreciate indications that imply a knowledge of linguistic or morphological aspects. As illustrated in Figure 9, explicit correction emerged as the primary preference at the higher level, followed by clarification requests. Recast techniques were positioned in the third rank of preference. Repetition strategies occupied the fourth position in this hierarchy.

Nonverbal cues were incorporated into the study due to their prevalent usage among facilitators, as they do not disrupt the continuity of students' oral discourse. Ergul (2023) demonstrated that certain nonverbal behaviors, such as teacher smiling,

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significantly influenced learners' self-correction processes. Beginner students in this study, on the contrary, did not perceive nonverbal signals as an efficacious technique for oral corrective feedback (OCF), potentially due to their subtle nature and the possibility of being imperceptible to students. The non-verbal cues population garnered some favorable assessment at the higher level, albeit not ranking among the most preferred methodologies.

To corroborate learners' esteem for immediate oral corrective feedback, the instrument included the option of teachers ignoring the mistake. This option was ranked as a very poor strategy in both cohorts, as confirmed by Alamri & Fawzi (2016) and Quinto (2020).

Favored correction methods are the most direct and clear in both cohorts. Learners would understand oral corrective feedback, such as explicit indication or recast or even clarification and elicitation, over more subtle correction, such as metalinguistic indications, which require a higher level of linguistic competence to be understood. Similar perceptions were reported in various studies (Alpian & Sari, 2022; Asmara et al., 2022; Muhsin, 2016; Muslem et al., 2021; Muti'ah & Azizah, 2024; Park, 2010; Rahmawati, 2023; Roothooft & Breeze, 2016; Septianisa, 2021). Additionally, investigations carried out by Burri (2022), Rochma (2023), and Shobaha (2019) have identified recast correction as the predominant preference among their respective study participants. Furthermore, Nasajin's (2017) findings, derived from a quasi-experimental research design, demonstrated that the cohort receiving extensive recast significantly outperformed the control group. This outcome lends credence to the notion that direct corrective methodology is efficacious.

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of the current study was to inquire about intermediate learners' perceptions of OCF and contrast them to those of lower-level students of EFL to shed some light on the provision of feedback. The findings provide interesting overviews that can aid professors in the selection of appropriate methods to provide feedback in class, considering students' expectations, which are rarely taken into consideration.

Findings point out a highly positive perspective of OCF by learners at beginner and intermediate

levels in the Costa Rican context, which is the pattern in most reviewed studies. Learners expect and appreciate these immediate interventions when they deviate from correct utterances in English because they are aware of the importance of error correction in language development.

Contrary to what could be the general belief among teachers, students favor immediate correction of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation errors at the time when they are committed. Interestingly, correct pronunciation is of elevated concern for intermediate students instead of the lower level. Students favor constant correction and value that their facilitators mend all errors when they occur. Letting errors slip by when not relevant to communication is not considered a good strategy by the learners.

It is concluded that learners prefer more direct OCF techniques, such as explicit correction, recast, and elicitation, regardless of proficiency level, coinciding with Jusa & Kuang (2016) and Watcharapol et al. (2023). Neither cohort favored indirect forms such as metalinguistic correction or non-verbal cues.

These observed similarities and differences in corrective feedback preferences between learners at varying proficiency levels contribute to the growing literature on adult English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students' perspectives regarding oral error correction. In accordance with Quinto's recommendations (2020), educators are advised to employ a diverse array of oral corrective feedback strategies. This approach should be based not solely on the instructors' personal convictions regarding error correction methodologies but should also take into account the individual preferences expressed by their students.

The study's limitations involve the reduced number of participants. Further research involving a larger number of students would reveal a more robust result.

Additional research could also explore the impact of age or gender on learners' perspectives. Findings by Babushko and Solovei (2020) report that older students are better at being corrected than younger ones.

Another angle for subsequent inquiry could consider the respondents' future professions since this could also influence learners' attitudes toward correcting errors.

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