

# EFL Learners' Preferences of Corrective Feedback in Speaking Activities

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## Abstract

This study examines the preferences and perceptions of Saudi EFL learners concerning the use of Corrective Feedback (CF) during speaking activities. The participants consisted of sixty EFL pre-intermediate female learners in their preparatory year at the English Language Institute (ELI) in King Abdulaziz University in Saudi Arabia. The study utilized both quantitative and qualitative approaches, including a questionnaire to establish learners' CF preferences when it came to the correction of errors during speaking activities, followed by interviews with ten learners to establish additional information on, and the reasons for, these preferences. The findings revealed that the students held a positive attitude to CF during speaking activities, strongly agreeing that their teachers' CF could improve their speaking skills. The study also found that students preferred CF to be immediate and to be given by their teachers, who they considered the most qualified to provide such feedback. In addition, the majority of respondents favored receiving CF on their oral grammatical errors. This study provides beneficial information concerning students' preferences towards the use of CF during speaking activities. This has the potential to contribute to EFL classroom practice, enabling teachers to reevaluate their instruction, particularly in relation to speaking skills, in order to improve speaking proficiency. Moreover, these results contribute to the literature focusing on EFL learners' preferences when it comes to the use of the CF in English speaking classes in Saudi Arabia.

**Keywords:** corrective feedback, errors, speaking, EFL learners, learners' perceptions, Saudi Arabia, learners' preferences

## 1. Introduction

Many non-native speakers wish to acquire both fluency and accuracy in the English language, which requires proficiency in all language skills. The most important of these is the ability to speak fluently, which has remained a challenge for EFL/ESL learners, including those in Saudi Arabia. Such learners are also aware that it is vital to avoid errors when speaking, particularly as this enables them to communicate with native English speakers in Saudi Arabia, as well as when studying or holidaying abroad, or using social media to exchange knowledge and learn about different cultures. Fan (2019) stressed the importance of addressing the prevention of errors when speaking and listening, both during lessons and when taking examinations, particularly for those intending to study abroad. According to the current researcher, students at English language institutes face a number of challenges relating to grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary, with most being unable to avoid errors during speaking activities, thus resulting in a negative impact on their final scores. This leads to considerable stress for students, due to their wish gain high scores in order to specialize in their preferred subject, while speaking also represents one third of their final score. However, errors continue to reoccur, resulting in the need for educators and researchers to pay serious attention to the issue of language learning, in particular the use of Corrective Feedback (CF) to encourage learners recognize their errors, and so improve speaking proficiency. To this end, research into CF has recommended instructors facilitate learning by addressing language learners' speaking errors as they occur (e.g. Coskun, 2010; Martin & Valdivia, 2017; Papangkorn, 2015).

Furthermore, it is important to undertake an in-depth study of learners' speaking errors, in order to identify methods of improving fluency and accuracy. Teachers should utilize every available CF strategy to help students recognize their oral errors, thus assisting them in producing a correct version of the language (Fan, 2019). However, teachers' CF can prove demotivating for students during oral work, inhibiting them and potentially leading to an increased number of mistakes. Ananda et al. (2017) stated that, in order to create successful learning outcomes, teachers need to establish their students' preferred oral CF strategy. This current study therefore highlights Saudi EFL learners'

perceptions of CF during speaking activities in the classroom, including their preferences, so providing teachers with a number of practical insights. It is vital to examine such preferences and perceptions in order to establish the most effective method of giving feedback, including the most effective timing, students' preferred provider of CF and the type of oral errors requiring CF. To the best of the current researcher's knowledge, there has been little previous research into EFL learners' perceptions of CF during oral activities in the Saudi Arabian context (Alhaysony, 2016). This study therefore addresses this gap in the literature.

The study focused on the following questions:

1. How do Saudi EFL learners perceive corrective feedback during speaking activities?
2. What are students' preferences when it comes to corrective feedback during speaking activities?

## 2. Literature Review

This section firstly, discusses the literature concerning oral CF in relation to EFL learners' perceptions of the correction of speaking errors, particularly in relation to Faqeih's (2015) statement that it is crucial to understand learners' perceptions of the use of CF, as this can influence both its impact and uptake. Secondly, there is a discussion of learners' preferences when it comes to the timing of CF, as well as the person most appropriate to deliver CF and the types of errors requiring CF.

### 2.1 EFL Learners' Perceptions of Oral CF

The literature contains a broad discussion of the opportunities offered by CF when developing proficiency in a language (e.g. Degirmenci Uysal, 2017; Fan, 2019; Hussein & Ali, 2014; Lyster et al., 2013; Milla & Mayo, 2014; Septiana et al. 2016; Suryoputro & Amaliah, 2016). In Indonesia, Suryoputro & Amaliah (2016) conducted a study to explore the uptake of oral CF among EFL diploma students, who agreed that oral CF has a number of advantages for the development of speaking skills. The students believed that oral CF improved: (1) their awareness of errors; (2) their motivation to engage in conversation; (3) their grammar and pronunciation; and (4) their vocabulary (Suryoputro & Amaliah, 2016).

Most research concerning learners' perception of oral CF has recorded a positive attitude towards oral CF, including as a significant strategy in the learning process (e.g. Alhaysony, 2016; Azad & Kalam, 2016; Faqeih, 2015; Lee, 2016; Muslem et al., 2017; Septiana et al. 2016). However, the findings differ in relation to the amount of CF and the specific techniques employed. Septiana et al.'s (2016) study of the use of CF in junior and senior high schools in Banda Aceh found that students appreciated their teachers' frequent feedback, considering that it had a positive impact on developing their speaking skills, but they also believed that their teachers should then allow them to self-correct such errors. The authors concluded that teachers need to be highly sensitive when it comes to addressing students' errors in order to avoid negative outcomes. Azad & Kalam (2016) examined the perceptions of sixty-eight EFL undergraduates in a university in Bangladesh towards the use of oral CF. The authors recorded that the students demonstrated positive perceptions, along with a willingness to receive immediate correction, including their teachers pointing out errors and subsequently providing them with the correct form.

However, it is significant that more advanced students have been found to express different views of oral CF. Lee (2016) explored the views of sixty ESL students enrolled on an intensive English language program in the USA, with the aim of being able to successfully complete their PhDs. The students found the student-teacher instruction used in the program (which differed from their previous experience of teacher-centered instruction) to be beneficial. The students believed that interaction between teachers and students ensured oral CF was more effective when it came to developing speaking proficiency. The students added that they enjoyed their American oral CF because it stressed language errors and pronunciation, unlike their none-native English teachers who tended to correct their grammar, which the students felt did not help them in developing their speaking skills.

A number of studies have compared the perceptions of students and their teachers. Roothoof and Breeze (2016) stated that incompatible attitudes between teachers and students related to the use of CF during speaking activities can have a negative impact on teaching objectives. This also provides pedagogical implications for teachers during oral CF, as well as for language teaching in general (Wang et al., 2018). A survey conducted by Roothoof and Breeze (2016) examined 395 students and forty-six teachers of English at secondary schools and private language academies in Spain. The authors found that teachers were hesitant to provide oral CF in an explicit manner, due to wishing to improve their students' speaking skills without causing them any embarrassment. By contrast, however, their students expressed a positive approach to receiving explicit oral CF, viewing it as neither embarrassing nor hurtful.

## 2.2 EFL Learners' Preferences of Oral CF

Various researchers have examined EFL learners' preferences concerning oral CF, in order to obtain additional insights into learners' preferences when it comes to addressing their oral errors, and the ways oral CF can be improved for the enhancement of speaking proficiency. Amalia et al. (2019) suggested the need to investigate students' preferences and expectations, in order to provide beneficial forms of oral CF. Katayama (2007) conducted a study on 588 EFL Japanese students from several universities, with the aim of understanding their preferences in relation to different methods of oral CF. The author found that students required their teachers to give them CF on all speaking errors, but, due to the large class sizes, this was not possible. In addition, students found corrections given from both their teachers and their peers to be beneficial. Japanese EFL students also expressed a preference for their vocabulary errors to be corrected by their teachers, as well as being given an explanation as to why their utterances were incorrect, or given hints to facilitate self-correction.

Several studies have examined students' preferences when it comes to the timing of oral CF. Jing et al. (2016) argued that teachers should focus on establishing the most effective time to provide CF for students' oral productions, in order to improve the learning environment. El çın and Öztürk (2016) found that EFL students preferred delayed oral CF (i.e. a teacher waiting until the student has completed his/her utterances before offering corrections), as this prevents students from being interrupted or embarrassed. Similarly, in a study held in a university in Thailand, Papangkorn (2015) found that male and female EFL learners preferred their teachers to offer CF after they had completed their speaking task, finding this the most effective time to correct oral errors. On the other hand, Gómez Argüelles et al. (2019) found that EFL teachers preferred giving oral CF at the end of the class, due to viewing immediate CF as having the potential to hurt their students' feelings. Alzeebaree1 et al. (2018) found that Kurdish EFL teachers preferred to give their students immediate CF on their spoken errors. The students studied by Ananda et al. (2017) also considered immediate oral CF to be the most effective strategy, believing that delayed CF led them to forget their errors. Several studies found that some students preferred being given written CF on oral work following the end of the lesson. Garc á and Mart ínez (2018) established that Mexican EFL undergraduates liked their teacher to give them CF in a written form one week and then three weeks following their classroom oral activities. The authors believed that students' satisfaction with the delayed written CF was due to it being clear and prevented them from experiencing embarrassment in front of their peers.

One preference discussed in the literature concerns the type of spoken errors to be addressed (e.g. Atma & Widiati, 2015; Calsiyao, 2015; Tomczyk, 2013; Ustaci & Ok, 2014). Atma & Widiati (2015) conducted a study investigating the preferences of freshmen and sophomores when it came to CF in speaking classes, identifying that freshmen preferred frequent correction of their grammatical errors, while sophomores preferred correction of their phonological errors. Similarly, Calsiyao (2015) found that Filipino EFL students held different preferences in regard to the types of errors requiring CF, with some preferring correction of their grammar and others of their pronunciation. The author considered the later choice to reflect the clear differences between the Filipino and English phonology.

## 3. Method

### 3.1 Study Setting and Participants

This current study took place at the English language institute (ELI) of King Abdulaziz University (KAU) in Saudi Arabia and utilized quantitative and qualitative approaches to answer the research questions. The main aim was to explore students' preferences in relation to corrective feedback for oral activities, while at the same time examining their perceptions of corrective feedback during oral activities. The study participants consisted of female EFL students in their preparatory year. This study included only female students due to the regulations in Saudi Arabia, which require segregation between male and female and male campuses. English is a compulsory subject during the first year, with a pass required by all students before they are able to start the major of their preference. Speaking skills form one aspect of their assessment to determine the acquisition of acceptable levels of accuracy and fluency in spoken English. The participants of the current study were selected by means of convenience sampling. Sixty pre-intermediate of proficiency level students aged between eighteen and twenty were selected from two classes being taught by the researcher. The purpose of the study was explained to the students, along with the reassurance that their participation was voluntary and they were free to withdraw at any phase of the study without any adverse impact. Accordingly, a consent form was distributed to students to confirm their agreement to take part, along with their understanding of the nature of the study.

### 3.2 Procedure and Data Collection

Two instruments were utilized in this study: (1) a questionnaire and (2) interviews. The questionnaire was designed by the researcher, adopted from the literature, and was followed by interviews with the students. The purpose of the questionnaire was to explore students' preferences for, and their perceptions of, corrective feedback during oral activities. The questionnaire was designed using fifteen five Likert scale questions, ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. The questionnaire was translated into Arabic, i.e. the native language of Saudi Arabia. Both the Arabic and English questionnaires were checked by one native English speaker colleague married to an Arab and who has been living in Saudi for over twenty years. In addition, both versions of the questionnaire were checked by two Saudi colleagues fluent in English. The questionnaire was also piloted prior to the actual study, in order to check for its clarity and to increase reliability and validity, as well the accuracy of the results (Cohen et al., 2011).

At the end of the questionnaire, students were asked to provide their names if they were willing to volunteer to participate in the interviews, which resulted in ten EFL female students volunteering to be interviewed. All interviews were analyzed autonomously for ethical reason. Standardized open-ended interviews were utilized in the study, with all interviewees being asked identical questions (Cohen et al., 2011). The purpose of the interviews was to gain data concerning the students' preferences when it came to corrective feedback during speaking activities, as well as the reasons for their responses. For example, the researcher asked interviewees about their preferred timing for corrective feedback: (1) immediately they made an error; (2) following completion of the speaking activity; and (3) at the end of class. The interviewees were subsequently given the opportunity to expand on the reasons for their preferences.

### 3.3 Data Analysis

The questionnaire was divided into four themes: (1) Students' perceptions of corrective feedback during oral activities; (2) students' preferences concerning the timing of corrective feedback; (3) Students' preferences of the types of errors requiring corrective feedback; and (4) Students' preferences when it came to the providers of corrective feedback. The program 'IBM SPSS statistics ver. 20 for Windows' was applied to evaluate and test the research question. Descriptive statistics were used to calculate the frequency of means and weighted means of each theme and ranking of statements. Validity testing of inter-item correlations was also used to obtain information concerning Persons correlation of themes with the total scale and Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient was used to measure the internal consistency of the scale items.

The current researcher noted down the interviewees' responses, with the transcript of all responses being read and analyzed by counting the frequency of respondents' preferences for corrective feedback. The same technique was used to cluster the reasons for interviewees' preferences. This technique assisted in attaining a systematic analysis for answering the research questions (Cohen et al., 2011).

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Questionnaire

To establish the reliability of the questionnaire, Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient was calculated to measure the internal consistency of the questionnaire items. Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient showed *reliable* consistency, i.e. Cronbach's Alpha = 0.7.

Inter-Item Person Correlations demonstrated that all themes had a statistically significant correlation with the total sum of the scale  $p$ -value  $< 0.005$ , i.e. the questionnaire was valid and had an internal consistency with its themes.

Table 1. Students' perceptions of oral CF on speaking errors

Students' perceptions of oral CF	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neither Agree/ Nor Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree		Weighted Mean	Weighted Mean
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%		
When my teacher corrects my speaking errors, I don't get annoyed.	1	1.7%	2	3.3%	2	3.3%	23	38.3%	32	53.3%	4.38	Strongly Agree
When my teacher corrects my speaking errors, I feel embarrassed.	26	43.3%	20	33.3%	8	13.3%	3	5.0%	3	5.0%	4.05	Disagree
I believe that teachers' oral CF can improve my speaking skills.	1	1.7%	0	0.0%	3	5.0%	14	23.3%	42	70.0%	4.60	Strongly Agree
I believe that oral corrective feedback will help me to not repeat my speaking errors in future.	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	4	6.7%	19	31.7%	37	61.7%	4.55	Strongly Agree
I prefer my teacher to always correct my errors during speaking activities.	2	3.3%	4	6.7%	10	16.7%	16	26.7%	28	46.7%	4.07	Agree
I am not worried about making errors when I speak English.	8	13.3%	10	16.7%	14	23.3%	15	25.0%	13	21.7%	3.25	Neither Agree/ Nor Disagree
Average	6	10.6%	6	10.0%	7	11.4%	15	25.0%	26	43.1%	4.15	Agree

Table 1 shows that the weighted mean of students' perceptions of oral CF on their speaking errors was 4.15. This is interpreted as *Agree*, revealing that the students held positive attitudes towards oral CF on speaking errors. The majority of students perceived teachers oral CF as beneficial for improving their speaking skills. Forty-two students (70% = 4.60) strongly agreed with the statement "I believe that teacher oral CF can improve my speaking skills". They also believed that CF can reinforce meaning, with (61.7%= 4.55) strongly agreeing with the statement "I believe that oral corrective feedback will help me not to repeat my speaking errors in the future".

Table 2. Time of oral CF

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neither Agree/ Nor Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree		Weighted Mean	Weighted Mean Level
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%		
I prefer my teachers to provide immediate oral CF.	2	3.3%	2	3.3%	6	10.0%	21	35.0%	29	48.3%	4.22	Strongly Agree
I prefer my teachers to provide oral CF after the speaking activity ends.	14	23.3%	20	33.3%	7	11.7%	13	21.7%	6	10.0%	2.62	Neither Agree/ Nor Disagree
I prefer my teachers to provide oral CF at the end of the class.	15	25.0%	21	35.0%	10	16.7%	9	15.0%	5	8.3%	2.47	Disagree

Table 2 reveals that the students preferred to be given immediate feedback. Fifty students agreed (n.21 agreed, n. 29 strongly agreed) with the statement "I prefer my teacher to give me immediate oral CF". This had a 4.22 weighted mean, which is interpreted as strongly agree.

Table 3. Types of errors that need oral CF

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neither Agree/ Nor Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree		Weighted Mean	Weighted Mean
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%		
I need more oral CF on my grammatical errors.	1	1.7%	3	5.0%	4	6.7%	23	38.3%	29	48.3%	4.27	Strongly Agree
I need more oral CF on my pronunciation errors.	2	3.3%	1	1.7%	6	10.0%	23	38.3%	28	46.7%	4.23	Strongly Agree
I need more oral CF on vocabulary errors.	1	1.7%	1	1.7%	7	11.7%	22	36.7%	29	48.3%	4.28	Strongly Agree
Average	1	6.7%	2	8.3%	6	28.3%	23	113.3%	29	143.3%	4.26	Strongly Agree

Table 3 demonstrates that EFL students strongly agreed that they required CF when it came to their grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary, with total average weighted mean of (4.26). This result was expected, due to the majority of students experiencing difficulties when it came to spoken English.

Table 4. Provider of oral CF

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neither Agree/ Nor Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree		Weighted Mean	Weighted Mean
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%		
I like it when my teacher corrects my oral errors in the class.	1	1.7%	8	13.3%	11	18.3%	10	16.7%	30	50.0%	4.00	Agree
I like it when my classmates correct my oral errors in class.	20	33.3%	11	18.3%	12	20.0%	17	28.3%	0	0.0%	2.43	Disagree
I like it when my teacher asks me to correct my errors myself in class.	10	16.7%	8	13.3%	15	25.0%	17	28.3%	10	16.7%	3.15	Neither Agree/ Nor Disagree

Table 4 shows that forty students preferred their teachers to correct their errors, with weighted mean of 4.00, followed by self-correction. Twenty-seven students (weighted mean =3.15) agreed to the statement “I like it when my teacher asks me to correct myself in class”.

#### 4.2 Interviews

As noted in the methods section, ten EFL students volunteered to be interviewed. In order to be able to collect more vivid data (which can help understand the students’ opinion and preference and the reasons of their choices), students were asked three questions and were also requested to ask to give reasons for their preferences concerning the timing of oral CF, the provider of oral CF and types of speaking errors requiring CF.

The majority of the interviewees (i.e. eight students) responded that they preferred their teacher to correct their speaking errors immediately. They gave the following reasons:

S2: “I need to know every single error as I speak, to be able to correct them in the right away.”

S5: “I believe immediate CF of my errors reinforces learning.”

S6: “I don’t want to forget my error and immediate CF can help all the class learn from our teacher’s CF so preventing us from repeating the same error.”

One student stated that she preferred her teacher’s CF to be given after she had finished her speaking activities:

S1: “I feel tense when my teacher interrupts me to correct my error, which makes me forget what I was supposed to say.”

Another student stated that she preferred her teacher to provide oral CF following the end of class because:

S5: *My teacher makes me feel embarrassed when she corrects my speaking errors in front of the whole class. This doesn’t help me to learn.”*

Interviewees were asked about their preferences when it came to the provider of oral CF. All ten students stated that they preferred their teacher to correct their speaking errors, giving the following reasons:

S6: “My teacher knows English better than any of us. She is the teacher! She can spot my errors.”

S9: “I trust my teacher, she is knowledgeable and can correct my errors. I can learn a lot from her.”

When interviewees were asked about the errors they felt required need attention and correction, five students indicated that this to be grammar:

S1: “I find grammar the most difficult. I can’t speak full sentence without making grammatical errors.”

S3: “Grammar is very important to be able to speak correct English.”

3 Students preferred CF for their pronunciation and vocabulary errors, giving the following reasons:

S7: “Vocabulary and pronunciation are more difficult than grammar. How can we speak if we don’t know how to pronounce the words in the correct way?”

Two students responded that they preferred more attention to be paid to vocabulary errors because:

S10: “Some words are long and hard to pronounce.”

S2: “I have difficulties in pronouncing English words. I want to be able to say them correctly so people listen to me and understand what I am saying.”

Only one student preferred all her errors in grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation to be corrected, giving the

following reason:

S9: *"I am in a learning phase. I need to be given all the skills to learn proper English"*

## 5. Discussion

The results reveal that the majority of students preferred their teachers to correct all of their speaking errors, with most strongly agreeing that this improved their English language skills. This result accords with that of Azad and Kalam (2016), who found Bangladeshi EFL students expressed a positive attitude towards oral CF, perceiving it to be beneficial for learning English. The authors found that the students expected their teachers to constantly correct their errors during class. In the present study, most respondents did not experience their teachers' oral CF as embarrassing, which is also in line with Roothoof and Breeze (2016), who found that students appreciated their teachers' oral CF and did not experience any hurt feelings or embarrassment when their errors were corrected. However, the result of this current study diverges from Atma and Widiati, (2015), who found that freshmen and sophomores wished their errors to be corrected but admitted that they experienced embarrassment when their teachers made such corrections during class. It is therefore suggested that teachers should take care when giving oral CF, taking into account the concerns and attitudes of their students (Agudo & de Dios, 2013).

The participants in the current study preferred to be given immediate CF to correct their speaking errors. However, two interviewees expressed a preference for CF to take place at the end of class or following speaking activities. The students preferred immediate correction of their errors, either because they did not wish to forget their errors or they wished the correct form to be reinforced, so as to improve their speaking skills. This can be seen as due to the low level of students' accuracy in English, as well as their eagerness to improve their performance in their examinations, so raising the level of their total grades in English. Tomczyk (2013) identified that low level students believed immediate CF of their errors to be more beneficial for the acquisition of speaking skills. These findings are supported by Ananda et al. (2017), who explored preferences for oral CF given by instructors of seventy-six students in the English Department of Mangkurat University. The study confirmed that students preferred CF to be given immediately following the occurrence of speaking errors, as this ensured they did not forget. The results of the current study were, however, not supported by the findings of El çin and Öztürk (2016), who stated that EFL students at the elementary level in the English preparatory program preferred corrections to be given following completion of a speaking activity, as this prevented any interruption and demotivation of the activity itself. Papangkorn (2015) also found that both male and female students felt that the most effective time for their teachers to provide oral CF was following the completion of their speaking activity.

The results of the quantitative and qualitative data of this current study reveal that the participants preferred oral CF to be given by their teachers, due to their higher level of trust in their teachers' ability to correct their errors, as opposed to classmates or self-correction. They felt that their teacher was the most effective at helping them to learn English. This was supported by Papangkorn (2015), who found that students preferred to receive CF from their teachers. Similarly, Hernández Méndez et al.'s (2012) study in a university in Mexico concerning EFL instructors' perceptions of oral CF and students' preference for CF, identified that: (1) students relied on teachers to correct their oral errors and (2) instructors believed that teachers were more qualified than peers to give CF. They also added that feedback from classmates has the potential to create conflict between students.

The findings of the current study demonstrated that students preferred oral CF when it came to the correction of grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary, with average weighted mean of (4.26). However, interviewees' responses varied, with half viewing grammatical errors as the most important, due to finding grammar difficult to grasp as well as being vital for speaking. This result can be considered firstly, due to students' weakness in understanding and applying English sentence structure, resulting in a failure to accurately convey meaning, with an adverse impact on communication. Secondly, to grammatical errors also being a reason for achieving low grades in their final examinations. This result accords with Azad and Kalam (2016), who found that EFL students preferred their grammatical errors to be corrected rather than those of vocabulary and pronunciation. It is therefore important for teachers to stress the teaching of grammar (Coskun, 2010), due to the majority of EFL students experiencing difficulties in this aspect of learning English. The current study found that only three interviewees preferred errors in pronunciations and vocabulary to be corrected, as they believed that the mispronunciation of words is capable of altering the meaning they wished to convey, while a lack of vocabulary makes it difficult to communicate in English. This is in line with the study of Ustaci and Ok (2014) which examined ELT preferences of oral error correction given by their instructors in a university in Turkey. The authors found that ELT students preferred correction of their errors in vocabulary and pronunciation. The ELT students wished their vocabulary to be corrected by being given the synonym of the incorrect word and for pronunciation to be corrected if they experience difficulties.

This current study contributes to research into oral CF, and in particular students' preferences in relation to error correction during the speaking activities of EFL students in the Saudi context. The study has a number of strengths, but also contains some limitations. Firstly, as a result of gender separation in Saudi Arabian universities, only female EFL students participated in the study, which thus lacked gender comparison concerning perception of oral CF. Secondly, there were only sixty participants, which prevents generalization of the results. Thirdly, the participants consisted of students with pre-intermediate proficiency in English. It should be noted that the inclusion of participants of different levels would have resulted in richer results and a variety of CF preferences, which is thus recommended as a fruitful area for further studies.

## 6. Conclusion

The current study explored EFL students' preference when it came to oral CF, including timing, the best provider of CF and the errors that should be corrected. The students had positive perceptions of CF in relation to speaking activities. They preferred immediate CF during oral work and considered their teacher to be the most effective at providing oral CF. However, two students wished their oral errors to be corrected either following their speaking activities or at the end of the lesson, in order to avoid interruption and embarrassment, which can have a negative impact on the learning process. The quantitative data revealed that all EFL students preferred that all errors in grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary were corrected, whereas qualitative data showed that students considered it most important to correct grammatical errors.

The findings of this study can offer some pedagogical recommendations to teachers and for future studies. English teachers should be aware of their influence on their students as the source of information and be prepared to take note of oral errors and provide clear and efficient CF to ensure students not only recognize their errors, but also learn. EFL teachers should be aware of students' individual preferences when it comes to oral CF and should be ready to meet their students' expectations when it comes to the types and timing of CF (Tasdemir, & Yalcin Arslan, 2018). Moreover, it is the teacher's role to provide students with a safe learning environment that remains free of tension, as well as avoiding interrupting students in a rigid manner, resulting in potential embarrassment and a failure to achieve learning targets. Regardless of students' stated preference for their teacher to correct their errors, teachers should attempt to create independent learners by guiding students to gradually become self-reliant, giving them the opportunity to undertake self-correction (Hartono, 2018). It was found that showing patience when dealing with students' oral errors, and not immediately providing CF, allowed students to interact and encouraged peer correction, which was found to activate language learning through interactivity (Sato, 2017). A number of studies have found that teachers failed to correct their students due to various reasons, including a lack of knowledge about how to correct errors or an inability to address the errors of all students as the result of the large class size (El çin & Öztürk, 2016). Thus, teachers should educate themselves about CF and its techniques through: (1) reading related research; (2) attending training sessions of oral CF; and (3) learning from more experienced colleagues.

The literature focusing on students' perceptions of CF contains limited studies related to EFL (e.g. Azad & Kalam, 2016; Değirmenci Uysal & Aydin, 2017; Khunaivi & Hartono, 2015; Lee, 2016; Septiana, 2016). Researchers should therefore undertake additional studies in this area. This current paper thus recommends that additional research be undertaken to investigate students' preferences in relation to oral CF in the Saudi context. Future research should also address the issue of student anxiety caused by oral CF, in order to identify its causes and how it can be best avoided, in order to establish a more conducive atmosphere for learning the English language.

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