

Learning Through Correction: Oral Corrective Feedback in Online EFL Interactions

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Abstract

Feedback has been vital and essential in all educational settings and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom interaction draws no distinction. It contributes to students' language learning and achievement. It, when involves learners during classroom interactions, becomes oral corrective feedback and has been viewed as a dynamic practice for EFL teachers to correct their learners' mistakes on the spot. This study investigated teachers' oral corrective feedback practices in an online EFL classroom interactions context. Furthermore, it correlated teachers' responses with the type of oral corrective feedback, gender, and years of experience. To achieve the study objectives, the descriptive-correlational method was used. A questionnaire and a semi-structured interview were applied to a sample of 61 EFL teachers. The results of the questionnaire revealed that EFL teachers consistently practiced oral corrective feedback in online classroom interactions. Also, no significant differences were shown in the study sample's responses based on the type of oral corrective feedback, implicit or explicit, gender, and years of teaching experience. Considering the study findings, some implications and recommendations are suggested.

Keywords: oral corrective feedback, EFL teachers, online classroom interactions

1. Introduction

Oral feedback, also known as corrective feedback in educational settings, is a form in which teachers correct students' mistakes or errors. It focuses on correcting students' mistakes and provides the optimal alternatives in implicit and/or explicit ways. In pedagogy, it is considered one of the most important motivational tools through which teachers judge students' errors, mistakes, or performance, and through which teachers correct these errors without causing them to feel offended. In other words, teachers should be supportive of students' spoken errors by offering oral corrective feedback. More specifically, oral corrective feedback is assistance offered by teachers to students regarding their spoken mistakes (Alkhamash & Gulnaz, 2019). Corrective feedback, according to Lightbown and Spada (1990), is a way of letting students know that their use of the target language is in error. Chaudron (1998) presents it as a certain type of pedagogy that occurs after an error and attempts to inform the students that they have committed an error. It is clear that, in contrast to the traditional teaching method, corrective feedback highlights language mistakes when they arise (un)intentionally during classroom interactions with a primary focus on meaning or communication (Chu, 2011). Oral corrective feedback is described by Lyster et al. (2013) as teachers' responses to students' statements with errors. Based on the previous studies, it may be argued that corrective feedback is a useful tool for improving language, especially when it serves as a source of interactional change. Studies from the last two decades showed that it has drawn the attention of foreign language education professionals' significantly. Li (2010), Lyster et al. (2013), and Nassaji (2016, 2017), to name a few, investigated the efficacy of oral corrective feedback and its usefulness and suggested its importance for EFL learners' linguistic improvement. Most works on corrective feedback in the available literature either duplicate or use as a model the work of Lyster and Ranta (1997). Jabbari and Fazilatraf (2012), for instance, investigated student uptake, error types, and corrective feedback techniques in communicative EFL classes in addition to, Panova and Lyster (2002) who conducted research in an adult ESL context. The study used seven terms to categorize different types of corrective feedback: elicitation, repetition, clarification request, recasts, explicit correction, metalinguistic feedback, and translation. However, there is currently a paucity of empirical evidence on this topic in the Saudi context to the best of the researchers' knowledge, very limited research, if none at all, is carried out with detailed account of oral corrective feedback in online EFL classroom interactions. Therefore, this study was conducted to fill this void. This study investigates oral corrective feedback in EFL classroom interactions with special reference to the online teaching context. The objectives are as follow:

- (1) To determine the extent to which EFL teachers practice oral corrective feedback in online classroom interactions.
- (2) To analyze differences in EFL teachers' responses based on the corrective feedback types, implicit and/or explicit.
- (3) To identify whether there are any gender-based differences in the responses of EFL teachers.

- (4) To identify differences in EFL teachers' responses according to years of experience.

2. Literature Review

Oral corrective feedback or corrective feedback has been investigated as a crucial component of classroom instructions in ESL and/or EFL contexts (Lyster et al., 2013). Sarandi (2016) pointed out that “corrective feedback is an indication that all or part of language that learners produce is deviant” (p. 236). He further argued that “the widely accepted corrective feedback strategies are a) recasts, b) metalinguistic explanation, c) elicitation, d) repetition, e) clarification requests, and f) explicit correction” (p. 236). These strategies are typically used in research on oral corrective feedback that look at how frequently specific strategies are used in different learning situations. Since teachers work with students in a variety of instructional settings and correction contexts, they often vary how frequently they give different types of oral corrective feedback to the students in classroom interactions where asking, clarification, verification, and correction are involved (Almekhlafy & Alqahtani, 2022). Sheen (2004) investigated the use of oral corrective feedback by teachers in four different contexts: Canadian ESL, New Zealand ESL, Korean EFL, and French Immersion. 2012 saw Shanshan (2012) conduct research into the various forms of oral corrective feedback utilized by teachers. The study examined how various error types affected the teaching technique teachers used and how students reacted to different forms of oral corrective feedback. Based on another study of teacher–student interactions in French immersion classrooms, Lyster and Ranta (1997) identified six different corrective feedback types: metalinguistic feedback, explicit correction, repetition, clarification requests, recasts, and elicitation which they then divided into two major forms of corrective feedback types: reformulations and prompts (Ranta & Lyster, 2007). Recasts and explicit corrections are examples of reformulations because they offer learners goal reformulations of their non-target output. Beyond reformulations, various signals are used as prompts to encourage students to do self-correction i.e. elicitation, metalinguistic clues, clarification requests, and repetition. Sheen and Ellis (2011) proposed a similar taxonomy of oral corrective feedback strategies based on this classification and information learned from a significant amount of research on corrective feedback. This taxonomy accounts for the distinction between reformulations and prompts as well as the distinction between implicit and explicit corrective feedback. The authors differentiate between didactic and conversational recasts. Additionally, they make a distinction in their taxonomy between explicit corrective feedback that offers proper forms (such as didactic recasts and explicit correction with or without metalinguistic explanation) and explicit corrective feedback that withholds correct forms (i.e. metalinguistic clues and elicitation). This distinction supports Bower and Kawaguchi's (2011) assertion that there are two types of corrective feedback: explicit and implicit. If there is an error in the learner's speech, explicit feedback makes it clear. In other words, the instructor immediately corrects errors made by students. By contrast, teachers also correct mistakes indirectly by giving students implicit feedback, which encourages them to change their assertions and make corrections. Explicit feedback, according to Lyster and Ranta (1997) is the act of explicitly giving the correct form. The teacher points out that the student's statement is inaccurate and offer an appropriate alternative. Fungula (2013) suggested that explicit feedback is the correct form, suggesting that the student's speech was inaccurate, and the teacher's suggestion was the right one.

To sum up, previous research focused on oral corrective feedback in in-person classroom settings and the techniques that teachers employ to correct their students' language errors. However, there is very little research on employing oral corrective feedback in online EFL classroom interaction in general and the Saudi context in particular. Furthermore, the current study is unique in correlating EFL teachers' responses to using oral corrective feedback with their gender and years of teaching experience in the online classroom context. Therefore, the current study investigates oral corrective feedback in EFL classroom interactions with special reference to online teaching context. The following research questions are proposed to address the research gap:

1. To what extent do EFL teachers practice oral corrective feedback in online classroom interactions?
2. Are there any variations in the EFL teachers' reactions depending on the explicitness or implicitness of the corrective feedback?
3. Are there any gender-related significant differences in EFL teachers' reactions?
4. Do EFL teachers' reactions vary significantly based on their years of experience?

3. Method

3.1 Research Design

The descriptive-correlational approach, in this mixed- method design study, was followed. The study attempted to identify teachers' practice of oral corrective feedback in online EFL classroom interactions and correlate it with gender, type of oral corrective feedback, and years of teaching experience.

3.2 Population and Sample of the Study

The study was applied to EFL teachers (n= 85) at Najran University in the academic year (2021/2022). The sample of the study was selected following the convenient sampling technique. The study instrument was sent to all the population of the study. The responses were received within two weeks. A total of 61 participants (71.8%) of the study population agreed to participate in the study and filled out the questionnaire. The distribution of the study sample by gender and years of teaching experience is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of the study sample

		Frequency	%
Validity	M	33	54.1
	F	28	45.9
	Overall	61	100.0
	1-5 years	22	36.1
	6-10 years	21	34.4
	More than 10	18	29.5
	Overall	61	100.0

3.3 Instruments of the Study

3.3.1 Questionnaire

The researchers decided to use a questionnaire. After they reviewed the existing literature and related studies, they developed a 10-item questionnaire of two domains about implicit and explicit oral corrective feedback practices in online EFL classroom interactions based on the model proposed by Lyster et al. (2013).

3.3.2 Face Validity

The questionnaire was reviewed by a jury (n=5). They were asked to confirm that the questionnaire could measure what it was designed for (teachers' oral corrective feedback practices in online EFL classroom interactions). Furthermore, they checked for the language soundness of items and wordiness. The suggestions and observations, which had a high percentage of agreement, were considered. Finally, the questionnaire was produced in its final version.

3.3.3 Reliability

The questionnaire was piloted on a sample of (20) participants. Next, Cronbach's Alphas was computed and scored 0.89 in total. The reliability of the first domain (implicit oral corrective feedback practices) reached 0.83 whereas the second domain (explicit oral corrective feedback practices) scored 0.85. These results indicate that the questionnaire enjoyed a very good rate of reliability.

3.3.4 Interview

To learn more in-depth about some volunteers' reactions to oral corrective feedback techniques in online EFL classroom interactions, a semi-structured interview was conducted with them. The replies of the respondents were then triangulated and verified using the information gathered from the semi-structured interview. Those who agreed to take part in the interview (n= 13) were contacted to arrange a suitable place and time. The collected data were recorded, transcribed, and then analyzed following the criteria by Braun and Clark (2006).

3.3.5 Statistical Processing

The researchers used a number of analysis tests to answer the research questions as follows:

1. To address the first study question, means, standard deviations, and ranks were computed.
2. The second study question was addressed using the paired samples t-test.
3. The third research question was addressed using the Independent Samples t-test.
4. The fourth study question was addressed using a one-way ANOVA analysis.
5. The respondents' responses concerning their preferred oral corrective feedback procedures and reasoning were analyzed using content analysis.

4. Results

1. *Results of the first research question: To what extent do EFL teachers practice oral corrective feedback in online classroom interactions?*

The oral corrective feedback procedures used by EFL teachers in online classroom interactions were analyzed using means, standard deviations, and ranks. Table 2 shows the outcomes.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of EFL teachers' responses to oral corrective feedback in online EFL classroom interactions

Item	Mean	Std. Deviation	Rank	Level
Domain 1 (Implicit oral corrective feedback practices)	3.90	.628	1	High
I rephrase a student's utterance to resolve a communication problem.	4.31	.696	1	Very high
I restate a student's utterance to confirm that his/her utterance was understood.	3.80	.872	3	High
I repeat a student's utterance with a rising tone to highlight the error	3.59	1.395	4	High
I use expressions like 'Pardon?', 'I don't understand?', etc. to indicate that a student's utterance has an error.	3.90	1.150	2	High
Domain 2 (Explicit oral corrective feedback practices)	3.84	.669	2	High
I rephrase a student's utterance although there was no communication problem.	2.54	1.191	6	Low
I rephrase a student's utterance indicating that there was an error.	4.23	.716	2	Very high
I indicate there is an error in a student's utterance, provide the correct answer, and elaborate on the nature of the error.	4.39	.954	1	Very high
I provide information about the nature of the error to help a student self-correct the error.	4.18	1.088	3	High
I ask a wh-question about the error to help a student figure out the correct form.	3.92	1.005	4	High
I use non-verbal cues like facial expressions, other gestures, etc. to help a student figure out the correct form.	3.79	1.185	5	High
Overall	3.87	.581		High

Table 2 shows that the total degree of EFL teachers' practices of oral corrective feedback in online EFL classroom interactions was high (M=3.87, SD= .581). In domains, implicit oral corrective feedback practices scored a high degree of practice (M=3.90, SD= .628). The statement, 'I rephrase a student's utterance to resolve a communication problem' was the highest-ranking among the implicit techniques, with a very high degree of practice (M=4.31, SD=.692). The statement, 'I repeat a student's utterance with a rising tone to highlight the error.' came last, with a high degree of use (M=3.59, SD=1.395). Explicit oral corrective feedback practices also scored a high degree of use (M=3.84, SD= .669). The statement, 'I indicate there is an error in a student's utterance, provide the correct answer, and elaborate on the nature of the error' came first, with a very high rate of use (M=3.39, SD= .954). The statement, 'I rephrase a student's utterance although there was no communication problem' ranked last, with a low degree of use. Furthermore, the low standard deviations of the total scale and domains reflected the respondents' homogenous responses to using oral corrective feedback in online classroom interactions.

4.1.2 Results of the Semi-Structured Interview

The collected data from the semi-structured interviews were content-analyzed after they were recorded and transcribed. The data from the interviews targeted more in-depth information about the respondents' use of oral corrective feedback practices in online EFL classroom interactions. The interviewees were asked to state which techniques of implicit/explicit oral corrective feedback they enjoyed using and provide justifications for their choices. The data were first arranged, and then coded, and surveyed. The main related information was highlighted and then classified under common themes according to similarity. The analysis revealed the interviewees' answers centered on the justifications they provided for their favorite use of which oral corrective feedback practices they favored. The majority of the respondents claimed to use explicit oral corrective feedback in online classroom interactions for a number of reasons. These reasons were: to increase students' awareness of their mistakes so as to avoid them in the future, the learning environment, students' achieving academic average or below average levels, and better understanding. To provide evidence, one teacher (T10) said, "Well, I prefer the explicit way coz it can help students figure out the mistakes to be avoided in the future [.] Also, unlike outside classroom contexts, students are learning English and should be aware of their mistakes." Another teacher (T12) added, "Explicit [.] give a thorough explanation of the corrective feedback so the student can understand better [.]" The teachers used implicit oral corrective feedback stated that they wanted to help students reach a conclusion, avoid hurting their feelings before the class, and help them to trace and notice their mistakes indirectly. To provide some excerpts, teacher T3 stated, "By asking Wh questions and explaining the errors in a light way avoiding to hurt his sentiment before the class [.]" Teacher T5 stated, "Sometimes it's good way to use implicit way to let students reach a conclusion [.]" The teachers who preferred the use of both techniques (implicit/explicit) attributed this to the students' style of learning. Teacher (T4) added, "Both [.] As both strategies match to students' style of understanding [.] One style of correction may not match to the nature of correction [.]"

1.2 Results of the second research question: Are there any variations in the EFL teachers' reactions depending on the explicitness or implicitness of the corrective feedback?

According to the type of corrective feedback (implicit/explicit), the Paired samples t-test analysis was used to determine whether there were any significant differences between the responses of the EFL teachers to oral corrective feedback in online classroom interactions. Table 3 shows the analysis results.

Table 3. Paired samples t-test according to the type of corrective feedback

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Implicit oral corrective feedback practices	3.90	61	.628	.774	60	.442
Explicit oral corrective feedback practices	3.84	61	.669			

According to Table 3, there were no discernible variations between the replies of the study population based on whether corrective feedback was implicit or explicit.

1.3 Results of the third research question: Are there any gender-related significant differences in EFL teachers' reactions?

The independent samples t-test was used to determine whether there were any gender-related variations in the responses of the EFL teachers to oral corrective feedback in online classroom interactions. The results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Independent samples t-test according to gender

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Implicit oral corrective feedback practices	male	33	3.89	.527	-.205-	59	.839
	female	28	3.92	.739			
Explicit oral corrective feedback practices	male	33	3.81	.707	-.421-	59	.675
	female	28	3.88	.632			
Overall	male	33	3.84	.573	-.379-	59	.706
	female	28	3.90	.600			

Table 4 shows that no significant differences based on gender (male/female) were present in the study sample's responses. This means that the gender of the respondents did not play any role in discriminating their responses. This result may have been due to the fact all faculty members are subject to the same teaching conditions in terms of materials, training, textbooks, environment, students' levels, etc.

1.4 Results of the fourth research question: Do EFL teachers' reactions vary significantly based on their years of experience?

One-way ANOVA analysis was used to show whether differences were recorded in EFL teachers' responses according to years of experience. Table 5 presents the results.

Table 5. One-way ANOVA analysis for differences according to years of experience

Domain		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
implicit oral corrective feedback practices	Between Groups	.433	2	.217	.541	.585
	Within Groups	23.226	58	.400		
	Total	23.660	60			
Explicit oral corrective feedback practices	Between Groups	1.438	2	.719	1.640	.203
	Within Groups	25.419	58	.438		
	Total	26.857	60			
Overall	Between Groups	.788	2	.394	1.173	.317
	Within Groups	19.490	58	.336		
	Total	20.278	60			

The results in Table 5 reveal no significant differences in EFL teachers' responses according to their years of teaching experience. That is to say, the variable of teaching years did not affect the respondents' responses to oral corrective feedback in online classroom interactions. This result may have been attributed to the training programs that EFL teachers receive through which they were exposed to and trained to use the techniques of oral corrective feedback.

5. Discussion

The current research studied EFL teachers' use of oral corrective feedback in online classroom interactions context. Furthermore, participants' responses were correlated with the variables of gender, years of teaching experience, and type of oral corrective feedback. The analysis showed that the EFL teachers' use of oral corrective feedback in online classroom interactions was high. The results indicated that the EFL teachers regularly utilize oral corrective feedback practices in online classroom interactions as they believe that they foster students' EFL learning. These finding align with previous studies involving Vietnamese EFL teachers. Ha and Murray (2020, 2021), for instance, discovered that Vietnamese EFL teachers were supportive of oral corrective feedback because they had experience of teaching in exam-focused settings and consistently offered oral corrective feedback as a necessary component of their teaching context. In the current study, similar comments were found in the interviews: "Well, I prefer the explicit way coz it can help students figure out the mistakes to be avoided in the future [...]....."By asking wh questions and explaining the errors in a light way avoiding to hurt his sentiment before the class [...]" The teachers' prior classroom experiences may also play a role in their favorable attitudes toward oral corrective feedback. Studies have revealed that instructors' attitudes toward oral corrective feedback are positively correlated with their level of expertise. (Kim & Mostafa, 2021; Rahimi & Zhang, 2015). In our study, the fact that all the participants were experienced might account for why they were so positive about oral corrective feedback. The findings also suggest that the teachers were very positive about oral corrective feedback and were inclined to employ both implicit and explicit types of feedback The teachers displayed a positive attitude towards oral corrective feedback, in general and the explicit feedback types they used, particularly in exam-oriented teaching contexts. These results could be compared with a study in Vietnam, where students were viewed as knowledge receivers and teachers as experts (Ha & Murray, 2020; Ha & Nguyen, 2021). Teachers are required to offer students the correct answers. However, our findings differ from other studies (Basturkmen et al., 2004; Brown, 2009; Kamiya, 2016; Li, 2017; Roothoof & Breeze, 2016; Schulz, 1996, 2001). This variation may be linked to various teaching and learning environments.

No significant differences were testified in our study sample's responses according to participants' years of teaching experience. This outcome is consistent with research by Pica and Long (1986), who assessed how L2 teachers with various degrees of teaching experience interacted in the classroom. Their research showed that there was no significant difference in the employment of reactive emphasis on form between teachers with and without experience. However, our results differ from those of Mackey et al. (2004) who asserted that the application of the incidental focus on form techniques was significantly influenced by the experience and education of teachers.

6. Pedagogical Implications

Feedback is a pedagogical value; hence it must be applied in EFL lessons. Oral corrective feedback has benefits that go beyond those of implicit and/or explicit feedback. Since oral corrective feedback has been demonstrated to be effective in prior studies, it can be a useful technique for EFL teachers who want to aid language learners in their growth. The researchers would advise EFL teachers to develop exercises that incorporate explicit and implicit ways with special emphasis on both form and meaning. As Martinez-Flor and Uso-Juan (2010) suggest, corrective feedback should address both form and meaning. Teachers should pay close attention to the kind and sophistication of the target linguistic resources while using authentic materials or developing their instructional materials. As a result, teachers can use resources at both the linguistic and pragmatic levels. Learners must have complete access to linguistic material (such as grammar and vocabulary) so that education can continue to center on the pragmatic implications of the input (Plonsky & Zhuang, 2019). Getting acquainted with free online corpora, participating in discovery activities with students, and utilizing various types of technology during both the instruction and feedback phases are further helpful tips for EFL teachers.

7. Conclusion

This study examined EFL teachers' use of oral corrective feedback in online classroom interactions context. The participants practiced both implicit and explicit feedback. The analysis revealed that EFL teachers consistently practiced oral corrective feedback in online classroom interactions. Also, no significant differences were shown in the study sample's responses based on the type of oral corrective feedback, implicit or explicit, gender, and years of teaching experience. They believed that oral corrective feedback was beneficial and necessary for learners' language enhancement; in other words, enabling students to use language effectively was an excellent strategy towards learning through correction. To be more specific, most of the participants used explicit oral corrective feedback in online classroom interactions for a number of reasons: to increase students' awareness of their mistakes so as to avoid them in the future, the learning environment, students' achievement of academic average or below average levels, and to improve their understanding. Researchers feel that immediate feedback is effective for both accuracy and fluency, yet teachers frequently hesitate to use it (Ellis, 2017). As a result, the study's findings can serve as a useful guide for EFL instructors who teach online.

8. Recommendations

Based on the study findings, the following recommendations are put forward:

- i. learning through correction as a strategy should be utilized in the classroom.
- ii. explicit oral corrective feedback should be used in online classroom.
- iii. immediate feedback should be offered for both accuracy and fluency.

In addition, further research on the types of corrective feedback frequency is strongly recommended to examine the effectiveness of the most frequently applied techniques of oral corrective feedback based on discrete skills.

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