

Saudi EFL Preparatory Year Students' Perception about Corrective Feedback in Oral Communication

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Abstract

This study sought to investigate the attitudes of Saudi EFL students towards corrective feedback (henceforth CF) on classroom oral errors. The subjects were 3200 (1223 male and 1977 female) students enrolled in an intensive English language programme in the preparatory year at the University of Ha'il. A questionnaire was the main instrument. This study seeks to extend our knowledge by examining the relationship between CF and gender, proficiency level, and students' track. The results revealed that students generally have a positive perception of oral CF. Further, delayed CF was more favoured than immediate feedback. Of the methods of CF used by the teacher, the students preferred asking for clarification, repetition, explicit feedback, metalinguistic feedback, elicitation, and recasting; the majority of them regarded no correction as a poor method. Although the students wanted all of their oral errors to be corrected, they reported wanting their serious errors to be corrected first, followed by frequent errors, individual errors, and then, less serious errors; less frequent errors was the least preferred category. Regarding the choice of correctors, students favoured teacher correction, then self-correction, and finally, classmate correction. As far as the three variables considered, the analysis of the data revealed that in sum, regardless of gender, students' proficiency level, and track, all students had similar beliefs about CF and strongly favoured receiving frequent CF in English oral communication classes once they were made aware of the purpose, significance, and methods of CF. However, the findings of the study showed that there was a significant gender difference, with women responding to CF significantly more than men. Moreover, the results revealed that highly proficient students preferred CF more than students with a lower proficiency, although there were no significant differences for most of the items. Additionally, there were some significant differences among students with different tracks. Pedagogical implications, limitations of the study, and recommendations for further research are also discussed.

Keywords: HUMs, MEDs, SCIs, CF

1. Introduction

Broadly speaking, errors are natural part of language learning. Hence, as far as EFL/ESL classrooms are concerned, speaking attracts the attention of almost all students. This is due to their interest in this skill in particular and because they need to practise the target language to achieve fluency. Therefore, error correction has received considerable attention from both researchers and language teachers. Moreover, providing feedback is the responsibility of the teacher in the first place. Hedge (2000) stated "in many foreign language situations, where there is little exposure to English or practice available in the community, error correction is an expected role for the teacher". Salazar Campillo (2003) mentioned that error correction is an important part of the explicit learning process, as it is a source of explicit input for L2 learners. Furthermore, Ammar and Spada (2006, 544) asserted that "one of the reasons for this increased interest in CF is related to the observation that although L2 learners in communicative classrooms attain relatively high levels of comprehension ability and, to some extent, fluency in oral production, they continue to experience difficulties with accuracy".

Learning and the teaching process are significantly linked to the way teachers and learners react to errors and how they try to correct them. The concept of an error and its CF is a controversial issue because of the complexity with which it is characterized. Errors in most cultures are considered things that should be avoided or prevented, as errors can be the cause of unfortunate events. According to Han (2008), error correction implies an evident and direct correction, whereas CF is a more general way of providing some clues or eliciting some

correction besides the direct correction made by the teacher.

According to Corder (1997), an error is a deviant form that results from lack of knowledge of a particular form and reflects a learner's current stage in interlanguage development. Many researchers and scientists attempt to set a definition of error, but it still remains problematic. More recently, Elzbieta Tomczyk (2013, 924) stated that "an error is the form of foreign language produced by a learner, which reflects his or her contemporary competence and which does not belong to the target language system". Additionally, she defines error correction as "a reaction to a speaker's utterance by someone who has made an assessment that the utterance itself, or at least the part of it, is linguistically or factually wrong" (p. 925). Moreover, "CF is a means of offering modified input to students that could consequently lead to modified output by the students" (Calsiyao, 2015).

Further, "Error correction is defined as a reaction to a speaker's utterance by someone who has made an assessment that the utterance itself, or at least a part of it, is linguistically or factually wrong" (Elzbieta, 2013). While James (1998) considers correction as the improved version of what the first speaker aimed to say. More recently, Ellis, Loewen and Erlam (2006, 340) stated that: "CF takes the form of responses to learner utterances that contain error. The responses can consist of (a) an indication that an error has been committed, (b) provision of the correct target language form, or (c) meta-linguistic information about the nature of the error, or any combination of these".

Calsiyao (2015) asked why language learners commit spoken errors in the target language. Possible reasons include the interference from the native language, an incomplete knowledge of the target language, or the complexity of that target language. Another cause could be fossilization. This occurs when a language learner reaches a satisfactory level of competence in the target language. Further, she raised another question addressing the reasons that teachers need to correct oral errors. In fact, there are several reasons. First, correction permits the learner to comprehend completely how much they have improved in learning the target language. Second, when a learner is corrected, s/he gains a better understanding how the target language works. Last, the confidence of the student is strengthened by CF because they know that they can rely on the teacher to check their expressions.

According to Truscott (1999), the correction of spoken errors does not improve learners' ability to speak more accurately, and foreign language teachers should abandon the correction of these errors. Along the same line, Harmer (2001) noted that "when students are in the middle of a speaking activity, over correction may inhibit them and take the communicativeness out of the activity. On the other hand, helpful and gentle correction may get students out of difficult misunderstandings and hesitation". This is consistent with Pouria Aghaei (2013) who noted that "providing CF is an important part of any EFL education because it is exceedingly helpful to learners in ensuring that they are learning and internalizing the correct version of target language forms". What makes the issue of providing CF even more complicated is the fact that it requires a range of quick decisions that a teacher needs to make after having noticed an error in a student's utterance.

There are few studies on the attitudes of learners and educators with regard to oral CF. This needs to be explored to have a scientific basis to address issues regarding CF. Moreover, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, there has thus far been no study to address gender or track as different variables that might affect CF. Further, no study has been conducted in Saudi context.

2. Literature Review

One of the recent issues in teaching speaking skills around the world has been the role of CF in learner uptake, defined as learners' reaction to the teacher's feedback. The research on CF has centred on its necessity and frequency, timing, methods, types of errors, and correctors. Research on CF has gained prominence in the domain of L2 acquisition because it plays a crucial role in developing L2 acquisition theories as well as teaching second languages.

There has been much discussion on errors and their correction in the foreign language classroom because attitudes of both teachers and students differ regarding errors. In fact, error correction is an important part of the explicit learning process because it is a source of explicit input for L2 learners (Salazar, 2003).

The vast majority of studies that have examined learners' preferences for correction have focused on written errors. However, a very small body of research has investigated learners' preferences/perceptions about the correction of spoken errors (Oladejo, 1993; Bang, 1999; Katayama, 2007). To the best of the researcher's knowledge, there are few studies that had been conducted on learners with different proficiency levels. Additionally, none of the studies conducted previously have examined learners' beliefs/preferences concerning correcting spoken errors with regard to the Saudi context, gender, or track. Hence, our study will focus on the above unexamined context.

There are a number of issues related to CF. Hence, we present a summary of the main issues concerned with the provision of oral CF.

2.1 CF and Proficiency

Proficiency level in a foreign language is known to play an important role in the level of anxiety and self-confidence in oral communication performance. DeKeyser (1993) investigated the effect of error correction on L2 grammar and oral tests by Dutch-speaking high school students learning French as a second language. He found the effect of error correction was determined by individual learner characteristics that included achievement levels and anxiety. For instance, high-achieving students did better on a grammar test after error correction than lower-achieving students. At the same line, Lin and Hedgcock (1996) investigated the effect of error correction on students' repair as a function of learners' proficiency levels. The participants were four highly proficient university students with extensive formal training in Spanish and four Chinese immigrants to Spain with low proficiency. Data were collected using interviews. The results showed striking differences in error recognition and error repairs between the two groups. The highly proficient group of students noticed error correction and successfully repaired their errors, whereas the immigrants with low proficiency showed little sensitivity to error correction.

MacIntyre (2007) noted that learners at lower levels are expected to be more hesitant and anxious during oral communication. Additionally, any attempt at CF for their errors may decrease their motivation and willingness to communicate in the target language.

Genc (2014) conducted a study on ninety randomly selected Turkish EFL learners attending intensive English courses at a private institution. Forty-two subjects were at the low proficiency level and forty-eight of them were high-level students. Data for the study were collected through a questionnaire (Fukuda, 2003) that was administered to all ninety subjects. The aim of the study was to investigate the preferences of Turkish learners of English for the correction of spoken errors. The data revealed that both groups of students preferred receiving CF for spoken errors. However, significant differences were found between low- and high-level students regarding the types of spoken errors, the time, the methods and the source of corrective feedback. In other words, in terms of the time of correction, 84.1% of high-level students agreed to be corrected after they finished speaking, while low-level students did not want to receive CF after the day's lesson. Moreover, regarding the type of errors to be corrected, 79.1% of high-level students reported that they "always/usually" wanted frequent errors to be corrected. On the other hand, 95.2% of the low-level students wanted serious spoken errors to be "always/usually" corrected. Furthermore, in terms of methods to treating errors, the findings revealed that the most preferred methods of error correction for high-level students were "repetition" and "clarification request", while low-level students preferred "explicit treatment" and "repetition" more than other types of error treatment. According to the preferred source for the correction of spoken errors, the study noted that 95.7% of high-level students preferred a native English speaking teacher to correct their spoken errors with the second preference being self-correction (78.7%). On the other hand, the most preferred source of correction for low-level students was Turkish speaking teachers (80.9%) with the next favourable source being self-correction (73.8%).

2.2 Student Perceptions of CF

Generally speaking, most, if not all, researchers agree that a large majority of students express a desire to receive CF. Students look forward to the correction of their errors and are frustrated or resentful when they are ignored or only tolerated. Uncorrected errors can serve as an input model for the class, which is very dangerous. Other students will acquire incorrect input; when errors are corrected, it hastens language acquisition by giving information about the rules and limits of language use. For example, Truscott (1999) investigated the perception of learners regarding CF. He found that the majority of the students in his study believed that their teachers should correct their oral errors in the classroom.

The literature on students' perceptions regarding error correction is limited in both ESL and EFL research (e.g., Cathcart & Olsen, 1976; Chenoweth, Day, Chun, & Luppescu, 1983; Oladejo, 1993; Bang, 1999). Chenoweth et al. (1983) examined adult ESL learners' attitudes towards interaction with native-speaking friends. They found that these learners with different cultural backgrounds had positive attitudes towards error correction. This correlates with the study of McCarger (1993) who investigated adult ESL learners' preference for error correction in his study of cultural differences in teacher and student role expectation. Moreover, Katayama, A. (2007) held a study on 588 EFL students at several Japanese universities using a questionnaire. The results showed that the students had strongly positive attitudes towards CF and that they wanted their errors to be corrected all the time

2.3 Types of oral CF Methods

Lyster and Ranta (1997) observed a variety of lessons in four different classrooms representing two types of immersion programmes. Data were collected in one fourth-grade class in an early total immersion school and in three classrooms in a middle immersion school. The data analysis yielded six different feedback types:

- 1) Explicit correction: clearly indicating the error with the correct form provided by the teacher.
- 2) Recast: Without directly indicating that the student's utterance was incorrect, the teacher implicitly reformulates the student's error or provides the correction.
- 3) Clarification request: by using phrases such as "Excuse me?" or "I don't understand," the teacher indicates that the message has not been understood or that the student's utterance contained some type of mistake and that a repetition or a reformulation is required.
- 4) Metalinguistic clues: without providing the correct form, the teacher poses questions or provides comments or information related to the formation of the student's utterance.
- 5) Elicitation: the teacher directly elicits the correct form from the student by asking questions (e.g., "How do we say that in Arabic?"), by pausing to allow the student to complete the teacher's utterance (e.g., "It's a..") or by asking the student to reformulate the utterance (e.g., "Say that again."). Here, the question differs from those that are defined as metalinguistic clues in that they require more than a yes/no response.
- 6) Repetition: the teacher repeats the student's error and adjusts intonation to draw attention to it.

Yao (2000) added body language as another method. Moreover, Sheen (2011) added explicit correction with meta-linguistic explanation: the correct of the form and a meta-linguistic comment about the form are provided.

Several studies on types of CF have been made by language analysts, and each of them found different methods to be effective in different situations. One of the prominent studies on CF was conducted by Lyster and Ranta (1997), who proposed a framework for several different approaches to CF provided by the teacher. In this framework, six different approaches to feedback were proposed: explicit correction, recast, clarification request, metalinguistic feedback, elicitation, and repetition.

Panova and Lyster (2002) confirmed the results in an adult ESL classroom in which recast was the most frequently used type of CF. Further, Katayama, A. (2007) found that the most favoured correction method was giving the student a hint that might enable that student to notice the error and self-correct.

Tsang (2004) investigated the occurrence of CF, the relationship between CF and types of learner errors, such as grammatical and phonological errors. The participants in his study were 481 secondary school students learning English in Hong Kong. The results revealed that the most frequent student-generated repair occurred in repetition and elicitation and the least repairs occurred with recast and explicit correction.

Park, G. (2010) did a study investigating students' preference of CF with 51 university students taking English conversation in the EFL context of Korea. Two instruments were used: the questionnaire for CF Approach (QCFAs) and the Test of English for International Communication (TOEFIC). The findings noted that the students chose – in the order of their preference – the recast method, explicit correction, elicitation, repetition, and the clarification request method. Haghani (2012) probed the effectiveness of different types of corrective feedback. He found that among the implicit methods of CF, elicitation proved to be the most effective, which is at odds with the results of Lyster and Ranta (1997) that found recast to be the most common form. This finding conforms with the result of the study of Mendez and Cruz. (2012), which was conducted at a Mexican university. This university offers English as Foreign Language (EFL). Fifteen students participated in the study. Semi-structured interviews and a questionnaire were used to collect data. The results showed that the students' favourite oral CF method was recasting, followed by grammatical explanations, gestures, and finally clarification requests. Further, Aghaei (2013) suggested a positive and favourable attitude towards error correction in the form of recast and explained that recast can have a positive effect on the quality of EFL students' oral output. In contrast, Tomczyk (2013) conducted a study on 250 secondary school students. Two methods of data collection were used: questionnaires and observations. The findings of the study supported the technique of indicating the noticed error by means of gesture and asking for the correction from the student who committed the given error. Another method preferred was indicating an error using repetition with a rising tone while waiting for the student who has made the error to correct it. Most recently, Zhang & Rahimi (2014) conducted a study on 160 Iranian EFL learners in three language institutes in the centre of Iran. Questionnaires supplied the data. The results indicated that according to CF methods, explicit feedback and metalinguistic feedback were the most effective methods of CF, and elicitation, recast, repetition and clarification request were the second most effective

methods. Another study was conducted by Calsiyao (2015) in which 365 students of Kalinga-Apayao State College provided data on their preferences towards CF on classroom oral errors. The questionnaire was the main instrument. The result revealed that the students preferred the recast, explicit, and explanation methods.

2.4 When to Use CF

CF can be provided immediately after the error has been made, or it can be delayed until later, after the communicative activity in which the learners are engaged is finished. Hence, determining the right time to give CF has been analysed by linguistic researchers. Researchers such as Kavaliauskiene, Anusiene, and Kaminskiene (2009) noted that during communication activities, teachers should not interrupt students just to give error correction because interruption may raise stress levels and hinder communication. These researchers recommended that errors should be dealt with later. This concurs with Otavio (2010), who stated that delayed CF has a positive effect on fluency and accuracy. In sharp contrast, Mendez and Cruz (2012) found that students prefer the instructor to provide CF immediately after the error has been made. Such a finding is in line with the findings of Aghaei (2013) that students agreed or strongly agreed that all errors in speaking should be corrected even if the correction interrupts their flow of communication. This might be due to those students' preference for accuracy over fluency or at least their parallel attention to accuracy and fluency at the same time. This finding is also in line with Tomczyk (2013), who stated that the most crucial argument in favour of CF is that errors have to be eliminated as soon as possible, before habit-formation takes place and the wrong forms become part of the students' interlanguage. Additionally, this agrees with Zhang and Rahimi (2014), who found that participants favoured immediate rather than delayed CF. Calsiyao (2015) also noted that students do not mind if the teacher does the correction while they are reciting in the classroom.

2.5 Types of Errors to Correct

Broadly speaking, teachers should not attempt to correct every error in oral communication. "Correcting all errors made by a student gives a real picture of the extent to which the student needs remediation. When the learner takes this seriously, he may be overwhelmed by the number of his errors and see his performance a failure." (Calsiyao, 2015). Hendrickson (1978) explained that learners do not like to be corrected for each minor error they make. This practice ruins their confidence in using the target language. Mendez and Cruz (2012) mentioned that when dealing with errors, language instructors have to make many decisions, and one of these is the type of error to correct. However, sometimes some types of errors are neglected to some extent, or only the most "serious" errors are corrected. Further, Zhang and Rahimi (2014) found that "serious spoken errors that may cause problems in a listener's understanding" gained the greatest attention, and "frequent errors" and "individual errors" gained the second greatest attention, while "infrequent errors" received the lowest attention. According to Calsiyao (2015), there is inconsistency in the response of the students as to the types of errors that should be corrected. At the beginning, they said that all their spoken errors should be corrected by the teachers, but later, they said that only those that impede communication should be corrected.

2.6 Choice of Correctors

Another corollary of cardinal importance in the process of CF is the question of who should provide the correction. The findings of Tomczyk (2013) revealed that the majority of the students considered a teacher to be the person who was supposed to correct them, whereas peer correction was not appreciated by the students. Additionally, they did not seem to prefer self-correction because only 17.2% of them wanted the opportunity for this type of correction. This finding comes in line with Aghaei (2013), who stated that the majority of students reported that they either agreed or strongly agreed that if they were not corrected by the teacher, their oral output would become less accurate. This finding was also supported by Zhang and Rahimi, (2014) whose results revealed that teachers' CF was most highly valued by the students, while their classmates' CF had the second highest value: and self-correction was the least favoured CF. This is consistent with Calsiyao (2015), who found that the teacher was the most preferred by the students to correct their spoken errors. They also had positive attitudes towards peer correction and self-correction.

3. Methodology

The current study was undertaken to investigate the students' perception about CF in oral classroom activities and other issues addressing error corrections, such as when corrections should have been made, how errors should be corrected, what errors should be corrected, and who should do the correction. Finding answers to these questions from the point view of the learners may be able to guide teachers in how to handle CF in a manner beneficial to the language learners.

3.1 Subjects

The target participants in the study were 3200 (1223 male and 1977 female) Saudi EFL students enrolled in an intensive English language programme in the preparatory year at the University of Ha'il. Upon enrolling in the intensive English program, they sat for a placement test to determine their appropriate level. The main goal of the preparatory year is to prepare the students for university undergraduate courses. Therefore, the learning objectives of the course are based on helping learners to develop their communicative, general and academic English skills. The programme has four levels from level one, which is for true beginners, through level four, which is the highest level students should complete before moving to an undergraduate university course. As a results, some students start at advanced levels, while others may be placed in lower levels. This means that not all the students follow the same linear path from the lowest to the highest levels. The curriculum in level four is established according to the student's track. If they are in the medical track, the content of the course will be medical English to prepare them for the health science colleges. On the other hand, if the student is in the science track, level four will focus mainly on ESP English to help them when they move to science and engineering colleges. Furthermore, the humanities track students are supposed to study academic English in level four to enable them to cope with their undergraduate course when they move to the humanities and social sciences colleges.

3.2 Instruments

3.2.1 Student Questionnaire

The purpose of the questionnaire is to gather information about oral (CF), students' preferences, when to correct, methods of CF, types of errors to be corrected, and who to correct. The questionnaire was constructed on the basis of a careful examination of previous questionnaires such Park (2010); Mendez and Cruz (2012); Aghaei, P. (2013); Tomczyk (2013); Rahimi and Zhang (2014); and Calssiyao (2015). It had some content validation by two refereed professors in applied linguistics. The Arabic version of the questionnaire was discussed and checked by professional Arabic teachers to avoid any ambiguity in the wording of the questionnaire, which could lead to problems of interpretation on the part of the respondents, and to ensure content validity. The questionnaire consisted of 21 items. An internal reliability analysis was performed using alpha to determine the extent to which the items on our questionnaire are related to each other. Alpha shows the internal consistency based on the average inter-item correlation. The internal reliability for our questionnaire was .87.

3.3 Procedure

The questionnaire was uploaded on the students' e-services system. This system is designed mainly for preparatory year students and teachers, and other students and teachers at the university cannot log onto the system. The students log into this system using their usernames and passwords to check their records in their courses on daily basis. We made arrangements with the database administrator (DBA) to upload the questionnaire and give the students the choice to either fill out the questionnaire or skip it. Once a student answered or skipped the questionnaire, it was not shown to him again. It was uploaded in the second semester (2014-2015) for one week. The students were told on the front page that there were no right or wrong answers to any question and that their confidentiality was secured and their responses would be used for research purposes only. They were also informed that while their participation would not affect their grades, they still had the option not to participate.

Data were analysed using SPSS 19.0. Frequency, means and standard deviation, Two-way repeated measure ANOVA tests. A p-value less than 0.05 was considered significant.

3.4 Research Questions

In the current study, according to the study's variable (language proficiency, gender, track), certain questions need to be answered. They are as follows:

- 1) What do the students think about CF?
- 2) How often do the students want their oral errors to be corrected?
- 3) When should students' errors be corrected?
- 4) How should students' errors be corrected?
- 5) What are types of student oral errors should be corrected?
- 6) Who should correct the errors?

4. Results and Discussion

This section details the results, provides an interpretation of the findings of the study and gives a report and analysis of CF among Saudi EFL students in the preparatory year at the University of Ha'il. Then, the discussion focuses on the interpretation of the relationship between CF and proficiency levels, gender, and track.

4.1 Importance of CF

The first query involved the students' disposition towards the statement "I want to receive CF when I make mistakes" and provided an answer for Research Question 1: what do the students think about CF?

Table 1. Importance of CF

Statement	Mean	SD	Gender		Level		track	
			t-value	p	t-value	p	F	p
I want to receive CF when I make mistake.	3.43	1.397	-3.820	.001	1.085	.278	3.459	.032

Table 1 reports the results for the students' overall preference towards the correction of spoken errors. As Table 1 illustrates, the responses show that the students have a positive attitude towards CF with an overall mean of 3.43 and standard deviation 1.397. This result is in line with Genc (2014), Zhang et al. (2014), and Calsiyao (2015). Referring back to Table 1, there is a significant difference that can be observed between male and female, t-value -3.820, p. 001 (male: mean 3.31 and standard deviation 1.471 and female: mean of 3.50 and standard deviation 1.344). Such results might refer to the opinion that women are usually more keen to learn more accurately than men. Furthermore, as far as proficiency level is concerned, the results revealed that there is no significant difference between high and low levels of proficiency among students, as students in both groups, regardless of their proficiency level, were in favour of receiving CF (t-value 1.085, p. 278). This concurs with what Genc (2014) found. Data obtained from ANOVA showed that there is a significant difference among students according to their track, F. 3.459, p .032. To know exactly where the difference lies, we ran the Tukey test and found that the difference is between humanities track (HUMs) and Medical track (MEDs) (p= .027). The reason seems to be that medical students have a very strong motivation to learn, as they will join health science colleges when they finish their preparatory year. Moreover, they have scored high grades on high school aptitude and achievement tests and this enabled them to be accepted in the medical track.

4.2 Frequency of CF

In this section, the results show the students' responses towards Research Question 2: how often do the students want their oral errors to be corrected?

Table 2. The frequency of CF

Statement	Mean	SD	Gender		Level		Track	
			t-value	p	t-value	p	F	p
How often do you want your teacher to give CF in your spoken errors?	3.33	1.316	-3.627	.001	-.470	.638	3.422	.033

Table 2 demonstrates the frequency of receiving desired oral feedback in classroom. The results reveal that most of the students state that they want their spoken errors to be corrected always with mean 3.33 and standard deviation 1.316. This might be because the students recognize the importance of oral CF, as illustrated in the above section. The finding here conforms with the results of some studies such as Katayama (2007); Aghaei (2013); Salima (2014); Genc (2014); and Calsiyao (2015). Here also, the results show that there are significant differences according to gender (t-value= -3.627, p= .001) and track (F= 3.422, p= .033), while there is no significant difference regarding the proficiency levels (t-value= -.470, p= .638). In other words, women reported that they always want to have CF more than men (male: mean 3.22 and standard deviation 1.397 and female: mean of 3.39 and standard deviation 1.260). According to the track, to know exactly where the difference lies, we ran the Tukey test and found that the difference is between SCIs and MEDs on one hand and HUMs on the other hand. This means that SCIs and MEDs prefer to receive CF more than HUMs. This result supports the argument mentioned in the previous section concerning the strong motivation that MEDs and Science track

(SCIs) students have. They are so keen to improve their English and widen their knowledge in English language.

4.3 When Oral Errors Should Be Corrected

This section illustrates the students' responses towards Research Question 3, which addresses the timing of CF by asking when should students' errors should be corrected, as observed in Table 3 below.

Table 3. When to use CF

Statement	Mean	SD	Gender		Level		Track	
			t-value	p	t-value	p	F	p
Immediate CF	2.77	1.207	-2.348	.019	2.758	.006	.190	.827
CF at the end of the class	2.92	1.259	-2.937	.003	1.503	.133	1.217	.296
CF after students finish speaking	3.08	1.278	-3.971	.001	.168	.867	2.376	.093
CF after the activity	2.91	1.208	-2.166	.030	.412	.680	.429	.651

As shown in Table 3, the majority of students state they want their error to be corrected after they finish speaking (mean 3.08 and standard deviation 1.278), then at the end of the class and finally after the activity (mean 2.92 and standard deviation 1.259; mean 2.91 and standard deviation 1.208, respectively). Thus, it is clear that they do not want their errors to be corrected as soon as errors are made (mean 2.77 and standard deviation 1.207). This result goes in line with what Genc (2014) found. However, such a result appears to be inconsistent with what other studies found, such as Tomczyk (2013); Aghaei (2013); and Calsiyao (2015). Possible explanations can be offered for this finding. First, the participants study English in an EFL setting and do not need it for daily life. Second, the participants in this study are preparatory year students.

Moreover, as far as gender being considered, the findings revealed that there are significant differences between men and women in all the above statements (CF after finish speaking, t -value= -3.971, p = .001; CF at the end of the class, t -value= -2.937, p = .003; CF after the activity, t -value= -2.166, p = .030; immediate CF, t -value= -2.348, p = .019). Additionally, the women here seem to have the above timing for CF more than the men (male: CF after finish speaking, mean 2.97 and standard deviation 1.369; CF at the end of the class, mean 2.84 and standard deviation 1.334; CF after the activity, mean 2.85 and standard deviation 1.306; immediate CF, mean 2.71 and standard deviation 1.282; female: CF after finish speaking, mean 3.15 and standard deviation 1.214; CF at the end of the class, mean 2.98 and standard deviation 1.208; CF after the activity, mean 2.94 and standard deviation 1.142; immediate CF, mean 2.81 and standard deviation 1.157). Further, by looking at proficiency levels, the results demonstrate that there is only a significant difference in immediate CF (t -value= 2.758, p = .006), while there are no significant differences in other statements. In other words, highly proficient students want to receive CF as soon as the errors are made more than low-proficiency students (highly proficient students: mean 2.82 and standard deviation 1.193 and low-proficiency students: mean of 2.70 and standard deviation 1.223). The reason behind this might be related to the fact that highly proficient students are more confident than low-proficiency students and their errors are fewer than less proficient ones. Such a result is supported with the result of the study of Genc, Z. (2014). Additionally, there are no significant differences among students according to their track.

4.4 Methods of CF

This section addresses Research Question 4: how should students' errors be corrected? The answer for this question is shown in the table below.

Table 4. Methods of CF

Statement	Mean	SD	Gender		Level		Track	
			t-value	p	t-value	p	F	p
Clarification request	3.23	1.310	-5.145	.001	1.520	.133	4.638	.010
Repetition	3.22	1.322	-6.478	.001	.573	.567	7.036	.001
Explicit feedback	3.22	1.294	-6.813	.001	1.227	.220	2.163	.115
Elicitation	3.04	1.210	-4.187	.001	1.925	.054	2.271	.103
No CF	2.35	1.233	.152	.879	2.740	.006	7.346	.001
Metalinguistic feedback	3.07	1.238	-4.780	.001	-.268	.788	6.046	.002
Recast	2.77	1.205	-2.852	.004	2.984	.003	6.066	.002

Among the seven types of CF methods, the most popular was to ask for clarification (mean 3.23 and standard deviation 1.310). This is consistent with Mendez et al. (2012). Repetition and explicit feedback were favoured next by the students with mean 3.22 for both and standard deviation 1.322 and 1.294, respectively. This finding is in line with the study of Park (2010) and with that of Genc (2014). Further, the metalinguistic feedback method comes in third place with mean 3.07 and standard deviation 1.238, and elicitation was in fourth place with mean 3.04 and standard deviation 1.210. The recast method was the fifth popular one among students with mean 2.77 and standard deviation 1.205. Such results come against those of Aghaei (2013), who found that there is a positive attitude towards recast as the most popular method among the students. No CF was reported to be the least frequently favoured method with mean 2.35 and standard deviation 1.233. Similar results were reported in previous studies (Tomczyk, 2013; Genc, 2014; and Zhang et al., 2014).

Referring back to Table 4, it was observed that there are significant differences among students according to their gender in the use of all CF methods except one, no corrective feedback, for which there is no significant difference (t -value = .152, p = .879). The reason for this is that the majority of students, regardless of their gender, disliked that method. In other words, female students show more preference for these CF methods than male students, except for no corrective feedback, for which male students have a slight preference over female students (male: mean 2.35 and standard deviation 1.286; female mean 2.34 and standard deviation 1.199). Further, regarding proficiency levels, it is clear from the table above that there are significant differences for the recast method and for no CF (t -value = 2.984, p = .003; t -value = 2.740, p = .006, respectively), whereas there were no significant differences in the beliefs of high- and low- proficiency students with respect to the other CF methods. Thus, it should be mentioned that high- proficiency students seem to be more inclined towards all of these CF methods than low- proficiency students are. This result conforms with the findings of other studies (i.e., Park, 2010; Genc, 2014). Moreover, in regard to the track of the students, the results revealed that there are significant differences for five CF methods out of the seven as shown in Table 4 above. To know exactly where these differences lie based on the track, we ran the Tukey test and found that the difference is between SCIs and MEDs on one hand and HUMs on the other. Therefore, SCIs and MEDs preferred to receive CF more than HUMs. The reason seems to be that medical and science students are more serious and the competition between students is high. They have to achieve high grades to enable them to gain admission to the health science and engineering colleges. On the other hand, humanities students will be admitted to the education and social science colleges, which are not preferred by the students; usually weak and unmotivated students join such colleges.

4.5 Types of Errors to Correct

In this section, Research Question 5 is addressed: what types of student oral errors should be corrected?

Table 5. Types of errors to correct

Statement	Mean	SD	Gender		Level		Track	
			t-value	p	t-value	p	F	p
Serious errors	3.73	1.319	-6.536	.001	1.573	.116	3.230	.040
Less serious errors	3.55	1.300	-6.311	.001	1.908	.057	4.189	.015
Frequent errors	3.69	1.300	-6.249	.001	1.495	.135	4.336	.013
Infrequent errors	3.45	1.227	.557	.577	-14.38	.001	7.909	.001
Individual errors	3.64	1.303	-5.162	.001	.816	.414	1.076	.341

Table 5 shows the responses on the types of errors on which students prefer to be corrected. It seems that the majority of the students want to receive correction for serious and frequent errors in oral communication with mean 3.73 and standard deviation 1.319 and mean 3.69 and standard deviation 1.300, respectively. Such findings are supported by Genc (2014), and Zhang et al. (2014). Further, individual errors come in the third place with mean 3.64 and standard deviation 1.303. This sheds the light on student concerns about individual errors. Less serious errors and infrequent errors are the fourth and the fifth with mean 3.55 and standard deviation 1.300 and mean 3.45 and standard deviation 1.227, respectively. From the above results, it is clear that the students are interested in having all types of errors corrected, as the mean of all the above types are above 3.

With regard to gender and as is observed in the above Table, there are significant differences between men and women for all types of errors except infrequent ones. Specifically, the results show that the women want these errors to be corrected more than men. Such a finding is not surprising, and the reason behind this in my own experience might be due to women usually being more serious and interested in understanding everything than men. On the other hand, in regard to the proficiency levels, the results revealed that there is no significant difference between high- and low-proficiency students in these type of errors except for one type, which is infrequent errors ($t\text{-value} = -14.38$, $p = .001$). According to the results, low-proficiency students prefer this type of error to be corrected more than high-proficiency students (low-proficiency students: mean 3.810 and standard deviation 1.289 and high-proficiency students: mean of 3.199 and standard deviation 1.109). These results are consistent with the findings of Genc, Z., (2014). This might occur because those low-proficiency students face those types of errors more than high-proficiency students. The same result is found regarding track, as there is no significant difference between students in the different tracks regarding these types of errors except for one type, which is infrequent errors ($F = 7.909$, $p = .001$). To know exactly where the difference lies, we ran the Tukey test and found that the difference is between SCIs and HUMs ($p = .001$). Therefore, SCIs preferred to receive CF more than HUMs. The reason, as we mentioned earlier, is that science students are more interested in learning than humanities students, who chose this track because they lack the skills and the capabilities to join engineering and science colleges.

4.6 Choice of Correctors

This section will provide the answer to Research Question 6 according to the students' perception: who should correct the errors?

Table 6. Choice of correctors

Statement	Mean	SD	Gender		Level		Track	
			t-value	p	t-value	p	F	p
Classmates	2.88	1.246	-4.138	.001	2.605	.009	7.447	.001
Teachers	3.39	1.272	-6.340	.001	2.915	.004	2.850	.058
Myself	3.19	1.265	-5.795	.001	.218	.828	8.112	.001

As Table 6 reports, students responded that they want their teacher to correct their oral errors with mean of 3.39 and standard deviation 1.272. The result confirmed the findings of some previous studies (Aghaei, 2013; Tomczyk, 2013; Zhang et al., 2014; Genc, 2014; Calsiyao, 2015). This might be because they trust their teacher more than they trust others. Self-correction had the second highest response with mean of 3.19 and standard

deviation 1.265. This result is in line with Mendez, E. et al. (2012). On the other hand, their classmates' CF was the least favoured. This agrees with Tomczyk (2013).

Once gender is considered, the results reveal that there are significant differences between men and women for all choices of correctors. Hence, the results show that women prefer those people to correct their errors more than men do. The same result is found regarding the students' proficiency levels, as there are significant difference among students with different proficiency levels for classmates' CF and teachers' CF (t-value= 2.605, $p = .009$; t-value= 2.915, $p = .004$, respectively), while there is no significant difference for self-correction (t-value= .218, $p = .828$). However, high-proficiency students prefer those correctors a little bit more than low-proficiency students. Finally, the results indicate that there are significant differences among students in different tracks regarding these types of correctors for classmates' CF and self-correction ($F = 7.447$, $p = .001$; $F = 8.112$, $p = .001$, respectively), but there is no significant difference regarding teachers' CF ($F = 2.850$, $p = .058$). To know exactly where the difference lies, we ran the Tukey test and found that the difference exists between SCIs and HUMs ($p = .001$) where SCIs students reported using these three types of corrections more than HUMs students. This result support the findings earlier.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore Saudi EFL students' attitudes, and preferences towards corrective feedback, including the timing of CF, methods of CF, types of errors that should be corrected, and the one who should offer the correction. Further, it investigated factors that have been found to affect CF use, such as gender, proficiency level, and students' track, to obtain additional insights from the students' statements about their own CF beliefs.

The results of this study indicated a positive and high preference for CF. Students believe that correction of their spoken errors is necessary. This strongly emphasizes the importance of error correction in preventing fossilization of spoken errors that do not receive attention and feedback.

Similar results were obtained by Genc (2014), Zhang et al. (2014), and Calsiyao (2015). Among the many methods that might be used to provide corrective feedback, the students preferred to ask for clarification and repetition as well as explicit feedback over other methods, and the least frequently favoured method was no corrective feedback. The results also proved that contrary to immediate correction, which is usually regarded as disruptive, delayed correction, including CF after students finish speaking, at the end of the class or after the activity, was most favoured by students. Moreover, the findings illustrated that the most suitable person to provide CF was the teacher, followed by the learner doing self-correction; the classmate was the least favoured. However, we assume that self-correction should be promoted among learners because students are actively engaged in the process of language learning. Further, the results of this study demonstrate that students are willing to receive error correction for different types of errors in speaking. It was demonstrated that serious and frequent errors in oral communication were the most frequently favoured, followed by individual errors. Less serious errors and infrequent errors ranked fourth and fifth.

As far as other factors considered, gender, proficiency level, and track, the results revealed that first, there were significant differences between male and female CF beliefs with regard to importance, frequency and timing of CF as well as the methods of CF, the types of errors to be corrected, and the choice of correctors. Hence, the women were more aware of these than the men. Second, the students' track has more effect than the proficiency level, as there were significant differences for twelve out of twenty-one statements on the questionnaire. However, regardless of students' proficiency level and for the majority of statements except some of the methods of CF and one of types of errors as discussed earlier, there were no significant difference between the high- and low-proficiency students. This might be attributed to the fact that both groups were familiarized with the purpose, importance, and methods of CF and they knew that the purpose of CF was to help them to endorse their language learning by drawing their attention to inconsistencies between their mother tongue and the target language.

5.1 Pedagogical Implications

1) The results of the current study highlight the importance of CF in oral communication in the classroom, as well as the high frequency of CF that is desired, as the majority of the students usually wanted their errors to be corrected. Therefore, teachers should provide CF to the students to help them to facilitate L2 acquisition, especially by using multiple feedback methods.

2) With regard to the timing of providing corrective feedback, the students preferred not to be corrected immediately, assuming that it was better to delay correction which unfortunately has some drawbacks. Although delayed correction is less disruptive and irritating than immediate correction, it is more effective to give CF after

erroneous forms have appeared because the processing mechanisms of students are then more likely to be activated.

3) The results showed that the students preferred their teacher to correct their errors, then to correct the errors themselves, and finally to be corrected by their classmates. However, fostering autonomous learning is a paramount task in the teachers' agenda, as is collaborative learning. Teachers should be aware of the advantages of classmate and self-correction, as they can increase language awareness and help learners to test hypotheses in the target language.

4) This study offers evidence for Ellis' (2009) general guidelines for giving CF. Specifically, Ellis (2009) suggests that:

“Teachers should ascertain their students' attitudes towards CF, [apprise] them of the value of CF, and negotiate agreed goals for CF with them. The goals are likely to vary according to the social and situational context. [...] Teachers should ensure that learners know they are being corrected (i.e., they should not attempt to hide the corrective force of their CF moves from the learners). Whereas it will generally be clear to learners that they are being corrected in the case of written CF, it may not always be clear in the case of oral CF”.

5.2 Limitations of the Study

We hope that the current study has presented valuable information to the study of CF attitudes of Saudi EFL learners of English. As with any other study, there are some limitations, but none of them is a threat to the validity of the research. However, these limitations seem to provide suggestions for further research on how CF might be further investigated. The limitations of this study are as follows:

- 1) As the questionnaire was the main instrument in this study, its data are based on self-reporting.
- 2) The participants in this study were limited to Saudi EFL students enrolled in an intensive English language programme. This excludes undergraduate students in different years and graduate students.
- 3) The study set out to investigate students' attitudes towards CF and the effect of gender, proficiency level, and track on the students' attitudes and preferences of CF. Hence, the present study is not an account of all the possible factors.

5.3 Recommendation for Further Research

- 1) The literature review presented in this study revealed that in the area of Arab EFL in general and Saudi EFL in particular, CF in the oral context has not been investigated thoroughly enough. Therefore, further research is highly recommended to conduct descriptive, experimental, and cross-sectional studies on Arab EFL learners in general and Saudi EFL students in particular. These types of studies can be expected to provide a better understanding of Arab and Saudi EFL CF attitudes and beliefs.
- 2) Other studies should investigate the CF of both male and female Saudi students at different ages and educational levels.
- 3) Investigating the effect of training on CF use, including the success of its use, is a vital issue to take into consideration in further research.
- 4) Further research may use multiple-method approaches such as observation, oral interaction recording and qualitative interviews, among many other instruments.

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