
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Role of Corrective Feedback in Second Language Acquisition within the Saudi Educational Context

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| ABSTRACT

This paper is a review of previous research that examines the role of corrective feedback in second language acquisition, specifically in Saudi educational settings. It provides a theoretical background on the definition and types of corrective feedback, as well as different perspectives from researchers on whether or not it improves second language learners' linguistic input. The researchers investigate the problems caused by insufficient corrective feedback in various Saudi educational settings, indicating a lack of awareness and ineffective approaches taken by educators in addressing second language learners' errors. They also emphasize the significant value of corrective feedback in the Saudi context. Therefore, this review aims to provide essential information that should be considered by second language teachers and researchers. Additionally, it highlights potential pedagogical implications that should be addressed in the future to resolve certain challenges related to corrective feedback.

| KEYWORDS

Corrective feedback, L2 learners, second language acquisition (SLA).

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

The main purpose of this paper is to examine and scrutinize the role of corrective feedback (CF) in the domain of second language acquisition (SLA). This essay discusses and observes the views of researchers on the effectiveness of corrective feedback, particularly in educational contexts where second language (L2) learners interact with their teachers and peers to improve the target language. The common types of CF are illustrated along with miscellaneous examples. One of the main objectives of CF is to internalize sound L2 input after gaining CF from teachers or peers. This could increase L2 learners' uptake, which would lead to appropriate modified output (Ellis et al., 2001; Suzuki, 2004). This is because comprehensible input proposed by Krashen (1985) tends not to be sufficient. Therefore, Swain (1985) suggested an Output Hypothesis that necessitates producing modified output mainly through CF. There have been multiple research studies conducted in the field of SLA, particularly the value of CF provided by English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers to EFL Arabic students. The current paper demonstrates the diverse attitudes of EFL Arabic learners, particularly EFL Saudi learners, towards written and verbal feedback. Feedback provides learners with critical information on their linguistic performance; otherwise, their academic level might be impaired (Zamel, 1985; Brown, 2009; Schulz, 2001; as cited in Mustafa, 2012). CF is provided only when there is a language error. As Chaudron (1988) asserts, the treatment of error concerns any teacher behavior that follows ill-formed utterances made by L2 learners to be informed about the fact of the mistake so that it is corrected. Linguistic feedback can be defined as giving either positive or negative evidence of learners' performance based on erroneous written or oral discourse that results in linguistic repairs (Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Suzuki, 2004). Negative evidence is related to those linguistic structures that cannot be used based on the rules of the target language. However, positive evidence refers to the correct linguistic output that is compatible with the rules of the target language, whether in written

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or spoken discourse. Further, feedback tends to be objective on language users' behavior to recognize the positive linguistic attitudes or to devise remedial suggestions that would contribute to treating the errors made (Harvard, 2007; Ito, 2015).

2. Discussion

2.1 Types of Corrective Feedback

There is a vast number of researchers in the domain of SLA who believe that CF falls into six types, namely recast, explicit correction, elicitation, clarification request, repetition, and metalinguistic corrective feedback. Recast refers to the reformulation of teachers' utterances as it is characterized by not interrupting language users and giving them a chance for the sake of the flow of communication (Lyster, 1998; Trofimovich, Ammar, & Gatbonton, 2007; Ellis & Sheen, 2006; as cited in Ghahari & Piruznejad, 2017) as example 1 illustrates below:

S: The cat eat cheese every day

T: Yes, the cat eats cheese every day

The second type is explicit correction, which means that L2 learners receive CF from their teachers about the erroneous utterances to be reproduced correctly (Lyster & Ranta, 1997). Likewise, the third type of CF is a clarification request that is expressed in diverse forms, including raising questions by listeners to indicate that the utterance has been incorrect or not understandable to be reformulated by the speaker (Sahyoni, 2018). This is in line with Spada and Frohlich (1995), who demonstrate that a clarification request refers to either an ill-formed utterance or the teacher having misunderstood what has been said. Further, Lyster and Ranta (1997, as cited in Vaezi, 2011 et al.) provided a salient definition for clarification requests to be concerned with encountering problems in either accuracy or comprehensibility such as "pardon me" is an example of clarification requests uttered to the speaker so that the utterance is reformulated (Lyster, 2004; as cited in Vaezi, 2011 et al.). Expanding on this, elicitation is the fourth type of CF. It draws L2 learners' attention to correct their errors. This can be carried out through certain strategies, such as raising open questions and resorting to pause techniques. For instance, emphatic stress would be done by teachers followed by a pause so that L2 learners identify the erroneous utterances (Panova and Lyster, 2002 as cited in Vaezi, 2011 et al.) as example 2 shows below:

S: My friend will comes tomorrow

T: My friend will.....?

Moreover, repetition feedback concerns repeating certain utterances to implicitly draw L2 learners' attention to the correct linguistic form (Panova and Lyster, 2002, as cited in Vaezi, 2011 et al.). Büyükbay (2007) conducted a research paper on the effectiveness of repetition of CF. The researcher concluded that it assists L2 learners in fixing their own mistakes and "own repair". Additionally, it enhances students' critical thinking. Also, teachers could make use of it to correct students' errors implicitly rather than explicitly interrupting and impeding their thinking processes. For instance, if L2 learners mispronounce a certain word, the teacher would repeat the correct pronunciation of that word more than once so that the student discerns its sound pronunciation. Ultimately, metalinguistic feedback can be defined simply as providing L2 learners with explicit comments concerning the nature of the error that L2 learners have made. This would be in line with Ellis (2009, as cited in Azizi 2014 et al.), who proposed that it refers to information, questions, or comments about the well-formedness of L2 students' linguistic production, such as when the teacher informs the student to omit indefinite articles with plural and mass nouns.

2.2 Different Views on Corrective Feedback in SLA Research

Over the recent decades, the research on CF in the domain of SLA has grown substantially. While some L2 researchers tend to rule out the effectiveness of CF in SLA (e.g., Krashen, 1985), others adopt different views and underpin the benefits gained from CF (Gass & Mackey, 2006). Initially, Krashen and his proponents argue that CF rules out the process of language acquisition, but it may play a role when it comes to language learning. While acquisition concerns acquiring language subconsciously, such as when children acquire their L1, learning should occur consciously so that L2 learners can interact with their teachers regarding certain linguistic matters, such as raising questions concerning grammatical structures. He believes that L2 learning might play a role in association with CF and that it works as a monitor to fix the erroneous output of the acquired system.

Likewise, Krashen's Natural Order Hypothesis stresses that linguistic rules are acquired in sequential order. This indicates that SLA tends not to be influenced by the intervention of CF. Expanding on this, he proposes the Affective Filter Hypothesis, which stresses that L2 learners' input might not be processed properly if the filter is high. Thus, CF could hinder L2 development. This is because L2 learners' confidence tends to be decreasing. In brief, while Stephen Krashen underestimates the role of CF in the field of SLA, he emphasizes the potential editing benefit of CF when blended with learning (Lin and Jin, 2016). This could be underpinned by Pienemann (2007 as cited in Lin and Jin, 2016), who demonstrates that formal instructions, including CF, are not expected to change the sequential stages of language development. Other researchers, such as DeKeyser (2007 as cited in Lin and Jin, 2016), seem to have some doubt about the effectiveness of CF, which needs to be investigated by doing more research. Others, however, opt for

CF to occur with an interaction approach when learning a language that examines the relationship between acquisition and communication. This could be mediated by certain mechanisms, such as noticing. Accordingly, CF comprises a couple of rules in SLA based on the process of interaction. The first is the negative evidence that refers to identifying what is unacceptable in language. However, the second is the positive evidence, which is the structures or rules that are compatible with the norms of the target language itself.

Although L2 learners immerse themselves in instructional settings and full language exposure for the sake of fluency and competence in the target language for several years, they fail to accomplish the typical linguistic level. Therefore, positive evidence alone does not suffice for L2 learners' communicative needs, and there should be an interventional role led by CF to let L2 learners know errors and reasons beyond them to be avoided and thus alter their linguistic output to be modified. Hence, CF is more likely to be a catalyst for SLA (Gass, 2003; Bitchener, 2012; as cited in Lin and Jin, 2016). Moreover, CF usually works in association with noticing that it plays a major role in prompting L2 learners to identify the gap between their current linguistic system and the target language. This would be achieved through either explicit or implicit feedback like recasts. As a result, noticing that results from corrective feedback are more likely to raise L2 learners' awareness to improve remarkably during the developmental stages of SLA (Robinson, 1995; Tomlin & Villa, 1994; Schmidt, 2001; as cited in Kim, 2004). In the same vein, CF would be a stimulus in language learning by drawing L2 learners' attention to form. This is led by Schmidt (1990, 1995, 2001 as cited in Rezaei, 2011 et al.), who believes that noticing should be done before learning as it is supposed to be paid to input so that L2 flourishes.

2.3 Corrective Feedback and L2 Learners' Uptake

Several researchers in the domain of SLA consider uptake as an important indicator that demonstrates the effectiveness of CF in L2 educational contexts. L2 learners' uptake could be defined as how L2 learners react to CF given by their teachers when they make errors that ultimately lead to the modified output. A key notion that has developed massively CF and L2 learners' uptake is the Output Hypothesis proposed by Swain (1985). The researcher observed how L2 learners of French were exposed to a great deal of input so that they could develop their linguistic abilities. According to those observations, the students did not struggle with comprehending their teachers' utterances; however, their linguistic production was inaccurate. Thus, she argues that comprehensible input (Krashen, 1985) seems to be insufficient to improve language acquisition, including syntax. Therefore, producing language output is important in response to input so that L2 learners develop their language further. Hence, providing L2 learners with consistent and beneficial CF plays a major role in modifying their output and improving accuracy whether CF is given by teachers or peers.

Uptake is deemed to be successful when L2 learners modify the erroneous utterances correctly, while it is regarded as unsuccessful if L2 learners incorrectly modify the original form of error. Therefore, CF tends to be facilitative for the SLA process (Ellis et al., 2001; as cited in Suzuki, 2004). Successful uptake that follows CF may indicate L2 learners' noticing that it is reflected through their modified output (Mackey et al., 2000, as cited in Suzuki, 2004). This is supported by several research papers that emphasize the role of feedback followed by uptake. For instance, McDonough and Mackey (2006, as cited in Gholami, 2021) investigated the development of constructing questions in association with CF. Their findings show that L2 learners gain uptake after they receive CF, which accelerates the development of their grammatical competence. Figure 1 below illustrates the stages through which L2 learners reach uptake, starting with making errors as the initial stage. Eventually, they may gain uptake by a particular type of CF, or they might not. If the errors are repaired, L2 learners will be further reinforced, and the topic is resumed. However, if the errors need to be fixed, they receive further feedback from the teacher (Lyster and Ranta, 1997).

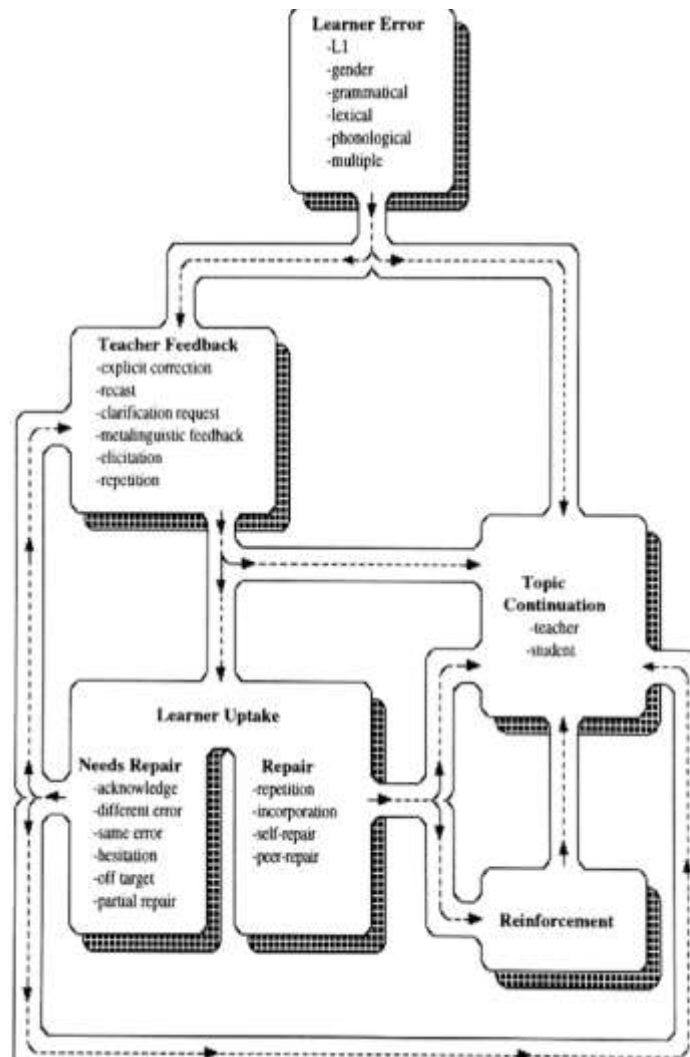


Figure 1 adapted from Lyster and Ranta (1997)

2.4 Previous Research on Corrective Feedback for EFL Saudi Learners

This paper examines research studies conducted by many researchers that focus on EFL Arabic learners. The objectives of these studies are diverse; therefore, the findings are also different. That is, while several scholars are concerned with EFL learners' and teachers' attitudes toward CF being exposed, others prefer to examine the effectiveness of CF in the development of SLA, such as one type of CF might be dominant in pedagogical practices due to its exceptional benefits in terms of EFL learners' uptake. To begin with, students' and teachers' perceptions and beliefs on CF should be exhibited. Hamouda (2011) surveyed the preferences of Saudi EFL learners and teachers and their attitudes toward written feedback that aims to correct linguistic errors. Another purpose of the study is to investigate the dilemmas encountered by students and instructors. The outcomes demonstrate that both students and teachers consider error-correction feedback to be beneficial. However, the findings also show that there are certain discrepancies in the way error correction is carried out. In other words, while learners favor an overall correction, teachers do not. Further, the participants involved in this study are supposed to be given open-ended questions and interviews to express their views concerning the best method that presents CF from their perspectives.

This may be compatible with Mustafa's findings (2011), who did several interviews to obtain EFL Saudi students' views on the corrective feedback. The study shows that the nature of the feedback Saudi students want is different from what they currently attain. Thus, EFL teachers should monitor L2 learners' performance in association with CF; however, they could diversify the types of CF so that Students' different needs and styles might be addressed and satisfied. This could be partially in line with Alshahrani and Storch (2014), who collected the data through feedback given by three teachers along with their students at a leading Saudi university on their beliefs concerning written corrective feedback, followed by interviews with teachers and questionnaires done by learners. The results display the comprehensive feedback provided by teachers, which focuses on mechanics, although teachers are unaware of that. The study illustrates that teachers are not mindful of their students' preferences for feedback, as they prefer

direct feedback. Thus, educators need to identify EFL learners' needs in terms of the best practices of CF to be addressed accordingly.

Moreover, the other important side of the research findings of the studies designed in the Arabic context is the practical facets of CF that enhance L2 learners' linguistic development. Initially, Al-wasabi (2019) proposed certain feedback approaches concerning written discourse and found that EFL Saudi undergraduates were highly motivated toward doing self-correction. Nevertheless, this may vary based on students' preferred learning strategies, which would be in line with Qutob and Madini (2020), who investigate different types of corrective feedback that participants desire concerning written assignments. They find that the learners favor constructive feedback to be provided through electronic devices as the researchers conclude their study by drawing pedagogical recommendations on incorporating constructive feedback in teaching plans so that they enhance students' academic levels effectively. In the same vein, Al-Hazzani and Altalhab (2018) examined the corrective feedback given by teachers on second language learning and whether or not it is an effective approach in the domain of second language acquisition. The researchers experimented with two groups. While the first group involves the control group, the other one includes the experimental group. The findings show clearly that the students involved in the teachers' written CF (the experimental group) improved significantly in comparison to their counterparts in the control group. This is because the students benefited from the explicit CF they obtained from their teachers and grew their writing skills exponentially. The findings of the study also underpin immediate CF as a salient instrument that fosters L2 learners' language development.

Alhaysony (2016), however, conducted a research paper on the verbal communication feedback between males and females at Ha'il University, using the questionnaire as a tool for obtaining data about students' attitudes toward oral CF. Among the prominent outcomes is that the proficient learners favored the CF far more than the ones with low proficiency. This is underpinned by Alzahrani (2016), who designed 10 a questionnaire at King Abdulaziz University so that teachers' beliefs about unfocused corrective feedback are exposed. The outcomes of this study show that the majority of subjects believe that the unfocused CF is effective in improving students' writing abilities, particularly those whose academic level is high, owing to their exceptional motivation, which results in handling the errors detected appropriately. These findings tend to be similar to those of Alhumidi and Uba (2016). The key goal of their study is to examine the impact of indirect CF on EFL Arabic speakers' linguistic development. They designed their research paper based on dividing the participants into two groups, as the subjects of the experimental group received a couple of tasks that included indirect CF. The outcomes of the research demonstrate that the ones who were given indirect CF improved considerably compared to those who did not obtain any feedback.

Further, Grami (2010) carried out a research experiment on peer feedback on EFL Saudi undergraduates' writing skills. The researcher emphasized the importance of peer feedback as an effective tool in the development of SLA. Interestingly, the researcher found that EFL Saudi undergraduates improved their writing abilities substantially. As the researcher gained students' beliefs about peer feedback compared to teachers, they prefer their teachers' CF since they think that they are more qualified than their counterparts. However, the overall perception was positive. Therefore, peer feedback has several benefits, such as improving team spirit when they feed each other linguistically. They also benefited from the social atmosphere created in the L2 educational context, in which they improved many learning skills, such as critical thinking, the ability to exchange thoughts, and autonomous learning. According to the researcher, L2 learners should be trained properly to receive peer feedback, as the current study shows exceptional improvement in writing quality. This is because the participants were exposed to training to peer feedback, which led to a positive attitude towards this type of feedback.

Moreover, Alwaheebi (2019) investigated the role of different types of CF in the field of SLA. The researcher examined the influence of CF on Saudi EFL undergraduates who study writing courses at the first level. The objective of the study is a comparison between asynchronous and instantaneous e-feedback for the sake of L2 learners' language development. The participants were divided into two main groups, namely, control and experimental ones. Each group was also subdivided into three groups based on the type of feedback, namely recast and metalinguistic, and the last group comprised both types. The outcomes of the study demonstrate that there is a statistically significant difference between the control and experimental groups (in favor of the experimental group) in terms of their performance after they were exposed to the post-test in writing to examine the influence of e-CF. This means that EFL Saudi learners' linguistic abilities grew considerably. In addition, the difference between the two groups concerning asynchronous and instantaneous e-feedback is statistically insignificant. However, the metalinguistic sub-group significantly outperformed the recast and metalinguistic groups. Likewise, the recast group performed better than the metalinguistic group. These outcomes may indicate that choosing a certain type of feedback would be more effective than diversifying multiple sorts of feedback, which could lead to distraction.

2.5 Pedagogical Implications of CF in EFL Educational Context

The role of CF is essential and contributes to enhancing L2 learners' linguistic accuracy. However, it appears to be a complex phenomenon, which is reflected through the controversies that surround CF in terms of what, how, and when the erroneous

utterance should be corrected. EFL teachers should be guided by research so that they reflect the best pedagogical practices of CF (Ellis, 2009). According to the research studies shown in this paper, there seem to be several benefits obtained on which pedagogical proposals need to be presented and considered. Initially, sound pedagogical methods should be implemented that suit the nature of CF in L2 educational settings. In other words, EFL learners' preferences toward CF are supposed to be exposed by teachers so that they gain greater language development. This is in line with Alshahrani (2019), who asserted that the participants were not satisfied with CF mechanisms adopted by their instructors to correct their ill-formed structures. In the same vein, L2 learners may prefer a particular type of CF along with a certain means by which their errors should be fixed. This seems to be compatible with their preferred learning strategies. For instance, Qutob and Madini (2020) demonstrate that the subjects in their study favor constructive feedback to be provided through electronic devices. Thus, EFL teachers need to create an educational atmosphere that fulfills L2 learners' demands to reach the highest level of CF, which ultimately contributes to enhancing their linguistic performance considerably.

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, the current research paper has examined and investigated the role and contributions of CF in second language learning. The aforementioned research papers display the growing interest among linguists in the exceptional role of linguistic feedback in improving learners' linguistic capabilities. It demonstrates certain controversial views on the effectiveness of CF. While many SLA researchers believe that CF is not needed and that L2 learners should be exposed to comprehensible input to enhance their linguistic abilities (Krashen, 1985), others think that corrective feedback is highly important. It draws L2 learners' attention to ill-formed utterances that need to be corrected, as proficient learners may encounter challenges in identifying certain errors they frequently make (Swain, 1985; Ellis et al., 2001; Suzuki, 2004). Therefore, CF assists them in achieving accuracy and clarity. It contributes to providing L2 learners with uptake that leads to modified output, thereby enhancing their linguistic abilities. Additionally, this article sheds light on the empirical investigation of CF in the Arabic and Saudi contexts and their pedagogical value in developing L2 learning. It also explores the different attitudes towards CF among L2 learners and teachers. The majority of research studies clearly illustrate that CF is beneficial and indispensable in L2 educational settings. Ultimately, the current paper demonstrates that EFL Arabic speakers with outstanding linguistic abilities seem to outperform those with low proficiency in terms of effective CF followed by linguistic uptake, owing to their persistence and exceptional motivation.

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