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Educational Context and ELT Teachers' Corrective Feedback Preference: Public and Private School Teachers in Focus

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Abstract

This study investigated the possible relationship between educational context and English Language Teaching (ELT) teachers' corrective feedback preference. To this end, 42 Iranian EEFL teachers from some private language institutes and 39 Iranian EFL teachers from different schools in Shiraz, Iran participated in the study. The Questionnaire for Corrective Feedback Approaches (QCFAs) was used as the instrument in this study. The questionnaire consisted of five different approaches of error correction: repetition, recast, elicitation, explicit correction, clarification, and request. In order to compare the preferred corrective feedback perceived by the institute instructors and school teachers, the researchers ran the Mann-Whitney's U test. The results revealed that the school teachers preferred the repetition approach most frequently, followed by clarification request, elicitation, explicit correction, and recast. On the other hand, the institute instructors chose the recast approach, clarification request approach, elicitation, explicit correction, and repetition in the order of their preference for error correction. The findings also showed that the school teachers significantly preferred the explicit correction and repetition more than private (institute) teachers.

Keywords: corrective feedback, educational context, Iranian EFL teachers

1. Introduction

Errors are an inseparable part of learning process. Errors demonstrate that learning is in progress. Errors inevitably occur in language classes. There are different approaches towards error correction. Some teachers or learners believe that errors should be corrected immediately and directly. Some believe that they should be ignored. Others think that they should be approached indirectly and implicitly. According to Yoshida (2010), an instructor's choice of corrective feedback type might be affected by their perception of particular learners and the error types.

Nowadays, there is a great tendency toward learning English as second language in most developing countries, including Iran. The experience of second language learning is an overwhelming process, which includes a wide variety of challenges. Some researchers believe that making errors is a natural and mandatory process of language learning. Errors play a crucial role in the learning process. The errors a learner makes can be considered as a crucial source of information about the nature of his/her knowledge (Edge, 1989; Iwashita, 2003). From the analysis of the learner's errors, teachers are able to infer the nature of learners' knowledge at that point in their learning and understand what they still have to learn (Abbasi & Karimnia, 2011).

Error correction literature has mainly focused on whether teachers need to correct students' writing or speaking errors and how this should be carried out. In fact, feedback provides information about the truth or falsehood of human behavior. It also provides teachers with a means to improve their own teaching performance (Paccapaniccia, 2002). Lightbown and Spada (1999) considered corrective feedback as any indication to the learners that their use of the target language is incorrect.

How teachers respond to such errors while teaching is very important. Different teachers use various kinds of error correction to correct their students' errors. Teachers provide corrective feedback explicitly and implicitly to the inappropriate utterances of their students. Understanding teachers' preferences in error correction is of crucial

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importance in the teaching and learning processes. Different studies on corrective feedback have focused on the significance of feedback, ways of receiving and providing feedback, as well as the effects of feedback on students' writing. Some studies have focused on the relationship between the types of corrective feedback provided to learners and the types of error made by them (Mackey, Gass, & McDonough, 2000; Moroishi, 2002). Many studies have focused on the relationship between learners' uptake and recasts. However, the relationship between educational context and ELT teachers' corrective feedback preference requires more exploration (Loewen, 2004; Lyster, 1998; Lyster & Mori, 2006; Lyster, Saito, & Sato, 2013; Moroishi, 2002; Ohta, 2000, 2001).

Based on the objectives, this study was guided by the following question:

Is there any significant difference between educational context and ELT teachers' corrective feedback preference?

2. Literature Review

Lyster and Ranta (1997) defined corrective feedback as providing positive or negative evidence upon learners' wrong utterances. Lyster and Ranta (1997) also believed that corrective feedback encourages students to repair their erroneous utterances according to the focus of feedback with regard to comprehensibility or accuracy. As corrective feedback provides students with opportunities to focus on specific linguistic forms, it leads to implicit learning. It also increases learners' communicative competence. According to Chu (2011), corrective feedback attracts learners' attention to linguistic forms in activities which focus on communication and meaning.

One of the prominent studies on corrective feedback was conducted by Lyster and Ranta (1997). They proposed a framework for six different approaches of corrective feedback. In this framework, six different approaches of feedback were defined: clarification requests, explicit correction, recast, metalinguistic feedback, repetition, and elicitation. Teachers' corrective feedback preference is considered as a variable that can determine the effect of error correction. Yoshida (2008) found that in the context of learning Japanese in Australia, teachers preferred recast most often for several reasons including limited class hours, whereas students preferred to have a chance to work out correct forms on their own before receiving correct forms by explicit correction or recast. The researcher also found that teachers selected corrective feedback based on their learners' characteristics such as their learning styles and proficiency.

The literature shows that the most frequently used type of error correction feedback in classrooms is recast (Sharwood, 1994; Sheen, 2006). However, Maftoon, Shirazi, and Daftarifard (2011) came to a conflicting result. They conducted a study to compare the effectiveness of self-correction and recast in classrooms through measuring the accuracy of the writing task. The participants were assigned into two groups (recast and self-correction). Results showed that there was not any significant difference between the two methods of correction. Students improved after treatment; however, self-correction group outperformed the recast group and recast did not improve learners' accuracy in the posttest.

Yoshida (2008) searched teachers' choice and learners' preference for corrective feedback types in Japanese as a foreign language classroom. The findings indicated that teachers preferred recasts because of the time limitation of classes and their awareness of learners' cognitive styles. The teachers also selected corrective feedback types. The teachers indicated that they preferred elicitation or metalinguistic feedback when they regarded the learners who made erroneous utterances as being able to work out correct forms on their own. While most of the students preferred to have a chance to think about their errors and the correct forms before receiving correct forms by recast.

Park (2010) investigated teachers' choice and students' preference of corrective feedback by teachers and university students. Twenty four native English teachers and 51 university students taking English conversation in the EFL context of Korea constituted the sample. The results showed that both teachers and students preferred recast more than the other approaches of corrective feedback proposed by Lyster and Ranta (1997).

More recently, Amrhein and Nassaji (2010) worked on how ESL learners and teachers perceived the usefulness of various kinds and amounts of spoken corrective feedback and the reasons they had for their preferences. The researchers found that students believed that providing written corrective feedback is the most useful technique. Students disapproved of the choices in which the instructor marks only a few errors, responds only to content and ideas, and marks only errors that interfere with communication.

Based on the studies done on corrective feedback and teachers' preferences of corrective feedback, it can be inferred that most of the factors which affect the effectiveness of corrective feedback are often under the control or

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supervision of the teacher. Therefore, teachers' preference of corrective feedback seems critical in the effectiveness of the feedback.

3. Method

3.1 Participants

Forty two Iranian EFL teachers from five private language institutes and 39 Iranian EFL teachers from ten schools in Shiraz participated in the study. They were selected based on convenience sampling. The participants' experience in teaching ranged between 1 to 21 years. They ranged between 23 to 48 years of age. All the participants were Persian native speakers, teaching English as a foreign language at different language institutes and schools in Shiraz.

3.2 Instrumentation

The Questionnaire for Corrective Feedback Approaches (QCFAs) proposed by Lyster and Ranta (1997) and modified by Park (2010) was used as the instrument in this study. The QCFAs have two different versions for teachers and students. The teachers' questionnaire was used in this study. For the teachers' version, the author asked teachers to write the numbers from 1 (the most frequently used corrective feedback) to 5 (the least frequently used corrective feedback) to each of the five CFAs they had used in class. The QCFAs was used to search the teachers' preference of error correction. The original corrective feedback approaches (CFAs) consist of five different approaches of error correction: explicit correction, recast, clarification request, elicitation, and repetition. The teachers were asked to explain why they chose number 1 (required) and number 2 (optional) based on their teaching experiences.

3.3. Data Analysis

The researchers fed the data into the computer and analyzed the data by SPSS (version16) software. For data analysis, the researchers reversed the scores given to the five corrective feedback approaches by teachers, with 5 meaning the most and 1 meaning the least favored corrective feedback by the participants. The researchers ran the Mann-Whitney's U test to compare the institute instructors' and school teachers' corrective feedback preferences.

4. Findings and Analysis

As the data were nonparametric, the researchers ran a nonparametric test to analyze the data. In order to compare the preferred corrective feedback perceived by the institute instructors and school teachers, the researchers ran the Mann-Whitney's U test. Tables 1 and 2 demonstrate the results on ranking and Mann-Whitney's U test, respectively.

Table 1. Mean ranks of the participants' corrective feedback preference

Ranks

	Context	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Explicit Correction	School	39	46.36	1808.00
	Institute	42	36.02	1513.00
	Total	81		
Recast	School	39	31.54	1230.00
	Institute	42	49.79	2091.00
	Total	81		
Clarification Request	School	39	37.08	1446.00
	Institute	42	44.64	1875.00
	Total	81		
Elicitation	School	39	40.87	1594.00
	Institute	42	41.12	1727.00
	Total	81		
Repetition	School	39	46.59	1817.00
	Institute	42	35.81	1504.00
	Total	81		

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According to Table 1, the school teachers preferred the repetition approach (mean rank= 46.59) most frequently, followed by explicit correction (mean rank=46.36), elicitation (mean rank=40.87), clarification request (mean rank=37.08), and recast (mean rank=31.54). On the other hand, the institute instructors chose the recast approach (mean rank=49.79), clarification request approach (mean rank=44.64), elicitation (mean rank=41.12), explicit correction (mean rank=36.02), and repetition (mean rank=35.81) in the order of their preference for error correction.

Table 2. Mann-Whitney's U test to compare the preference of the corrective feedback by Institute instructors and school teachers

Test Statistics[a]

	Explicit Correction	Recast	Clarification Request	Elicitation	Repetition
Mann-Whitney U	610.000	450.000	666.000	814.000	601.000
Wilcoxon W	1513.000	1230.000	1446.000	1594.000	1504.000
Z	-2.040	-3.706	-1.504	-.049	-2.348
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.041	.000	.133	.961	.019

a. Grouping Variable: Context

According to Table 2, the explicit correction (sig.= .04, p< .05), recast (sig.= .000, p<.05), and repetition (sig.= .019, p< .05) were the approaches that showed significant group differences. But the comparison between the two groups in terms of the two other approaches (clarification request and elicitation) did not show any significant difference among them. According to Table 1, the results indicated that the school teachers preferred the explicit correction (mean rank=46.36) and repetition (mean rank=46.59) more than institute teachers explicit correction (mean rank=36.2), and repetition (mean rank=35.81). The results also revealed that institute instructors preferred the recast approach (mean rank=49.79) more than their counterparts (mean rank=31.54).

The results of the qualitative questionnaire showed that the school teachers' group chose the explicit correction and repetition approaches mainly for affective reasons. The school teachers' most frequent responses are presented below.

> *When the teacher repeats the error, the student can exactly understand what part of the sentence is wrong. The repetition of the mistake is a direct clue for the students. It helps the students to correct their mistakes easier.*
>
> *The explicit correction is a very useful and time saving approach.*
>
> *Clarification and explicit correction indicate that the student's utterance is incorrect and can be considered as an effective way for avoiding error fossilization.*
>
> *When the teacher corrects the students' errors explicitly, not only the students who have errors in their utterances but also their peers benefit from repetition as corrective feedback.*
>
> *Teachers should correct the students' errors on the spot. This approach is the best approach for the immediate correction.*
>
> *The explicit correction is the best approach to correct the young learners' errors.*
>
> *As the time allotted to the classes is limited, teachers don't spend much time on each learner's errors. Therefore, they try to explicitly correct the students' error.*

In addition, the institute instructors' responses to the open-ended question revealed that they preferred the recast as the most effective approach because of the following reasons:

1. Through the recast approach, students are allowed to think, notice their errors, and correct their errors.
2. The recast is less intimidating than the other error correction approaches.

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3. Through the recast, teachers can give their students the opportunity to correct their mistakes.

4. Reformulation of all or part of a student's utterance make the student thinks about his/her utterance.

5. Discussion

The aim of the present study was to find out if there was any relationship between educational context and ELT teachers' corrective feedback preference. The results of study are discussed below:

The research question of this study was, "Is there any significant difference between educational context and ELT teachers' corrective feedback preference?" To answer this question, the Mann Whitney's U test was run. The results of the present study revealed that context has a significant relationship with the teachers' preferred corrective feedback. Based on the findings of the current study, the school teachers selected the explicit correction and the repetition as the most preferred corrective feedback types. While the institute instructors reported the recast as the most preferred corrective feedback approach. This result can be justified based on the fact that in Iranian schools, the focus is on language. In addition, accuracy is more emphasized than fluency in Iranian schools.

Lyster and Mori (2006) concluded that effective corrective feedback types were different in form-oriented and meaning-oriented classes. Lyster and Mori (2006) also reported that uptake occurred most frequently after recasts in Japanese immersion classrooms. That is due to the fact that in immersion classrooms, teachers expected the students to speak accurately. They also expected the students to repeat the teachers' recasts in order to practice the forms during discourse. The use of corrective feedback approaches as prompts, such as clarification requests or elicitations, resulted in the most frequent uptake in French immersion classes where meanings and content are focused more than the accuracy of forms.

Concerning the relationship between the context and teachers' corrective feedback preferences, the results of the present study were in line with Oliver and Mackey (2003) who indicated that educational context influences types of corrective feedback. Nabei and Swain (2002) also suggested that the awareness of recast as a corrective feedback is influenced by "the teaching environment, the interaction context, and the learner's cognitive orientation" (p. 43).

6. Conclusion

The results of this study demonstrated that there was a significant difference in the choice of corrective feedback by the school teachers and private (institute) instructors. According to the obtained results, the school teachers preferred the explicit correction and repetition approaches more than private (institute) teachers. The findings also showed that private (institute) instructors significantly preferred the recast approach more than the school teachers. It can be concluded that the characteristics of the educational context have an important role in the teachers' corrective feedback preferences.

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