

The Role of Positive Oral Corrective Feedback in Reducing Fossilization among EFL University Students

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate whether the employment of positive oral corrective feedback with first year foreign language (EFL) students (LMD) at the University of Chadli Bendjedid El-Tarf plays an effective role in preventing the students' errors from getting fossilized and correcting their errors if they have already been fossilized. So, positive oral corrective feedback which is provided by the teacher upon students' errors while performing oral activities reduces errors' fossilization. Accordingly, students will achieve accuracy and fluency, therefore developing their oral skills.

Key words: positive oral corrective feedback, fossilization, errors, accuracy.

Résumé

Le Feedback Oral Positif et Correctif et la Réduction de la Fossilisation

Le but de cette étude est de déterminer si l'emploi du feedback oral positif correctif avec les étudiants de première année langues étrangères (système LMD) à l'université de Chadli Bendjedid-EL Tarf-, joue un rôle efficace pour éviter que les erreurs des étudiants soient fossilisées et les corriger si elles ont déjà été fossilisées. Donc, le feedback oral positif et correctif employé sur les erreurs des étudiants, diminue la fossilisation et par conséquent, les étudiants pourront atteindre la précision et l'aisance et donc le développement de leurs compétences en oral

Mots clés : feedback oral positif et correctif, fossilisation, erreurs, exactitude.

دور التصحيح الشفوي الإيجابي في الإنقاذ من التحجر

ملخص

يهدف هذا المقال إلى اكتشاف الدور الفعال وراء استعمال التصحيح الشفوي الإيجابي في مساعدة الطلبة لتحسين مستواهم اللغوي الشفوي. حيث أجريت هذه الدراسة مع قسم طلبة السنة الأولى لغة إنجليزية بجامعة الشاذلي بن جديد- الطارف- لذلك فإن تقديم التصحيح الشفوي من قبل الأستاذ أثناء تأديتهم للتمارين الشفوية له دور فعال في انخفاض مستوى التحجر، كما يرفع وعي الطلبة بطبيعة الأخطاء اللغوية الشفوية مما يؤدي إلى رفع مستواهم في استعمال ونطق الكلمات جيدا، وتوظيفها في السياق اللغوي الشفوي المناسب. الكلمات المفتاحية: التصحيح الشفوي، التحجر، الأخطاء، الدقة.

Introduction:

Learning to speak a foreign language is a difficult task for non -native speakers to achieve. In classroom settings, it is the role of the teacher, who has to do all his/her best to help students to speak fluently. There are different techniques that the teacher may make use of, one of which is providing students with positive oral corrective feedback on the performed activity (spoken activity). This may have great effects in developing students' speaking abilities, but the teacher has to keep it a positive and profitable experience for all the students involved.

Statement of the Problem

Once the teacher provides a positive oral corrective feedback on the errors of a single student, that particular student will benefit and even his/her classmates will. As such, this study is expected to raise students' awareness to the phenomenon of fossilization, to give them insight about its causal factors in order for them to avoid them, as they are expected to be able to improve their oral performance through the provision of teacher's oral corrective feedback.

Thus, we assume the following:

Positive oral corrective feedback provided by the teacher during or after the end of the oral activity will reduce the most fossilized errors. The teacher has to consider several dimensions as when (time) and how (way) the corrective feedback has to be provided.

The Aims of the Study

This study attempts to investigate the effectiveness of the teacher's oral corrective feedback in reducing students' fossilization while performing an oral activity in the classroom setting. Another aim is to explore if it enhances English foreign language learners' oral performance, thus, resulting in the development of the teaching and learning process in general. This study is expected to raise the awareness of students to the phenomenon of fossilization, to give them insight about its causal factors in order to avoid them. Also, they are expected to be able to improve their oral performance through the provision of teachers' oral corrective feedback.

Research Questions

The problem that is discussed in this study poses two main research questions:

1. How effective is teacher oral corrective feedback in boosting learners to overcome the phenomenon of fossilization?
2. Does the employment of positive oral corrective feedback strategy improve learners' oral performance?

Research Hypothesis

As such we hypothesize that:

Teacher's oral corrective feedback upon students' errors while performing oral activities will reduce students' error fossilization. Accordingly students will achieve accuracy and fluency and therefore develop their oral skills.

Methodology

•The Subject of the Study

This study is carried with first year students in the Department of English at Chadli Bendjedid University (El Tarf). In the academic year of 2015/2016, two groups are involved; (74) students, (18) males and (56) females. They have been selected randomly. Their ages range from 19 to 26 years old. All the participants under investigation are specialized in Didactics. They attend two oral sessions per week. The reason for selecting the first year students is that they have vocabulary shortage, most of them, if not all, did not yet reach the proficiency level of the target language; they are not yet accurate or fluent

•Data Collection Instruments

The instrument that is used is the questionnaire which consists two parts.

Part I: The Respondents' Personal Information

The first part is designed to collect information concerning the students' background information. Data in this section includes the respondents' details about their age, gender and their oral module average, how often they study oral expression, how many languages do they speak and to seek their perception towards the courses. All of the presented questions in this part are in the form of check list items.

Part II: Classroom Oral Activities, Fossilization and Corrective Feedback

This part is devoted also to collecting information as to whether the learners are aware of making errors, whether they feel comfortable when they receive correction from both the teacher and the students. Also, to get an idea how they prefer to be corrected on the spot during the performance or straight after the activity. This part is further subdivided into two sub-parts: (a) oral activities, (b) fossilization and corrective feedback. Different types of questions are provided, some of which require selecting from the presented lists and others are open-ended questions. Open-ended questions offer opportunities to present the students' perceptions towards the teacher's oral corrective feedback and to talk freely without being restricted. They are asked to give suggestions for future improvements and modifications.

Review of Literature

1. Fossilization

1.1. Definition of Fossilization

Selinker (1972) is the first who discussed the notion of fossilization in the paper of inter-language in 1972. He notes that most of the second language learners (probably about 95%) could not achieve a native-like proficiency; the learners are unable to reach the same level of first language competence. He refers to this as "fossilization". Selinker, (1972, p.215) claimed that:

"Fossilizable linguistic phenomena are linguistic items, rules and subsystems which speakers of a particular native language will tend to keep in their inter-language relative to a particular target language, no matter what the age of the learner or amount of explanation and instruction he receives in the target language".

So, this phenomenon occurs when progress in the acquisition of the learnt language is stopped, despite continuous exposure to input, it is learners' cessation of inter-language learning.

Graham (1981) mentioned that, fossilization occurs when learners permanently incorporate deviant linguistic forms into their foreign language competence. According to Han (2004) fossilization is when learner's progress reaches a level when it cannot be developed despite further exposure to "comprehensible input" as mentioned by Krashen (1985).

1.2. The Classification of Fossilization

Selinker (1972) classified fossilization in terms of forms, into two major categories; individual and group fossilization, he further subdivides the former to (i) error reappearance and (ii) language competence fossilization. Fossilization is also classified into temporary fossilization and permanent fossilization.

1.3. Major Causes of Fossilization

A variety of hypotheses were suggested by different researchers to explain possible causes of fossilization and due to the lack of whole-life span research, none of them are accepted as the absolute truth. Han (2004) claims that, there are three fundamental reasons that lead to the occurrence of fossilization: learners' L1 interference, maturational constraints and Critical Period. Selinker (1972), however, suggested five reasons to explain the causes (1) Language transfer, (2) Transfer-of-training, (3) Strategies of second-language learning, (4) Strategies of second-language communication and (5) Overgeneralization of target language (TL) linguistic material. Ellis (2008) has summarized the factors of fossilization as internal and external. The internal factors include the age of the foreign language learners, learners' emotion and second language interference, whereas, the external factors include the lack of learning opportunity, strategies of second language learning, strategies of second language communication and the role of foreign teachers.

2. Corrective Feedback

2.1. Definition of Corrective Feedback

Definitions of corrective feedback were provided by different linguists like Ellis, Loewen and Erlam (2006, p. 340) who have stated that: “*corrective feedback 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*”.

Lightbown's and Spada's (1999) definitions of corrective feedback share similar points to Ellis's et al. (2006). According to them, corrective feedback refers to the input provided by the teacher to the learners indicating that their use of the target language is grammatically inaccurate or defective in communication.

Sheen (2011) pointed out that a teacher can provide corrective feedback not only when learners face communication breakdown, but also to draw learners' attention to forms even in those situations where they comprehend each other.

According to Ellis (2009) and Lee (1990), the timing for the provision of corrective feedback is under the teacher's control. Ellis (2009) points out that the teacher has the choice of either to provide immediate corrective feedback following the learner's erroneous utterances or to provide delayed one.

2.2. Strategies of Corrective Feedback

Different classifications for corrective feedback types were proposed by different researchers (Lyster & Ranta, 1997, Ellis, 2009) these classifications differ in essence. Lyster and Ranta (1997) distinguish six strategies in their often-cited classroom observation study as (1) Explicit feedback, (2) clarification requests, (3) metalinguistic feedback, (4) elicitation, (5) repetition and (6) recasts. They further rearranged these six strategies into two categories implicit and explicit. Classification requests and repetition give feedback implicitly, whereas elicitation, metalinguistic...give feedback explicitly.

2.3. Guidelines for Corrective Feedback

Ellis (2009) proposes guidelines that comprise an explicit set of principles that a teacher has to take into consideration when determining his/her own corrective feedback policy. These guidelines are drawn on both interactionists and cognitive views of corrective feedback:

1. Teachers should provide oral corrective feedback in non-threatening ways; raise the students' awareness to the value of corrective feedback. The goals may vary from one student to another; thus, the teacher has to negotiate with the students agreed goals for corrective feedback.
2. Teachers have to provide not only oral corrective feedback, but also written one. Both types of corrective feedback should be provided because corrective feedback is for both accuracy and fluency work, thus teachers should not hesitate to correct students' errors.
3. It is effective if teachers identify particular linguistic targets for correction in different lessons. Ellis insists on focused corrective feedback because it is potentially more effective than correcting unfocused errors (targeting errors to correct).
4. Teachers should make things clear to students from the beginning; they should ensure that students are aware of being corrected; no way to hide the process of correction.
5. Teachers should vary the oral and written corrective feedback strategies; they should not implement only one strategy. Furthermore, Ellis proposes ways in which teachers should follow: teachers have to adapt specific strategies when correcting particular learner (one strategy may suits particular student and do not suits others). One way to do so, is to start with an implicit form of correction, e.g., teachers simply indicate that

there is an error and, if the learner fails to self-correct, they can move to a more explicit form i.e. a direct correction).

6. Teachers should provide oral corrective feedback immediate and delayed. They have to be cautious and experiment the best timing for each learners to provide him/her with correction.
7. Teachers should create space following the timing of the corrective move allowing learners to uptake the correction. However, they should not require the learner to produce the correct form.
8. It is not an obligatory for teachers to follow a consistent set of procedures for all students; in accordance with the cognitive and affective needs of the individual learner, they should vary the corrective feedback provider, the timing and the way of correction.
9. Teachers should provide correction for a specific error on several occasions, not only one time (to correct errors only on the first time it appears), this continuous correction of the same error enables learners to achieve full self-regulation.
10. Teachers should be careful when providing oral corrective feedback, they have to take into consideration the affective side of the learners; they have to monitor the extent to which corrective feedback causes anxiety in learners. Thus, they should adapt the strategies they use to ensure that anxiety facilitates rather than debilitates.

These guidelines were proposed to be presented to teachers as set of propositions that they can reflect on and debate. They serve as a basis for the development of teachers.

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Presentation and Discussion of the Findings

Analysis of the Students' Questionnaires

a. Analyses of the First Part : Personal Information

The first part of the presented questionnaire is devoted to collecting the participants' personal and some background information, from question 1 to 6. It reveals that the chosen sample age in this study is ranging between nineteen and twenty eight years old. The percentage of the multilingual students (51%) is nearly the same to that of the bilingual students (43%). Only four students 5% confess that they are monolingual; perhaps, they can only communicate in their native language.

The last question in the personal students' information part was about whether the students have opportunities to practice English outside the classroom setting; the aim of raising this question is to see whether they are depending on themselves or just depending only on their teacher in enriching their knowledge and learning English in general. The common shared answer between the majority of the students (81%) is that they do have opportunities to practice English other than classroom setting. The biggest percentage 85% goes to social media; may be through chatting, sending messages in English, 12% listen to English songs, and only 3% watch English speaking channels.

b. The analysis of the second part: Section (1) classroom oral activities

• Question 1: teacher's focused activities.

The results show that discussion and debate 55% are the most frequent used oral activity, the teacher may believe that this activity raises the students' amount of speaking followed by games for fun and change the routine. However, low percentage goes for the employment simulation and role play. Presentation, dialogues and riddles are also practiced in the class.

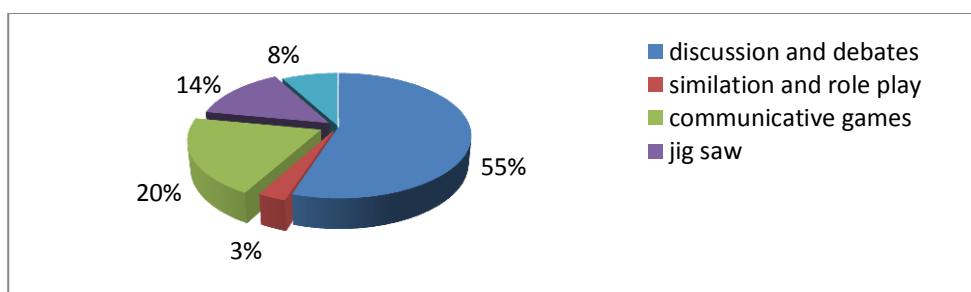


Figure 01: Teachers' focused activities

• Question 02: The teacher' principles.

All of the students replied with one accord voice that the teacher makes the oral activities students-teacher approach, this indicates that the interaction moves from student to teacher and teacher to students. The teacher may play the role of a guide, feeding in of new language.

• **Question 3: Students' feeling towards oral activities.**

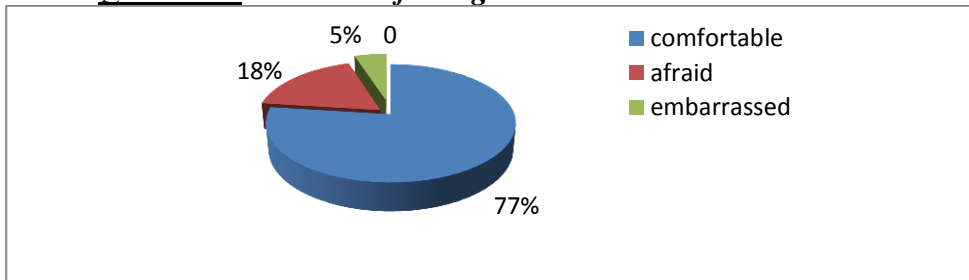


Figure 02: The oral activities' impacts on students.

Most of the students 77% experience positive emotion, comfortable, when performing orally in class due to the safe and relaxed environment. While the rest experience negative emotions; either they feel afraid or embarrassed and this perhaps due to the new setting and shyness.

• **Question 4: The students' perception towards the effectiveness of oral activities.**

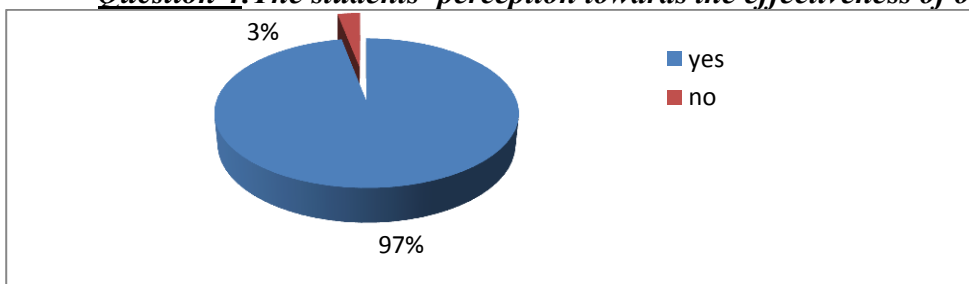


Figure 03: The effectiveness of oral activities

The majority of the students believe that performing oral activities enhance their oral abilities. The students are given opportunities to practice and manipulate the new learnt language, learning from others' errors. They claim that they obtain new vocabularies with the right pronunciation, and lead them to produce accurate and meaningful utterances. Only 3% believe that oral activities are of no values may be they are visual students; they learn more when seeing the graphic forms.

Section (2) Fossilization and oral corrective feedback

• **Question 01: The frequency of the students' oral errors.**

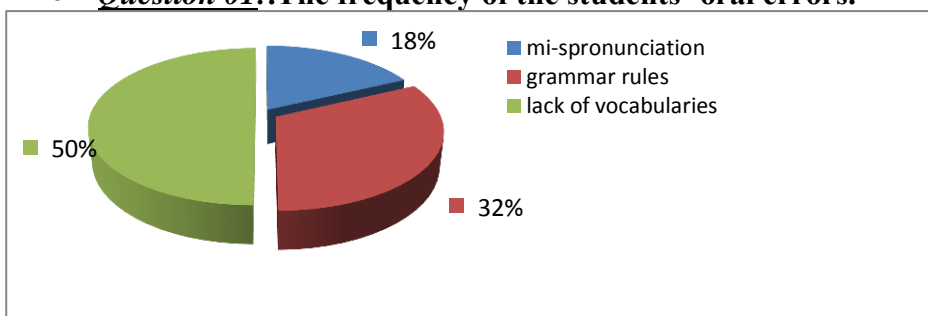


Figure04: Distribution of errors types.

The students considered their hindrances in becoming fluent and accurate speakers as follows: since they are beginners, there is no surprise that half of them suffer from the lack of vocabulary. 32% respond that are not accurate in grammar because of the wrong application of the rules (tenses, adjectives...). Proper English pronunciation or native-like accent perhaps is a challenge for those 18% as such they are not fluent (lack of practice, exposure to the target language).

• **Question2: The student's views about the position of errors.**

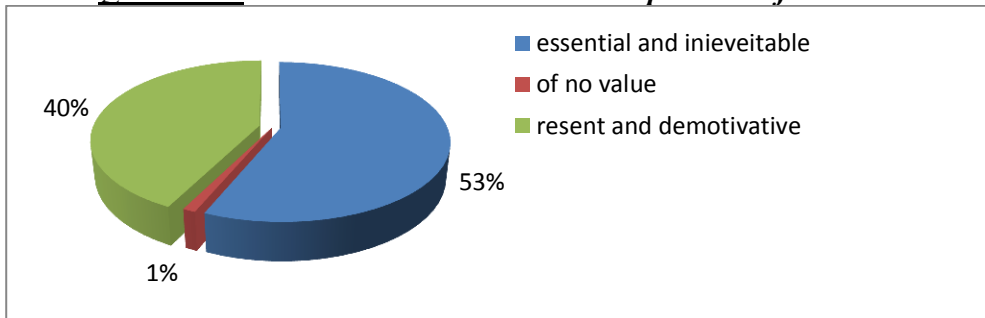


Figure 5: The students' perception towards errors

The vast majority of the students claim that errors represent inevitable and unavoidable features. Moreover, they believed that errors play an essential part in the learning of a second or a foreign language. However, **only 1%** regard errors as something negative, unpleasant aspects that have to be avoided. For them errors are of no value. More than half of the participants **40%** state that they get resent and demotivated once they produce errors in front of the teacher and their classmates.

Question 3: The frequency of producing the same errors.

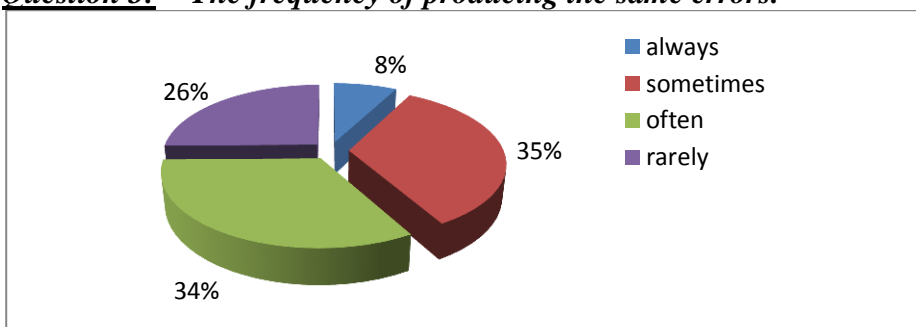


Figure 06: The frequency of producing the same errors .

The aim behind raising such a question is to see if the students are facing problems of fossilization and also investigating the effectiveness of teacher' corrective feedback. Students declare that their errors sometimes appear more than once and **others** reply that they often do so. Whereas **34%** state that they rarely produce the same errors, which indicates that the teacher' oral corrective feedback is effective, it reduces their errors. However, only few of them are suffering from the fossilization; their errors become fossilized.

Question 04: The factors that lead to the occurrence of fossilization.

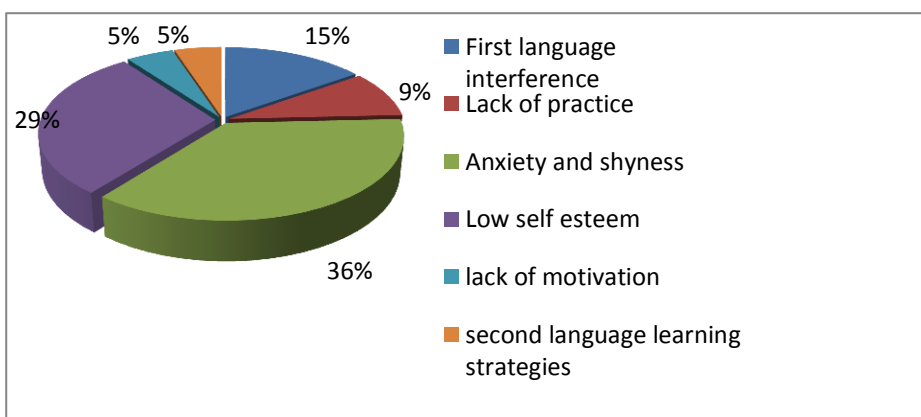


Figure 07: The putative causal factors of fossilization.

This question is devoted to discover the causal factors that lead the students' errors to become fossilized. **36%** believe that anxiety and shyness are the major cause of fossilization. In addition to being anxious, **29%** reply that it is because of the one's low self-esteem. First language interference receives only **15%**. Approximately **9%** of the students claim that since they are not practicing English, it is difficult to overcome the errors and **5%** goes for both the lack of motivation and the second language strategies. So, the internal factors appear to be the causal factors for students' fossilization.

Question 5: The student ability to self-correct his/her produced errors.

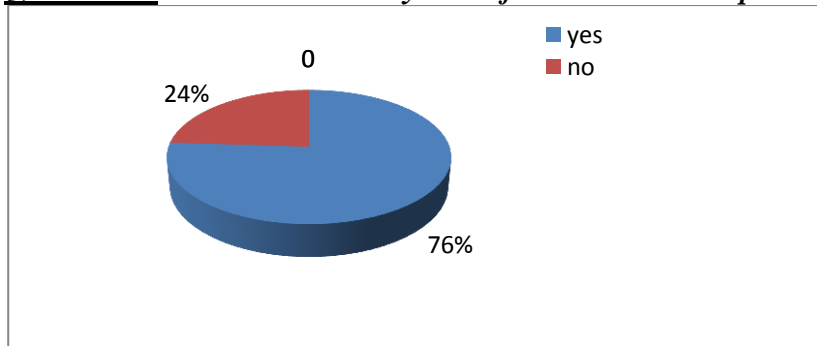


Figure 08: The student self-correction.

This question aims at exploring whether the students are able to self-repair the errors or require others' repair. The above table shows that, the majority of the participants are able to recognized and immediately correct themselves; this indicates that they are committing mistakes -due to non-linguistic features- and not errors. However, nearly **25%** of them confess that their errors require repair from their teacher or their peers; due to the lack of linguistic competences; they ignore the rules.

Question 6: The participants of oral corrective feedback in the class.

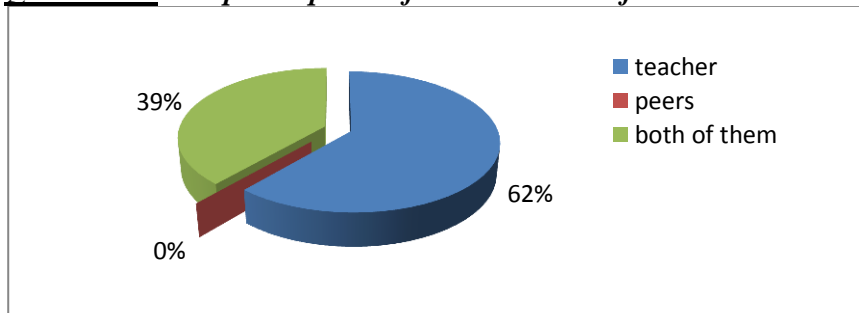
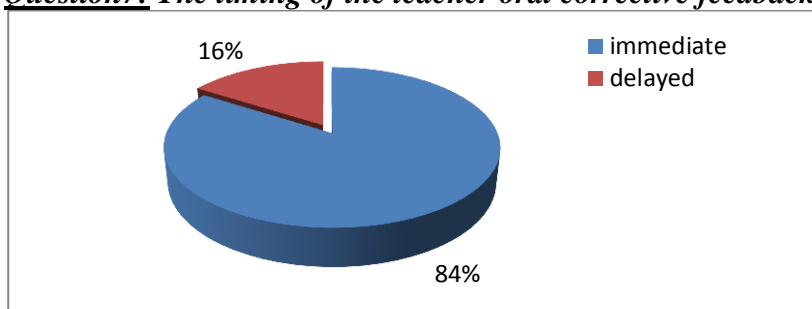
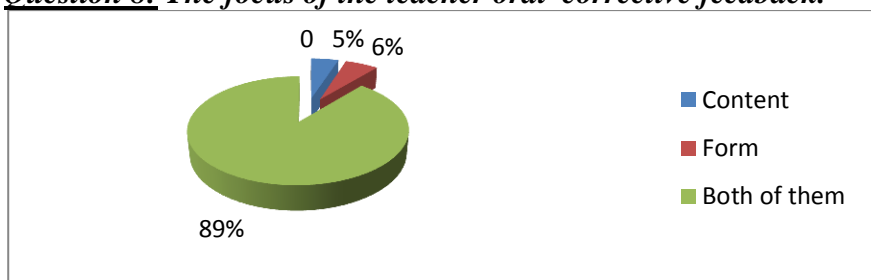


Figure 09: The source of oral corrective feedback.

As it is manifested that the teacher is the only source of oral corrective feedback, in which the biggest portion prefer to be corrected by the teacher. They justify their choice by claiming that he/she has the sufficient knowledge, it is his/her responsibility to locate and correct errors. **39%** declare that both the teacher and the peers are involved in the correction. They would not mind having their errors to be corrected by peers as they feel comfortable with their peers' correction; they may get anxious and embarrassed once they receive correction from the teacher.

Question7: The timing of the teacher oral corrective feedback provision.**Figure 10: The appropriate time for corrective feedback.**

Although all of the involved participants of the study belong to the same group, their answers differ, **84%** of the students reveal that they receive immediate corrective feedback from the teacher while the rest claim that the teacher provides delayed one. So, it depends on the teacher's goals and students' needs, he/she provides oral corrective feedback in two different times ; sometimes immediately and some others in dilation,

Question 8: The focus of the teacher oral corrective feedback.**Figure 11: Content / form corrective feedback**

Correspondingly, **84%** of the respondents responded that the teacher provides oral corrective feedback on both content and form, **5%** of them replied that the teacher focuses only on the content, **6%** of the focus is on only the form.

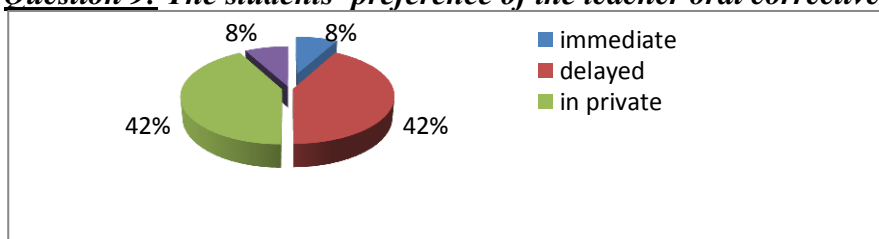
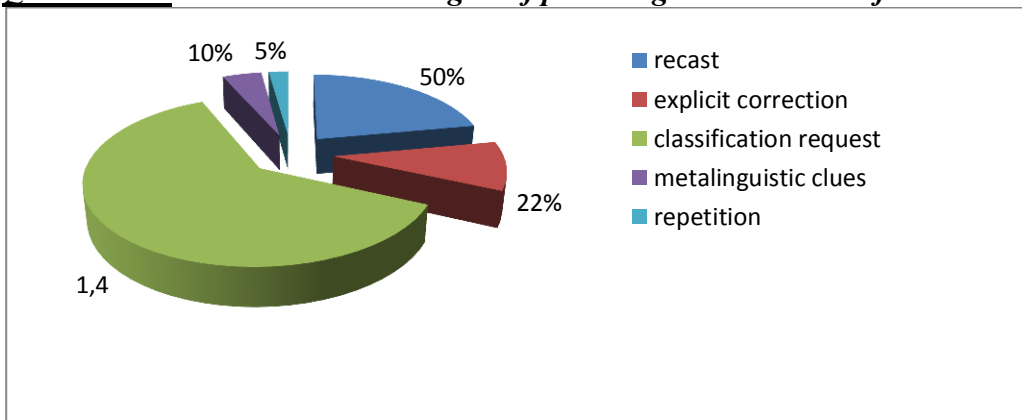
Question 9: The students' preference of the teacher oral corrective feedback .**Figure 12: The timing and the way preference.**

Figure 12 precises the timing and the students' preference of receiving oral corrective feedback. The majority of the students clearly indicate a preference for private delayed correction, (**42%**for each), perhaps due to the high affective impacts they receive from corrective feedback . But only **16%** would like to be corrected immediately (**8%**) in front of the class (**8%**) and following their errors, this may indicates that they perceive low affective factors from oral corrective feedback.

Question 10: The teacher's strategies of providing oral corrective feedback.**figure13: Corrective feedback most frequent used strategies .**

Here, we want to discover what is the strategy/s used by the teacher while providing oral corrective feedback on the students' errors. The most frequently used strategy is recast, with **50%**, then explicit correction **22%**. **14%** is devoted for the classification request. The metalinguistic clues and repetition receive only **10%** and **5%**, respectively.

Question 11: The effectiveness of the teacher's oral corrective feedback in enhance the students oral performance

36% of the students agree to participate in this question; they find it difficult, if not impossible, to learn without corrective feedback. They simply claim that corrective feedback facilitates the learning because it allows them to immediately compare their errors to accurate models. It ensures linguistic accuracy; it allows them to understand the nature of the errors and also to notice the gap between their deviant interlanguage forms.

Question 12: Suggestions for the teacher oral corrective feedback

All of them suggest that, the teacher should not provide immediate oral corrective feedback for each and every committed errors, otherwise it will be a demotivated aspect and better to be provided in private and not in front of all of the class. Another suggestion would be, if the teacher collects the most common produced errors to be corrected together without mentioning the source of the errors. Since the participants are in the first year, they would prefer in addition to his oral corrective feedback if he writes the new vocabularies on the board to see their graphic forms.

Discussion of the Students' Questionnaires.

The students' questionnaires are about investigating the effectiveness of the oral corrective feedback strategies that are used by the teacher on the students' oral performance. To investigate its connection to the students' uptake, how, and at what time the students' prefer to be corrected and by whom. The analysis of the students' questionnaire shows that the students face hindrances while communicating in grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary such as misapplications of the rules and exceptions of those rules and due to the lack of the linguistic competences, the students over generalize the rules without paying attentions to those exceptions.

Another reason is when trying to be a fluent speakers of the target language, the students follow various strategies to simplify the language, one of which is through omission; they omit the "s" of the third singular person pronouns, moreover, they transfer informal language to the

academic one due to the over listening to songs (slangs) and shortening words, just like when chatting.

Furthermore, it seems that the students have various opportunities to practice English outside the classroom; not only with their teachers, or their colleagues, but rather with other people (friends, relatives, and maybe native ones). Chatting with friends and relatives; the students may communicate using English for prestige, to show off, or with natives, in order to learn more and evaluate their oral abilities. These opportunities appear while chatting with friends from the same class, the same country, or other than the same country (foreigners), or with native speakers of the target language (English) through social media, such as: the most used material that is included in the social media is the Facebook. Nowadays, the majority if not all of the students have Facebook accounts, when chatting in English; they may find it easy and gain time (rather than writing Arabic words with English letters).

It is not only Facebook that is used by the students. Twitter is also used by the students, or chatting orally with each other through Skype. Moreover, many students enjoy listening to English songs; they are able to enhance their oral abilities via listening how native speakers pronounce such words, or just through watching English speaking channels (TV). Lack of practice, high affective factors, first language interference..., appears to be the most causal factors that lead the students' errors to appear more than once; they lead to the occurrence of fossilization.

The lack of practice hinders the students' errors from being reduced; if the students do not have opportunities to interact, produce oral utterances, their errors would not flow up and if they would not, the teacher could not neither raise the students' awareness, nor provide correction for no errors. If their awareness is not raised to the nature of the errors, and receive no correction, they may think that they produce accurate language and thus keeping producing their errors. The students' affective factors, if these factors get high they result negatively on the students' performance; they raise the filter, that impedes the teacher's input (corrective feedback) from reaching the LAD, and thus the students' output will be the same as before receiving input. Transferring the first language rules, pronunciations, and vocabularies that are not the same as the target language whenever the students get blocked, could lead to the production of errors and even after receiving correction from the teacher, they continue producing the same errors; one reason could be forgetting the teacher correction.

The choice of the oral corrective feedback may differ from one teacher to another; it depends on the teacher's goals and the students' needs and preference. After analyzing the students' questionnaire, we can see that teachers provide and allow them to participate in the correction feedback process in order to evaluate the students' understanding and attention to the errors.

The students do not mind receiving peers' correction, they may feel comfortable and feel free when asking clarification from their peers; but, almost all of them are expected and prefer to be corrected by the teacher in private and in dilation. They prefer to be corrective individually, may be due they have high affective factors; they may get embarrassed, inhibited, demotivated, when being corrected in front of the class.

The students have positive attitudes towards the teacher' positive oral corrective feedback because they do believe that it has great impacts on their oral performance, it enhances their levels, it raises their awareness to the errors, they simply believe that it facilitates the learning because it allows them to immediately compare their errors to accurate models and pushes them to correct

their errors and to avoid them in the future. They provide suggestions for the provision of the teacher oral corrective feedback, one of which is for the teacher not to provide immediate correction for each and every committed errors, it may demotivate them, and break down the flow of communication or to provide it privately; individual corrective feedback. They also suggest that it would be preferable to collect the most common produced errors, and write the new vocabularies on the board to see their graphic forms and to be corrected together at the end of the course.

Conclusion :

In a conclusion, the findings of the present study demonstrate that learners have strong positive attitudes about the usefulness and usability of the teacher's positive oral corrective feedback in the classroom, which enhances both the linguistic and the communicative competences. Moreover, it helps both the teacher and the students to prevent the occurrence of errors in the future and reduces the phenomenon of fossilization. The results provide motivation for language teachers to continue practicing the corrective feedback, as the learners clearly prefer it in their language learning. However, teachers should be cautious when applying the different oral corrective feedback strategies, as some of them are more likely to cause anxiety, demotivation. As such, language teachers should focus on determining how to provide corrective feedback that is tailored for each student and takes into account his / her language skills and affections.

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