

A Gender-based Analysis of EFL Female Teachers' Attitude Towards Oral Error Correction in Iranian Classroom Setting

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Abstract

While extensive research delves into error analysis, the interplay of gender and attitudes towards oral error correction (OEC) in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms remains understudied. This study addresses this gap by examining OEC practices of Iranian female EFL teachers in both male and female classrooms. Key aspects of OEC, including frequency, timing, type, method, and delivery agent, are investigated. Seventy-two female teachers with varying experience (1-10+ years) participated, randomly selected from segregated school settings. A modified version of Fukuda's (2006) questionnaire gathered data, analyzed via paired-sample t-tests to discern statistically significant differences. Results reveal no significant variations in error selection or chosen feedback method across contexts. However, differences emerge in frequency, timing, and error types targeted. While the specific nature of these variations requires further exploration, the implications for English teachers, policymakers, and teacher educators are evident, particularly in informing pedagogical practices within segregated education systems. This study contributes to the nuanced understanding of gender-based OEC practices in EFL, shedding light on pedagogical implications for segregated educational settings.

Keywords: English as a Foreign Language; Error analysis; Error correction; Gender

Introduction

In the vibrant EFL classrooms of Iranian language institutes, fostering effective speaking skills requires striking a delicate balance between various factors. Cultivating positive affective reactions, enhancing task interest, and ensuring students perceive learning value are all key elements in this process (Uztosun, 2017). Language instructors, predominantly female in these settings, play a crucial role in supporting students' journey, catering to their individual needs and fostering autonomous motivation (Davis, 2020).

While prior research has explored gender differences in language learning methods, surprisingly little attention has been paid to the specific area of oral error correction (OEC) practices among female teachers. Interestingly, studies suggest that students often exhibit higher engagement and improved performance when instructed by a teacher of the same gender (Dee,

2006). Yet, despite extensive research on error correction itself, the timing and gender-specific nuances of this crucial pedagogical tool haven't been adequately explored.

This article seeks to bridge this gap by examining the key factors influencing female EFL teachers' attitudes and practices towards OEC in both female and male classes within Iranian language institutes. We delve into their perspectives on the necessity, frequency, timing, type, method, and delivery agent of OEC, scrutinizing their approaches across these diverse contexts. By shedding light on the nuanced interplay of gender and OEC in Iranian EFL classrooms, this study aims to inform pedagogical practices and contribute valuable insights to a field where gender-specific dynamics remain understudied.

Literature Review

A robust understanding of EFL speaking skill development necessitates examining various factors, including the intricacies of gender dynamics within the classroom. This review of literature sheds light on existing research in three key areas: gender, error correction, and foreign language acquisition, highlighting the need for a deeper exploration of their interconnectedness. By synthesizing relevant studies, we aim to identify knowledge gaps and pave the way for further investigation into the nuances of female EFL teachers' approaches to oral error correction in both female and male classrooms.

Gender

Gender plays a crucial role in shaping educational experiences. Studies reveal its complex influence on students' expectations, learning styles, and engagement (Black, 2020). Moreover, ensuring gender equity and fairness in teaching practices remains paramount for creating a high-quality learning environment (Krkovic et al., 2014). While gender is a social construct distinct from biological sex, research indicates persistent biases in various educational aspects, affecting both students and teachers (Yang, 2011).

Error Correction and Foreign Language Acquisition

Effective error correction is a cornerstone of foreign language learning, impacting both beginners and advanced speakers (Xu, 2019). Learners' emotional responses to language acquisition are profoundly influenced by the type and quality of feedback they receive (Rezazadeh and Zarrinabadi, 2020). Well-crafted corrective feedback encourages learner engagement, strengthens cognitive understanding, and improves production accuracy (Sarandi, 2017; Carvalho et al., 2020). Additionally, the motivational impact of teacher feedback fosters positive post-feedback behavior and promotes sustained learning (Sixte et al., 2020). Notably, language errors also serve as valuable feedback for teachers, guiding them to refine their pedagogical approaches and optimize learning outcomes (Barnes and Lock, 2013).

Teachers' Preferences for Error Correction

Several factors influence teacher preferences for error correction techniques, including the gender composition of their class. Studies suggest that female teachers may adopt different approaches depending on the gender of their students. For example, some research indicates that female teachers may offer more supportive and indirect feedback to female students, while employing a more direct or corrective approach with male students (Liu et al., 2016). Additionally, the intersectionality of gender with other factors like race-ethnicity can further influence these preferences, highlighting the need for nuanced research in this area (Black, 2020).

Beyond gender, factors like maintaining conversational flow, minimizing learner anxiety, and upholding classroom comfort are also prioritized (Sepehrinia & Mehdizadeh, 2018). The context of instruction, age and developmental readiness of learners, and specific error types all play a role in shaping teachers' decisions regarding the type and timing of corrective feedback (Ajideh & Fareed Aghdam, 2012; Bell, 2020). Moreover, teacher experience has a significant impact on tolerance for errors, with more seasoned educators demonstrating greater patience and flexibility (Pishghadam and Norouz Kermanshahi, 2012).

Types of Error Feedback

Different error types necessitate distinct corrective strategies. Teachers often pay closer attention to discourse-level errors while demonstrating greater tolerance for syntactic mistakes (Shanshan, 2012). Recasts and explicit correction are among the most commonly used feedback techniques, with metalinguistic feedback also playing a significant role in promoting learner repair and language development (Nassaji and Kartchava, 2020; Al-Rubaiey and Nassaji, 2013; Taipale, 2012).

Error Analysis and Language Learning

Errors are an inevitable part of the language learning journey, occurring when learners lack the necessary knowledge or linguistic structures to self-correct (Oluwatosin, 2011). Error analysis serves as a valuable diagnostic tool in language pedagogy, providing crucial insights into different aspects of teaching and learning (Boroomand & Rostami Abusaeedi, 2013). Researchers have developed various frameworks and classifications for errors based on linguistic levels, systematicity, and severity, enhancing our understanding of learner needs and informing effective pedagogical practices (Boroomand & Rostami Abusaeedi, 2013).

Methodology

The participants in this quasi-experimental study were 72 female English teachers in institutes across Iran, including Tehran, Karaj, Shiraz, Rasht, and Esfahan. They were randomly selected, and their teaching experience ranged from one to more than 10 years.

Instruments

Data was collected through two instruments: a questionnaire and face-to-face interviews. The questionnaire, adapted from Fukuda (2006) with specific modifications focused on [explain key adaptations], contained three sections and 44 items using a 5-point Likert scale. The first two sections addressed female teachers' perceptions of oral error correction in both male and female student groups, covering aspects like necessity, frequency, timing, error types, feedback methods, and delivery agents. The third section gathered general demographic information (gender, teaching experience, oral skill class experience). The interviews, lasting approximately three months, utilized the same questionnaire format for consistency and clarification. All participants answered all questions.

Procedure

The questionnaire was distributed in person to teachers in classrooms and offices, and electronically via email and Google Forms. Participation was voluntary and anonymity was assured. Completed paper forms were collected in person, while online submissions were retrieved from Google Forms and email. The researchers conducted face-to-face interviews for further clarification and elaboration on specific questionnaire responses.

Data Analysis

A paired-sample t-test was employed within the framework of a quasi-experimental design to statistically assess the differences between female teachers' perceptions of oral error correction in male and female student groups. This analysis focused on six categories derived from the questionnaire: necessity, frequency, timing, error types, feedback methods, and delivery agents.

Results and Discussion

Validity and Reliability

The internal consistency and reliability of the questionnaire were confirmed by Cronbach's alpha values exceeding 0.7 for all sections, indicating the dependability of the study's findings. These results accurately reflect the perspectives of the female teachers sampled and hold significance for broader research contexts focused on gender and error correction in language learning.

Results and Discussion

Involving 72 female teachers who completed questionnaires and participated in interviews, this study sought to explore and compare error correction techniques for male and female students. Employing a paired-sample t-test for analysis, the results are detailed in Table 2.

- **Question 1: Necessity of Error Correction**

The mean values reveal that female teachers perceive a higher necessity for error correction in female classes (M=4.00) compared to male classes (M=3.74). This suggests that female teachers attribute greater importance to error correction in female students.

• **Question 2: Frequency of Error Correction**

Female teachers, as indicated by mean values (Female M=3.63, Male M=3.29), tend to correct errors more frequently in female students, reflecting a notable discrepancy in correction frequency.

• **Questions 3 to 6: Timing of Error Correction**

The study delves into the timing of error correction, revealing nuanced differences between female and male classes. Notably, for Question 3, 40.3% of female teachers disagreed with correcting errors immediately after they were made in female classes, a percentage significantly higher than in male classes (8.3%).

Similar trends emerge in Questions 4, 5, and 6, underscoring varied approaches to error correction timing in female and male classes.

Table 1
Responses on the Timing of EC in Female Teachers (%)

	Class	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	SD
Q3	Female	23.6%	40.3%	20.8%	11.1%	4.2%	3.02	.563
	Male	0.0%	8.3%	69.4%	19.4%	2.8%	2.34	1.082
Q4	Female	0.0%	6.9%	16.7%	51.4%	25.0%	3.35	.750
	Male	2.8%	12.5%	37.5%	44.4%	2.8%	3.94	.837
Q5	Female	4.2%	36.1%	25.0%	31.9%	2.8%	3.53	.546
	Male	0.0%	1.4%	47.2%	47.2%	4.2%	2.96	.963
Q6	Female	12.5%	43.1%	27.8%	15.3%	1.4%	3.74	.539
	Male	0.0%	0.0%	29.2%	66.7%	4.2%	2.50	.949

Table 2
Comparing Female Teachers' Error Correction Techniques for Male and Female Students

Error	Groups	N	Mean	SD	T-value	P-value
EC	Male	72	3.74	0.822	-2.568	0.012*
	Female	72	4.00	0.839		
Frequency of EC	Male	72	3.29	0.895	-3.185	0.002**
	Female	72	3.63	0.895		
Timing of EC	Male	72	2.93	0.548	-7.565	0.001**

	Female	72	3.41	0.387		
Errors that need to be treated	Male	72	3.41	0.710	0.912	0.365
	Female	72	3.35	0.750		
Method of corrective feedback	Male	72	3.59	0.477	1.368	0.178
	Female	72	3.53	0.546		
Delivering agents of EC	Male	72	3.83	0.541	1.732	0.088
	Female	72	3.74	0.539		

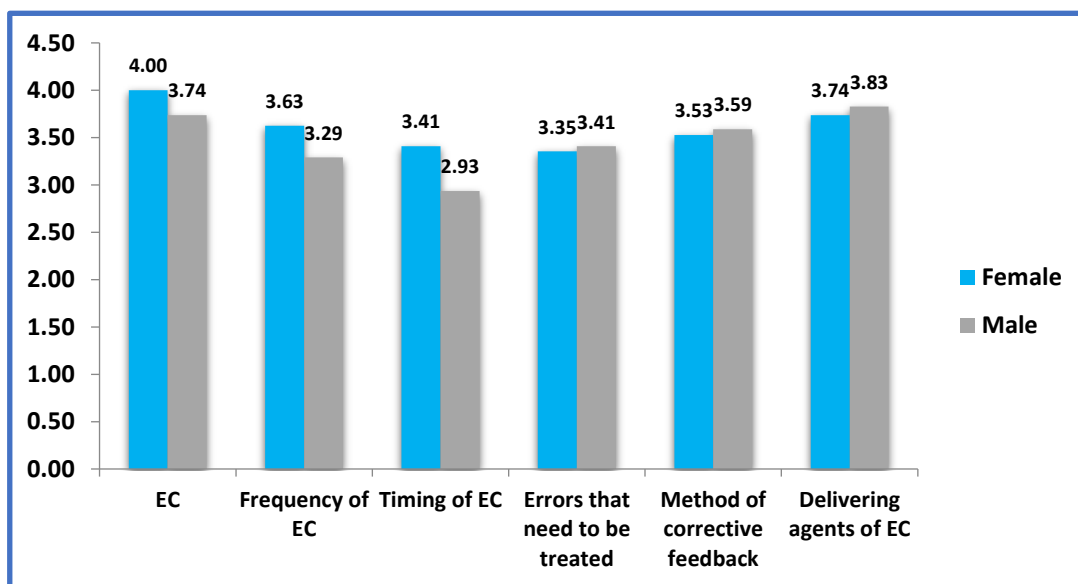


Figure 1. Mean of the Female Teachers' Error Correction Techniques for Male and Female Students

Expanding the discussion beyond the study's specifics, the importance of gender analysis is highlighted. As observed by Black (2020), capturing and contextualizing student evaluations is crucial for fostering fairness and inclusiveness, aligning with the broader discourse on effective teaching. The study's findings resonate with existing research, such as Lasagabaster (2015) and Azar and Molavi (2013), emphasizing the need for gender-aware interventions and positive attitudes toward error correction for enhanced learning outcomes.

Conclusion

This study aimed to explore differences in female teachers' attitudes toward error correction in male and female classes. The research yielded significant insights, revealing that female teachers exhibited no notable distinctions in treating errors, method of corrective feedback, and delivering agents of error correction between male and female classes. However, discernible differences emerged in the perceived necessity and frequency of error correction.

Specifically, female teachers expressed a higher perceived necessity for error correction in female students compared to their male counterparts. The frequency of error correction also reflected a similar pattern, with female teachers more actively correcting errors in female students. Moreover, the timing of correction indicated that female teachers tended to allow female students to finish speaking before offering corrections, while corrections for male students were more prevalent at the end of class.

These findings carry substantial implications for teacher education, particularly for supervisors, administrators, and teacher evaluators in language institutes. Awareness of the nuances in English teachers' approaches to error correction is valuable for material developers, teachers, and supervisors, contributing to the enhancement of teaching methodologies and strategies.

In conclusion, the study suggests the importance of replicating such investigations in public schools, considering potential differences between private language institutes and public schools in Iran. Findings from this study and similar research can assist researchers, educators, and students in understanding the impact of teachers' gender on the learning process. Students are encouraged to discern effective feedback mechanisms for their learning styles, thereby facilitating the language learning journey.

While the study provides valuable insights, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations. The relatively small number of participants restricts the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the reliance on questionnaires and interviews as criteria measures may not capture nonverbal reactions, and future research might benefit from incorporating diverse methods to address this limitation. Overall, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse on error correction in language teaching, laying the groundwork for further exploration and refinement of teaching practices.

Conflict of interests

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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