Assessing Tanzanian English as a Foreign Language: Teachers and Students' Preference of Written Corrective Feedback

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Abstract: *The current study was an assessment of the opinions and preferences of Tanzania English as a foreign language (EFL) students and their teachers with regard to Written Corrective Feedback (WCF). It focused on Respondents feelings on errors, their preference on actors of error correction, immediacy of error correction and social company during error correction and whether there are differences between teachers' and students' opinions and preferences. The study involved 20 English language teachers, 10 from public schools and 10 from private secondary schools. Composition of the participants considered gender balance; hence ten females and 10 males were purposively selected. Participants also involved 60 secondary school students from the same schools where the teachers were drawn. Data were gathered through written questionnaire to elicit both teachers and students' opinions about their perceived preference on actors and correct time for WCF and the social group involved. The resultant data were handled both quantitatively and qualitatively. The findings have revealed that over half of the students and a grand majority of their teachers felt that it is the teacher who ought to correct the errors. Furthermore, the majority of both students and their teachers opined that errors should be corrected every time it is committed and a significant number felt that their errors should be handled by their social group rather than the teachers. It was concluded that, in handling learners' errors their feelings and perceptions should be taken into account. This can be through classroom observation or carrying out classroom based attitudinal study.*

Key words: Language Errors, Learners, Teachers

Introduction

From the 1950s, after major criticisms by innatists and cognitivists against behaviorist approach to language acquisition, linguists and scholars in language in education have realised that to acquire and develop linguistic system, a child makes hypotheses, tests them, and gradually acquires the correct language forms. They have noted the same case in the learning of a second language where the child's acquisition of its first language (L1) has contributed in changing this view concerning language two (L2) learning. Just like a child at the beginning of its L1 acquisition, the L2 learner has his own limitations along the learning process and s most likely to make errors

that reflect the hypotheses that the child keeps making during all its language learning process to finally gain proficiency. Errors, whether intralinguistic or interlinguistic, have thus become necessary and an important step in the learning process of any L2 learner. Errors have not only become important for the learner but also for the teacher and the linguist. Errors enable the teacher to know their learners level of acquisition and thus be in a better situation to design remedial activities for them. Errors also help the researcher to understand the psycholinguistic process of a learner acquiring a second language.

However, research reports that the teacher's feedback may have three different effects on the learners. The feedback may interrupt the learners' L2 acquisition progress, confuse them and consequently, inhibiting their learning; alternatively, it may help them to notice the gap between their performance and the target language or it may simply have no effect on them. In spite of its usefulness, teacher's feedback may have undesirable effects, and that is why the appropriate feedback should be selected for the appropriate error and appropriate learner and in appropriate time.

Theoretical Base of the Study

Many researchers such as Lightbown and Spada (1999) and Long (1996) share the idea that input alone is not sufficient to reach a high level of proficiency in any L2 learning. According to them, the learner should be active in his learning process and this is by producing his output and being able to compare it with the given input so as to identify the difference and make his own self-correction, which is proved to be very effective in the L2 learning process. In addition to self-correction, research referring to peer-correction has been an efficient method that should be given a certain priority in second language acquisition (SLA) classes.

Various studies, e.g., those by Carroll and Swain (1993), Iwashita, (2003) and Sheen (2004), have indicated that, in general, teachers' corrective feedback is inconsistent, ambiguous, arbitrary, and idiosyncratic. As a result, studies in this area are rarely viewed positively because, as Han (2002: 569) contends "in real classrooms, students rarely get much, if any, individualized attention, and corrective feedback, if provided, it is usually given ad hoc, [attention generally] covering a wide range of inter-language constructions". Given limited time in language classes, it is virtually impossible for the teacher to address each error that occurs. Thus, errors are selectively corrected. Consequently, classroom interaction often does not address individual needs of language learners. Several studies, however, have found that developmental readiness (Mackey & Philp, 1998), attention,

motivation, language background (Han & Selinker, 1999), education level (Bigelow et al., 2006) and proficiency level (Lyster, 2004), all influence a learner's processing of corrective feedback.

There have been a few studies on perceptions on corrective feedback. In fact, Amrhein (n.d.) noted that there has been a renewed interest into how students and teachers perceive the usefulness of corrective feedback, notably the written ones. Such studies, she observes, are on students' preferences. She cites some studies on students' opinions and preferences for certain types and amounts of WCF which affect their use of this type of feedback for learning such as McCargar (1993) and Schulz (2001) both of whom conclude that if a student prefers or believes that one type of WCF is more useful, then he or she may be more likely to pay more attention to the correction and use it for learning than if he or she does not believe in its effects. Furthermore, students' preferences for WCF are not homogenous.

In a survey of 59 English as second language (ESL) class, students' attitudes towards feedback on their written work, Radecki and Swales (1988) concluded that ESL teachers might lose their credibility among their students if they do not correct all surface errors, since findings revealed that students expressed their need for written corrective feedback. Hence, they expect correction of all errors.

In Africa most studies are in the realm of error analysis. For example, in South Africa a study by Nzama (n.d,) of both rural and urban schools revealed that all grades committed the following errors: incorrect use of auxiliaries, tenses, concords, articles, prepositions, pronouns, plurals, mother tongue interferences, infinitives and auxiliary with past tense.

A study conducted by Eyengho and Fawole (2013) in Nigeria assessed error-correction techniques used in correcting students' essays in English language in the South Western parts of Nigeria. The results showed that indirect approach to … was the most effective means of … as indicated in the results of (x=11.88) compared to the use of direct metalinguistic technique (x=11.53) and the use of conventional method (x=10.4).

In Tanzania, Msanjila's (2005) study sought to identify and discuss writing problems in Kiswahili in secondary schools. The study revealed six glaring writing problems, namely: capitalization and punctuation problems, inexplicitness or fuzziness, poor organization or illogical sequencing, spelling problems and grammatical errors. Other scholars within this area who have examined writing problems in Kiswahili essays in some Teacher Training Colleges and the University of Dar es Salaam, are Mkude (1980), Qorro (1988) and Msanjila (1990), all of these scholars noted with great

concern that students have writing problems in expressing themselves systematically and logically. Sebonde and Biseko (2013) examined morpho-syntactic errors among secondary school students in Tanzanian English Language Classrooms focusing on corrective feedback techniques that teachers used to handle their students' morpho-syntactic errors (both written and spoken errors). The data revealed that a total of four corrective feedback techniques are commonly used in Tanzanian English language classrooms. These are focused Corrective Feedback, direct Corrective Feedback, indirect Corrective Feedback and metalinguistic Corrective Feedback. It was also discovered that teachers preferred the use of indirect Corrective Feedback when they mark written assignments while explicit and recast are the most applied techniques in handling students' oral errors.

On the basis of the literature surveyed and the researchers' experience and interest, the current study sought to assess the opinions and preferences of Tanzania EFL students and their teachers with regard to WCF. Its foci were what opinions and preferences of Tanzania EFL students and their teachers with regard to Written Corrective Feedback (WCF) and whether there are differences between teachers' and students' opinions and preferences towards WCF.

Methodology
The study involved a total of 20 English language teachers, 10 from public schools 5 males and 5 female participants, and the 10 participants were drawn from both private and public secondary schools. These were purposively selected following gender and work experience as major criteria. It also involved 60 secondary school students form the same schools from which the teachers were drawn but their attributes were as follows: from each school there were 6 students (3 pursuing Arts subjects and 3 pursuing Science sub-streams). Half of each sub stream was boys and the other half girls. These were randomly selected from each sub stream to ensure representativeness.

The proposed study used a written questionnaire to elicit both EFL O'Level teachers and students' participants' opinions about their perceived usefulness of the frequency of using WCF in their English language classes. The resulting data were handled both quantitatively and qualitatively.

The questionnaire responses were recorded in an excel spread sheet and then imported to SPSS 15.0 for statistical analysis. For the quantitative data, the frequencies of responses on the questionnaires were calculated and then compared. Qualitative analysis was conducted on the participants' explanatory responses and were summarized and categorized according to common themes and then compared between teachers and students.

Findings
The findings are organized into five subthemes, namely respondents' feelings on errors, their preference on actors of error correction, time of error correction, immediacy of error correction, and social company during error correction.

Respondents' Feelings on Errors
The respondents were asked to indicate their feelings on seeing their written work corrected by their teachers (for students) or seeing their errors in their students' assignments (for teachers). Their responses are as summarized in table 1.

Table 1: Respondents' Feelings on Errors

	When Students are corrected		When Teachers notice errors	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percentage
Embarrassed	11	18.3	8	40.0
Annoyed	5	8.3	10	50.0
Confused	5	8.3	2	10.0
Reassured	5	8.3	20	100.0
Fine	34	56.7	8	40.0
Total	60	100.0	10	50.0

The majority of the learners (34, which is 56.7%) indicated that whenever they saw their written assignment marked, with errors indicated or corrected, they felt fine. Feeling fine here, means not being emotionally evoked by the errors the teachers had indicated or corrected. The same kind of feeling was shared by 8% of the teachers.

A half of teachers (10, which is equal to 50%) and a fairly small number of students (5 which is only 8.3%) indicated that they felt annoyed when viewing errors in students' scripts. This is a group which feels annoyed at seeing students' errors in teachers' feedback; this kind of feeling is what scholars like Pishghadam and Alchondpoor (2011) refers to as perfectionists, a people who strive to meet very high standards in everything they do and they strongly believe that mistakes are evidence of an individual's unworthiness characteristic. In their study Aregersen and Howitz (2002) noted that anxious learners reported, inter alia, a higher level of concern over their own errors, something that has, according to Mehrabizadeh (2003), a debilitating effect. Other forms of reactions which share similar emotive reactions are feeling of embarrassment (by 90% of teachers and 18.3% of students) and confusion (by 10% of teachers and 8.3% of students).

Preference on Actors of Error Correction
The respondents were asked to identify the person who is the one they prefer to correct errors. The responses by both the students and their teachers are summarized in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Preference of who should Correct students' Errors

	Students		Teachers	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
by a classmate	22	36.7	2	10.0
by the teacher	34	56.7	18	90.0
not indicated	4	6.7	0.0	0.0
Total	60	100.0	20	100.0

Table 2 summarizes the comparative responses of students and their teachers on their preferences of who should correct the errors. The findings indicated that over half (56.7%) of the students and a grand majority (90%) of their teachers felt that it is the teacher who ought to correct the errors. This is a solid belief on teachers as the 'know all' person and the authority when it comes to language corrective feedback. Given such belief, Oladejo (1993) opines that teachers must be willing to change their attitude towards errors as well as realize that language teaching is a process of an intervention to quicken the language learning process.

This is also in agreement with earlier recommendations by Corder (1973) and Allwright (1975) who argue that the teacher should be primarily responsible for correcting learners' errors. However, a significant number of students (22 out of 60, which is equivalent to 36.7%) indicated that peer/classmates should be primarily responsible to correction of their classmates' errors. This position was also shared by 2 out of 20 teachers (10%). This viewpoint is congruent to Raven (1973) and Cohen (1975) who recommended that peer correction is a welcome attempt to complement the teacher's role in error correction.

Time of Error Correction
The respondents were further asked to show preferred time for error correction. Their responses are as summarized in Table 3.

Table 3: Preference of when Errors are Corrected

	Students		Teachers	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Every time you make a mistake	32	53.3	14	70.0
Only when the mistake is important	17	28.3	4	20.0

Never, errors should not be corrected at all	11	18.3	2	10.0
Total	**60**	**100.0**	**20**	**100.0**

Another vexing issue in this area is the correct time for error correction. There have been vehement contentions amongst scholars in this area. Table 3 indicates the students and teachers' varied preferences with regard to time of error correction, with the majority of both students (53.3%) and their teachers (70%) opting for every time an error is committed. In other words, all instances of errors, even if they all point to non-mastery of one or specific rule of grammar or language use, should be corrected. In a study by Kavaliquskiene and Anusience (2012) it was noted that 64% of all their respondents concurred with the assertion that teachers should correct every error. This was also in line with Lim's (1990) respondents the majority of whom also indicated grammatical errors to deserve correction always they occur.

Immediacy of Error Correction
Related to the aspect of time of error correction is the notion of how immediate error correction should be affected. Table 4 summarizes the students and their teachers' preferences in this aspect.

Table 4: Preference of Immediacy of Error Correction

	Students		Teachers	
	Frequency	**Percent**	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Immediately	31	51.6	8	40.0
After class	24	40.0	10	50.0
Not indicated	5	8.3	2	10.0
Total	60	100.0	20	100.0

The findings suggest that while 51.6% of students would prefer the errors they made to be corrected immediately, 40% of their teachers share the same preference. However, 50% of the teachers and 40% of their students indicated their preference for delayed (after class) treatment of errors, agreeing with Amara's (2015) assertion that, for communicative purposes, delayed correction is usually preferred because … In smith's (2000) study, it was noted that delayed corrective feedback was so unpopular among students respondents that only 2 out of 50 (4%) indicated preference for delayed correction of errors.

Social Company during Error Correction

We were interested to find out learners and their teachers' preferences as to whether they preferred to be corrected individually or as a group while they corrected errors. Table 5 summarizes their responses.

Table 5: Preference of the Social Company during Error Correction

	Students		Teachers	
	Frequency	**Percent**	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Individually	30	50.0	7	35.0
As a Group	27	45.0	9	45.0
Not Indicated	3	5.0	4	20.0
Total	**60**	**100.0**	**20**	**100.0**

The findings indicated that half of the participating students favoured being corrected individually as contrasted with the teachers 35% favouring correcting their learners' errors individually. While, as indicated earlier, the students earlier, the students might be concerned with social image, their teacher's preference of handling their learners individually may be due to pedagogical efficiency of such technique. Of Kavaliauskene and Anusiene's (2012) study, over 95% of students respondents agreed with an assertion that individual correction of mistakes in writing is useful, attributing its utilitarian value to facilitative role in personalized learning of language. This individual error correction had earlier been proposed by Fregeau (1999), Koshik (2002) and Lewis (2002) in what they called "individual conference" during which the teacher meets learners individually, to assist those that have difficulties with correcting particular errors.

However, a significant number 45% for both students and teachers favoured group error correction over individual consultation with the teacher. This kind of error correction is labeled by Harmer (1991) an error illustration "during which the teacher uses learners" common errors as instances for class explanations.

4. Pedagogical Implications of the Findings

As can be seen from the analysis, corrective feedback is an important part of the foreign language learning, since it considerably increases the accuracy of learner output. The opinion and preferences of corrective feedback should be adapted to the objective of the lesson, the activity and the needs of learners. If the objective is to develop accuracy, then, of course, corrective feedback is necessary. In this case, teachers are to follow such an imperative: allow the students to correct themselves first, then in the case when it does not work, the teacher may allow for the correction from peers, and finally, if

no one knows how to repair the erroneous form; the teacher can intervene by giving the right correction. This may seem tedious and time-consuming at first sight. Nonetheless, it helps to reduce reliance on the teacher and at the same time, increase student autonomy and confidence. If the activity focuses on fluency, correction is not as frequent as in the case of the activities developing accuracy, since constant interruption of students' utterances may be perceived as disruptive or even irritating, especially when errors do not hamper the meaning of communication.

When it comes to the time of providing corrective feedback, EFL teachers may think that it is better not to correct immediately and frequently, but students may assume that their teacher is not qualified enough to correct errors or that teachers do not want or care giving feedback to their students. What is more, EFL teachers may prefer to provide delayed correction, which unfortunately has some drawbacks. Although it is less disruptive and irritating than immediate correction, it is more effective to give corrective feedback after erroneous forms have been identified, because the processing mechanisms of students are then more likely to be activated.

In order to rectify both teachers and students' opposing expectations involving the correction of errors, mistakes and attempts to …?, one should correct them in a positive and friendly manner, assuring that any kind of error is an inevitable part of foreign language learning. Positive attitude towards students' errors and mistakes makes them feel more comfortable and confident that they will manage to reduce their erroneous forms of the language in the processes of language learning.

Conclusions

Learning a language involves testing out hypotheses about the learning system. As a result, some of the attempts might be erroneous. Since erroneous forms of language are inevitable parts of language learning, there might be various views concerning them. Some teachers regard errors as failures in teaching particular in language aspects and students perceive them as failures to gain what they are supposed to learn and know. However, errors might also be accepted as indication of the learning taking place within a learner. The researcher has been especially interested in investigating the distinctions in opinions between teachers and students, and also in comparing their views as stated in this study's questionnaire items.

The quantitative and qualitative analysis demonstrated that speaking in the classroom is perceived as the opportunity to make errors, that is why so many students hesitate from taking part in language learning communicative activities. The study has made it clear that corrective

feedback is considered a crucial part in language learning processes, and it is even expected by most students and teachers.

Although peer correction and self-correction have many benefits and the majority of teachers declare to promote these types of correction in the classroom, the students seem not to appreciate them and they expect their teachers to rectify what they do not know. It has also been proved that contrary to immediate correction, which is usually regarded as disruptive or even irritating, delayed correction is most frequently used by teacher, in spite of the fact that it is not as beneficial as it might be considered since learners' cognitive processing mechanisms are less likely to be activated. The study demonstrates that students might react to corrective feedback in a number of ways. However, the findings have revealed that learners usually feel contented when they receive corrective feedback, which prevents them from committing the same errors in future language practices.

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