PERCEPTIONS OF ENGLISH INSTRUCTORS AND LEARNERS ABOUT CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK

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Abstract:

Corrective feedback has always been popular in English as a foreign language (EFL) settings and its effectiveness in language learning has been widely debated. An increasing number of second language acquisition studies (SLA) indicate that there is a dilemma in the effectiveness of corrective feedback in terms of EFL instructors' and learners' perceptions. Although the effectiveness of corrective feedback is a point at issue, there is not much research related to investigating instructors' and learner' perceptions. It is the aim of this study to examine the perceptions of instructors and learners about corrective feedback in learning English as a foreign language (EFL). The findings of the study show that the instructors and learners seem to have almost similar ideas about corrective feedback. However, the instructors and learners seem to have one contradicting perspective that is about oral error correction: the instructors do not seem to favor oral correction all the time, but the learners do. Furthermore, the interviews display that while the instructors prefer non-direct feedback, the learners prefer direct and explicit feedback. Language instructors need to know what their learners expect in corrective feedback and to form a common understanding with their learners for increasing the effectiveness of corrective feedback.

Keywords: corrective feedback, instructors' perceptions, learners' perceptions, English as a foreign language

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Introduction

Corrective feedback can be seen "*as an umbrella term to cover implicit and explicit negative feedback occurring in both natural conversational and instructional settings*" (Sheen, 2004, p. 264). Corrective reaction can be assumed as "*any reaction by the teacher which transforms, disapprovingly refers to, or demands improvement of, a student's behavior or utterance*" (Chaudron, 1977, p. 24). Although more than a decade has passed and continuous research has been presented on journal articles and conference papers (Ashwell, 2000; Bitchener & Knoch, 2010; Chen, Nassaji, & Liu, 2016; Ferris, 1995; 1997; 1999; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Kepner, 1991; Lyster, Saito, & Sato, 2012; Mackey et al., 2007; Polio, Fleck, & Leder, 1998), ongoing discussion is still carried out about providing corrective feedback in the classes. It can be stated that corrective feedback has benefits in L2 learning process (Russell & Spada, 2006). For instance, Ashwell (2000) points out that teachers have different ways to deal with student errors in writing. Focusing on form in giving corrective feedback at later drafts of writing may be better for the improvement of L2 students because accuracy can be said to subordinate meaning or content. In addition, Lyster and Saito (2010) examined the impact of corrective feedback on language development. Doing a meta-analysis with 15 classroom-based research studies, the researchers found out that corrective feedback has an important and long-term impact on language development. Chen et al. (2016) carried out a study on the perceptions of learners about written corrective feedback. The results exhibit that the learners favor and value the use of corrective feedback.

Despite the benefits that corrective feedback has in the literature, Truscott (1996, p. 327) in his paper against the grammar correction in L2 writing classes suggest that we should abandon error correction due to three reasons: "*(a) Substantial research shows it to be ineffective and none shows it to be helpful in any interesting sense; (b) for both theoretical and practical reasons, one can expect it to be ineffective; and (c) it has harmful effects*".

According to Truscott (1996), side effects of grammar correction are neglected. In response to Truscott, Ferris (1999, p. 2) thinks that Truscott's argument is "*premature and overly strong*". Ferris (1999) emphasizes that the type of error correction, the profile of the students, and the design of the studies carry an important role in error correction's efficiency and generalizability. Ferris (1995) found out in her study that 155 students enrolled in ESL composition program give more importance to teacher feedback given to earlier versions rather than final drafts of their writing. The students think that the feedback contributes to their writing development.

Another study conducted by Bitchener and Knoch (2010) emphasizes the importance of written corrective feedback on improving language accuracy of advanced

L2 learners. The study was carried out with 63 advanced L2 learners by utilizing three experimental groups and one control group. Experimental groups were designed in three ways: 1) corrective feedback with "*written metalinguistic explanation, 2) indirect circling of errors, and 3) written meta-linguistic feedback and oral form-focused instruction*" (Bitchener & Knoch, 2010). The findings reveal that all three experimental groups had improved accuracy scores immediately after getting corrective feedback on their pre-test writings contrary to the control group.

Schulz (2001) found in her study about teachers' and students' perceptions about the role of grammar instruction and corrective feedback that Colombian and U.S. teachers have a strong belief about continuous correction of written errors. On the other hand, only about half of them believe that oral error correction should be carried out in the class. While teachers' perceptions about correcting written errors ally with those of the students, the students prefer oral correction in the class (94% of U.S. and 95% of Colombian students). Schulz (2001) relates this to the notion that the teachers generally do not want to break the flow of communication. The findings go along with those of Lasagabaster and Sierra's (2005) study. It was found in their study that while the students strive for more explicit error correction, the teachers generally prefer to do less oral error correction in order to keep up the communication.

McCargar (1993) found in his study that there is a disagreement between the teachers and learners. Whereas teachers disagree that "*language teachers should correct every student error*" (p. 198), students consider otherwise. Additionally, while teachers gently shared the belief that "*language teachers should point out a student error without correcting it*" (p. 198), the learners except a group (Korean) obviously refuse it. Schulz (2001) found that the learners in her study were sympathetically inclined to error correction. The findings of this study that are parallel with those of other studies indicate that corrective feedback is demanded by most learners (Chen et al., 2016; Ferris, 1995; 1997; 1999; Leki, 1991; McGargar, 1993). Furthermore, some students may not prefer to be corrected constantly in order to communicate freely as in the sample of Lasagabaster and Sierra (2005). One can assume that when there is a mismatch between what the students expect and teachers' behaviors, learner motivation can be affected from this negatively (Schulz, 2001).

The students in this study preferred "*a more selective correction in which two aspects should be fundamental: a) more time should be devoted to each ECM (Error correction moves); and b) a wider use of resources and strategies to improve the efficiency of the correction*" (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005, p. 124). Mackey et al. (2007) examined the perceptions of teachers and learners about corrective feedback based on the linguistic target of feedback, type of feedback, and the nature of learner participation. The findings display

that learners understand the corrective feedback when morphology/lexis is the linguistic target of corrective feedback. The more explicit the feedback is, the more similar teachers' and students' perceptions about corrective feedback become. What is more, the learners benefit more if the corrective feedback is for them rather than their classmates.

Taking all these into consideration, one can easily agree that there is a gap in the literature regarding students' and teachers' perceptions about error treatment (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005; Lyster & Mori, 2006) and be a need to investigate the learner and teacher perceptions about corrective feedback (Sheen, 2004). Furthermore, it was found in Schulz's (1996) study that there were remarkable differences in the perceptions between teachers and students about the role of error correction. It is highly prominent to know what teachers think while giving corrective feedback and what students understand from the teachers' actions. This study can provide an invaluable perspective to this process and might give important contributions to understanding corrective feedback.

In this respect, research questions of the study can be seen below:

1. What are the perceptions of English learners and instructors about corrective feedback in an EFL setting in Turkey?
2. What are the similarities and differences of English learners' and instructors' perceptions about corrective feedback in an EFL setting in Turkey?

Research Design

This study aims to investigate the perceptions of English instructors and learners about corrective feedback in learning English as a foreign language. The study was designed as a cross-sectional survey because its aim is "*to collect information from a sample that has been drawn from a predetermined population*" (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2011, p. 394). The pre-determined population is the instructors and learners at the preparatory class of a state university in Turkey.

Participants

Purposive sampling was applied due to being feasible (Fraenkel et al., 2011, p. 430). The participants were at a state university in Turkey studying and teaching at preparatory class during 2015-2016 fall semester. A hundred Turkish EFL learners and ten instructors took part in the study. The level of the learners was intermediate (n=89) and upper-intermediate (n=11) based on the placement test of the preparatory school. The

learners were from English Language and Literature and English Language Teaching Departments. The instructors have been teaching English to these learners. They have different years of teaching experience.

Table 1: Participant profile

Participants	Number
Instructors	10
Learners	100

Instrumentation

Two different versions of questionnaires were used in the study: teacher questionnaire and student questionnaire. They were used in a study by Schulz (1996) previously. The permission was taken from Schulz by e-mail. Since the focus of this study is corrective feedback, the grammar instruction part of the questionnaire was not used in the study. The last three items were added by the researcher to the teacher questionnaire based on the items on the student questionnaire. The items which were added to the teacher questionnaire are as follows: 7T. Students prefer to be corrected by their fellow students in small group rather than by me in front of the entire class.; 8T. Students learn a lot when I correct the errors made by their fellow students rather than the peer correction. 9T. Students learn a lot when I correct the error the student makes in the class. The expert judgment was taken for these three items in order to make sure that the items are clear and do not break the unity of the questionnaire. The questionnaires were arranged as the 5-point Likert scale (strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree). The questionnaires were administered to the participants in English. Another instrument was used in the study. The written interview form (in English) was applied to both students and teachers.

The expert judgment was taken for the written interview questions before the application. The learners were asked "*Do you like to be corrected by the teacher, how and why?*" and "*Do you dislike to be corrected by the teacher, how and why?*". The instructors were asked "*What factors do you take into consideration in error correction?*" and "*How do you handle both oral and written errors?*".

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed checking the numbers and percentages of learners and instructors on the same question by using SPSS 15.0 software program. In the tables below, both the numbers and the percentages of the results were displayed. The written interview

was presented in the discussion part and direct quotations from both instructors and learners were given.

Findings and Discussion

The aim of this study is to find out the perceptions of instructors and learners about corrective feedback in learning English. The findings are illustrated in table 2 in order to discuss the research questions.

Table 2: Perceptions of instructors and learners about corrective feedback

Items	Teachers & Students									
	SD		D		N		A		SA	
1T. Most students dislike it when they are corrected in the class.	2	20	4	40	1	10	1	10	2	20
1S. I dislike it when I am corrected in the class.	31	31	36	36	20	20	9	9	4	4
2T. Teachers should not correct students when they make errors in class.	1	10	8	80	-	-	1	10	-	-
2S. Teachers should not correct students when they make errors in class.	56	56	34	34	4	4	3	3	3	3
3T. Teachers should not correct students' pronunciation or grammatical errors in class unless these errors interfere with comprehensibility.	-	-	3	30	2	20	4	40	1	10
3S. Teachers should not correct students' pronunciation or grammatical errors in class unless these errors interfere with comprehensibility.	45	45	30	30	18	18	6	6	1	1
4T. Most students feel cheated if a teacher does not correct the written work they hand in.	-	-	1	10	2	20	5	50	2	20
4S. I feel cheated if a teacher does not correct the written work I hand in.	11	11	22	22	24	24	29	29	14	14
5T. Generally, when students make errors in speaking the target language, they should be corrected.	-	-	3	30	2	20	5	50	-	-
5S. When I make errors in speaking this language, I would like my teacher to correct them.	-	-	5	5	11	11	41	41	43	43
6T. Generally, when students make errors in writing the target language, they should be corrected.	-	-	-	-	2	20	1	10	7	70
6S. When I make errors in writing this language, I would like my teacher to correct them.	-	-	1	1	5	5	38	38	56	56
7T. Students prefer to be corrected by their fellow students in small group rather than by me in front of the entire class.	-	-	5	50	3	30	-	-	2	20
7S. I prefer to be corrected by my fellow students in small group work rather than by my teacher in front of the entire class.	11	11	34	34	34	34	17	17	4	4

8T. Students learn a lot when I correct the errors made by their fellow students rather than the peer correction.	-	-	1	10	2	20	6	60	1	10
8S. I learn a lot when my teacher corrects the errors made by my fellow students in class.	2	2	6	6	20	20	52	52	20	20
9T. Students learn a lot when I correct the error the student makes in the class.	-	-	1	10	1	10	7	70	1	10
9S. I learn a lot when my teacher corrects the errors I make in class.	-	-	4	4	11	11	53	53	32	32

The first research question is:

1. **What are the perceptions of English learners and instructors about corrective feedback in an EFL setting in Turkey?**

The results indicate that learners (70% of the instructors and 43% of the learners) feel cheated if the teacher does not correct the error. The instructors and learners like corrective feedback in the class, which has also been revealed in many studies (Leki, 1991; McGargar, 1993; Schulz, 2001). What is more, it can be understood from learner interviews that some learners in this study want the instructor to be friendly, direct and explicit when the instructor gives corrective feedback (Lyster, 1998b; Seedhouse, 1997; Spada, 1997), and to correct the errors gently. In this regard, the learners mention in the written interview that *"The teacher should be friendly and tell me the correct form with a smooth tongue". "The teacher's attitude is very important". "Errors should be corrected and this is a good thing".*

On the other hand, there are a small number of learners and instructors who are not so favorable about corrective feedback (30% of the instructors and 13% of the learners). It can be observed from the written interview results that some learners in this study feel that the instructor may be critical (n=16), be the only authority in the class (n=12), not be sincere (n=10) and be friendly (n=14), and not be the only source (n=12). Furthermore, some learners in this study (n=15) feel like that the instructors criticize themselves not the errors. One of the learners reports in the written interview *"If the teacher targets me all the time, I do not like it. I feel a bit guilty if the teacher always targets me and tries to correct me all the time because there are other students in the class"*. Besides, some learners feel shy (n=25) and anxious (n=37) while receiving corrective feedback. A learner expresses in the interview that *"If the self-confidence of the students is low, then they may feel offended in the class. Due to this, the teacher should encourage that student. However, if a student has a high level of self-confidence, that student does not get hurt in error correction"*.

Because of these factors, a small number of learners do not seem to like error correction in the class. In this respect, an instructor mentions her technique about how she gives feedback *"There are some students who are not open to criticism and other who think*

that they did everything wrong. Firstly, I try to increase the motivation by saying "You did it well!" After that, I give some feedback". Another instructor explains her technique that *"Generally, if I give oral feedback, I write down the errors to remember. Then, I speak to the whole class like 'friends, generally your friends do these kinds of mistakes'. While they are having a group work activity, I wander around and I take some notes. If there is an error made by only one student, there is no meaning in telling it. But, if the error is recurring, then I tell the whole class like 'friends, our students generally make that kind of error'. I do not tell them in person. Generally, it is effective and sometimes the student says 'it was me'. They notice themselves".* It can be concluded from the comments that the instructors seem to believe the importance of such learner variables as motivation (DeKeyser, 1993) and anxiety (Horwitz, 2001; Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005; Sheen, 2008) in the effectiveness of corrective feedback and language learning process. In addition, the perceptions of the instructors ally with Calve's (1992) proposition that *"errors that recur frequently should be targeted"* (as cited in Lyster, 1998a, p. 72). As is easily seen in the comments that the instructor's preference in this study to give non-direct feedback and to encourage to talk before giving corrective feedback can be assumed as a good way of giving corrective feedback to such learners who feel shy and anxious.

Another point that seems clear in this study is that the instructor should be the one who gives corrective feedback because the learners believe that they learn a lot when the instruction does the correction (80% of the instructors and 85% of the learners). It can be understood from the written interview that the learners see the instructor as the one who improves their English (n=90), is trustable in error correction (n=54), and is the one showing the error (n=82). A learner comments in the interview that *"The teacher should emphasize the error and correct all the time".* What is more, the learners think that the instructor should help and guide them in a positive way (n=8).

The last point that must be highlighted is that both most instructors and learners would prefer teacher correction to peer correction (70% of the instructors and 72% of the learners). An instructor comments in the interview that *"I accept them all whatever they say in terms of logic and accuracy in speaking. I get very angry when peers make such comments as 'do not be ridiculous'. I am careful about not offending them. And I express that the content is important for me".* Another instructor says that *"We have some codes beforehand. We sign an agreement and when something goes wrong, we show them the agreement and they do not do any offensive behavior in the class".* A learner expresses that *"Peer correction is sometimes good but the peer correction after the teacher has corrected it is not pleasant. In writing that happens but I do not correct it most of the time. It also depends on the person. I prefer teacher correction to peer correction much more. I do not like to be corrected by my peers all the time."* Another learner explains that *"I like it when it happens with my partner or a*

close friend of mine. But if it is out loud in the class, I do not like it". These expressions of the learners in this study regarding their preference for teacher correction seem to be parallel with some studies (Nelson & Carson, 1998; Zhang, 1995). Furthermore, it can be understood from the comments that both sides prefer teacher correction. On the other hand, this contradicts with the suggestions of peer correction (Jacobs, Curtis, Braine, & Huang, 1998; Lockhart & Ng, 1992; Mangelsdorf, 1992; Paulus, 1999) and self-correction (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005; Yoshida, 2008). It can be suggested that the instructors and learners in this study are inclined to a traditional method in which the teacher is seen as an authority to correct the errors (Schulz, 2001).

The second research question is:

2. **What are the similarities and differences of EFL learners' and instructors' perceptions about corrective feedback in learning English as a foreign language in a Turkish setting?**

The findings display that the instructors and learners in this study share almost similar ideas about corrective feedback. Both instructors and learners seem to believe that students like corrective feedback. Additionally, they think that instructors but not peers should correct the errors because both instructors and learners think that when the instructor corrects the errors, the learners learn a lot, instructors should correct learners and instructors should correct written errors.

In terms of writing, both the instructors and the learners in this study prefer corrective feedback (80% of the instructors and 94% of the learners). A learner expresses his opinion about corrective feedback as "*The teacher should write clearly, show the error, underlie the wrong one, and correct the word or collocations*". A learner expresses that "*I usually use checklist for writing. However, there are recurring written errors, I write them down and show the correct one like 'not this, but this is the correct one'. I again talk to the whole class without targeting a person*". Another instructor expresses that she does not show any tolerance for written errors because "*In written feedback, we have a checklist and we deal with many issues. We are a bit harsher in writings because this is the most informal course we had in this institution*". One can agree that both instructors and learners in this study seem to give much importance to the written feedback. In addition, it should be pointed out that explicit correction seems to be desired by learners in this study as in some studies (Lyster, 1998b; Lyster & Saito, 2010; Seedhouse, 1997; Spada, 1997).

On the other hand, there is a perception contradicting between instructors and learners in this study. It can be acknowledged from the findings that the learners in this study expect both oral and written feedback from the instructor. A learner in the interview comments that "*In writing, spelling, grammar, any mistake should be corrected. If*

the teachers do not correct my errors, I start to make more errors. I like explicit correction because I cannot understand some parts. Coding is good but there are some codes we understand clearly and some we cannot". However, the instructors (50% of them) in this study think that they should not correct learners' pronunciation or grammatical errors in class unless these errors interfere with comprehensibility, which is disagreed by the majority of the learners (75% of the learners) in this study. An instructor comments in the interview that "*The oral feedback I give depends on the task*". This perception can indicate that the instructors should take the instructional setting into consideration (Lyster & Mori, 2006; Panova & Lyster, 2002; Sheen, 2004). The findings of this study seem to be parallel with McCargar (1993) and Schulz (2001)'s studies which show that the learners opt for both oral and written corrective feedback. On the other hand, while the instructors seem to have a strong belief to give written feedback, they do not prefer oral correction in the class in order not to disrupt the communication. Also, it can be understood from the comments that while the learners in this study expect direct and explicit feedback, the instructors in this study prefer non-direct feedback. From another point of view, the findings of this study from the aspect of learners contradict with those of Lasagabaster and Sierra (2005)'s study because the students in that study demanded not to be corrected all the time in order to be able to communicate however they want.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to find out the perceptions of EFL instructors and learners about corrective feedback in learning English. It was revealed in the findings that the instructors and learners share similar perceptions. Both think that the learners like corrective feedback and prefer teacher correction to peer correction. Furthermore, both agree that when the instructors correct the errors, the learners learn a lot. In addition, both believe that the students feel cheated when the instructors do not correct the learners' written work. However, they have a disagreement on one statement. While both instructors and learners think the instructors should correct written errors, only instructors agree that teachers should not correct students' pronunciation or grammatical errors in class unless these errors interfere with comprehensibility but the learners desire to be corrected. Furthermore, the learners in this study prefer to be corrected explicitly. What is more, the learners see the instructor as an authority in corrective feedback and expect the instructors to be friendly, guiding, and direct while the instructors prefer non-direct feedback. Also, it can be understood that the

instructors in this study seem to take learner anxiety, motivation, and instructional setting into consideration.

All in all, the findings of this study may suggest that the instructors and learners seem to share similar ideas possibly due to the similar language learning experience. In addition, there can be some implications for language instructors from this study. Firstly, it seems important for language instructors to know what their learners expect in corrective feedback and to form a common understanding with their learners for increasing the effectiveness of corrective feedback. Secondly, it is good to consider some other non-language influences such as motivation and anxiety in corrective feedback and language learning process. Finally, it is advised for language instructors to give place to their learners' opinions in order to increase their engagement in language learning process.

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