A study on error correction techniques in teaching Speaking skill for first-year English majored students

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Abstract: *In the process of teaching and learning, first-year English majored students at Dong Nai Technology University frequently make errors especially in speaking sessions. As a matter of fact, pointing out errors is extremely necessary task for learners to know whether they are successful or not when speaking the language through the feedback they receive from the teachers. Therefore, this study was conducted to introduce the effectiveness of using various error correction techniques in teaching students' speaking skill. Both research methods including classroom observation, and questionnaire were used to collect data from 120 freshmen and 4 lecturers at Faculty of Foreign Languages. Several conclusions regarding the efficacy of using error correction approaches when teaching speaking skills to English language learners have been made from the study. In addition, the findings of the research may provide valuable insights for educators and researchers in optimizing teaching methods and supporting the development of students' English oral performance.*

Keywords*: Error correction techniques, English language, first-year students, teaching strategies*

1. Introduction

English language proficiency is of paramount importance in today's globalized world, particularly for students majoring in English. As they embark on their journey to master the language, first-year English majored students encounter various challenges, among which error correction stands as a crucial aspect of their learning process. The effectiveness of error correction techniques significantly impacts students' language acquisition and their ability to communicate accurately and confidently.

Correcting errors is crucial in various subjects in general and English in particular. In reality, when learning English, first-year students seldom get it right on their first attempt. Many teachers fear that not correcting errors will perpetuate them, forming ingrained language habits that are difficult to correct later on. Correcting errors in spoken English for first-year students is often deemed one of the most unpleasant tasks for teachers due to its subjective nature influenced by factors such as background knowledge, pronunciation, and spontaneity. The perspective on error correction is also supported by many students, as they always want teachers to correct them to avoid mistakes in future learning and communication practice. However, it's known that sometimes the teacher's error correction approach significantly affects the effectiveness of language learning for first-year English majors. Incorrect error correction methods can lead to counterproductive results, diminishing students' enthusiasm and confidence in learning, which is detrimental to language acquisition. Therefore, the research was conducted to apply error correction methods in English speaking classes and evaluate their effectiveness, aiming to develop specific measures to help students improve their oral skill.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Errors and error correction in language teaching

When students use English, whether in writing or speaking, they always want to know if their performance is correct or not. However, it is required to differentiate between mistakes and errors. As defined by Brown (2000), a mistake was a performance error resulting from the incorrect utilization of a recognized system. Since mistakes are haphazard and non-systematic, they have no bearing on language acquisition. Noticeably, an error referred to a conspicuous divergence from the grammatical norms of a native speaker, indicating the learner's level of interlanguage competence. Common types of errors encountered in learning English include vocabulary, grammar or sentence structure, and spelling errors. These errors can significantly impact the clarity and coherence of their writing or speaking performance.

According to Richard et al. (2002), an error was when a word, speech, or grammatical structure was used incorrectly to the point and suggested that the learner had not finished the task. Also, Huang et al. (2016) stated that it was difficult for a student to self-correct an error. Therefore, teachers' error correction is essential in language teaching and learning.

Correcting students' language errors is always important because of its significance in error analysis, helping teachers apply appropriate techniques and strategies to help students avoid or minimize these errors while practicing a foreign language. Typically, error correction is done after students have used the language. Error correction also aims to enhance students' interest in learning English. It helps students actively engage in learning activities, interact, identify their own mistakes, and correct them together to learn how to apply English in real life. Donald (2018) asserted that error correction for learners had three effects. First, teachers observed learners' progress and supplemented what still needed to be learned. Second, the error correction process offered valuable insights into the language acquisition process and the specific tactics employed by language learners. Third, for the learning process, making mistakes was considered as a factor that learners corrected to study in depth.It's not easy to identify and correct errors effectively if students themselves do not try and focus on learning. In other words, applying effective learning methods, no matter how good or efficient they are in any environment, if students themselves lack motivation to learn well, it greatly affects the effectiveness of the language learning process.

2.2. Sources of errors

Nguyen (2004) revealed that when studying a foreign language, there are two primary kinds of errors that might occur. These are errors related to interference (interlingual error) and target language (intralingual error). First and foremost, interlingual error or mother tongue interference is quite systematic in the process of learning English. Teachers and learners of second or foreign languages (L2) have both witnessed and experienced the impact of their mother tongue (L1) (Wood, 2017). Students often mechanically employ some of the linguistic aspects of the L1 linguistic knowledge to their target language; yet, this frequently results in errors. Similarly, Lixin (2015) claimed that interlingual transfer may be the primary cause of most errors. Consequently, educators had carefully considered errors that appeared to stem from the impact of students' first language when determining the areas of emphasis in foreign language instruction.

In terms of intralingual error, it is the exact opposite of interlingual error in that it focuses on the target language and views it as the source of the problem. Intralingual error occurs when a specific rule of the target language is misused. According to Keshavarz (2003), instead of coming from language transfer, intralingual errors were the outcome of incorrect or incomplete target language learning. In Keshavarz and Astaneh's study in 2004, six categories were used to group intralingual errors including over-generalization, ignorance of rule limits, erroneous analogy, hyperextension, hypercorrection, and incorrect categorization In addition, other elements that could contribute to errors in second language learning included techniques and materials for instruction and assessment, the types of language exposures the student has access to, language transfer from one or more other languages, and so on.

2.3. Teachers' error correction techniques in language classroom

The findings from relevant studies on error correction revealed various forms of feedback and its significance for addressing errors in language instruction and application. Lyster and Ranta (1997) clarified popular forms of error correction in language classrooms via direct and indirect methods consisting of explicit error correction, metalinguistic feedback, recast, elicitation, repetition, translation and clarification request. In Tsang's (2004) study, it was observed that teachers primarily employed recast and explicit correction methods for error correction. Also, repetition was the most commonly used type of feedback, which was most effective in addressing grammatical errors. He proposed that phonological errors were often resolved by recasting and explicit correction.

It is undeniable that teacher's involvement plays an significant role in correcting students' errors. When examining several forms of error correction techniques such as clarification, recast, and repetition, it is concluded that students tended to use their teachers for help when they needed. It is true that, teacher's correction of errors for students is the most optimal method usually applied in the teaching process. However, students can also self-correct, correct in pairs, or correct in groups to make language practice more effectively. Importantly, Kennedy (2010)

proposed that the teacher's corrective techniques were based on the learners' proficiency. In short, addressing errors and developing English oral skills for students requires a comprehensive and flexible approach, combining specific teaching techniques with a positive and supportive learning environment.

3. Methodology

3.1.Research methods

Two methods of gathering data were used in this study consisting of questionnaire and classroom observation. Combining two approaches can strengthen the evidence supporting the research conclusion by increasing the validity and reliability of the findings.

3.1.1.Classroom observation

The author conducted observations and recordings of teaching in 4 different classes to determine the errors in the speaking tasks and the teachers' frequencies of using error correction feedback. In fact, classroom observation allows researcher to concentrate on both teachers' and students' actions and behaviors in the classroom objectively. The research was only piloted within eight weeks and on eight lessons of Listening-Speaking 1 course. The researcher created a set of speaking criteria in order to accurately identify errors in participants' performance including lexical resource, grammar, and pronunciation.

3.1.2.Questionnaire

Furthermore, questionnaire was delivered to all students with the aim of eliciting their ideas and attitudes to error correction techniques; and investigating the effectiveness of the applied teaching methods from students' perceptions and experiences. The questionnaire comprised seven questions with predetermined response options in Likert scale from strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. Then, the percentage of opinions of students was calculated and finally placed in the designated table.

3.2.Participants

Teachers and students from Faculty of Foreign Languages, Dong Nai Technology University were chosen as participants. First of all, 120 first-year English majored students from 18 to 20 were asked to participate in the study. Indeed, various levels of English competence were seen among these participants. Additionally, 4 experienced teachers who has instructed freshmen in speaking courses were invited to join the experiment so that the collected data could be sufficiently trustworthy.

3.3.Data analysis

Firstly, the observational notes and the recordings of eight lessons underwent multiple reviews and were meticulously documented in order to determine whether the students' performance had improved contrasted to how they had performed prior to the experiment. Besides, a further idea was revealed during the process of analysis, specifically students' speaking errors to clarify what kind of errors they frequently made in speaking tasks and practical measures for the issue. For every question, the frequencies and percentages of responses were calculated using excel computer program. According to the quantitative data expressed as percentages, the perspectives of educators and learners regarding the potential benefits, attitudes, and opinions about error correction techniques in the classroom were recognized.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results of observation

Firstly, the figures of Table 4.1 clarify the practicality of the study on common errors in the teaching and learning process for first-year English majored students. It is noticeable that the researcher had categorized observing criteria in terms of incorrect grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation in students' performance. From observations, the total number of errors made by students is 460, of which the lowest was 130 vocabulary errors, accounting for 28.3%. In fact, students understood the meaning of words and how to use them in sentences. With 150 pronunciation errors corresponding to 32.6%, this figure indicated that students did not pay enough attention to speaking practice and remembering word pronunciation, leading to unsuccessful communication at times. The prevalent mistakes committed by students were in grammar/sentence structure with 180 errors, corresponding to 39.1%. This may be due to the multiple grammatical rules in English confusing students in memorizing and applying into their speaking tasks.

Table 4.1. Common errors in students' speaking performance

Types of errors	Number	Percentage (%)
Pronunciation	150	32.6
Grammar/Sentence Structure	180	39.1
Vocabulary	130	28.3
Total	460	100

Table 4.2 shows the frequency of different corrective feedback used in the classes applied by teachers. The data contained a total of 295 teachers'

various types of correction. In particular, the form of translation was not applied much by teachers, accounting for only 3.4%. It is true that teachers usually did not use L1 to correct errors because it was difficult for students to make progress in mastering the target language. Also, repetition and clarification request were not used frequently at 9.8% and 10.5% respectively. This was understandable because repeating mistakes without understanding the nature of the problem was ineffective for low proficiency students. In terms of explicit error correction, teachers point out errors and offer corrections for students directly. Obviously, this form was used more by teachers, accounting for 13.6% due to the fast error reformulation. In addition, the results showed that teachers used the suggestions for students to find and correct errors themselves at higher proportions like metalinguistic feedback at 15.3%, elicitation at 20.3%, and recast at 27.1%. Thus, it appears that students had increased opportunities and a greater amount of time to effectively practice the new language with a variety of correction methods. In short, if the mentioned error correction techniques helped students to recognize and make reformulation themselves in full corrections or even partial corrections, the students could get the benefits which may have a beneficial impact on their academic performance.

Table 4.2. Teachers' frequencies of using error correction techniques

Types of correction	Number	Percentage (%)
Explicit error correction	40	13.6
Metalinguistic feedback	45	15.3
Recast	80	27.1
Elicitation	60	20.3
Repetition	29	9.8
Translation	10	3.4
Clarification request	31	10.5
Total	295	100

Furthermore, Figure 1 illustrates the proportion of errors which were improved after implementing error correction methods. It can be clearly seen that with translation and explicit error correction methods, all students (100%) could make full correction, but most did not understand the nature of the problem. However, a rather optimistic result was that metalinguistic, elicitation, and recast were considered relatively effective for first-year students in correcting errors since these techniques encouraged students to self-correct their errors partly or fully, accounting form 89% to nearly 97%. The figures indicated that the

teachers' prompts, comments, especially implicit reformulation made students self-reliant and active in the learning process and this is no doubt, will affect their oral production.
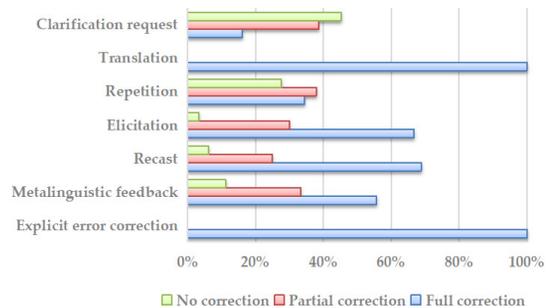

Figure 4.1. The effectiveness of error correction feedback

4.2. Results of questionnaire

The students were required to evaluate the extent to which they perceived error correction as an important feature in learning speaking skill. Most students expressed their consensus, with 66.7% of respondents indicating agreement and an additional 24% indicating strong agreement. The pie chart clearly illustrated that just 3.3% of the replies expressed disagreement, and there were no instances of strong disagreement. The data demonstrates that relevant error correction techniques facilitated the students' ability to recognize their errors inside the classroom, undoubtedly impacting their oral fluency.
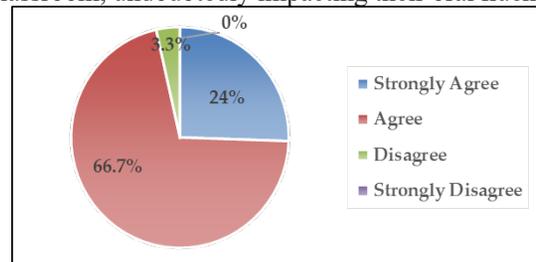

Figure 4.2. Students' perspectives on error correction as an important feature in learning speaking skill

In response to question 2, " Error correction feedback makes learning speaking skill more effective," a large percentage of students (35%) and strongly agreed (60.8%), as shown by the bar graph below. This is comprehensible given that the majority of students in the pie chart above realize the importance of error correction for their oral ability. Teachers' feedback gave students information about their weakness in speaking new language. Still, several students expressed their disapproval with the disagreement rate only amounting for 4.2%.

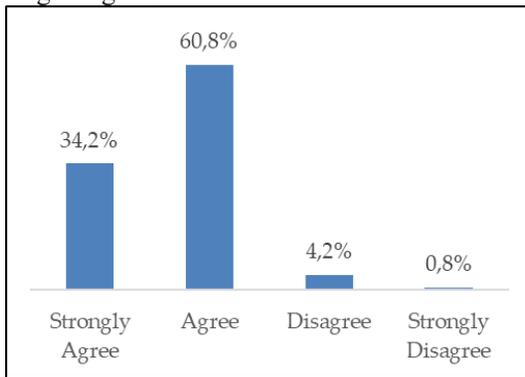Noticeably, only one participants (0.8%) showed strong disagreement.

Figure 4.3: Students' opinions about the effectiveness of error correction feedback

Additionally, a rating of the students' thoughts on several facets of error correction methods was requested. The outcomes of the students' responses were displayed in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3. Students' views on using error correction techniques

Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
You got valuable feedback from your instructors during your speaking courses.	31.7%	60%	5.8%	2.5%
You were given further opportunities for self correction in speaking practice.	20.8%	66.7%	8.3%	4.2%
You were aware of the responsibility for checking your own mistakes.	29.2%	63.5%	8.3%	0%
You became more confident about yourself.	41.6%	51.7%	5%	1.7%
You felt comfortable with teachers' comments about your performance.	33.3%	45%	12.5%	9.2%

In order to facilitate analysis, the responses in Table 4.3 were combined into two categories: "agree" and "disagree" in table 4.4.

Table 4.4. Students' views on using error correction techniques (percentage was combined)

Questions	Agree	Disagree
You got valuable feedback from your instructors during your speaking courses.	91.7%	8.3%
You were given further opportunities for self correction in speaking practice.	87.5%	12.5%
You were aware of the responsibility for checking your own mistakes.	92.7%	8.3%
You became more confident about yourself.	93.3%	6.7%
You felt comfortable with teachers' comments about your performance.	78.3%	21.7%

The majority of the items displayed a high percentage of agreement. According to a survey, 91.7% of the students acknowledged that they get more valuable feedback from their teachers while only 8.3% of the participants expressed disagreement. In addition, 87.5% of students unanimously agreed that they had more opportunities for self correction in speaking practice through teachers' feedback. Notably, the data indicated that 92.7% of students believed that they gain more responsibility for checking their own mistakes since they were aware that error correction was not completely the teacher's job. Therefore, it is necessary to turn the process of error correction into an automatic process to promote self-checking, and foster independent learning. In particular, 93.3% of the respondents admitted that they felt more confidence in themselves after receiving teachers' feedback despite of making mistakes in their performance. Furthermore, the number of students strongly agreed (33.3%) and agreed (45%) that they felt comfortable with teachers' comments was quite high, comparing to the remaining 21.7% of the students expressed disagreement. This is also understandable since high proportion of students unanimously acknowledged that they obtained valuable feedback from their lecturers. Overall, the data suggests that error correction had beneficial impacts on the majority of students, leading to improved learning outcomes.

5. Conclusion

This study has explored various error correction techniques utilized in teaching English skills to first-year English majored students. Through the examination of classroom practices and feedback methodologies, it has become evident that teachers employ a range of strategies to address errors and provide constructive feedback. While there is a commendable diversity in the approaches adopted, there remains room for refinement and adaptation to suit the specific needs and sensitivities of first-year students. The findings underscore the importance of considering the psychological factors at play in language learning environments, particularly with regard to student anxiety and confidence levels.

By fostering a supportive and empowering atmosphere, educators can facilitate more effective error correction practices that encourage student engagement and growth. Moving forward, it is recommended that teachers engage in continual professional development and reflective practice to refine their error correction techniques and stay abreast of evolving best practices.