

# HOW WOULD OUR STUDENTS LIKE TO BE CORRECTED? : A STUDY ON LEARNERS' BELIEFS ABOUT LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGY

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## *Abstract*

**Purpose:** This study aims at finding out whether learners with different English proficiency backgrounds respond differently to corrective feedbacks (CFs) and what kind of CFs are acceptable for them.

**Methodology:** This study was conducted using a qualitative method with a semi-structured interview and learning journals as the instruments to collect the data. Six students were involved in this study, two of them were high achievers, two were medium achievers, and the other two were low achievers.

**Results:** The findings showed that all participants in this study believed that they needed CFs from their lecturers and they were confident that CFs was very significant to improve their English competence.

**Implications:** This study revealed that although most of the participants were alright to receive CFs immediately after they made mistakes, they would do differently if they became teachers. They would wait until their students finish talking before they give CFs or they would do it at the end of the class. The results confirmed that they preferred CFs which were accurate, appreciative, motivating and make them feel comfortable. Finally, this current study also points out that the way how lecturers give feedbacks has to consider the type of mistakes.

**Keywords:** *Corrective feedbacks, English competence, mistakes, learners' beliefs*

## INTRODUCTION

Many scholars believe that learners' beliefs play an important role in the learning process as they affect the ways how the learners approach language learning. The study of learners' beliefs has been popular since Horwitz developed a set of questionnaires to assess beliefs, i.e. Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) in 1985. Since then, a great number of studies have been carried out all over the world, in different contexts with a variety of results. Some Doctoral theses have also been written based on comprehensive researches using BALLI. One of the reasons why the study of beliefs has attracted researchers and education practitioners may be the fact that beliefs are a central construct in every discipline which deals with human behavior and learning.

Pajares argues that belief as a construct does not have a single correct definition and that it is extremely difficult to define because it "does not lend itself to empirical investigations" (p.308) and therefore he claimed it as a "messy" concept. Nevertheless, some scholars have proposed their definitions to approach the concept of belief as closely as possible. For example, Garner and Alexander assert that beliefs may be conceived as mini-theories of the mind, ways of characterizing language and behavior and ascribing the mental state of people. Further, they argue that beliefs are "a part of social and cultural truth" that people try to hold on in their day to day lives (p. 3). Beliefs are not easy to pinpoint and describe because they are interwoven with other personal philosophies, habits, experiences and social histories. Benson and Lor present the idea of the conception of learning to compare with beliefs. The concept of learning relates to what the learner thinks the objects (in the context of language learning, the object is a language) and the processes of learning are. Beliefs deal with what the learners hold to be true about the objects and processes. In the context of language learning, the object covers two ideas, the language to be learned and how to learn the language which includes the learning strategies. Wenden used the term "metacognitive knowledge" to refer to beliefs and defined metacognitive knowledge as "the stable, stable although sometimes incorrect knowledge that learners have acquired about language, learning, and language learning process" (p. 163). Meanwhile, Horwitz defines beliefs about language learning as language learners' preconceived ideas or notions on a variety of aspects related to second or foreign language learning.

As learning is happening in the mind of a learner as the result of the cognitive process, trial and error are unavoidable. As we understand, foreign language learning takes time, it is a gradual process, and therefore mistakes will appear during all stages of a learning process. In interlanguage theory, it is a normal phenomenon in the process of language learning

that a learner makes mistakes. Therefore, mistakes in language learning should be viewed as part of learning and as a natural process. Learners' mistakes provide information to teachers on which aspects the learners are still struggling, what concepts they may have understood or overlooked and what extra work they still need to do. In other words, learners' mistakes are beneficial for teachers as they can prepare a treatment for the learners so that they will not make the same mistakes in the future. Although there is an argument that error correction is of little benefit and even harmful for the learners, and therefore it should be kept aside in foreign language learning, there is a stronger claim that error correction is very significant in improving the student's language proficiency.

### Feedback-based learning

This model of feedback-based learning (modified from [Szynalski](#)) confirms that correction should be a part of a learning process as it will target the errors produced by the students and eventually will improve the proficiency of a learner. As we understand an error made by a student is a representation of either our teaching failure or his or her failure in understanding our explanation. Similarly, what a student feels to be hard may also be felt by others and thus when one student is struggling in a certain aspect of a language, other students may also feel the same. Either way, a remedial treatment will improve the students' understanding of the issues they are struggling. [Szynalski](#) argues that feedback-based learning is a slow learning model as language learning is a very memory-sensitive task. In other words, learning a language exploits learners' memory capacity; it is because not all language rules work consistently, and very often they change based on the context. Obviously, learners need correct examples, and therefore a competent teacher is essential in language learning.

Error correction has been an interest of investigation by SLA researchers and SL and FL practitioners for decades. Debates on the issue of whether error correction or CFs is necessary for language learning to have produced two contrasting opinions. Scholars working within nativist paradigms believe that providing language learners with positive evidence or correct examples of the target language is sufficient whereas interactionist scholars such as [Gass](#) consider that negative evidence is also beneficial in the language learning process. The former scholars argue that CFs is not only unnecessary but also adverse in the language learning process, for example, [Krashen](#), while the latter group of scholars believes that errors should be corrected immediately.

Error correction, negative feedback or CFs (CF) is information given to learners regarding linguistic errors they have made. [Zhang and Rahimi](#) add this definition from the point of view of a teacher or a more competent interlocutor. They define CFs as a reaction to learners' incorrect linguistic form in order to help them notice their incorrect utterance and correct it. Literature shows that there are two opposing views regarding the effectiveness of CF represented by meaning-based approach and form-focused instruction. The proponents of meaning-based approach believe that exposing learners with comprehensible input or positive evidence of a second or foreign language is sufficient to make the learners reach the expected proficiency in the target language learned. Additionally, they argued that providing learners with CFs may potentially increase anxiety, raise affective filters, hinder the ability to process comprehensible input and consequently decrease L2 learning ability. He asserts that CF may increase the anxiety of a learner, raise his affective filter and obstruct L2 learning especially in the most anxiety-provoking classroom activities, i.e., oral communication.

On the contrary, the scholars who support form-focussed instruction such as [Ellis](#), [Erlam](#), and [Rahimi and Zhang](#) contend that it is important for a language learner to find out his or her area of incompetence in the target language. They suggest that teachers or more competent others need to find out a suitable strategy such as showing his or her negative feedback to make the learners consciously aware and care about their weakness in the target language. [Schmidt](#) believes that providing CFs for language learners can assist them with interlanguage development. This strategy is believed to be effective especially when learners fail to realize the gap between their interlanguage form with the target language form. A lot of studies have also revealed that providing learners with CFs may assist them in the process of target language acquisition, for example, the studies conducted by [Loewen](#) and [Koni and Leka](#). Individual attributes which include self-efficacy, anxiety, and beliefs about CF are reported to be factors which determine the effectiveness of CF in language learning. Furthermore, [Li](#) and [Sheen](#) verify that anxiety which may influence learners' feeling of apprehensiveness has a significant role in forming learners' beliefs about CF. They also believe that one of the ways to improve the effectiveness of CF to help learners in the process of language learning is by understanding this individual attribute.

According to [Gardner and MacIntyre](#) anxiety which is classified as a stable personality trait is defined as "the apprehension experienced when a situation requires the use of a second language with which the individual is not fully proficient" (p. 5). In this definition, they point out that lack of proficiency in the target language as the cause of the apprehension. In relation to CF, [Krashen](#) deliberates anxiety as debilitating and believe that CF may potentially influence L2 learning as it can increase

L2 anxiety, raise affective filters, hamper the ability to process comprehensible input and consequently decrease L2 learning ability.

## METHODOLOGY

This study is conducted using a qualitative method to answer research questions; (1) Do learners with different English proficiency respond differently to CFs? And (2) What kind of CFs are acceptable for students with different English competencies? As Seliger and Shohamy believe that qualitative research is more appropriate to describe a social context of second language learning. Intentionally qualitative research was designed to provide a detailed description of what is happening within a community, a group and in a conversation. This method also describes who speaks to whom, what message is being delivered, what feeling comes with the delivery and how the message affects the receiver. Therefore the researcher believes that this method is the most effective method to answer the aforementioned research questions.

### Instrument

The researcher used a semi-structured interview and learning journals to collect the data. The researcher believes that these two instruments are the most effective ones as an interview can dig up information as comprehensive as possible to find the core data to answer the research questions. While learning journal provides evidence of what is really happening within the participants, what they are feeling and their personal experience during the study.

### Participants

The participants of this study were the pre-service English language teachers who have been studying English for four semesters in the English Education Department. Six students consisting of two high achievers, two medium achievers, and two low achievers were involved in this study. These students were interviewed one by one with questions dealing with their learning experience and how they believe CFs have affected their mindset especially about effective correction. They were also given time to write a learning journal in which they ought to include their experience in relation to CFs from their teachers or friends.

## RESULTS

As explained earlier in the methodology section, the participants of this study come from different English competence background: High achievers, medium achievers, and low achievers. Therefore, the analysis uses this grouping to investigate if their competence backgrounds affect their beliefs about CFs.

### The necessity of corrective feedbacks

The necessity of CFs is the belief the participants hold about the importance of receiving feedback from their lecturers about their language performance. All participants shared the same belief that CFs are very important and that they need them to improve their competence. For example, Ika, one of the high achievers believes that there is a connection between CFs and the development of their English competence. She also argues that CFs may avoid the students to produce similar mistakes in the future.

Corrective feedback is very important sir. We can't develop without the correction and feedback from the lecturer. If he does not give correction, there is a big possibility that we may make the same mistakes in the future. For example, when we write an essay in semester four and the teacher does not correct our mistakes, later we may make the same mistakes when we write graduating paper or thesis.

(Ika/high achiever/interview)

..... Teachers' feedback is very significant in the English learning process because professionally a teacher is responsible for the success of his students to achieve their goals. With feedbacks, the students feel encouraged to learn more because he feels that his teacher appreciates his efforts. ....

(Zata/medium achiever/learning journal)

The data presented suggest that the participants believe that CFs plays significant roles in the progress of a learner's competence. The participants also showed the feeling of worried that the same mistakes may be made if their earlier mistakes were not taken care well. Therefore she confirmed the significance of CFs in English language learning.

### Timing of giving corrective feedback

Timing of giving feedback is the time the teacher or a lecturer gives the CFs after he found a learner makes a mistake. The decision of when to give the feedback is up to the teacher; it can be given immediately after the student makes mistakes or it can be given later after the students finish speaking or even later in the conclusion before the class end. Almost all of the participants do not have any problems if the feedback is given immediately after the mistake is made. The extracts below are what the participants shared in the interview.

Frankly speaking, I don't mind sir if lecturer corrects me my mistakes immediately because I realize that my grammar is so messy.

(Novi/high achiever/Interview)

Personally, I will be happy if my lecturer corrects me immediately when I make a mistake sir because it can evaluate my capability and improve it.

(Winda/medium achiever/interview)

When my lecturer corrects me immediately, I feel so grateful and happy because then I know my mistakes and how to correct them. I realize that I am still learning and surely I must make mistakes from time to time and therefore I need guidance and feedback from my lecturer.

(Aisyah/low achiever/interview)

These three students from different English competent backgrounds have confirmed that immediate feedback right after they make mistakes is not an issue for them. They shared the same belief about their English competence which requires continuous supervision from their lecturers to make progress. Furthermore, Aisyah, one of the low achievers explicitly stated her condition of learning and that making mistakes during learning is inevitable and therefore she appreciates any feedbacks from their lecturer for her improvement.

However, their beliefs about the timing of giving feedbacks switch when the participants put themselves as prospective teachers. All the participants were confident to articulate their beliefs that waiting until the students finish talking is the right time to offer the CFs.

When I became a mentor in the PALP (Peer Assisted Learning Program), I let them speak until they finish then I correct them. I ever corrected them immediately when they made a mistake, and it made them feel unconfident. Therefore, if I become a real teacher one day, I will wait until they finish talking.

(Novi/high achiever/Interview)

Novi shared her experience that as one of the high achievers in the department she was appointed to be a mentor for the first year students who need extra tutoring from the senior. When she tutored them she witnessed the impact of giving an immediate correction to the students had made them feel unconfident. Therefore she restrained herself from giving feedback immediately and promised that when she becomes a teacher one day, she would do it later after her students finish talking.

I will wait until he finishes. When he has finished, I can correct him if he makes a mistake because every student has his own characters, sir. For me it (being corrected immediately after making a mistake) is ok, but for students, it may not be ok. So for me, to be safe it is better to correct the mistakes after they finish talking.

(Zata/medium achiever/Interview)

### Method of giving corrective feedbacks

In response to how CFs should be given by a teacher, some beliefs were raised by the participants. The following extract was the one that contains not only the accuracy of the feedback but also the way how CFs should be addressed.

In my opinion when giving correction, the teacher should: (1) do not offend and therefore do not raise her voice, (2) show the mistakes and give the correction (show the correct ones) (3) give motivation to the students to learn harder and (4) appreciate the students for example by saying "it's not a problem, you can be better again later.

(Winda/medium achiever/Interview)

Winda, one of the medium achievers forward a reminder that a teacher who is giving a CFs to the students has to make sure

that the students feel alright, know on which part he makes a mistake and what is the correct ones. Besides, the teacher has to appreciate and encourage the students as well.

### Types of mistakes

The data shows that one of the participants of this study considers types of mistakes as an important issue that requires a wise decision from the teacher on how to deal with them. The ways how to deal with the mistakes can be either giving CFs or just ignore them, giving the feedback immediately, or it can wait later and how to approach such mistakes in a way that comfort the students.

It depends on the mistakes the students make sir. If it is a small mistake such as pronunciation the teacher can correct them immediately with polite language so that it will not offend the students. But if the mistakes are too many (the students make mistakes frequently), the teacher can wait until the end of the class and discuss with all the students. Maybe the teacher has not taught the materials in the class. The teacher also has to consider how serious the mistakes are then she can decide when to correct them and how to do it.

(Ika/high achiever/interview)

It implies that the types of mistakes matter for the participant. She explicitly mentions different types of mistakes as small, frequent, and serious which implicitly she categorizes mistakes into small and big, frequent and infrequent and serious and not serious. Although she gave the example of small mistakes such as “mispronunciation” but did not provide examples for the frequent and serious types of mistakes.

### DISCUSSION

The results show that all the participants in the study believe the significance of correction for their learning improvement. They link the teacher’s CFs to their necessity as a student who always needs someone they trust to guide them to achieve their goal which is being competent in the English language. For this reason, they admit that teacher’s CFs do not only help them perform correctly but also avoid them to produce the same mistakes in the future. Their belief is in line with what [Loewen](#), [Koni](#) and [Leka](#) who argue that teachers’ CFs assist the students in the process of target language acquisition. The students’ belief about the significance of the CFs support [Ellis](#)’ view that the awareness of the purpose of CFs can enhance the effectiveness of CFs which eventually affects the students’ competence.

On when is the best time to give CFs, almost all of the participants did not mind with receiving correction immediately after they made a mistake. They were aware that they were still learning and that making a mistake for them is normal and they consider it as part of the learning process. Therefore when a teacher corrects them, they were grateful as they learn something new. Their belief echoes [Lavery](#)’s feedback-based learning model where correction is part of the learning process cycle which will benefit the students. Their feeling “alright” to receive immediate feedbacks also support [Brown](#)’s and [Richards and Rodgers](#)’ views that CFs should be given immediately. It also implies that the teacher does not need to experiment in regard to the best time to give feedback when they have already developed positive attitudes toward and believed in the value of CFs.

However, the students’ responds changed when they were supposed to put themselves as teachers, whether they would give CFs immediately or postpone until the students finished or wait until the end of the class. All the participants were confident that giving a correction to the students need to consider the feeling of the students. In detail, some advice like using offensive language, raising the voice, humiliating the students should be avoided. Instead, the teacher has to use an encouraging expression, praise the students, give motivation and other positive feedback. Their ideas are consistent with [Krashen](#)’s ideas that CFs may provoke anxiety which hinders oral communication. Providing CFs in a way that comforts the students assists target language acquisition (see [Ellis](#), [Erlam](#), [Rahimi](#) and [Zhang](#), and interlanguage development. Following [Ellis](#)’ suggestion, the teacher needs to do experimentation with the timing to find out the best time the students feel comfortable to receive CFs.

Although not all participants mention the types of mistakes the teacher needs to take care, there was one participant who was concerned with the level of seriousness of the mistakes and how to deal with it. It implies that “minor” mistakes which are corrected immediately and repeatedly may give negative impacts on the students’ effort to learn English. Psychologically overcorrection is a threat and a kind of “humiliation” toward the students which will surely inhibit learning and hinder the teaching and learning process. This is consistent with [Budden](#)’s belief that over correction is dangerous for the students because the teacher may destroy the teaching and learning process. To avoid any inconvenience the students may feel when



they receive feedbacks, the teacher should investigate to what extent his CFs may cause anxiety and therefore “should adapt the strategies they use to ensure that anxiety facilitates rather than debilitates” (p. 14).

## CONCLUSION

Four major themes were revealed in this study, necessity, and significance of CFs, the timing of giving CFs, methods of giving CFs and level of mistakes and how to deal with it. This study has confirmed that all the participants believed in the significance of CFs and that they were in need of it to improve their English competence. Most of the participants have articulated their comfort with immediate CFs as they believed that it was for the sake of their competence progress. However, all the participants agreed that they would not give instant feedback if they become teachers in the future. Instead, they would wait until their students finish talking or provide the CFs as a conclusion. Another finding shows that CFs should be given in a way that makes the students feel comfortable, appreciated, and motivated. The result of this study also affirms that the lecturers have to consider the level of seriousness of the mistakes to give feedback. In general, there is no difference between students from different English proficiency background in response to CFs.

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