

An investigation into oral error correction practices and beliefs of EFL university teachers in Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

Despite the wealth of knowledge in the field of oral corrective feedback (OCF), empirical evidence is still scarce regarding the EFL teachers' OCF beliefs and practices in the Saudi Arabian context. This study, therefore, seeks to gain an understanding of teachers' use of OCF in the Saudi Arabian university context. The following three questions guided the study: 1) What are teachers' reported beliefs about OCF in Saudi Arabian university context? 2) What are teachers' observed practices of OCF in this context? 3) To what extent are these teachers' beliefs about OCF congruent with their observable practices? Four ESL university instructors were observed and interviewed. The results reveal that the OCF beliefs of EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia are mostly in line with the conducted research. However, strong discrepancies between the OCF beliefs and practices were also noted. Based on these findings, it is recommended that the Ministry of Education and other responsible bodies need to offer in-service and pre-service training to EFL instructors in Saudi Arabia in order to align their OCF beliefs with practices.

Keywords: oral corrective feedback; error correction; spoken errors; SLA

1. Introduction

Error correction has been an area of interest in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) for several decades, and the preponderance of research in

terms of corrective feedback (CF) illustrates its pedagogical and theoretical significance (Li, 2013). Furthermore, even though different SLA theories have varying views as regards the efficacy of CF in second language acquisition (Krashen, 1982; Schmidt, 1990), a large and growing body of studies, such as Li (2012), Russell and Spada (2006) and Saito and Lyster (2012), has investigated if CF plays a role in SLA. Additionally, numerous studies have been conducted in order to examine the efficacy of different error correction practices, which is evident from the literature review. Furthermore, researchers and practitioners have frequently disagreed whether or not learners' spoken errors should be corrected. If correction should be provided, there are questions about when, which and how this should happen, as well as who should be responsible for the correction (Ellis, 2009; Lee, 2009; Lightbown & Spada, 1999). Consequently, oral corrective feedback (OCF) has been regarded as a "complex phenomenon with several functions" (Chaudron, 1988, p. 152). Nonetheless, providing feedback on students' spoken errors is one of the tasks every teacher is confronted with during every class.

Since it has been argued that teachers' beliefs and practices have the potential to impact the efficacy of the teaching and learning process, an investigation into teachers' beliefs and practices is 'critically important' (Griffith, 2007). Therefore, it comes as no surprise that OCF practices and beliefs of EFL teachers have been thoroughly researched all over the world (Méndez et al., 2010; Suzuki, 2004). However, the research carried out in the Saudi Arabian context is still scarce and the studies have been limited to written CF (such as Mustafa, 2012). As a result, this paper reports on a small-scale mixed methods research, which has been conducted to gain insights into EFL teachers' OCF practices and beliefs in the Saudi Arabian university context.

2. Literature review

2.1. Oral corrective feedback

It has been argued that teachers lack an awareness of the relative merits of different error correction techniques that they use in their classes (Hyland & Anan, 2006). Hyland and Anan (2006) point out that inconsistent or uninformed CF fails to achieve the perceived benefits of the intended feedback and can also lead to confusion and frustration in students. Therefore, investigating teachers' CF practices and beliefs is of great importance. It comes as no surprise then that several studies have investigated teachers' error correction practices and perceptions, and one of the earliest studies in teachers' oral error correction behavior was carried out by Chaudron in 1977. In an attempt to identify types of errors and the relationship between error types, feedback and repair, Chaudron (1977, as cited

in Panova & Lyster, 2002, p. 576) conducted an observational study of immersion classrooms, which was also the 'first serious attempt' to gain a deeper insight into this topic (Panova & Lyster, 2002, p. 575). Based on the obtained data, he developed a model of corrective discourse. Furthermore, his findings revealed that the most commonly used strategy was reformulation and repetition. A similar study was conducted by Doughty in 1994 (as cited in Panova & Lyster, 2002, p. 576). Using observation as a research tool, Doughty sought to identify the most frequently used strategies in the classrooms. As a corollary, preference was shown for teacher-generated repair, as recasts accounted for about 70% of the CF moves.

Lyster and Ranta (1997) conducted a research project in four French immersion classrooms. Their study sought to investigate different types of CF and their distribution in ESL classrooms. They also aimed to explore the relationship between the uptake and different types of CF, and thus identified six different feedback types used by teachers and analyzed the efficacy of these strategies in terms of learner uptake. Lyster and Ranta (1997) noted that the strategies that offered negotiation of form (i.e., elicitation, metalinguistic feedback, clarification requests, or teacher repetition of an error) were more effective than the ones which did not provide this opportunity (recast and explicit correction). They argue that these strategies did not only lead to more learner engagement than explicit feedback and recasts, but they also resulted in learner uptake in the form of self-correction or peer-correction. Also, recasts were found to be the most often used strategy. However, these led to the least amount of uptake.

An examination of OCF practices as regards teachers using semi-structured interviews was undertaken by Méndez, Cruz and Loyo (2010). Their study was carried out in Mexico, and it aimed to analyze the actual role of CF in the EFL classes in the English Language Program at Universidad de Quintana Roo. Using qualitative methods, that is, semi-structured interviews, it explored the OCF techniques used by the EFL teachers participating in this program. The findings showed that the most commonly applied type of correction was teacher correction. Furthermore, among the most frequently used techniques were error repetition, recasting, the use of paralinguistic features, and metalinguistic feedback. The findings also illustrated that errors related to phonology and morpho-syntax were among the most frequently treated errors, while errors related to semantics and pragmatics received less attention from the participants. However, in accordance with Hyland and Anan's (2006) findings, it was noted that the provision of CF appeared to be "inconsistent, ambiguous and unsystematic" (p. 250). They recommended that teachers ought to provide CF which is clear enough to be perceived by learners as such. However, the major weakness of this study was the absence of triangulation. In consequence, relying heavily on one instrument, the study could only offer insights into teachers' reported practices.

In the Arab world, OCF has received some attention only recently. Among the very few studies conducted in Arab countries is the one undertaken by Alqahtani and Al-Enazi (2011) in Kuwait. Using a questionnaire, they surveyed 103 EFL teachers in Kuwait in order to assess how they perceive their oral feedback skills. The findings of their study demonstrated that clarification request was the most common way of providing OCF by EFL teachers, while the metalinguistic way was the least frequently applied one. However, the study allowed to elicit only the self-reported practices of Kuwaiti EFL teachers; therefore, the results need to be interpreted with caution.

2.2. Teachers' beliefs

A significant body of research acknowledges that teachers' beliefs have an important impact on teachers' practice (Lee, 2009). Richards and Lockhart (1996) consider exploration of teachers' beliefs essential in order to understand their classroom actions. The relationship between beliefs and practices has been extensively explored by Borg (2001, p.187), who argued that beliefs guide people's actions. Borg (1999) identified clear influences of teachers' theories on their instructional decisions and stressed the need to investigate teachers' beliefs in order to enrich our understandings of all aspects of ELT. Furthermore, Borg and Burns (2008) claimed that due to the dearth of conclusive evidence about what constitutes good practice, teachers would base instructional decisions on their own practical theories. This means that controversies related to spoken error correction demonstrate the need to investigate teachers' beliefs, in addition to practices, as their practices are partly a result of their beliefs.

With specific reference to error correction, insights into the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices have been provided by several studies. A notable study in this area was undertaken by Basturkmen, Loewen and Ellis (2004), who examined the relationship between teachers' stated beliefs and practices of incidental focus on form in intermediate level ESL communicative classrooms. The study is relevant to the present investigation, as incidental focus on form can also consist of spoken responses to errors made by students. Both consistencies and inconsistencies between stated beliefs and classroom practices were noted. The researchers claim that their findings were consistent with a number of previous research studies conducted to compare the beliefs and practices of teachers.

Similar conclusions were drawn by Kartchava (2006), who examined the relationship between novice ESL teachers' beliefs and practices. Ten pre-service teachers were shown videotaped scenarios of different errors to elicit their OCF beliefs. The researcher then observed the participants during their ESL classes to identify if their reported practices or beliefs were in line with their actual practices. The results illustrated both consistencies and inconsistencies in the intended relationship.

The above findings are complemented by Ng and Farrell's (2003) study, which investigated teachers' beliefs regarding grammar teaching and error correction. The research tools included observations, lesson outlines, materials, samples of student composition scripts and interviews. The findings of this study certainly provide food for thought. It was noted that although teachers' beliefs and practices corresponded in most of the areas, beliefs and practices related to error correction showed little correlation to each other.

Major discrepancies between teachers' beliefs and practices related to OCF have also been noted in a study conducted in an Omani EFL context by Faki and Siddiek (2013). To the best of the author's knowledge, this was the only study on this topic that had been conducted in an Arab context. It was conducted to investigate an apparent lack of awareness that experienced EFL teachers revealed in relation to error correction. The findings were consistent with other related research projects, as they revealed a significant difference between these teachers' attitudes about OCF and their actual practice. Time and institutional constraints were considered to be the reasons for these discrepancies. One major weakness of this study was the use of questionnaires to elicit the participants' beliefs. Phipps and Borg (2009) have argued that such elicitation can only show teachers' theoretical or idealistic beliefs.

The studies presented thus far show the discrepancies between teachers' OCF practices and beliefs, and several reasons have been identified for such discrepancies. However, it is unknown if such discrepancies exist in the Saudi Arabian EFL context, and if so, what reasons underlie teachers' inability to put their beliefs into practice.

3. The study

3.1. Research questions

Taking into account the overview of the previous studies presented above, the following research questions were formulated:

1. What are EFL teachers' reported beliefs about oral error correction in the Saudi Arabian university context?
2. What are these teachers' observed practices of oral error correction (OCF) in this context?
3. To what extent are these teachers' beliefs about OCF congruent with their observed practices?

3.2. Methodology

A mixed-methods approach was identified as the most appropriate to address the research questions. The necessity of employing a mixed methods approach was validated by the findings of the pilot study conducted prior to the main research, using the survey method. It was noted by the researcher that using a quantitative method did not provide a complete picture of OCF practices in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, more profound understanding of the research problem required qualitative data.

The data were collected by means of observations and interviews. Structured observation was suitable for this enquiry since the research questions were related to a particular behavior, that is, spoken error correction, about which specific information was required. The researcher took the role of a non-participatory observer. In order to record the data, an observation schedule was designed; the observation schedule (Appendix 1) was informed by the attributes generated by a number of studies in this area, such as the ones conducted by Ellis (2009) and Lyster and Ranta (1997). The categories were determined in advance and pre-observation coding was completed. The second instrument used in this study was a semi-structured interview, and the questions were also informed by the relevant research attempt, such as that conducted by Ellis (2009) (see Appendix 2).

The site where the data was collected was a university in Saudi Arabia. A volunteer sample of four EFL teachers of adults was observed and interviewed. All of these participants worked in the same university and taught in the PYP. It is important to note that all of the observed teachers were females, as laws pertaining to gender segregation in the Kingdom prevented the researcher from observing male respondents. The ethical guidelines of the region and institution were followed, particularly concerning the receipt of the informed consent.

3.3. Data collection

This study involved a combination of self-report and observed data. As regards the data gathered through observations, four classroom observations were conducted to analyze the teachers' OCF practices. Due to time constraints, it was only viable to observe each teacher once. The duration of each class was one hour, and the lessons to be observed were chosen by the participants. The researcher had no influence in terms of selecting what type of lesson she could observe.

The interviews were conducted in the university a few days after each observation. Specific episodes of events observed during the lessons and the observer's field notes were used to generate discussion topics. The teachers were reminded about their OCF practices and asked to comment on these and

provide a rationale for using them. This technique was adapted from Basturkmen, Loewen and Ellis (2004), and it allowed the teachers to articulate their beliefs in relation to their practices. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed using Duranti's (no date) transcript conventions (interview transcripts can be requested from the author).

3.4. Data analysis

For data analysis, Lichtman's (2013) 3C approach was used, which includes coding, categorizing and concept emerging. Using this approach, the interview data and the observational notes were coded into meaningful chunks. The data was then categorized into small groups, each representing the teachers' sets of beliefs and practices regarding a particular topic. Then salient themes were identified. Finally, the data from the teachers' interviews and classroom observations were matched for convergence and divergence between beliefs and practices. Details of the data can be requested from the researcher.

3.5. Findings

3.5.1. Findings: Interview data

This section presents key findings from the interview data. Contributions from the participants were gathered and categorized into themes, and these themes are labeled below and summarized with brief examples in order to illustrate each category. Next to each of the comments, T1, T2, T3 and T4 refer to individual teachers who have made them.

Theme 1: Attitudes to errors

A salient theme emerging from the data was that teachers differed in their attitudes regarding errors. Some professed a positive attitude, whereas others considered errors "disappointing:"

For me, personally, it's a part of learning. (T2)

It's quite disappointing for me. (T1)

Theme 2: Importance of providing OCF

All the teachers stated that OCF plays a role in language learning and the majority of them considered providing OCF their responsibility:

I do think the spoken correction is very important. (T2)

I don't know how else they are going to be corrected. They won't be corrected at home you know. (T3)

Theme 3: Correction strategies

The interviewees stated that they used a range of correction strategies, including repetition, clarification requests, recasts, paralinguistic signals and grammatical explanations:

I would say, can you repeat it? (T1)

Non-verbal communication is very important.' (T1)

I will say, "girls, where is the subject, where is the verb, underline it." (T1)

They make a mistake; I will repeat it, clarification in the correct tense or the correct form. (T2)

. . . for reading, I think, repeating; for communicative speaking, I can repeat the sentence; for reading, I just read it for her. (T4)

Theme 4: Most effective and ineffective correction strategies

The interviewees discussed what they viewed as the most effective and ineffective correction strategies. The majority of them agreed that providing OCF through the written medium was the most effective strategy:

Putting errors on the board seems to be very effective . . . (T2)

T1 considered peer feedback the most effective strategy and commented:

First, I get their attention. Second, they notice, and they correct themselves when it's time to do it. This is so far most effective. (T1)

As far as the most ineffective strategy is concerned, only T2 commented on this and regarded recasts as the most ineffective strategy:

The most ineffective way is, I think, the sort of slipping it in. (T2)

Theme 5: Variables affecting OCF

The teachers frequently referred to several variables when discussing their ideas about their OCF practices and beliefs; they believed that these variables played a significant role in their OCF related decisions. One variable that was referred to most commonly when discussing OCF decisions was the learners' language proficiency:

I think I correct more at level 2 and level 3, because they are at a level they have recognition of learning more things . . . (T3)

I also take into account the proficiency of the girl within the same unit. Because . . . I expect more from some of the students. (T1)

. . . at a higher level I would single them out because they are at a level where they need to tweak their English a little bit. (T3)

Yeah, it depends on the level of the students. (T4)

Other factors which were believed to influence the participants' OCF decisions included learner differences, learner responses, the type of activity, and focus of the lesson:

You get a sense of the students too, if someone is going to be receptive to the correction or they are going to stand out a little. (T3)

. . . age definitely has -- and where they are in their lives. (T2)

When I correct and I see the students responded badly, then I say next time I won't be that spontaneous. (T2)

I would stop them (during a communicative activity); if it happens more than once, I will stop it so that everyone will get it. (T1)

Theme 6: Choice of corrector

The participants professed that they used all the three types of correction, including teacher-, self-, and peer-correction depending on several factors. However, a tendency for self and peer-correction preference can be noted in the comments below:

I prefer them if they correct themselves, it depends on the correction. (T1)

I don't think there is a best way. (T1)

Yeah, sometimes I let the students correct themselves. But when I am sure that they are going to give the correct answer (. . .) Because I don't want them to be confused. . . (T4)

I would say, "can someone help her?" So, it's not me constantly saying you are wrong, you did this wrong, it's more of a group effort. (T3)

Theme 7: Timing of correction

As far as the issue of immediate or delayed correction is concerned, the participants showed that they based this decision on several factors:

I use different tenses. (T1)

When it's reading, as soon as it happens. (T4)

Usually, I wait till the end, which also depends on the students and who they are. (T2)

Theme 8: Choice of error

As regards the issue of which errors they chose to correct, the interviewees believed that they employed selectiveness when providing OCF. Some stated that they made a distinction between global and local errors, whereas others professed a preference for correcting grammatical errors:

You have to decide what to correct. (T3)

I focus more on the vowels. (T2)

[I prefer correcting] grammar. (T1)

Depends on how severe the error is, you know. (T3)

. . . if it changes the meaning, then I will correct. (T2)

It was also evident from the data that the decision of which error to correct was also based on several factors, including learner levels and activity type:

When they are speaking, I guess I don't correct their pronunciation errors unless it's very off. . . if it changes the meaning, I will correct it. (T2)

So, I have to correct really big mistakes; when it's a very good student, I correct them on every mistake they make. (T4)

Theme 9: Spontaneous behavior

All the respondents showed an awareness of the fact that their OCF behavior was spontaneous:

I like to think that I think about it, but I know it just comes out. (T2)

It's tricky, you just have to go with the gut feeling. (T3)

It's an instinct. (T3)

I cannot control myself. (T1)

It's just what hits me at the time. (T3)

3.5.2. Findings: Observational data

This section aims to present salient data collected through observations of the participants' classes. T1, who spoke English as a second language, was observed teaching a reading lesson to a class of beginner level university students. She demonstrated a strict attitude towards errors and provided OCF to every error that occurred throughout the lesson. OCF was provided almost in the same manner to all the learners during each stage of the lesson.

The data revealed that all errors were corrected by the teacher, who used explicit techniques to provide OCF. Also, correction was provided orally and immediately after an error occurred. Furthermore, T1 did not always allow much time before providing the correct form, and the students were often interrupted and corrected during their speech. The following episode, which happened at the beginning of the lesson when a student was asked to read a passage, illustrates typical OCF behavior of T1:

Example 1

Student: I leave . . .
T1: (interrupts) leave or live?
Student: live
T1: Excellent

On several other occasions during the lesson, the teacher corrected errors by providing the correct forms in the same way, such as when saying "went or want?," "the or they?," "said or sad?," and "bet or pet?" These corrections were followed by modified speech from the students.

T2, who spoke English as the first language, was teaching a communicative lesson to a class of upper-intermediate level university students. In the previous lesson, which finished ten minutes before the observation started, the students were taught a *past tense* by the same teacher; during the observed lesson, the students were practicing this newly learnt grammar in a free practice activity. This could be the reason why a large number of corrected errors were grammatical in nature. Similar to T1, T2 treated a large number (86%) of errors during the one-hour-long observed lesson. A clear preference for local errors was evident, and a total of 71% of these were corrected. A large majority of EC (90%) was provided by the teacher, and there was no instance of self-correction. All of the OCF was provided orally and immediately after the errors occurred; however, at the end of the lesson, the teacher provided delayed OCF through the written medium to the most commonly occurring errors during the lesson. What is interesting in T2's observed data is that in contrast to T1, the percentage of recasts among the OCF strategies was 95% and thus EC was provided implicitly. This implicit correction was done in a way that the students often did not realize that they were being corrected. Also, in contrast to T1, T2 did not insist that the students alter their utterances. The following example demonstrates a typical OCF behavior of T2 during the observed lesson. The student was describing a story that happened in the past:

Example 2

Student: She is telling, please don't make a big party.
T2: So, she told you?
Student: Yeah.

The above example shows that T2 did not treat pronunciation errors and focused on grammatical errors, which was the focus of the lesson. Immediate and implicit provision of correction is also evident in the example. This behavior was consistent throughout the lesson.

T3 was a native speaker of English and she was observed during a communicative lesson teaching a class of upper-intermediate level learners. In contrast to the other teachers, T3 tended to be lenient towards errors and left a large majority (53%) of them untreated. She did not interrupt the flow of the lesson and corrected errors implicitly. Also, she showed a clear preference for local and pronunciation errors. A salient feature of the observed data is that all the OCF was provided by the teacher orally and immediately after the erroneous utterance, using just one implicit OCF strategy, namely recasts. The following is an example resembling her typical manner of providing EC during the observed lesson:

Example 3

Student: You should open another account in the bank, a saving account without an ATM card.

Teacher: Ok, good, that's excellent, I didn't think about that one (laughs). So, you should have two separate accounts.

The above episode, which occurred during the free practice, not only shows how T3 used recasts, but it also illustrates that she performed OCF in an encouraging way by focusing on the content of the message first, and then correcting the error.

Finally, T4 was a native speaker of Arabic and was observed when teaching lower-intermediate students. The lesson started with a brief explanation of a grammar point, and the purpose of the communicative lesson was to practice that grammar in a free practice activity. She demonstrated a strict, rigorous attitude to errors. She corrected a large majority of the errors that occurred during the observed lesson, leaving only 8% of the total number of errors untreated. Despite the focus of the lesson, which was grammar, a large majority of the treated errors were pronunciation errors. Also, local errors were given preference when providing OCF. Also, T4 made use of both implicit (41%) and explicit (59%) correction strategies. All the OCF consisted of immediate feedback, and oral provision of OCF by the teacher was prevalent in the lesson. The following example shows her typical OCF behavior during the observed lesson:

Example 4

Student: Sheerful

Teacher: Can you say it again? Cheerful, it's not sheer, it's not chair, the one you are sitting on, cheerful.

Student: Cheerful

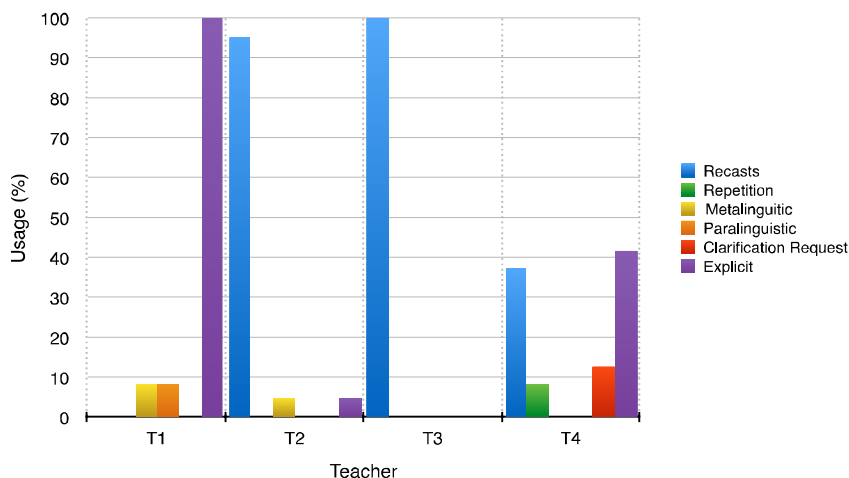


Figure 1 A comparison of observed teachers' use of OCF strategies

One striking feature of the data was that the teachers' practices were similar to each other's in most cases; there were only a few areas where the teachers differed from each other in how they provided OCF. Figure 1 illustrates this difference among the teachers in their use of correction strategies. It is evident that T1's OCF behavior was distinct from the other three teachers with respect to the use of recasts. This could have been due to the fact that all the other teachers were observed during lessons devoted to the development of communicative skills, whereas T1 was observed during a reading lesson.

3.5.3. Comparison of the interview and observation data

With the purpose of highlighting the main areas where the teachers' beliefs and practices were congruent and incongruent, Table 1 summarizes their beliefs and practices in relation to OCF. It is clear that in certain respects the teachers' stated beliefs were congruent with their classroom practices. For example, T1 talked about the need to correct all the errors, and this belief was evident in her practice. A higher percentage of the corrected errors was evident in her lesson, compared to the lessons of the other three teachers.

A large number of divergences were also noted between teachers' beliefs and practices. In other words, clear divergences were noted mainly in the areas of the choice of the corrector and the choice of error. Teachers' stated OCF preference for global and grammatical errors, including peer and self-correction, was not observed. Therefore, all the examples given earlier above illustrate that correction was provided by the teacher on most occasions. Similarly, providing offline and written OCF, considered to be advantageous, was not prevalent in

the teachers' behavior. Most importantly, a consideration of variables, which was evident in their beliefs, was not apparent in classroom practice. Finally, despite the fact that the classes differed in the learners' levels of language proficiency and lesson types, the teachers appeared to be making the same decisions in relation to the choice of the corrector, errors and timing of OCF provision.

Table 1 Summary of similarities and dissimilarities between stated OCF beliefs and practices

OCF Preference	Teacher	Observed practice	Stated beliefs	Lesson type/level
Timing of OCF	T1	All OCF provided immediately after the error	Believed in immediate correction during reading & pronunciation	Reading lesson/ beginners
	T2	All OCF provided immediately after the error	Believed in delayed correction during communicative lesson and varying this according to learner type and lesson focus	Communicative lesson/upper intermediate
	T3	All OCF provided immediately after the error	Believed in delayed correction during communicative lesson	Communicative lesson/upper intermediate
	T4	All OCF provided immediately after the error	Preferred correcting during communicative activities	Communicative lesson/lower intermediate
Written OCF	T1	Used oral medium only	Best strategy	Reading lesson/ beginners
	T2	Provided written OCF	Best strategy	Communicative lesson/upper intermediate
	T3	Used oral medium only	Best strategy	Communicative lesson/upper intermediate
	T4	Used oral medium only	Preferred strategy	Communicative lesson/lower intermediate
Strategy	T1	100% explicit correction and some paralinguistic signals, grammatical explanation	Preferred paralinguistic signals	Reading lesson/ beginners
	T2	100% recasts	Considered it the most ineffective way of correcting	Communicative lesson/upper intermediate
	T3	100% recasts	Did not comment	Communicative lesson/upper intermediate
	T4	Explicit correction and recasts	Preferred paralinguistic signals and recasts	Communicative lesson/lower intermediate
Error type	T1	All corrected	Stated she prefers correcting all errors	Reading lesson/beginners
	T2	More grammatical and local errors corrected	Stated a preference for grammatical and global errors	Communicative lesson/upper intermediate
	T3	Corrected pronunciation and local errors	Stated a preference for grammatical and global errors	Communicative lesson/upper intermediate
	T4	Corrected pronunciation and local errors	Stated a preference for grammatical and global errors	Communicative lesson/lower intermediate
Choice of corrector	T1	Teacher correction	Prefers using self and peer correction but bases it on learners' level	Reading lesson/ beginners
	T2	Teacher correction	Prefers using self and peer-correction	Communicative lesson/upper intermediate
	T3	Teacher correction	Prefers using self and peer-correction but bases it on learners' level	Communicative lesson/upper intermediate
	T4	Teacher correction	Prefers using self and peer-correction	Communicative lesson/ lower intermediate

Another remarkable finding was that teachers' general attitudes to errors affected their practices; those teachers who considered errors a part of learning, corrected errors implicitly (T2 & T3) and did not insist on modified speech by the learner. On the other hand, those teachers who did not see errors in a positive light, corrected errors explicitly (T1 and T4) and insisted that the student repeat the correct form.

4. Discussion

This section has been divided into three parts, and each of these parts deals with one of the three research questions.

4.1. RQ 1: What are teachers' stated beliefs about OCF?

The first research question concerned the teachers' reported OCF beliefs, and the interview questions were used to elicit them. Overall, the teachers' stated beliefs about OCF practices appeared to be consistent with the existing empirical literature. This section discusses the findings related to the main issues pertaining to OCF.

The obtained data imply that, in accordance with Russell and Spada's (2006) view, the majority of teachers see value in spoken error correction. However, when talking about their OCF strategies, most commonly they relied on two implicit strategies including paralinguistic signals and clarification requests. One interesting finding is that none of the interviewed teachers referred to explicit correction. A possible explanation for the reported preference for implicit OCF strategy has been provided by Lyster and Ranta (2013), who suggested that teachers' extensive use of implicit strategies can be attributed to teacher-education literature and courses that often highlight the possible negative affective impact of explicit CF strategies. This avoidance of explicit correction is also supported by several researchers, such as Lynch (1997), who favored "nudging" (p.324) their learners towards a solution instead of providing them with the correct answer.

There was a notably significant consensus of opinion amongst the interviewed teachers as regards providing OCF through written or oral medium. All four of the interviewed teachers considered it to be the most effective OCF strategy. T2 pointed out that "because they see and they are actually looking at the error, it's visual, they hear me saying it, then they have to write it themselves, I think that the combination of hearing, seeing and doing it themselves is the most effective way of correcting." This is in harmony with the researchers who are in agreement about the efficacy of providing OCF through the written medium (Gainer, 1989). In relation to the choice of the corrector, the data revealed that all the three types of corrections were employed by these teachers. T3, for example, stated: "So, it's not just me who is. . . [correcting]." T1 also reported:

"I don't think there is a best way." These findings are endorsed by Ellis's (2009) recommendation of varying the choice of the corrector.

As regards the participants' views about the timing of OCF provision, the participants differed in their views on the issue of providing immediate OCF during fluency-based activities. 50% of the teachers stated that OCF should be delayed in fluency activities, whereas the other fifty percent argued against it. These contrasting views of the teachers are in line with the views of SLA scholars and methodologists, who have consistently differed in their stance on efficacy of immediate or delayed OCF during fluency activities (Harmer, 2014; Lynch, 1997). Ellis (2009, p. 11) maintains that "there is no evidence to show that immediate correction is any more effective than delayed." The result also confirms Hyland's (1990) view, who maintains that scholars would be unable to reach a consensus as to when to correct errors, and argued that each teacher would have their own preference.

Finally, with regard to the teachers' preferences about which errors they choose to correct, the stated beliefs and practices of the participants were congruent with the scholars' views, who have for a long time recommended "selective correction" (Burt, 1975, p. 62) as the most effective technique. A clear preference for selecting global errors for providing OCF is evident in the survey, that is, the expressed respondents' beliefs. T3 referred to the difficulty of making a distinction between global and local errors, thus reporting a problem that was also noted by Hanzeli (1975). More precisely, T3 argued that due to the familiarity with learners' errors, she might classify an error as a local error, which someone in a native English-speaking country might consider a global error. One salient finding is when discussing the issue of whether to correct and which error to correct; all the interviewees referred to one variable, namely "learners' language proficiency." This is in line with Burt's (1975) view, who recommended considering learners' level of proficiency when making this decision.

Overall, the stated OCF beliefs and practices of the participants corroborate the ideas of Lyster and Ranta (2013), who made a case for using a variety of CF strategies. A salient feature of the data is that the majority of the teachers believed in varying feedback according to several variables, including learners' individual differences, activity type and lesson types. The interviewed teachers' consistent reference to *it depends* . . ., when asked about their OCF beliefs and practices, gives support to Ellis's (2009) view, which opposes the idea of following a rigid set of OCF techniques for all students. The data showed that these teachers do not have a clear preference for any particular type of approach and that their approaches fluctuate depending on several factors. Their beliefs endorse Ellis's (2009, p. 14) recommendation of varying OCF decisions according to the 'cognitive and affective' needs of the learners.

4.2. RQ 2: What are teachers' observed practices of OCF?

The second research question addressed the actual nature of teachers' OCF practices in Saudi Arabia. The observations revealed a number of noteworthy findings about OCF practices. One aspect in which the OCF observed practices of these teachers were in harmony with the existing literature was the use of error correction strategies. When supporting the previous research into the area (such as Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Panova & Lyster, 2002; Suzuki, 2004), the most commonly used strategy (39%) was recast. Furthermore, 75% of the teachers used recasts, whereas 25% did not and thus showed preference for explicit correction. The dissimilarity among the participants in the use of recasts is in accordance with the scholars' divide on the efficacy of recasts (Han, 2002; Lyster & Ranta, 1997).

A large majority of OCF practices of the observed teachers were not validated by the research. As a result, the preferred way of all the teachers was to provide OCF orally. The provision of corrective feedback on learners' spoken errors through the oral medium has been largely criticized due to its implicitness, and correction through the written medium has been favored (Gainer, 1989, p. 46). In the same vein, the teachers did not demonstrate much selectiveness when choosing which errors to correct. Out of the total of 39% untreated errors in all the observed classes, 81% occurred during T3's class. This shows that the other three teachers provided OCF to a large majority of errors that occurred in their classes, without showing much selectiveness. What is more, a large number of the corrected errors were local errors. This behavior is in clear contrast with the scholars' views that discourage an "all out" approach and recommend "selective error correction" (Burt, 1975, p. 62). However, it should be noted that researchers have acknowledged that selection of errors is a complex and time-consuming process (Walz, 1982).

Another striking feature of the data was that despite empirical evidence confirming the efficacy of self and peer-correction, a large proportion of OCF was provided by the teachers. T1, for example, exhibited a behavior that has been regarded as "error creating" (Allwright, 1975, as cited in Gainer, 1989, p. 45) by providing an instant correction without allowing anytime for self or peer-correction. The preferences for teacher correction by the participants, however, match those observed in earlier studies (Doughty, 1994; Panova & Lyster, 2002). One possible explanation for this behavior can be that self and peer-correction are more suited to learner-centered classrooms (Ellis, 2009), and it has been argued that these types of corrective feedback may not be acceptable or beneficial in every teaching context (Hendrickson, 1978, p. 296). Therefore, it is possible that by relying exclusively on teacher correction, the participants might be taking into account learner preferences, as Saudi students have been noted to

favor teacher correction to peer and self-correction (Hamouda, 2011). However, apart from this one example, the teachers did not appear to consider variables that should be taken into account when making EC decisions. All the teachers showed consistent error corrective behavior during their lessons, regardless of the stage or type of lesson and the learners' language proficiency levels, in clear contrast with the research that supports considering such variables when making OCF decisions (Such as Burt, 1975; Hedge, 2000; Mackey & Philip, 1998). It has been argued that in order to cater to learners' needs and levels in any one class, teachers often have to show inconsistent error corrective behavior (Allwright & Bailey, 1991, p. 105; Ellis, 2009, p. 10; Richards & Lockhart, 1996, p. 191).

4.3. RQ3: To what extent are the teachers' beliefs about OCF congruent with their observed practices?

The third research question concerned the relationship between teachers' OCF beliefs and practices. The findings of this study demonstrated that although in certain respects teachers' OCF practices reflected their beliefs, a large number of discrepancies were also noted. Therefore, despite their professed beliefs regarding the importance of correcting global errors, T2, T3 and T4 showed a clear preference for local errors. Similar inconsistencies were noted in other areas, such as the choice of the corrector and correction strategies. One possible explanation of such mismatches between beliefs and practices could be that the teachers' OCF decisions were possibly based on certain variables, which were not apparent to the researcher; for example, during the interviews, some teachers commented that they take into account individual learner differences and responses when they make OCF decisions. As T3 commented: "You know, if you have a kind of a shy, insecure student, I think I will go a little bit easier on her and the way I will correct it will be a little bit gentler, I guess" (Theme 5).

It is possible that the teachers were taking into account individual differences when making their OCF decisions and these differences were not readily visible to the observer. Farrell and Ives (2014) confirm that some beliefs are difficult to observe. However, other more apparent variables, such as lesson or activity type were also not observed to be affecting the teachers' OCF practices. These discrepancies between teachers' error correction beliefs and practices seem to be consistent with other research attempts which have found that teachers' error correction beliefs do not always become practical (Al-Faki & Siddiek, 2013; Basturkmen et al., 2004; Kartchava, 2006; Lee, 2009; Ng & Farrell, 2003).

Several explanations can be provided for the discrepancies between beliefs and practices. Situational constraints (Basturkmen et al., 2004) have been considered to be one of the reasons why beliefs and practices do not often match.

Consistent with Farrell and Lim's (2005) findings, T1 and T4 referred to time as a factor influencing their decisions. The "culture of the institution" (Richards & Lockhart, 1996, p. 38) can also prevent teachers from putting their beliefs into practice, as T3 stated that the administration expected to see a lot of OCF. She also confirmed that the Hawthorne effect affected her behavior to a large extent. Previous studies have also shown that contextual factors, such as time constraints and school policies, are among the reasons why teachers' beliefs cannot be implemented (Farrell & Lim, 2005; Lee, 2009; Ng & Farrell, 2003; Phipps & Borg, 2009).

The mismatch between professed beliefs and classroom practices can also be attributed to social desirability bias, which refers to the tendency of participants to over or under-report certain behaviors in order to be socially acceptable. It is possible that the participants reported the practices which they believed were considered desirable, although they do not actually engage in them, thus leading to a discrepancy between their beliefs and practices. The findings also corroborate the view of Pajares (1992, p. 309) who has suggested that sometimes an "ideal or alternative situation" is constructed by individuals, which may not represent the reality. Similarly, Donaghue, (2003) argued that participants often wish to promote a particular self-image.

Another possible explanation of the gap between the teachers' stated beliefs and their practice could be that in contrast to written corrective feedback, which gives teachers time to reflect on errors. This means that the provision of OCF has to be spontaneous and unplanned. T1, T2 and T3 expressed their awareness about the impulsive nature of their OCF behavior. Statements, such as "I like to think that I think about it, but I know it just comes out, it's just what hits me at the time and you just have to go with the gut feeling," illustrate that due to the nature of this type of feedback, teachers have to make quick decisions. This can result in incompatibilities between beliefs and practices. Basturkmen, Loewen and Ellis (2004) confirm that incongruencies between stated beliefs and practices are more evident in unplanned and incidental behaviors than between stated beliefs and planned behaviours.

One interesting finding is that, in contrast to the previous research (such as Farrell & Ives, 2014), the teachers were able to 'verbalize their reason for their practices and reasons for mismatches (Sinprajakpol, 2004, p.193). However, these explanations largely appeared to be justifications of their practices. The reliability of the reasons the teachers provided for their mismatches between beliefs and practices has been questioned by Lee (2009, p. 19), who maintained that such reasons are "real explanations for mismatches or mere excuses that teachers use to justify their practices."

The participants also manifested some congruencies in their beliefs and practices. In consequence, although teachers' attitudes to errors differed from each other, these differences were evident in their EC practices. An example might

be the fact that T1 and T4 considered “errors disappointing,” whereas T2 and T3 exhibited a positive attitude towards errors. This attitude was reflected in their practices. T1 and T4 corrected errors more explicitly and made comments, such as “don’t you remember girls, I have always told you.” They interrupted the learners’ utterances to provide OCF and also ensured that the students modified their utterances after being provided with OCF. On the other hand, T2 and T3, who considered errors a part of learning, corrected errors implicitly to the extent that the students often did not realize they were being corrected.

In addition to correcting errors implicitly, T3 and T4 tended to focus on the content of the utterance. The learners were not interrupted; instead recasts were provided after they had finished their utterances. These teachers did not insist that the learners modify their utterances. Taking demographics into account, this result validates Hyland and Anan’s (2006, p. 515) findings which noted that native teachers “accentuate the positive.”

5. Conclusion

The following conclusions can be drawn from the above discussion. First of all, in the context under investigation, teachers have theoretical knowledge regarding oral corrective feedback and their stated beliefs appeared to be informed by literature. Secondly, the OCF practices of the participants showed a combination of attributes. Some of these practices were validated by the relevant literature, whereas a large number of practices have been discouraged by the scholars. However, taken together, the findings match those observed in earlier studies. Furthermore, the analysis showed considerable mismatches between teachers’ OCF beliefs and their actual practices, corroborating the previous research that beliefs are not reliable guides to practice (Basturkmen et al., 2004; Farrell & Ives, 2014; Pajares, 1992). The findings also suggest that the discrepancy found in the participants’ OCF beliefs and practices could result from a number of factors, such as time constraints or institutional expectations. It is also evident that the very nature of OCF, which requires on-line decision-making, contributes to the incongruencies between the teachers’ beliefs and practices.

The present study offers some important implications for foreign language teacher education. These are as follows:

- Teacher training program should provide trainees with the knowledge of theoretical underpinnings of error correction research and practices. In particular, Ellis (2010) recommended providing teachers with a clear framework, which they can adapt to suit their instructional settings.
- The practicing EFL teachers need to modify their oral error correction behavior in order to facilitate language learning by putting their beliefs into practice.

- Heads of educational institutions may benefit from the findings of the current research to bring practice in line with teachers' beliefs and the new research on this topic. The present study can be used to raise awareness among the pre-service teachers regarding the error correction behavior of EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia. Educational institutes should provide in-service teachers opportunities for professional development. Authorities should also analyze the contextual reasons why beliefs do not get put into practice and thus take measures to solve these issues.

This small-scale study contributes to a growing body of research into teachers' error corrective behavior; however, it should be reiterated that this was a small-scale study with a number of limitations and therefore the results need to be treated with caution. In order to fully examine OCF practices of ESL instructors in Saudi Arabia, further studies are needed that focus on both male and female ESL teachers working in varied educational settings. More research in this area may help to identify strategies, which could be put into practice in professional development programs and teacher training programs to cultivate more effective ways in which teachers can respond to errors. Further research will also help authorities to make informed choices pertaining to the pedagogical decisions that need to be made to improve teaching practice in Saudi Arabia.

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APPENDIX 1

Observation checklist

Observation Protocol
(Error correction Behavior)

Date _____ Teacher's Name _____

Time _____ Lesson Type _____

Institute _____ Class duration _____

No. of untreated errors _____

Serial No.	Error type				Corrector	When	Strategy							How	Observation Notes (timing, activity type, learner response, etc.)		
	Grammatical	Pronunciation	Global	Local			Teacher	Self	Peer	Instant Correction	Delayed Correction	Explicit Correction	Metalinguistic			Repetition	Recasts
1																	
2																	
3																	
4																	
5																	

APPENDIX 2

Sample of the interview questions

A) Questions eliciting general OCF beliefs:

1. How do you usually feel when your students make oral errors? What do these errors imply to you about the students and their learning?
2. How would you usually respond to such errors?
3. What factors make you decide to correct or ignore oral errors?
4. When you correct students' errors, how do you decide on the correction strategies you use?
5. Do you take individual student's learning styles/personalities/proficiencies in English into consideration when you correct students' oral errors? Why/Why not?
6. What strategies have you found to be particularly effective/ineffective for oral error correction?

B) Questions about the OCF practices observed in the lessons:

1. What was the objective of today's lesson?
2. I saw you use [recast, repetition, metalinguistic, etc.] to correct students' oral errors. Could you tell me more about why you used those specific strategies during the class I observed?
3. How are those correction strategies related to your lessons' objectives?
4. Are the strategies you used in those lessons the only ones you generally use to correct students' oral errors?
 - If 'yes',
What do you use those strategies in particular?
What do you like most about them?
How have you come to know them?
 - If 'no',
What are the other error correction strategies you usually use?
What factors prevented you from using those strategies during today's lesson?
5. In your lesson ____out of errors you corrected were (global, local, grammatical, pronunciation). Could you tell me more about why you preferred correcting these types of errors?
6. In the lesson some of the errors were untreated by you. Could you please tell me your reasons for this?
7. For some errors you used _____(self/peer/teacher) correction. Could you please tell me your reason for that choice?
8. For error ____ you chose to provide written/oral feedback. Can you please tell me what was your reason for that?
9. Is there anything else you would like to tell about the observed lessons and/or oral error correction?