

# **PEDAGOGICAL PRECISION: INVESTIGATING ORAL CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK PRACTICES AMONG TANZANIAN SECONDARY EDUCATORS**

**Felicity Rosemary Kamugisha and Benjamin Elias Mwakatumbula**

University of Tanzania

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## **Abstract**

This paper investigates the use of oral corrective feedback (OCF) by English language teachers in Tanzanian secondary schools through classroom observation and interviews with teachers and students in two public secondary schools in Dar es Salaam City. The study employs Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory to analyze how teachers handled students' spoken errors using different strategies and highlights the significance of OCF in promoting self-repair, reducing fossilization of errors and supporting language learning in Tanzanian secondary schools. Results indicate that explicit correction was the most frequently used strategy, while corrective comments were the least frequently used. Additionally, the learners' levels of language proficiency influenced the teachers' choice of OCF strategy. The study concludes by emphasizing the importance of effective OCF strategies in language classrooms and the significance of balancing numerous linguistic, cognitive, and circumstantial factors in teaching.

**Keywords:** Oral corrective feedback, English language teaching, Sociocultural Theory, language proficiency, secondary schools, Tanzania.

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## **Introduction**

English is the medium of instruction in Tanzanian secondary schools, but many students struggle with English language skills due to insufficient exposure in primary schools. This paper seeks to investigate the use of oral corrective feedback (OCF) by English language teachers in Tanzanian secondary schools, where OCF plays a crucial role in reducing errors and promoting self-repair in language learning. The study employs Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory to analyze how teachers handle students' spoken errors using various OCF strategies such as explicit correction, clarification requests, recasts, metalinguistic feedback, repetition, and corrective comments. Classroom observation and interviews with teachers and students in two public secondary schools in Dar es Salaam City were conducted to collect data for the study. Results show that explicit correction was the most frequently used strategy, while corrective comments were the least frequently used. Furthermore, learners' levels of language proficiency influenced the teachers' choice of OCF strategy. The article highlights the importance of effective OCF strategies in reducing fossilization of errors and supporting language learning in Tanzanian secondary schools. The study provides pedagogical insights into how teachers handle students' errors in language classrooms and emphasizes the significance of balancing numerous linguistic, cognitive, and circumstantial factors in teaching.

### **Status of ELT in Tanzanian Secondary Schools**

The use of the English Language in Tanzanian education can be traced back to the British colonial rule in Tanganyika. During the British colonial rule, the English language was the language of governance, and it was taught as a subject in lower primary classes and a medium of instruction (henceforth MoI) in upper primary education classes and secondary education. During the early phase of British colonialism, English played the role of creating native-like speakers of English,

aimed at servicing low-level colonial government needs (Mapunda, 2015:37). After independence in 1961, English continued to be the official language and language of government although this role changed slightly in 1967 when Swahili was declared the official language of Tanzania (ibid: 37). However, since then English is still an official language just as Swahili; and it is used in domains like the high court, international relations, government documentation and in secondary and post-secondary education.

Currently, Tanzania follows a language policy which is pronounced in the 1995 Education and Training Policy\* which designates Swahili to be the medium of instruction in primary schools and English a compulsory subject at that level. In regard to the medium of instruction at the secondary level of education, English is the MoI, except for the teaching of other approved languages. Besides, at secondary level, Swahili is a compulsory subject up to the end of the ordinary level of secondary education (MoEC, 1995:35-45). According to this policy, children in Tanzania start learning English as a subject in Standard III up to Standard VII. When they enrol in secondary schools, they change the language of instruction from Swahili to English in all courses except Swahili in the first four years of secondary education.

In 2014, the Government of Tanzania issued an upgraded version of the 1995 Education and Training Policy, but since then it has been partially implemented. As of now, the Government is revising the 2014 Education and Training Policy in order to make it implementable, and consistent with other changes in curricula.

The shift of the language of instruction from Swahili in primary education to English in secondary education has created problems in communication as well as teaching and learning because of deficiency in English language skills caused by insufficient exposure of learners to the language in primary schools (Mwamkoa, 2020). Although the English syllabus in secondary schools has the aim of making students capable of using appropriate English language to communicate in different settings as well as achieving academically in all content areas, achieving this goal has been a struggle for both teachers and students in secondary school classrooms resulting to many errors. The English language situation in secondary schools requires teachers to appropriate use corrective feedback strategies. The provision of appropriate corrective feedback is of vital importance in language learning. McDonough (2005:79) states that when learners modify their previous erroneous utterances in response to negative feedback, learning opportunities are created by both the provision of negative feedback and the production of modified output.

### **Theoretical Consideration**

The study employed the Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory. The main claim of the theory is that language learning, like any other kind of learning, is social in nature; and is constructed through a process of collaboration, interaction, and communication among participants in social settings (Nassaji & Swain, 2000:35). Any kind of mental functioning, from voluntary attention to concept formation and volition, is initially social and collaborative, arising first between individuals as intermental activities, and then becoming intramental activities for the individual (Nassaji & Swain, 2000:36). The sociocultural theory appreciates the fact that in the learning process, learners require support from others; and dully introduces the concepts of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and mediation as among its primary constructs. The Zone of Proximal Development is the gap between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers. SCT further observes that the transformation from the learner's actual development level to the potential developmental level is initiated and shaped by the dialogic interaction between the teacher and the learner. The teacher enters the learner's ZPD, challenges and supports the learner in the task; scaffolds the learner

through guided participation in the goal-oriented activities, and finally empowers the learner to construct and solve the problem on his or her own (An, 2006:30).

For Vygotsky, mediation represents the use of tools, which refers to things that are adopted to solve a problem or reach a goal. Tools are adopted to resolve a problem or achieve a target. Transformation of thinking processes into higher-order is possible through the mediating function of culturally constructed artifacts including tools, symbols, and more elaborate sign systems such as language (Nassaji & Swain, 2000:38). In the teaching and learning process, the teacher's verbal directions and interactions with students play a mediational role. The concept of ZPD is important in understanding the distance between learners' ability to solve problems independently and under the teacher's guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers during the process of oral error correction and the role of teacher-learner interaction in the sequence of OCF moves. As well, the concept of mediation functions in understanding various forms of teachers' oral corrective feedback techniques as mediation tools when students produce erroneous utterances.

### **Methods and Procedures**

In this part we are describing how the processes of data collection and analysis were carried out, the study sites, and the reasons for the various decisions which we made. To begin with, this study is qualitative in nature following the philosophy of interpretivism. Interpretivism believes that truth is not absolute, but dependent on the context of its production. In this regard, objective reality can never be entangled. It admits multiple meanings and means of knowing (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005:5). The study was conducted in Dar es Salaam Region, specifically in Ubungu District. Two community-owned secondary schools, famously known in Swahili as *shule za kata*<sup>†</sup> were conveniently selected. For ethical reasons we will refer to the schools as School A and School B. The schools are mainstream average public schools which have common qualities in terms of facilities. Participants in this study involved secondary school (Ordinary level) students in the two secondary schools and six English language teachers. Like most students in other public secondary schools in Tanzania, students in the two schools made their way to secondary school through public primary schools where Swahili is the *de jure* medium of instruction. The transition from Swahili to English as the language of instruction leads to difficulties in communication and understanding for students hence more chances for errors. For this case, the teaching at this level involves abundant support and feedback from teachers.

The data were collected through classroom observation and interview methods. Classroom observations involved audio recording of teacher-

*Shule za Kata* is a Kiswahili term used to refer to community secondary schools established in each ward across Tanzania.

student interaction in English language lessons by using Zoom H5 Handy Recorder. A total of 13 lessons were recorded, transcribed, and analysed. The aspects which were focused on were formal grammar lessons, English language reading, writing, and literature lessons. One-on-one interviews were conducted with six English language teachers who were also involved in observation to appendage the data obtained in the classroom observations.

The audio recordings from classroom observation and interviews were transcribed and imported into the QRS NVIVO 12 software as rich-text files for coding. The analysis process of the observation data focused solely on teacher-student interactional moves that involved the error treatment structure. The interactional moves that did not involve the error treatment process were excluded from the analysis. The process of coding data was guided by Lyster & Ranta (1997) error treatment sequences which were identified in the transcripts of observation data and the interview responses. The process involved allocating labels to the extracts containing error treatment moves from the transcripts based on the six categories of OCF. The error treatment sequences which were not in the six categories were coded in emergent codes as other corrective comments and more than one

strategy (combinations of different types of OCF in a teacher's single turn). The structures were coded under other corrective comments only when they instantly followed a student's ill-formed utterance and when they indicated to the student who made an error that there is something uncommon. However, these comments did not point to the error directly but they helped students understand that there is something wrong with their utterances made and tried to make some adjustments.

### **Findings**

Through observation, it was found that many students committed different spoken errors in the classrooms when they were communicating through the English language. The study of the OCF practices in the English language classrooms has shown that teachers in both schools applied at least six categories of strategies in handling students' ill-formed utterances. The findings revealed the use of explicit correction, clarification request, recasts, metalinguistic feedback, repetition, and other corrective comments. Additionally, findings from classroom observations unveiled the use of a combination of more than one strategy in a teacher's single turn when handling errors. Below are extracts from the observational data that illustrates how teachers applied the strategies in the EFL classrooms:

#### **Explicit Correction**

(1) (School A, T2, -Definite Article Lesson)

S. \*Not only was the house dirty but also intidy [wrong negative form]

T. Intidy is wrong, it is untidy...say untidy

The teacher's OCF turn in these extracts is characterized by three features. First, the teacher points out to the learner that what she said was not correct 'intidy is wrong'. At this stage, the teacher was making the student aware of the erroneous form, 'in'-. Second, the teacher provided the correct form precisely i.e. 'untidy'. Besides, there is a third feature in the teachers' feedback which is a word that directs the learner to make a correction or say the correct form that has been provided i.e. 'say'...

#### **Clarification Request**

(2) (School A, T6, - Expressing Future Plans Lesson) S. \*Where are you going to do next month? [Lexical error]

T. Where or what?

The question "where or what?" indicates to the student that his/her utterance was not clear, not understood, or not well-formed, and that repetition or reformulation is required.

#### **Recasts**

(3) (School B, T2, - Reading for Comprehension)

S. \*The class perform well [grammatical error-wrong tense] T. The class performed well

In this extract, the teacher reformulated the student's utterance by adding a missing tense form, that is, '-ed' without notifying the student that there was an error in that sentence and without informing the learner who made an error to repeat the correct sentence he reconstructed.

#### **Metalinguistic Feedback**

(4) (School A, T3, - Definite Article)

S. \*Salim is tallest [grammatical error-missing article]

T. You should use the definite article before superlatives

The comment 'You should use the definite article before superlatives' after the student's turn provides a metalanguage information 'definite article' about the ill-formed utterance.

#### **Repetition**

(5) (School B, T2, - Expressing Opinions Lesson)

S.\* I wouldn't go if I were she [lexical error-use of she instead of her]



T. She?

The teacher just repeated a part of the utterance with an error to let the learner know that there is something wrong with their utterances.

Whenever the strategy was applied teachers used a highlight intonation to draw students' attention to the erroneous form.

More than One OCF Strategy- Repetition + Clarification Request + Explicit correction

(6) (School A, T6, - Expressing Future Plans Lesson)

S.\* We shall not going in Mwanza next week [grammatical – wrong tense + lexical error -wrong preposition]

T. going? Alafu tunasema going 'in' au going to? We shall not go to. Say it (Going? But then, do we say going in or going to? We shall go to. Say it)

In this sequence, the student made two errors in a single turn: wrong use of -ing - 'going' instead of 'go' and wrong preposition 'in' instead of

'to'. In handling these errors, the teacher combined first, repetition, 'going?'; second clarification request, 'but then, do we say going in or going to?' and explicit correction, we shall not go to, say it. The first two strategies repetition and clarification requests were used to deal with the first grammatical error while the third strategy handled two errors at the same time.

Repetition + explicit correction

(7) (School B, T3, - Seeking and Giving Advice Lesson) S. \*If I were you, I was run quickly [grammatical error] T. was? No. I would run.... now repeat it

The teacher repeated the wrong form 'was' while notifying the student about the ill-formedness 'no' giving the right form explicitly- 'I would

run' as well as giving direction to the learner to repeat the right form – 'now repeat it'

Repetition + Metalinguistic Feedback

(8) (School A, T2, - Definite Article Lesson)

S. The mountain Kilimanjaro has highest peak in Tanzania [grammatical error-missing article]

T. has highest? Don't omit the article 'the' in superlatives

metalinguistic Feedback + Explicit Correction

(9) (School A, T2, - Definite Article Lesson) S. \*the ocean Indian [grammatical error]

T. Follow grammatical rules. It should be ...the Indian Ocean

The use of more than one strategy in one teacher's turn occurred when a student committed multiple errors in a single turn (as in excerpt 6) and when the teacher wanted to put emphasis on the correction of the error (as in excerpts 7, 8 and 9).

Other Corrective Comments

(10) (School A, T2- Definite Article Lesson)

S. The driver the car every day [grammatical error-missing verb]

T. eeeh! You must be joking.

S. aaah, mmh

(11) (School A, T5, - Active and Passive Voice lesson)

S. the garden were dug by them [grammatical error –use of plural form on singular]

T. You are not serious

S. the garden.... the...

In the above extracts the teacher provided corrective comments as in

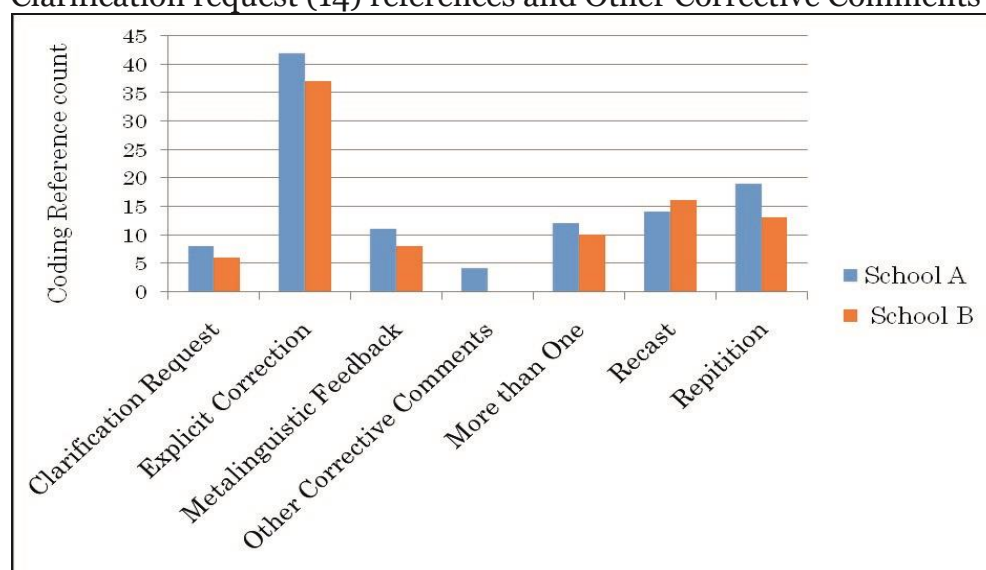
(10) you must be joking and (11) you are not serious immediately after the students' errors. The students who made errors hesitated in trying to fix their errors because their teachers' comments made them feel that there is something wrong with their sentences.

Based on the coding frequencies of teachers' turns containing OCF strategies i.e. the total number of references coded in the OCF strategy nodes, the observational data displayed a high utilization of explicit corrective feedback followed by repetition. The references indicated the times the strategy was applied by the teachers in both schools during the classroom observation.

**Table 1: Distribution of OCF Strategies**

Strategies	School A	School B	Total
Clarification Request	8	6	14
Explicit Correction	42	37	79
Metalinguistic Feedback	11	8	19
More than One	12	10	22
Other Corrective Comments	4	0	4
Recast	14	16	30
Repetition	19	13	32

The data in Table 1 show that explicit correction (79 references) was the most frequent strategy used by teachers in handling students' errors in English language lessons observed followed by repetition which has 32 references. The other OCF strategies identified from the data were recast (30 references), more than one strategy (22 references), metalinguistic feedback (19 references), Clarification request (14) references and Other Corrective Comments (4) references.



**Figure 1:** Frequency of the OCF strategies

Elicitation was coded as one of the OCF strategies as it was spotted in different kinds of literature (Leyster & Ranta 1997; Panova & Lyster 2002; Suzuki, 2004; Maolida, 2017). However, the strategy could not be traced in the classroom observation results as it was not applied by all teachers.

The interview findings support classroom observation data. Although the teachers were not aware of the technical terms of the OCF strategies, they reported using some strategies in dealing with learners' erroneous utterances. Their responses made it possible to fix the ways they specified in the OCF typologies. Table 2 summarizes the interview results.

**Table 2: Interview Results**

Teacher	Response	Strategy
T1A	What I do when they pronounce wrongly ...is to tell them that this is not right, this is pronounced like this. I give them straight answers.	Explicit Correction
T2A	I correct them by giving them the correct word and the rules in the class ...so they must follow it.	Explicit Correction
T4A	Because they are not capable of using English correctly they don't pronounce words correctly... so I tell them their problems but I have to give them correct words	Explicit Correction
T6A	To tell you the truth... I speak them in Swahili when they make errors. They don't know English so if you correct them in English they will not change. But I always tell them right answers	Explicit correction
T1B	In structure lessons, ... I correct them on the spot, but if error continues I make remedial. I speak the sentence nicely, or I pick another student to speak the sentence correctly then I tell the student who made an error to speak like the student who repeated nicely	Explicit Correction
T2B	If I find a sentence is not grammatically correct, I correct it and tell him or her to repeat it as I have corrected it, I say the correct sentence and the student repeat it	Explicit Correction

Basically, the findings justify that explicit correction i.e. notifying students of their errors and giving them correct forms is highly applied by teachers. The results also revealed language switch to L1(Swahili) in trying to provide OCF as well as involving peer students in helping making utterances correct.

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to examine teachers' OCF practices in EFL classrooms in Tanzanian secondary schools. The study revealed the use of explicit correction, repetition, recasting, combined strategies, metalinguistic feedback, clarification request, and other corrective comments. These results suggest that teachers were concerned about students' speech and handled the errors made by their students during instruction. The use of different strategies identified in the classes entailed teachers' encouragement of students' interlanguage progress (Maolida, 2013:121) and assistance to the students' understanding of the correct forms of the English language. The teachers' provision of OCF is in line with what Vygotsky's Social Cultural Theory argues that learning is a sociocultural process that involves different actors who take part in shaping learning.

Generally, the results revealed somewhat devastating use of explicit correction followed by repetition. These results are supported by a study carried out by Sebonde and Biseko (2013) in a different setting on the techniques used by English language teachers in handling students' morphosyntactic errors in Dodoma, Tanzania. However, there are some differences in the results obtained from our study with other many studies. Most of the studies reviewed (Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Panova & Lyster, 2002; Suzuki, 2004; Lyster, Saito, & Sato, 2013; Sung & Tsai, 2016; Maolida, 2017) show tremendous use of recasts over other OCF strategies in the classes studied. The reasons for these dissimilarities can be due to the nature of the lessons, and the students' level of proficiency in the language studied. The classes studied in this study aimed at learning English as a foreign language, and at the lower level of using English as a medium of instruction. We are saying that the use of explicit correction was somewhat devastating because the focus of the English language

lessons at this level was to enhance students' use of the language rather than learning broad knowledge contents. However, the feedback which we observed mostly focused on the use of some identified grammatical forms of the language in speaking. In such circumstances, teachers would perhaps choose strategies that would overtly show what was expected of students in speaking the target language.

It has been shown that explicit correction is beneficial for the students who have an inadequate understanding of the target language such as beginners and intermediate learners. This is due to the fact that explicit correction can prevent ambiguity and decrease misperception because teachers identify the error and provide its correct form (Tersta & Gunawan, 2018:156). This understanding was supported by the interview responses by teachers on the strategies they apply in their classrooms. One of the teachers stated that:

"Because they are not capable of using the language correctly they don't pronounce words correctly, so I tell them their problems but I have to give them correct words" (T2 school B)

Furthermore, the results suggest the presence of low incidences of other strategies of OCF, and complete absence of elicitation. This means that teachers had to involve students partially based on the knowledge that, in classrooms teachers are the only proficient speakers who interact with a large number of students who are not proficient (Spada & Lightbown, 2009). Other OCF strategies like elicitation and clarification request give students time to work on their ill-formed utterances although their application was very limited. The underutilization specifies teacher-centered teaching where teachers own the authority for providing OCF in the classroom. This was similarly supported by the classroom data where there was no peer OCF identified during students' interaction in group work in all the lessons observed. This gives the impression that the students' level of proficiency might affect teachers' choices on the methods of teaching as well as the most effective type of OCF. Lyster and Ranta, (1997:56) puts it clear that it is significant to acknowledge the need for teachers to sensibly bear in mind their students' level of L2 proficiency when making decisions about feedback because students with a higher degree of proficiency are likely to comprehend errors committed in teaching and learning due to their more exhaustive and longer exposure to the language than lower advanced students. This means that explicit corrective feedback works better in lower advanced students than implicit strategies.

As well, the classroom results reflected elements of the communicative language teaching method which is highly acclaimed in the current trends in language teaching. The analysed OCF episodes were part of the classroom interactional activities which engaged students in using English language regardless of their proficiency levels. The teachers played the role of motivating listeners while providing corrective feedback to the students' erroneous utterances in the speaking activities during instruction. The integration of CF in communicative language activities is thought to be a vehicle toward more precise and coherent language use since they allow students to either accept, reject, or modify a hypothesis about correct language use (Brandl, 2021:19). Also, Han (2002:1) asserts that in communicative language teaching, CF is still a crucial tool for promoting L2 knowledge creation and usage.

In regard to the theoretical implication of the findings, the study findings indicate how the teachers (more knowledgeable) work collaboratively with students (less knowledgeable) in handling spoken errors in the classrooms. The application of the oral corrective feedback strategies was dialogically based. Students and teachers engaged in problem-solving and knowledge building activity. According to Ellis, Loewen and Erlam (2006:2), correction is not something done to learners but rather something carried out with learners. It facilitates the cooperative construction of a Zone of Proximal Development where students are supported to use linguistic forms that they were not yet able to employ independently.



## **Conclusion**

This paper has examined how teachers utilize different OCF strategies in Tanzania English language secondary schools. The study was done in two Dar-es-Salaam public secondary schools. The findings reveal that teachers use at least six techniques in handling students' errors which are explicit correction, clarification request, recasts, metalinguistic feedback, repetition, and other Corrective comments. Further, there was a use of a combination of more than one strategy in a teachers' single turn when handling errors. Besides, the study indicated a higher utilization of explicit correction than other types of OCF. The results are generally contradictory with some other studies which have shown tremendous use of recasts over other OCF strategies as we have indicated in our study. The fact also applies to the interview results where teachers reported little or no knowledge of other OCF strategies although some were identified in some lessons. However, the choice or preference of a certain type of OCF depends on the instructional intention of the classroom and the learners' level of proficiency in the language studied.

Generally, the study provides pedagogical insights on the issue of corrective feedback. Teachers need to face circumstances in their classrooms when trying to handle students' errors on how CF might work depending on their situations. Nevertheless, teachers must keep working on different types of CF to enable them to balance numerous linguistic, cognitive, and circumstantial situations in their classrooms. We, therefore, commend that teachers employ a wide range of corrective strategies. In addition, the handling of students' errors must be done in a manner that does not produce negative impacts on learners. The use of negative comments by some teachers as identified in the study might inhibit uptake on the part of the learners.

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