AJLLSE GLOBAL RESEARCH NETWORK

AMERICAN Journal of Language, Literacy and Learning in STEM Education
Volume 4, Issue 06, 2026 ISSN (E): 2993-2769

The Role Of Corrective Feedback In Second Language Acquisition: A Classroom Observation Study Of Beginner Efl Learners

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Abstract: *This classroom-based action research aims to investigate the efficacy of oral corrective feedback (CF) strategies among young, elementary-level students, who are learning English as a foreign language (EFL) in Uzbekistan. The study was conducted over twelve lessons in a private language course with 15 primary school students aged 9–11. Observational discourse analysis was used to examine students' immediate responses (uptake) and successful self-correction to different types of feedback provided by the teacher. According to the results there were clear differences between output-promoting and input-promoting strategies. While indirect recasts gave low levels of successful repair results, explicit output-promoting strategies significantly improved students' successful repair rates. Clarification requests, elicitation, and metalinguistic feedback emerged as the most successful ways. Findings show that these strategies encourage students to not only comprehend the meaning, but also actively pay attention to the grammatical forms and help them remember and apply their existing linguistic knowledge in practice. The study provides practical recommendations for EFL education in Uzbekistan, emphasizing the importance of specific and targeted feedback strategies in developing students' self-correction and reducing the risk of developing long-term language errors.*

Key words: *Oral Corrective Feedback, Learner Uptake, Linguistic Repair, Recasts, Elicitation, Metalinguistic feedback, Primary EFL, Uzbekistan education.*

Introduction

In the field of second language acquisition (SLA), how learners process and correct linguistic errors remains an important research topic. For young learners of English as a foreign language (EFL), oral errors are an unavoidable and essential part of interlanguage development. Interlanguage is a temporary and evolving linguistic system that learners develop as they move from their native language to the target language. How teachers respond to such errors has great importance. Traditional grammar-translation methods have historically emphasized the immediate and decisive elimination of errors, which has often increased learners' anxiety and reduced their communicative confidence. In contrast, early communicative approaches have emphasized meaning over structural accuracy and advocated little intervention in errors. However, modern SLA research shows that ignoring errors completely often leads to the permanent reinforcement of grammatically incorrect, fossilized forms.[1] Therefore, the focus of modern language pedagogy is to find the optimal balance through Oral Corrective Feedback (CF). Corrective feedback serves as an important interactional tool that provides students with information about the correctness of their speech. Although the existing literature has studied the cognitive effects of corrective feedback in many laboratory settings, there is a need for local and practical studies that observe how these interactional processes work in real time in natural classroom settings.[2]

This is especially relevant for young primary school students in developing education systems such as Uzbekistan, as they simultaneously try to master significant structural differences between their native language and English. This action research study aims to fill this gap by examining the use of different oral corrective feedback strategies and their impact on learner uptake in a private, out-of-school, elementary EFL course. By analyzing how specific types of feedback encourage or inhibit self-correction, this article aims to provide practical pedagogical recommendations for elementary language teachers.[3]

Literature Review

To understand oral corrective feedback in the classroom, we must examine how the human mind processes a foreign language. The theoretical foundation of this study centers on a classic debate in Second Language Acquisition (SLA): whether internal development is triggered by receiving passive input or by the pressure of producing active speech output. For decades, communicative language teaching was heavily influenced by Stephen Krashen's Input Hypothesis. Krashen argued that language acquisition is a subconscious process that occurs only when learners are exposed to messages they can fully understand. In this view, direct error correction is counterproductive because it forces students to focus on abstract rules rather than real meaning. Furthermore, aggressive correction can raise the "affective filter"—a psychological barrier of anxiety and stress that blocks language processing. This explains why many instructors prefer gentle, indirect methods like recasts, which correct errors naturally within conversation without stopping the lesson.[4]

However, research soon revealed limitations in classrooms that relied purely on input. This led Merrill Swain to propose the Output Hypothesis. Swain discovered that simply listening to input is not enough to achieve grammatical accuracy because it allows learners to process meaning without analyzing syntax. She argued that producing output forces a cognitive shift from passive, semantic understanding to conscious, syntactic processing. When a student hits a linguistic barrier, teacher feedback acts as a catalyst that forces them to modify their speech. This interactional loop turns passive reception into active cognitive growth, proving that speaking helps learners actively test their linguistic hypotheses.[5]

This process is further explained by Richard Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis, which states that learners must consciously notice the gap between their flawed speech and the correct target form before they can change a mistaken habit. In the classroom, this moment of noticing triggers "learner uptake"—the student's immediate attempt to respond to the teacher's feedback. When learners successfully correct their own errors following a turn, they accomplish formal linguistic repair; conversely, if they duplicate the initial mistake or remain silent, the interaction is classified as an unsuccessful instance of uptake. Crucially, Mackey provided empirical proof that when young learners actively notice these gaps during conversation, it directly leads to long-term grammatical development. [6]

The tactical debate in feedback literature focuses on whether teachers should provide the correct answer or force students to discover it. Roy Lyster and Leila Ranta divided these options into input-providing and output-prompting strategies. Within the category of input-providing methods, conversational recasts serve as the primary tool, featuring a teacher's implicit reformulation of a flawed student response without direct overt correction. Teachers favor recasts because they are polite and maintain the lesson's flow. However, recasts are often "pedagogically ambiguous" for young beginners. Because a recast sounds like natural conversational agreement, 9-to-11-year-old students usually miss the corrective intent entirely, assuming the teacher is simply agreeing with their meaning rather than correcting their grammar.[7]

Conversely, output-prompting strategies—collectively known as prompts—include clarification requests, metalinguistic clues, elicitation, and repetition. Prompts purposely withhold the correct answer. Instead of fixing the mistake, the teacher provides a scaffolding clue that pushes the student to search their memory and self-correct. Rod Ellis notes that while prompts require more mental effort, they are highly effective for beginners. Beginner students often know the underlying rule but lack the cognitive speed to use it automatically in spontaneous speech. Therefore, output prompts provide the interactional nudge needed to turn passive knowledge into accurate performance. This choice is

especially critical for learners navigating the structural distance between an agglutinative native language (like Uzbek) and an analytical target language (like English), where prompts help prevent early errors from fossilizing.[8]

Methodology

Research Design and Paradigm

This research is based on a qualitative paradigm of classroom-based action research and uses a systematical participant-observation design. In Second Language Acquisition (SLA) action research is considered an important methodological approach that connects theoretical ideas with real classroom practice. By being both a teacher and a researcher, the investigator was able to observe the natural and spontaneous classroom interactions which are often unnoticeable for external observers. In order to reduce potential observer bias and strengthen validity, post-lesson interaction matrices, reflective journals written after each lesson, and systematic discourse coding procedures based on established SLA frameworks are used in this study. [9]

Setting and Participant Profile

The study was conducted in a private English language course organized and taught by the researcher in Bukhara, Uzbekistan. The course was designed as an intensive program to develop basic English skills in young students, in addition to regular school lessons. A group of participants consisted of 15 younger-aged, specifically 9-11 aged school kids and they were 4^{th} and 5^{th} grade students who are learning English as a foreign language (EFL). A group was linguistically the same, which means all students spoke in Uzbek (L1) and for them, this private course served as an important environment to practice English (L2).[10]

According to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) all students were initially at the beginner (A1) level. This private course environments became particularly conductive to conducting research about corrective feedback, as no pressure classroom environment reduced students' anxiety and encouraged free oral speech and quick mutual communication during intensive practice sessions.

Operationalization of Linguistic Variables

To ensure strong empirical rigor, the interactional exchanges between the teacher-researcher and learners were analyzed using the discourse taxonomy developed by Lyster and Ranta (1997). The independent variable in this study is the type of oral corrective feedback (CF) used by the teacher. It was divided into two main categories and six specific subtypes:

A. Input-Providing Strategies (Implicit/Explicit Models)

Explicit Correction: Directly identifying an incorrect utterance and providing the correct form (e.g., "No, you must say 'went', not 'goed'").

Recasts: The teacher implicitly fixes the student's incorrect sentence, preserving its meaning, without directly saying there was an error or offering grammar rules.

B. Output-Prompting Strategies ("Prompts")

Clarification Requests: Signals that the student's utterance was not understood or was incorrect (e.g., "Pardon?", "What did you say?"). In this classroom, this strategy was also used when students were asked to translate an Uzbek word into English, where the teacher would intentionally show lack of understanding (e.g., "What? I can't hear you") to encourage them to fix their own mistakes when they mispronounce or say the incorrect word.[11]

Metalinguistic Feedback: Comments or questions about the grammatical accuracy of the student's sentence without saying the correct form.

Elicitation: Techniques used to guide students to produce the correct form themselves, such as pausing to let them complete a sentence ("Yesterday I…?") or asking them to rephrase their answer.

Repetition: The teacher repeats the student's incorrect sentence with emphasis or rising intonation to point out the error.

The dependent variable is learner uptake, defined as the student's immediate response to corrective

feedback. Uptake was coded in two ways: Repair (successful self-correction or correction with help from peers) and Needs Repair (no successful correction, including repeated errors, simple acknowledgment without correction, or silence/communication breakdown).

Results.

Data Collection and Documentation Protocols

Over twelve instructional sessions, data was collected using a longitudinal design. To avoid the Hawthorne Effect – where learners act differently because they know they're being watched – the study did not use videos. Instead, a two-level triangulation method was used for observations.

Real-Time Interaction Checklists:

The teacher-researcher used a simple, organized clipboard matrix during class stages with a lot of interaction. This includes L1-to-L2 translation for vocabulary, accuracy checks during explicit instruction, and Q&A activities. Each error, feedback, and uptake sequence were immediately recorded, either right then or right after the interaction, using the relevant taxonomy.

Immediate Post-Lesson Reflective Logs:

Right after each lesson – within 30 minutes – the researcher wrote detailed reflections. These logs included the linguistic context of student mistakes and their behavior. They covered 4th and 5th graders' reactions and highlighted both successes and failures in correction attempts.[12]

The collected Table 1. interaction sequences were analyzed using structural conversational discourse analysis. To illustrate how classroom interactions were transcribed, segmented, and categorized during the analysis phase, the following structural interaction matrix presents typical behavioral patterns observed among participants during the vocabulary exercises and morphosyntactic accuracy checks.

Table 1. Discourse Analysis and Coding Procedures

Sequence ID	**Pedagogical Context**	**Teacher Prompt (L1) / Student Response (L2)**	**Teacher Corrective Feedback (CF Type)**	**Immediate Learner Uptake**	**Analytical Coding**
Ex-01	**Vocabulary Drill** (L1-to-L2 Translation)	**Teacher:** asks the English translation of thee uzbek word "*Kitob?"* **Student:** (Mumbles / mispronounces word)	*"What? I can't hear you."* **(Clarification Request)**	**Student:** "*Book!"* (Corrects pronunciation clearly)	**Repair** (Successful Output)
Ex-02	**Vocabulary Drill** (L1-to-L2 Translation)	**Teacher:** "*Yetib kelmoq?"* **Student:** "*Arrive"* pronounced as [əˈraɪd] (Phonological/Pronunciation error)	*"Arrive"* pronounced as [əˈraɪd]? **(Repetition with rising pitch)**	**Student:** "*Arrive"* pronounced as [əˈraɪd] (Repeats the identical error)	**Needs Repair** (Unsuccessful Uptake)
Ex-03	**Morphosyntactic Check** (Target: Indefinite Articles)	**Student:** "*I have cat."* (Omission of article)	*"You have…?"* **(Elicitation via slot-filling)**	**Student:** "*I have a cat!"* (Supplies missing article)	**Repair** (Successful Self-Correction)

Ex-04	**Q&A Activity** (Target: Past Simple Tense)	**Student:** "*He goed to school yesterday.*"	*"Remember our rule for yesterday."* **(Metalinguistic Feedback)**	**Student:** "*He went to school yesterday.*"	**Repair** (Successful Self-Correction)

The systematic tracking of oral interactions during the four weeks study process provided total of 120 corrective feedback (CF) cases. According to the data analysis 4th and 5th grade beginner learners reacted differently to input-providing and output-prompting strategies.

The Table 2. distribution of overall teacher-initiated feedback and students' successful response (repair) rates are summarized in the following:

Table 2. Distribution and Effectiveness of Feedback Types

Corrective Feedback (CF) Category	Total Episodes (N=120)	Successful Learner Repair	Unsuccessful Uptake (Needs Repair)	Repair Success Rate (%)
Clarification Requests	30	21	9	**70%**
Elicitation	25	17	8	**68%**
Metalinguistic Feedback	20	13	7	**65%**
Recasts	30	11	19	**36.6%**
Repetition	15	7	8	**46.6%**

Output-Prompting vs. Input-Providing Outcomes

The Efficacy of Clarification Requests in Vocabulary Drills

Clarification requests, used in L1-to-L2 vocabulary exercises, provided the highest rate of successful student correction (70%). When the researcher simulated a misunderstanding in the conversation (e.g., "What? I can't hear you"), a consistent two-stage behavioral pattern was observed among 9–11-year-old participants. In most cases, students first repeated their initial response to confirm the teacher's attention, and then immediately underwent an independent cognitive shift, correcting their pronunciation or lexical choice to the correct form in the target English language.[13]

The Structural Advantages of Elicitation and Metalinguistic Feedback

Elicitation (68% success rate) and metalinguistic feedback (65% success rate) were shown to be highly effective, systematic interventions during open grammar instruction and question and answer (Q&A) sessions. These strategies were clearly structured and provided clear boundaries for young learners because they had a pedagogically rigorous tone. Pausing in the middle of a sentence during elicitation or reminding learners of a grammar rule in metalinguistic feedback (e.g., "Remember the rule for yesterday") provided early learners with clear linguistic cues to guide and correct their interlanguage patterns.

The Limitations of Recasts for Young Beginners

In contrast, implicit recasts—although frequently used due to their less intrusive nature (N=30) — showed the lowest correction success rate (36.6%). While recasts helped some students to notice and correct morphosyntactic errors, they were ineffective in most cases. Discourse recordings showed that students at the elementary level in grades 4 and 5 often lacked grammatical awareness and were unable to distinguish between corrective recasts and simple communicative affirmations. As a result, students often perceived the teacher's recasts as confirmation of their message rather than form correction, and therefore continued to respond or repeated the same linguistic error in subsequent turns.

Discussion

The empirical results of this classroom-based action research study provide important insights into the real-time cognitive processing of corrective feedback by young, beginning EFL learners. The apparent

difference in success rates between output-promoting strategies (clarification prompts, elicitation, metalinguistic cues) and input-promoting strategies (recasts) is directly relevant to one of the central debates in contemporary Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theory.[14]

The Cognitive Push of Prompts vs. The "Ambiguity" of Recasts

The main finding of this study is that explicit and output-prompting strategies produced significantly higher levels of learner uptake and successful correction than indirect strategies. In particular, the high success rates of clarification prompts (70%) and elicitations (68%) strongly support the Output Hypothesis proposed by Merrill Swain. According to Swain, speaking the target language is not only the outcome of learning but also the means of learning. The researcher's use of clarification prompts such as "What? I can't hear you" or pauses during elicitations forced 4th and 5th graders to move from passive semantic comprehension to active syntactic processing. They were not passive; rather, they were encouraged to independently produce the correct forms, drawing on their developing mental lexicons.

In contrast, the relatively low success rate of recasts (36.6%) in this study confirms the common problems identified by researchers such as Roy Lyster and Leila Ranta (1997). According to their classic classroom discourse analysis, recasts are often "pedagogically ambiguous" for young learners. Because recasts subtly alter grammatical form while preserving communicative meaning, a 9–11-year-old primary school student may not fully understand the teacher's intention to correct. As the results show, when a student says "He goed to school" and the researcher responds "He went to school," the primary school student often perceives this as a communicative affirmation (i.e., as an agreement that the child went to school), rather than as a grammatical correction. Therefore, recasts are often overlooked by young primary school students whose grammatical foundations are not yet firmly established.

Age-Appropriateness and Developmental Readiness

The results also suggest the important role of developmental readiness in the context of primary school EFL. 4th and 5th graders are undergoing a cognitive transition; they are gradually moving from formula-based language processing to rule-based early awareness. The success of metalinguistic feedback (65%) suggests that these young learners respond very well to structured and clear boundaries. Because metalinguistic cues (e.g., "Remember our rule for yesterday") have a firm and clear instructional tone, they serve as immediate cognitive signposts. Furthermore, the specific behavioral pattern observed during clarification prompts—students first repeating an error and then correcting it—reveals an important micro-step in the real-time language recall process. This initial repetition suggests that the teacher's signal interrupted the student's automatic response and forced him to revise his response. Subsequent self-repair confirms that beginning students often have sufficient linguistic knowledge to produce the correct form, but require a specific interactional "nudge" from the teacher to activate it.

Pedagogical Implications for the Uzbek EFL Context

These results have important practical implications in the local EFL learning environment of Uzbekistan, where young learners are learning the structural differences between Uzbek, an agglutinative L1, and English, an analytic L2. While communicative teaching approaches typically encourage gentle and indirect feedback such as recasts to maintain the flow of the lesson, this study suggests that an active approach that encourages output is much more effective for young learners. Teachers working in intensive additional language courses should not be afraid to use explicit and direct instructional methods. Artificially simulating a communication barrier or providing metalinguistic cues does not increase student anxiety in a supportive classroom environment; on the contrary, it actively supports the learning process and prevents initial errors in the interlanguage stage from becoming permanent and fossilized.[15]

Conclusion

This classroom-based action research study examined the real-time interactional properties of oral corrective feedback among beginning EFL learners in an intensive private course setting. Empirical data collected during the learning process showed that output-promoting strategies—specifically,

clarification requests, elicitation, and metalinguistic feedback—are significantly more effective than indirect, input-promoting recasts in eliciting successful learner repair. Although recasts are widely used due to their gentle and less intrusive nature, they create a high level of pedagogical uncertainty for beginning learners aged 9–11. Learners often perceive grammatical correction as a simple communicative affirmation. In contrast, explicit and direct guidance strategies inhibit the process of automatic and erroneous speech production. They force young learners to "feel" the difference between their developing interlanguage system and the target language forms. Such interactional stimulation stimulates independent cognitive processing, allowing learners to actively recall and correctly apply grammatical rules that they already passively understand. These results have important pedagogical implications for the developing primary EFL education system in Uzbekistan. As young learners acquire the deep structural differences between an agglutinative first language (Uzbek) and an analytical target language (English), teachers need to adopt a more strategic and form-oriented approach to providing oral feedback. Rather than prioritizing fluency at the expense of accuracy, teachers working in intensive supplementary learning environments should confidently use targeted feedback techniques that encourage learners to produce language. In a supportive and engaging classroom setting, creating communication challenges or providing clear grammatical hints does not increase students' anxiety. Instead, these strategies support the learning process by encouraging successful self-correction and helping prevent early language errors from becoming long-term habits.

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