Students' Attitude towards Oral Error Correction Techniques Employed by Secondary School Language Teachers in South Western Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper investigated the attitude and preferences of students towards oral error correction techniques during teaching-learning process. Descriptive research design was adopted for the study. A questionnaire titled: the Students' Preferences on Effective Error Correction Techniques (SPEECT) was used to collect the data. Ten schools and two hundred secondary school students were randomly sampled for the study. Findings revealed that students believe that teachers should correct their errors in the classroom using pragmatic error correction, phonological error correction and vocabulary error correction. It was therefore recommended that teachers should adoptshould adopteffective corrective measures that would enhance the spoken andwritten(Though the paper is concerned with the oral aspects of English, it's technically impossible to omit the written aspect because often times, the spoken aspect is reported in the written form, therefore error correction techniques is equally extended to the writing skills of the students) English of the students.

Key Words: Error Correction, Oral Error, Attitude, Techniques and Language Teachers

Introduction

Research has showed over the years that teaching and learning can only be successful and effective if the teacher takes into cognizance the learners' needs and preferences (Horwitz, 1988, Nunan, 1987 & Schulz, 2001). In specific, Horwitz (1988) states that any language teacher using a communicative approach will have to contend with student(s) who complain about teachers not correcting their each and every oral error. Furthermore, several studies point to the fact that the teachers' pedagogical strategies are often in contrast with the learner's preferences (Cathcart & Olsen, 1976; Hawkey, 2006; McCargar, 1993; Oladejo, 1993; Peacock, 2001; Schulz, 1996, 2001). Language teachers agree that in order to avoid unsatisfactory learning outcomes, teachers should take note of students' perception about the styles or methods being employed in the teaching-learning process (Green & Oxford, 1995). Consequently, language teachers especially in an English language classroom should ensure that the instructional process are reviewed constantly in order to address varied students language problems and work towards providing assistance to identified problems in order for meaningful classroom instruction. Perhaps, this informs Nunan (1995) suggestion that teachers should find out what their students think and feel about what and how they want to learn.

There is a general consensus among language experts that making/committing errors is a necessary and natural process in language learning (Hendrickson, 1978; Edge, 1989). Students' errors (written or spoken) and corrections to these errors have been of deep concern to language teachers. Research on teachers' responses to students' errors are in abundance however, limited researches are available on students' attitude and perceptions regarding error correction especially in ESL domain (Bang, 1999; Chenoweth, Day, Chun &Luppescu, 1983). It may be instructive to find out how students' perceive error correction as this forms the thrust of this study.

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For instance, Truscott (1996) argues that teachers' decision making should not be based only on students' preferences. Young (2004) however urges language teachers to always listen to students' voices not because they want to take to their opinions but in order to understand what their students expect in the classroom situation, this may reduce the conflict between the teacher and the students. One of the first researchers to attempt to illuminate students' perspective on error treatment was Cohen (1987). Before that, researchers had focused on the nature and the most effective types of error correction.Though, some researchers speculated that second language (L_2) students had negative feelings towards error correction (Semke, 1984), the findings of empirical studies have however shown that most students want to receive error correction and consider it very helpful in enabling them to minimize errors and improve the quality of their spoken/oral English rather than being harmful or offensive.In the Nigerian environment, where English language is not only a second language but a lingual franca, researches on students preferences for oral error correction are limited. It is however instructive to point out that the teaching of oral English/or test of oral is a major component of the school curriculum right from the Junior Secondary School (JSS) level to the Senior Secondary School (SSS) level.

Students are required to go through systematic learning of the vowels, consonants, stress and intonation of English in order to boast their speaking skill and to make their usage of the English language intelligible. This is reflected in the various internal and external English language examinations students are being exposed to.For instance, Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME), the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WAEC), National Examination Council (NECO) and General Certificate Examination (GCE), have a complete section on text of oral where candidates are examined specifically on oral English. This section attracts 60 marks and other recognized examining bodies incorporate the aspect of the test of oral in the objective part of their questions. This is also in a bid to show that oral English is important in the scheme of things and the more reason why language teachers should handle it properly and effectively. Once students find it difficult to communicate in the English language effectively, all other aspects of the English language become stunted or static. The present study is therefore geared towards examining students' attitude towards oral error correction techniques employed by teachers in teaching English language.

Statement of the Problem

Students' expressions and speaking skill continually fall below expectations. This may be due to the type of correction techniques language teachers adopt in the teaching learning process. Consistent reports show that students' performances in public examinations especially English Language are poor (WASSCE, Report, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009). Our concern in this paper is on the Test of Oral represented in WASSCE and NECO examinations. Employers of labour are increasingly finding it difficult to accommodate most of our so-called graduates due to their poor oral and written English. This unhealthy performance on the part of the students could be traced to the type of orientation students are constantly receiving at the secondary school level. The poor quality of the products of our secondary schools remains a national debate and a course for concern to all educational stakeholders. There is therefore a need to pay more attention to students' attitude towards oral error correction and the appropriate techniques that can be adopted to improve students' communicative skills.

Purpose of the Study

The main objective of this study is to find out the attitude and preferences of students towards oral error correction techniques employed by language teachers in classroom situation. Specifically, the objectives of the study are to:
(a) find out the type of oral error correction techniques employed by language teachers in the classrooms;
(b) examine students' attitude towards oral error correction techniques employed by their language teachers;
(c) investigate students' preferences for oral error correction techniques in the teaching learning situation.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

(1) What are the attitudes of senior secondary school students towards oral error correction during the teaching learning process?
(2) What are the students' general preferences towards oral error correction during the teaching-learning process?
(3) What are the students' preferences towards specific types of error correction techniques used during the teaching learning process?

Research Method

The descriptive survey design was adopted. Gilbert (1994), Akuezuilo and Agu (2003), and Awotunde and Ugoduluwa (2004), agree that survey involves collection of information on the opinions, beliefs and attitudes of the public. Hence, this design was adjudged appropriate for this study. The population for the study comprised all senior secondary school students in South Western Nigeria. Out of the total population, two hundred senior secondary school students were randomly sampled from ten public secondary schools.The instrument used for data collection was questionnaire titled; Students' Preferences on Effective Error Correction Techniques (SPEECT), structured by the researcher. It consists of two sections. Section A consist of students' attitudes towards oral error correction in Nigerian secondary schools while section B consists of the students' preferences for the various error correction techniques used by language teachers in class. Each item had likert type scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided (U), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD) at the end of the statement. An expert in Measurement and Evaluation and another expert in English language validated the instrument. A cronbach alpha reliability co-efficient for the instrument on the data collected outside the study area was 0.69 and 0.71 respectively, the reliability co-efficient is high enough to consider the instrument reliable. Copies of the instruments were administered face to face to the respondents. The completed questionnaires were collected on the spot by the researcher. Mean scores and standard deviation were used in analyzing the data.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Research Question 1: What are the attitudes of senior secondary school students towards oral error correction during teaching learning process.

Table 1: Students' Attitudes toward Oral Error Correction

S/N	Items	N	%1 SD	%2 D	%3 U	%4 A	%5 SA	Mean	Standard Deviation
1.	My oral errors should be corrected by the English teacher	200	1.1	2.7	14.3	31.4	36.2	3.11	0. 82
2.	English teachers should correct all spoken errors of students	200	14.0	25.2	25.2	12.1	4.1	2.10	1.00
3.	English teachers should correct only errors that interfere with communication	200	6.2	20.1	23.2	21.5	12.3	2.11	1.11
4.	My classmates should correct my spoken errors during peer group session.	200	2.5	11.2	25.3	30.4	14.5	2.45	1.00

It can be seen from Table 1 above that, the students are favourably disposed to receiving error corrections from their language teachers. Adding up the total number of students who agree and strongly agree, about 70% of them support the first statement. The mean (3.11) for item 1 as against the means (2.1), (2.11) and (2.45) for items 2,3 and 4, shows clearly that the students want to improve their speaking skill in English language.

This results is consistent with the result of studies among ESL students conducted by Cathcart and Olsen (1976), Edge (1989), Chemoweth, Day, Chun and Luppescu (1983), and McCargar (1993) as well as those conducted by Oladejo (1993), and Bang (1999), which maintained that accuracy both in spoken and written English are vital because most examinations are based on how accurate a student is in constructing correct pieces of language. Research Question 2: What are the students' general preferences towards oral error correction during the teaching learning process?

Table 2: Students' Preferences towards Oral Error Correction during the Teaching-Learning Process.

S/N	Items	N	% 1 SD	% 2 D	% 3 U	% 4 A	% 5 SA	Mean	Standard Deviation
5.	I want my teacher to correct only my grammatical errors.	200	2.5	9.9	34.4	31.2	18.7	3.25	0.92
6.	I prefer only phonological error correction	200	8	2.6	9.5	36.5	44.1	3.96	0.82
7.	I prefer vocabulary error correction.	200	4	3.00	17.2	44.4	30.1	39.1	0.80
8.	I prefer pragmatic error correction	200	6	1.00	6.7	25.1	58.7	4.00	0.72

From Table 2, the mean (4.00) for item 8 shows that most of the students prefer pragmatic error correction as against items 5 (3.25), 6 (3.96), 7 (39.1) and 9 (2.9) respectively. Students' preference for pragmatic error correction in this study may be due to the fact that most of the students find it easy to construct grammatically correct sentences but may not be sure whether or not their utterances are appropriate in specific contexts. It can also be seen from Table 2, that item 6(44.1) shows that most of the students prefer phonological error correction during the teaching learning process. This preference is due to the fact that almost all the dialectical elements in the Nigerian environment do not share the same features with the English language features. Besides, the acquisition of English pronunciation, accent, and intonation patterns are difficult for Nigerian learners of English. Research Question 3: What are the students' preferences towards specific types of error correction techniques used during the teaching-learning process.

Table 3: Students most Preferred Methods of Correcting Oral Errors

S/N	Items	N	% 1 SD	% 2 D	% 3 U	% 4 A	% 5 SA	Mean	Standard Deviation
9.	Giving hints that would enable students to identify and self-correct the errors.	200	4.4	12.1	19.2	33.6	30.8	3.66	1.12
10.	Teacher explaining why the utterance is incorrect.	200	4.1	9.9	22.0	30.2	33.2	3.69	1.14
11.	The teacher points out the errors and provides the correct answer(s)	200	2.2	8.6	26.0	34.8	28.2	3.70	1.02
12.	The teacher presents the correct answer(s) when repeating all or part of the students' utterances.	200	6	1.00	6.7	25.1	58.7	4.00	72
13.	The teacher ignores the students' oral errors.	200	60.4	28.2	9.7	1.6	2.0	1.53	0.75

It can be seen from Table 3, that the students prefer the error correction technique in item 13 (3.75) more than the other methods. However, this is just a small margin compared with the other items in the table except item 14 (1.54) which receive the lowest favour of error correction technique used by English language teachers during the teaching learning process. This study shows that most of the students prefer the error correction technique in item 13. Lyster and Ranta (1997) refer to this method as the 'recast technique'. Recasts have been frequently employed by teachers in observational studies, Fanselow, (1976); (Cathcart& Olsen, (1976); Doughty, (1994).

Conclusion and Recommendation

It is imperative to point out that most of the public schools in South Western Nigeria and Nigeria in particular have large enrolment, consequently classes are usually large. This situation makes it very difficult to spend much of the teaching-learning period**s** handling students' errors. However, other challenges that might contribute to students' preferences are: teachers' variables, lack of qualified hands, inadequate teaching-learning facilities, inconsistent language policies and implementation amongst others. One clear implication of the findings of this study is that, there appears to be certain differences between the techniques English language teachers employed and what the students actually preferred. It therefore implies that this study provides information that may contribute to a clearer understanding of students' perceptions of classroom error correction.

Nunan (1987) argues that one of the most serious blocks to learning is the mismatch between the teacher and learner's expectations about what should happen in the classroom. Given that matching the expectations of teachers and learners is important for successful language learning, it can be hoped that teachers will take time to survey their students' perceptions towards pedagogical practice. Information about students will help the teachers know whether the pedagogical practice meets their students' expectation. Again, educational administrators should ensure that students' enrolments into the schools should be controlled in such a way as to reduce the students' population in the classroom for effective teaching and learning.

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