

Analysis of the relation between the levels of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) in students of 7th grade of basic education to 4th grade of high school and the Oral Corrective Feedback Strategies (OCFS) used in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes.

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Abstract

This research investigates the link between Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) and Oral Corrective Feedback Strategies (OCFS) in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms among Chilean students, spanning from 7th grade of basic education to 4th grade of high school. The study was initiated to address the challenge of anxiety in language learning and its impact on students' performance and participation. It aimed to identify corrective feedback methods that can mitigate anxiety while boosting motivation and engagement. A mixed-methods approach was used, combining quantitative data from surveys with qualitative insights from interviews. The research population consisted of 100 students and six teachers from three different Chilean regions. The instruments included the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), a questionnaire on corrective feedback, and semi-structured interviews. Data analysis employed paired t-tests, ANOVA, and thematic coding. The findings highlight that metalinguistic feedback and elicitation strategies effectively reduce FLA by promoting self-correction and engagement, while strategies like recasts and clarification requests foster greater classroom participation. However, explicit correction and repetition, though enhancing motivation, can elevate anxiety if not applied thoughtfully. The study concludes that OCFS, when tailored to the individual learner, significantly reduces FLA and enhances motivation. It calls for teacher training focused on creating supportive environments through adaptive feedback methods. The limitations of the study include the small sample size and the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which may have influenced the learning environment.

Introduction

Teachers are often confronted with various challenges in the classroom, making the need to expand their toolkit constant. This paper deals with issues that concern daily practice, three main factors that united three pre-service teachers in an effort to ascertain the well-being of our students during a challenging time of our undergraduate studies. The factors are Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA), Oral Corrective Feedback Strategies (OCFS), and their role in aiding students to achieve academic success while boosting motivation, engagement, and active participation in a setting of English as an Additional Language (EAL). EAL has become a privileged factor that favors academic success (Hessel & Strand, 2021). This paper's order will first contextualize the undergraduate thesis that gave way to this paper. Next, a discussion of the concepts of FLA and OCFS will be offered in relation to their role in academic success. Following that is a brief discussion of the results and conclusions obtained from the findings. Some limitations of this research will be discussed, and finally, guidelines in the form of a pedagogical proposal to mitigate FLA in our classrooms.

Contextualization

To provide structured contextualization for this study, an innovative model called the Ice Cream Cone Model, proposed by Brownhill et al. (2017) presents great potential. The model presents a system through which research inquiry can be organized. It is a funneling-down model composed of 5 stages; a) a main focus, b) an aspect of the main focus, c) the purpose or impact of the research, d) the research context, e) the participants and f) the questions. Each stage of the model will be developed.

a) Since the author's introduction to Krashen's (1982) theories by a dissertation advisor, it became evident that the teaching of languages was deeply shaped by socioemotional elements present in the learning environment as well as in the learners themselves. The theories describe various factors affecting students' motivation to engage and participate in the EFL classroom. Specifically, the theory known as "Affective Filter" has been noticed in our students throughout our training experiences and in our learning process as English learners and pre-service teachers. Here, it was rapidly agreed that socioemotional learning was a strong driving force in teaching.

b) The need for the aspect to explore came next. Upon further research, the concept of FLA stood out as a significant barrier to effective language acquisition during the early stages of research. Moreover, the impact of OCFS on the learner's level of FLA began to arise, prompting interest in the relation of these two aspects and their influence on the socioemotional elements and clarifying the selection of two of the three instruments used during the research.

c) The research demonstrated that there is a critical need for effective feedback mechanisms that not only correct linguistic errors but also foster a supportive learning environment (Horwitz, 2001). OCFS are a crucial pedagogical tool used to address learner errors in real-time, providing immediate and context-specific guidance. However, its application can have varying effects on learners, particularly in terms of anxiety and motivation (Zhu & Wang, 2019). Insights into learners' and teachers' beliefs about effective OCFS will be offered as the results and discussion are developed. How those specific beliefs intend to minimize FLA while enhancing socioemotional elements such as motivation, engagement, and participation will also be detailed.

d) The context of the country and the world during this research process should be clarified to facilitate understanding of this research. In late 2019, Chile experienced a significant social outburst triggered by widespread dissatisfaction with economic inequality stemming from the current neoliberal model (Aranguéz & Sanhueza, 2021). Shortly after, the COVID-19 pandemic hit in early 2020, adding to the nation's challenges during our 4th year of university, the year in which the author started the undergraduate thesis behind this research, fulfilling the degree requirements of Licenciadas en Educación (Bachelor's in Education). The events mentioned above led to rapid adaptations in education as society aimed to maintain educational continuity amid the unprecedented social and health crises, and one cannot but recall the adage of desperate times requiring desperate measures.

Some challenges from the adaptations made during the COVID-19 pandemic also impacted this research process. Figueroa-Céspedes et al. (2022) describe the difficulties generated by facing the litany of problems such as the swift transition to online learning, the mastery of digital tools for remote education, issues of communication, the fading line between person and the professional, the changes in social relationships for learners and teachers alike, pedagogical tensions due to methodological differences, and emotional discomfort and oscillation. All the while, socio-emotional learning increased in importance but suffered terribly at the same time (Muñoz & Lluch, 2020).

e) The instruments described hereinafter were applied in the classroom of teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in schools of three regions of Chile. The quantitative data was obtained from the implementations of i) a survey by Horwitz et al. (1986), the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), ii) a questionnaire designed by Zhu and Wang (2019) to elicit learners' beliefs about Corrective Feedback (CO) which synthesized previous studies present in the relevant literature, and iii) a socio-demographic survey answered by a sample of 100 students from 7th grade in basic education to 4th year of high-school, and iv) a semi-structured interview administered to six teachers. Data analysis included paired t-tests, ANOVA, and Pearson correlation coefficients for quantitative data, and thematic coding for

qualitative data. Ethical considerations such as informed consent and confidentiality were considered. This comprehensive methodology that combined quantitative measures with qualitative insights ensured a thorough examination of OCFS's impact on FLA.

f) Finally, the research question is as follows: What is the perception of English teachers regarding the relationship between the levels of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) in students from 7th grade to 1st year of high school and the Oral Corrective Feedback Strategies used by their teachers?

Theoretical framework

This study's theoretical framework is anchored in several key concepts and theories related to socioemotional learning and language learning.

An in-depth description of the concepts of FLA and OCFS will be shared. Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis discusses the importance of comprehensible input for language acquisition, whereas the Affective Filter Hypothesis posits that emotional factors such as anxiety can interfere with effective language learning.

FLA describes a type of anxiety specific to the context of learning and using a foreign language (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). It is characterized by feelings of tension, apprehension, and nervousness, which can significantly hinder language acquisition and performance. It is influenced by various factors, including the learner's personality, previous language learning experiences, and the perceived difficulty of the language being learned (Horwitz et al., 1986). Horwitz et al. (1986) detail evidence that FLA negatively affects learner motivation, reducing their willingness to participate in classroom activities and practice the target language. High levels of anxiety can lead to avoidance behaviors, where learners might refrain from speaking or engaging in classroom interactions, thus missing out on valuable practice opportunities (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991).

Participation in the EFL classroom is crucial for language development, providing learners with opportunities to practice and refine their language skills. However, FLA can significantly reduce participation levels, as anxious learners may fear making mistakes and being judged by their peers or instructors (Young, 1991). OCFS refers to the responses given by teachers to address and correct learners' errors in spoken language. There are various types of OCFS, each with its own implications for learner anxiety, motivation, and participation.

Zhu and Wang's (2019) description of OCFS are the bases for the following interpretations and examples. To start with the explicit strategies, there are 1) Explicit Correction, which involves directly indicating that an error has been made and providing the correct form.

For example, if a student says, "They want eating," the teacher might respond, "You should say, 'They want to eat'". This OCFS's impact is that, while an explicit correction is clear and direct, it can sometimes increase anxiety as it publicly highlights the learner's mistake. However, it is also highly effective in providing unambiguous feedback. Then 2) Clarification Requests, used when the teacher indicates that the student's utterance was not understood or was incorrect, prompting the student to reformulate their statement. For example, "What do you mean by 'He do?'". Clarification requests encourage learners to self-correct and reflect on their language use, fostering deeper cognitive engagement. However, they may cause temporary anxiety as students realize their initial attempt was flawed. Often found is 3) Metalinguistic Feedback, which provides comments, information, or questions related to the linguistic nature of the error without explicitly providing the correct form. For instance, "Do we use 'go' or 'goes' with 'we?'". Metalinguistic feedback promotes metacognitive awareness and self-correction. It encourages learners to think critically about their language use, enhancing long-term retention and understanding.

Non-explicit strategies are 4) Recasts, they involve the teacher reformulating the student's error without directly indicating that an error was made. For example, if a student says, "Peter don't like it," the teacher might respond, "Peter doesn't like it". Recasts are explained to be less intrusive and can reduce the negative emotional impact of making errors. They are subtle and often perceived as less threatening by learners, thus potentially lowering anxiety (Sheen, 2011). 5) Elicitation is another strategy that prompts learners to correct errors. For instance, if a student says, "He go to the mall," the teacher might respond, "He...?" prompting the student to complete the sentence correctly. This strategy fosters active learner engagement and encourages autonomous language use. It supports the development of self-monitoring skills, though it may initially increase anxiety as students are prompted to recognize and correct their errors. With 6) Repetition, the teacher repeats the learner's error, often with a questioning intonation, to draw attention to the mistake. For instance, "He go to the mall?". This strategy subtly indicates the presence of an error and encourages self-correction. It is less direct than explicit correction but still provides a clear signal to the learner. According to the literature, each strategy has both positive and negative aspects that might differ from what students and teachers need. This will be discussed further in this paper.

It now becomes relevant to explore the relationship between OCFS, FLA, and socio-emotional elements such as motivation, engagement, and participation. The latter is considered the sum of perceived motivation and engagement in class and will hereinafter be referred to as "perceived participation." We may highlight that it is openly accepted that effective OCFS can create a supportive learning environment that mitigates anxiety and encourages active engagement (Horwitz, 2001).

Motivation is also a critical factor in language learning. Intrinsic motivation is considered part of the student's personal characteristics, and it is shown to influence the effort and persistence learners put into their studies (Dörnyei, 2005). OCFS that are perceived as supportive and constructive can enhance intrinsic motivation, making learners more eager to participate and take risks in using the target language (Dörnyei, 2005).

Lyster and Ranta (1997) describe engagement as the degree of attention, curiosity, and interest that learners exhibit and teachers perceive in the learning process. By providing timely and appropriate feedback, OCFS can help maintain high levels of engagement, ensuring that learners remain focused and invested in their language development (Lyster & Ranta, 1997).

Finally, active perceived participation in classroom activities is essential for language practice and development (Sheen, 2011). Perceived participation is interpreted by Sheen (2011) as the behavior in which students are willing to practice the target language in the classroom. OCFS that minimize anxiety and encourage self-correction and reflection can increase learner participation, providing more opportunities for practice and improvement (Sheen, 2011).

Methodology

The study employed a mixed-methods approach to examine the effects of Oral Corrective Feedback Strategies (OCFS) on Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) and student participation in English language classrooms. The sample consisted of 100 students from 7th grade of basic education through the 4th year of high school enrolled in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) courses, varying in age, gender, and proficiency levels. On the one hand, quantitative data was collected through surveys identifying socio-demographic information, measuring FLA, and measuring their perceptions of OCFS used in classes by their EFL teachers. These instruments were applied to students alone. On the other hand, qualitative data were gathered via in-depth interviews, providing insights into teachers' experiences with OCFS. Data analysis included paired t-tests, ANOVA, and Pearson correlation coefficients for quantitative data, and thematic coding for qualitative data. Ethical considerations such as informed consent and confidentiality were considered. This comprehensive methodology combined quantitative measures with qualitative insights, thoroughly examining OCFS's impact on FLA.

Results

Moving on to the quantitative results, this study provided a variety of enlightening insights. For example, a relevant reduction in FLA among students who received metalinguistic feedback and elicitation strategies was found. These strategies encouraged self-correction and deeper cognitive engagement, allowing students time to process the feedback, identify the mistake, and successfully elicit the correct response. By using these strategies, students felt more accomplished, leading to lower anxiety levels.

Students exposed to recasts and clarification requests showed higher levels of perceived participation in classroom activities. These strategies were valued as less threatening and more supportive, fostering a more inclusive and encouraging learning environment.

The use of explicit correction and repetition was associated with increased intrinsic motivation among learners. These strategies provided clear and direct feedback, helping students understand and correct their mistakes, thus boosting their confidence and willingness to engage in class activities.

Engagement levels were highest among students who received a combination of feedback strategies. This demonstrated a multimodal approach helped maintain student interest and attention, facilitating continuous improvement and sustained effort in language learning.

Regarding qualitative results, interviews revealed that students appreciated immediate and specific feedback. They also valued feedback delivered in a supportive manner, which helped them feel more comfortable and less anxious about making mistakes. In addition, teachers noted an overall improvement in student performance and classroom dynamics after implementing corrective feedback strategies. They observed that students were more willing to take risks and participate in class, leading to more interactive and productive classroom sessions.

While the qualitative data highlighted a preference for feedback that encouraged self-correction and reflection, students expressed that feedback that involved them in the correction process (such as elicitation and metalinguistic feedback) was more effective in promoting long-term learning. This revealed that students wish to be corrected and feel compelled to actively participate when the strategies used in class are student-centered as well as kind; in other words, they feel encouraged by their teachers when they perceive corrections as help rather than simple clarifications or, even, scolding. It is critical to state that a supportive and non-threatening feedback environment significantly reduced FLA and enhanced the overall classroom atmosphere. This environment encouraged students to engage more actively and confidently in language learning activities.

Overall, the results of the study indicate a slight negative correlation between the use of OCFS and FLA levels, indicating that the type and manner of delivering oral corrective feedback play a role in influencing FLA, motivation, engagement, and participation among EFL students. Both students' and teachers' insights revealed that strategies that encourage self-correction, provide immediate and specific feedback, and foster a supportive learning environment are most effective in reducing anxiety and promoting active engagement in the language learning process.

The findings suggest that teachers should adopt a multimodal approach to feedback, combining various strategies to cater to learners' diverse needs. By creating a supportive and encouraging classroom atmosphere, teachers can significantly enhance the learning experience and outcomes for EFL students.

Discussion

Our findings are consistent with previous studies suggesting that Oral Corrective Feedback Strategies can mitigate language learning anxiety. Rassaei (2015) indicates that these strategies significantly impact reducing foreign language anxiety (FLA) in students. This reduction in anxiety is crucial for creating a conducive learning environment, as lower anxiety levels enhance students' willingness to participate and engage in language learning activities.

Explicit OCFS has been found to be more effective in reducing FLA compared to implicit OCFS. According to Zhu and Wang (2019), explicit feedback strategies are associated with lower levels of FLA. These strategies provide clear and direct corrections, which help students understand their mistakes and learn from them without feeling unduly stressed or anxious.

In addition to reducing anxiety, OCFS were found to improve academic performance and active perceived participation in class. Gan et al. (2018) observed a significant negative correlation between the use of OCFS and anxiety levels, indicating that as OCFS increases, anxiety decreases, leading to better academic outcomes and higher levels of student engagement. This improvement underscores the importance of incorporating OCFS into classroom practices to support student learning and achievement.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of OCFS can vary depending on the educational context and the individual characteristics of students, highlighting the need for a personalized approach. Sheen (2011) emphasizes that teachers should consider these characteristics when implementing OCFS to ensure its effectiveness. A personalized approach allows for adapting feedback strategies to meet the unique needs of each EFL student, fostering a more supportive and effective learning environment.

Pedagogically, the results suggest that teachers should adopt a combination of explicit and implicit feedback strategies tailored to their students' specific needs, as they can identify the varied and unique expressions of the factors of motivation, engagement, and participation in their specific context. Nassaji (2018) advocates for the implementation of adaptive OCFS to maximize the positive impact on learning. By combining different strategies, teachers can address various aspects of language learning, thus reducing FLA and enhancing overall student performance.

Limitations and implications

Numerous limitations of this paper include the small sample size, the study duration, the use of instruments that required translation and contextualization, and the impact of the COVID-19 emergency requiring online teaching for teachers, students of the sample, and the researchers. The online classes restricted oral production activities. The author recommends exploring other factors that affect FLA and the effectiveness of OCFS, perhaps even recreating the study in a post-COVID era. Addressing these limitations in future studies could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how correction strategies in oral activities influence language learning anxiety and academic performance, provide perspective on how to aid our students in overcoming anxiety while maximizing the likeliness of their participation, and how to implement effective oral production activities that support socioemotional learning.

These points clearly show how the study's findings can be applied in educational practice and suggest paths for future research in the field of foreign language teaching. Educators can create more supportive and productive learning environments that reduce FLA and enhance student success by understanding and implementing effective corrective strategies.

Pedagogical proposal

As a means of providing further indication of this study's applications in the EFL classroom, herewith is described a pedagogical proposal created to reduce foreign language anxiety (FLA) and enhance student motivation, engagement, and participation through the use of effective Oral Corrective Feedback Strategies.

Central to this proposal is integrating multimodal corrective strategies tailored to the individual needs of the student sample. The proposal seeks to create the supportive and non-threatening learning environment described throughout this paper by providing immediate and specific feedback that encourages self-correction and deeper cognitive engagement. Such an environment helps students feel comfortable and less anxious about making mistakes, fostering a more inclusive and encouraging classroom atmosphere.

Teacher training and development are crucial components of the proposal. For teachers to be equipped with the knowledge and skills to implement OCFS effectively, this paper is the first approach to guide your journey. This journey involves understanding the different types of feedback and how to adapt them to suit the diverse needs of their students. Recognizing students' individual characteristics and contexts is also emphasized, suggesting a personalized approach to feedback where strategies are adapted based on each student's specific challenges and strengths. Using the instruments mentioned above during your diagnostic process is a way you can incorporate pedagogical research as a fundamental building block for your teaching practice.

Increasing student participation in class is another key objective of the proposal. Once you have identified the needs and preferences of your specific class, either by observation or the application of these instruments, implementing feedback strategies that are perceived as supportive rather than punitive, where students are encouraged to engage more fully in the learning process, will be a strong guiding compass. Continuous improvement through regular feedback and reflection is supported, correcting immediate errors and helping students understand underlying language rules and patterns for long-term learning and retention.

The proposal also advocates for incorporating technology and gamification strategies to enhance feedback delivery and promote gamification strategies in the classroom. Nowadays, we often find various tools; the key is finding the ones that suit your and your students' needs. Online platforms can facilitate the provision of feedback, tools that enable self-correction and peer feedback, as well as websites, apps, and software that include game setting during all stages of an EFL class; warm-up, development, closing and assessment, regular monitoring and evaluation of the feedback and gamification strategies used are essential to ensure their effectiveness. Collecting data on student performance and anxiety levels allows for the continual refinement and improvement of the feedback process. Turning activities into games will allow for healthy competition, and promoting group activities where students feel supported by their peers can enhance group cohesion, reinforce strong identities and self-image, and spread comradery amongst your EFL students. Using mistakes as learning opportunities will both increase motivation and boost students' confidence, allowing them to achieve academic and socio-emotional goals.

Collaboration among students and peer feedback as a supplementary strategy are suggested. Incorporating self-assessment and peer-assessment instruments that incorporate socioemotional indicators is a safe and recommended approach, as it will help students develop both their language and cross-curricular competencies. Also, carefully and thoughtfully implementing peer assessment and peer-based feedback will allow talented students to support their classmates as they confidently demonstrate their knowledge and feel they are collaborating in the grand scheme of your teaching practice, allowing them to take a

protagonist role. This approach can build a sense of community and reduce anxiety through mutual support and learning. By adopting these comprehensive strategies, the pedagogical proposal aims to create a more effective and supportive learning environment that reduces FLA and enhances student engagement and performance.

Finally, the proposal suggests a specific curriculum for you to begin. The unit "Feelings and opinions" from the 7th grade of basic education curriculum in Chile (Ministerio de Educación de Chile, 2016), as well as content that aims to work on emotional intelligence as a socioemotional competence through art, is the perfect way to start. During such a critical age, peers' opinions and self-image are sometimes a factor that draws students to a constant state of anxiety or fear of embarrassment. By developing the content of emotions with students going through important cognitive changes, you will address more than one objective during your class, incorporating Content and Language Integrated Learning, which can help you achieve academic success in a challenging, healthy, affective, and effective classroom.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis's introduction and theoretical framework provide a comprehensive overview of the critical issues related to Oral Corrective Feedback Strategies, Foreign Language Anxiety, and their implications for student motivation, engagement, and participation in the EFL classroom. By exploring various OCFS and their impact on FLA, this study aims to identify effective pedagogical practices that support language learners in overcoming anxiety, enhancing their language skills, and promoting emotional intelligence through developing socio-emotional awareness. Through this research, there is hope to contribute to the development of more effective and supportive teaching methodologies in the field of EFL education.

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