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## Teacher feedback acceptance in English for specific purposes: A study in a Spanish EFL classroom

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### Abstract

This study investigates the role of teacher feedback in improving speaking skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, focusing on Vocational Training students in Spain. Despite the importance of feedback, large class sizes and examination-driven curricula often limit its availability, creating a gap in effective speaking skill development. This study aims to determine whether teacher feedback can mitigate these challenges by analyzing speaking tasks in an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classroom, specifically among Marketing students. Using recorded and transcribed classroom interactions of seven students, the findings reveal a strong dependence on teacher feedback, minimal peer feedback, and a lack of learner autonomy. These results highlight the crucial role of teacher feedback in student progress while emphasizing the need for strategies that encourage peer interaction and independent learning. The study underscores the necessity of fostering learner autonomy in EFL classrooms, suggesting that future research should explore methods to integrate more student-led feedback mechanisms.

**Keywords:** Autonomy in learning; EFL; speaking skills; teacher feedback; vocational training

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The study of feedback in contemporary cognitive research can be associated with two types of processing limitations (McLaughlin et al., 1983); The authors differentiate these limitations in terms of attention focus, which is relevant to this paper's objective of examining whether students pay attention to teacher-provided feedback and how they react to it. This reaction may partially depend on the different attitudes teachers adopt toward learners' errors. These attitudes typically manifest in two forms of teacher responses: verbal and non-verbal (Fanselow, 1977; Allwright et al., 1991; Sutiyo, 2018; Liu, 2021). Several other notable scholars in the field (Chaudron, 1977a; Nystrom, 1983) have explored this topic in depth.

Chaudron (1977a) provides a detailed model of teachers' reactive moves, based on his research on corrective discourse in French immersion classes at the elementary level in Canada. He concludes that most teachers focus more on content errors than on linguistic or phonological errors. This finding implies that corrective feedback is a significant factor in the student-teacher interaction (Nystrom, 1983). Chaudron's (1977a) model outlines the strategies teachers use in response to learners' errors.

Chaudron's (1977a) model of discourse aligns closely with the analysis proposed by Sinclair & Coulthard (2013), in that it identifies a third speech act in the typical teaching exchange: the teacher's reaction to the student's response. Sinclair & Coulthard (2013) identified three types of speech acts: Initiation, Response, and Follow-up. Chaudron (1977a) refers to this final act as Feedback. In classroom discourse, Allwright (1976) recognizes the same speech acts, creating ideal conditions for language learning: the teacher initiates, the student responds, and the teacher follows up.

Regarding feedback, there is inconsistency in how teachers address learner errors (Nystrom, 1983). Some errors are overlooked, while others receive significant attention. Overlooked errors do not aid student learning unless some students notice the lack of correction. In such cases, one might consider that the teacher does not provide corrective feedback, which can influence whether students respond to feedback on their errors.

The distinction between self-correction and peer correction is also important, as these methods may be employed if the teacher decides to inform students of their errors, allowing them to correct themselves or each other (Allwright et al., 1991; Zhang, 2024). Long (1977), and Fujii (2024), find peer feedback valuable, suggesting that it can be beneficial, particularly when students are making similar errors and can learn from each other's feedback.

In native speaker-non-native speaker interactions, Gaskill (1980) differentiates between self-correction and other-correction. He defines "correction" specifically as "other correction," which occurs when one speaker corrects another's utterance (Schegloff et al., 1977). Self-correction occurs before opportunities for other correction, making it essential to analyze how feedback is provided orally and whether students are receptive to it.

Feedback has been studied more extensively in oral contexts than in written ones, which suggests that self-correction is common in oral feedback (Allwright, 1976; Allwright et al., 1991; Pishghadam et al., 2011; Quinto, 2020; Ismail et al., 2023). This focus on oral communication aligns with the primary goal of the English language classroom observed in this study: developing oral production skills in English during Vocational Training lessons.

Another aspect to consider is the different types of reflective activities (Tarvin & Al-Arishi, 1991; Farrell, 2015) used in language classrooms. The process-oriented activity, consisting of three stages (proto-reflective, analytical, and evaluative) encourages students to assess their output and correct their errors. Self-correction can be beneficial in the foreign language classroom for two reasons: it enhances students' understanding of the language, and it indicates whether they pay attention to teacher feedback.

Most research on feedback has concentrated on correction frequency and error correction methods (Nystrom, 1983; Chaudron, 1977b; Iwaki et al., 2024). Other studies have examined feedback's effect on second language acquisition (Tomasello & Herron, 1989; Carroll et al., 1992; Chen & Zhang 2021). Tomasello

& Herron (1989) discuss how errors may result from native language structure transfer and compare two methods for correcting such errors in the foreign language classroom. This comparison may involve analyzing specific feedback types to determine if students pay attention.

Conversely, Carroll et al., (1992) focus on concept formation and identification studies involving non-linguistic concepts, demonstrating the utility of feedback. Variables such as feedback timing (immediate vs. delayed), form (reward vs. punishment, verbal vs. monetary), and nature (positive vs. negative) are important in assessing whether students pay attention to teacher feedback (Barringer & Gholson, 1979).

### **1.1. Purpose of study**

This study will primarily focus on the nature of feedback, as Long (1977) provides a more detailed discussion of feedback timing. According to Carroll et al., (1992), positive feedback confirms the correctness of the original behavior, while negative feedback indicates the behavior is incorrect. Forms of negative feedback include repetition, substitutions, and expansions. This paper aimed to determine whether students paid attention to the feedback provided by the teacher. Attention to feedback was interpreted as the acceptance of the teacher's corrective feedback. Several scholars (Martí Viaño and Sánchez Macarro, 1996; Tsang, 2004; Uysal & Aydin, 2017; Muslem, et al., 2021), a student's acceptance of the teacher's correction should be considered the first step toward achieving learning. The authors suggest that this acceptance is primarily based on the learner's desire to memorize the corrected output provided by the teacher.

The present study was set to test the following hypothesis: students most frequently accept corrective feedback when it is provided in a lesson involving adult learners who have a genuine interest in developing their interlanguage system.

## **2. METHODS AND MATERIALS**

### **2.1. Participants**

To demonstrate the acceptance of feedback, we recorded and transcribed sessions from an English language classroom during the teaching practice period of the MA in Teacher Training and Language Teaching, with a focus on English. The recorded classroom was part of a Business English course, inherently connected to English for Specific Purposes (ESP). This course was integrated into the Vocational Training curriculum for Commerce and Marketing at a high level and was conducted three times a week throughout the entire academic year of 2022-2023 at a Vocational Training school in the Valencian Region, Spain. The primary goal of the Business English course was to enhance the student's speaking skills. The class consisted of seven Spanish learners. Most of these students had completed their 2nd A-level. Some had started their university studies but chose to pursue Vocational Training at a higher level instead of completing their university degrees.

### **2.2. Data collection tool**

Data were collected and coded using the categories of corrective feedback and uptake (the students' responses) as developed by Lyster and Ranta (1997). Given the focus on analyzing teacher and learner behavior in this study, we concentrated on instances of corrective feedback and uptake within teacher-learner interactions in the classroom.

### **2.3. Procedure**

The observer collected audio recordings of classroom interactions during a 50-minute session. Throughout the 2022-2023 academic year, recordings were made during three different periods, corresponding to the first, second, and third terms. However, this paper focuses solely on the session recorded during the second term. To capture contextual and paralinguistic aspects of the EFL classroom, the observer also took detailed field notes. The recordings were transcribed faithfully and then coded according to the categories established by Lyster and Ranta (1997).

### **2.4. Analysis**

To analyze the acceptance and/or non-acceptance of feedback, the study focused on three different tasks that occurred in the transcripts of the recorded ESP language classroom. The first task was a free-form activity involving a conversation between the teacher and the students. The second task involved negotiation, which was intended to include a role-play component. However, the role-play did not take place, so it will not be discussed here. Instead, the research examined how the teacher provided feedback during this negotiation activity and whether the students accepted it, as there was a significant amount of feedback to consider. The third activity analyzed was a listening comprehension task, aimed at assessing whether students understood the material. The feedback provided in this task appeared to aid learners in understanding the content rather than serving as purely corrective feedback. The researcher refers to this task as "commentary on the text."

### 3. RESULTS

To effectively analyze these tasks, it is useful to examine them separately to identify in which area feedback most frequently was accepted. The researcher refers to these tasks as T1, T2, and T3. T1 corresponds to the free task, which involves a conversation between the students and the teacher. T2 pertains to the negotiation activity, and T3 relates to the listening comprehension task or commentary on the text (Tables 2 and 3).

**Table 1**

*Accepted feedback*

Feedback on	T1	T2	T3	Total
Pronunciation	1	6	-	7
Structures	1	3	-	4
Vocabulary	1	3	2	6
Content	-	-	2	2
Total	3	12	4	19

**Table 2**

*Non-accepted feedback*

Feedback on	T1	T2	T3	Total
Pronunciation	-	-	-	-
Structures	1	2	-	3
Vocabulary	-	-	1	1
Content	1	-	-	1
Total	2	3	1	6

The results indicated that students were more likely to accept corrections related to vocabulary (86%) and structures (80%). This higher acceptance rate may be attributed to the corrections being concise and focused on a single problem, potentially facilitating more effective learning. It is noteworthy that the findings of Martí Viaño & Sánchez Macarro (1996) differ from these results; their research found that learners were more inclined to accept corrections in the area of pronunciation rather than structures. Similarly to Martí Viaño & Sánchez Macarro (1996), Muslem et al., (2021) accepted in a positive manner oral corrective feedback from their EFL instructor which was focused on the area of pronunciation. Also, Uysal & Aydin (2017) differed from the outcomes obtained in this research since EFL teachers aimed to correct errors focusing, mainly, on repetitious, meaning distorting, and conversation errors as well as pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary errors. However, on the one hand, it is important to note that Martí Viaño & Sánchez Macarro (1996) analysis was based on 30 recorded lessons at the University of Valencia with intermediate-level students while, on the other hand, Uysal & Aydin (2017) focused on analyzing 15 English instructors working in School of Foreign Languages at Balikesir University. In contrast, the present study's findings are based on an advanced-level ESP language classroom in a Vocational Training school.

Regarding non-acceptance, the area of content (33%) was where students most frequently rejected the feedback provided by the teacher. This might be due to misunderstandings on the students' part about what the teacher was attempting to elicit. An illustrative example is shown below:

*T: Very usual by the time. Right, let's have. What are you doing now?*

*S2: Nothing*

*T: Nothing. OK, OK, that's very good English. What did you do last night, Rosa?*

In this instance, the teacher was eliciting information from the students to allow them to practice speaking, which was the primary focus of this ESP classroom aimed at communication. However, the student did not respond as the teacher had expected. Consequently, the teacher responded with, "That's very good English." Although the student could have accepted this feedback and continued speaking, the teacher immediately addressed another student, thereby not allowing the first student the opportunity to accept and act on the feedback.

In other cases, non-acceptance was primarily due to the teacher continuing to speak, and attempting to elicit responses from other students. As a result, the student who made the error did not have the opportunity to accept the feedback provided by the teacher.

*T: OK, don't worry. They didn't mind. Montse, did you watch "todos los hombres son iguales"?*

*S2": yesterday was the last, the last chapter*

*T: Chapter. And did you study? And what are your plans for this weekend? Your plans?*

In this instance, the teacher provided feedback on the pronunciation of the word "chapter" (/ˈtʃæp.tər/). However, the student did not have the opportunity to accept this feedback because the teacher continued eliciting information from other students, leaving the student who made the error unable to respond to the correction.

Non-acceptance also occurred in situations where the teacher continued to explain the meanings of certain words or expressions. In these cases, students were not given the chance to accept the feedback. The example below illustrates this scenario:

*S1: Well, the way people our products are five years old or the guarantee is not oport of the what they have. Mr. Angeline and brothers is...haven't eh ninguna, any...*

*T: Any...*

*S1: Anyone*

*T: Any, guarantee (writing on the blackboard) right.*

*S1: Eh, right. Mr. Peters and sisters, brother any garantes. No, he has (Teacher is writing on the blackboard) no one.*

*T: Moment. You have (writing on the blackboard) And...one point:*

*S1: there isn't!*

*T: Guarantee. We were talking about this import, ok? Guarantee, you have a watch and if it breaks, you have a valuable guarantee, you can check this to the mechanic, and they can mend it for you free, (...)*

In this instance, the student appeared to understand the meaning of "guarantee," or at least gave that impression. Our interpretation is that the teacher was unsure whether the student truly understood the term, which may explain why the teacher decided to provide a definition. The feedback here was centered on vocabulary, as the teacher seemed to prioritize defining the word "guarantee." However, the student's original error was related to pronunciation, which was not addressed due to the teacher's focus on the definition. Ideally, the teacher would have corrected the pronunciation by emphasizing the correct syllable, but this aspect was overlooked, possibly because the teacher considered the lexical understanding more important.

It is worth noting that some errors were initially ignored by the teacher, likely to encourage students to speak more freely without the immediate concern of making mistakes.

*S4: eh, the transport lorry insurance, insurance of lorry are an insurance of...*

*S2: they didn't mind.*

The teacher chose to correct such errors after the students had finished speaking to avoid interrupting them. This approach involved delaying the correction until an appropriate moment, ensuring a smoother flow of conversation. It is important to note that, in certain contexts, the teacher utilized a visual technique, which is quite important and effective in the language classroom, to provide corrections. This was done by writing the corrected version on the blackboard.

*T: OK OK, thank you. See treatment, payment, remember, Dolores, M<sup>a</sup> Dolores and Marisa, remember insurance, insurance (writing on the blackboard and stressing on the correct syllable) Right? Paying for is paying for, the Spanish way is paying a house, in English is paying for...a house! and then when you're talking about the amount, ok, the amount, what do you do? A ver, desde un millón hasta dos millones, how do you say that? Since or From? For cantidades, what do we use? Distance de Valencia a Madrid*

The technique used, that is, emphasizing the correct syllable after writing the word on the blackboard, was likely very effective, as it may have helped students better assimilate the correct pronunciation. However, a problem arose in this context: the student did not explicitly accept the correction. This was likely because the teacher's goal was to provide multiple forms of feedback while simultaneously attempting to elicit the correct answer from a grammatical structure.

*S3: From...*

*T: OK, very good (writing on the blackboard). From...to England. There is a verb to express the amount in euros which is plus, ok. Amparo or Sandra, whoever. What do you sell?*

The example above illustrates how the teacher confirmed the correct structure, even reinforcing it by writing it on the blackboard, after giving positive feedback to the students who attempted to provide the correct answer. This technique may suggest that students accepted the corrective feedback provided by the teacher. The example below demonstrates a situation where the student was attempting to use the structure "since...until." As the student appeared unfamiliar with this structure, the teacher opted to provide the correct form in English, using visual support to aid understanding.

*S4: Eh, eh, since...eso...hasta (T. writes in the blackboard) since eleven hundred million until twenty-five million euros*

The student's acceptance of this structure occurred because the teacher had previously provided assistance using the blackboard. It is important to highlight other techniques that could be beneficial for the teacher when correcting errors. One such technique involves the teacher repeating any word or expression that was not pronounced correctly, allowing students the opportunity to accept and internalize the correction.

*T: And what happens?*

*S1: Eh, they leave*

*T: They leave*

*S1: they open the window*

This example took place during the free task, or conversation, where the students and the teacher were discussing what had happened in the last chapter of "Todos los hombres son iguales." In this instance, the student did not accept the correction because she perceived the teacher's response as a confirmation of what had been said, and thus continued with the conversation.

Another technique the teacher could consider is encouraging self-correction. Self-correction occurs when a student has the opportunity to recognize and correct their error.

*T: What about the man? The man. A man who is? There you are*

*S3: I don't remember her...his name*

*T: his name. Did you read the chapter?*



In this extract, we observed that the student corrected herself after becoming aware of the error. The teacher then confirmed the correct utterance by repeating the correct form. Self-correction can also occur when the teacher prompts the student to correct the error once it has been identified.

*T: Ok, you know, when you use, I don't know you use s like this, for us is very long, is the same than sss, ok. They probably want to know what is this, you have said SURS, and how do you pronounce this word? (writing on the blackboard)*

*S5: El; Bl; EM*

*T: no, try again*

*S5: Al; Bl; EM*

It should be noted that, after identifying the error, the teacher used visual support to highlight the mistake and then suggested that the student correct it. Self-correction does not inherently imply acceptance by the students, as acceptance typically occurs when the correction is provided by the teacher or another speaker.

According to authors (Schegloff et al., 1977; Kormos, 1999; Rabab'ah, 2013; Islam, 2022), self-correction is generally preferred in conversation. This preference can help the speaker assimilate their errors more effectively. The same holds in the foreign language classroom, where self-correction is a valuable tool in the process of second language acquisition.

The teacher might also consider using discourse markers as a strategy for providing corrections.

*S4: ok, a ver...eh, the limit time, eh...three weeks, three all in a mose-waterblack and two or three days infrilted in chemical (/ˈkem.ɪ.kəl/) products*

*T: chemical? /ˈkem.ɪ.kəl/*

*S4: chemical /ˈkem.ɪ.kəl/*

*T: chemical /ˈkem.ɪ.kəl/, very good*

In this instance, the student made a pronunciation error, prompting the teacher to use a discourse marker, the question mark, to correct. The teacher's intent was likely to draw attention to the error, making students aware of it, and thereby helping them achieve the correct pronunciation more easily.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the focus of attention in the classroom may partially depend on the student's acceptance of the correction provided by the teacher. We have noted that acceptance occurs primarily when the teacher employs various techniques that aid students in better assimilating their errors. Non-acceptance often stems from the teacher's actions; for instance, the teacher may not wait for students to accept the correction because they become engrossed in providing explanations and comments, or they continue eliciting responses from or addressing other students. This often happens when the teacher prioritizes the lesson topic over the language form.

Additionally, self-correction should be considered a valuable technique in the language acquisition process, as it frequently occurs in conversation. However, it does not necessarily imply acceptance since the students have already corrected themselves without the teacher's intervention. This paper has aimed to focus on the response to correction in the foreign language classroom.

To enhance the effectiveness of teacher feedback in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classrooms, several strategies should be considered. First, encouraging peer feedback could promote greater student autonomy and reduce reliance on the teacher. Future research could explore methods to integrate peer-to-peer interactions and evaluate their impact on speaking skills development. Additionally, incorporating more reflective practices, such as self-assessment, could foster learner independence and help students become more aware of their errors and progress.

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Moreover, addressing the limitations posed by large class sizes and exam-focused curricula requires innovative approaches, such as technology-based feedback tools or group-based speaking activities, to ensure more personalized feedback for each student. Future studies might also investigate the long-term effects of feedback on student language acquisition, particularly about fostering interlanguage development in diverse learning environments. Finally, expanding research to include different educational levels, such as Primary Education, Secondary as well as A-level, and contexts could provide a broader understanding of feedback's role in language learning.

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## APPENDIX

Here's the full transcript of the lesson which was recorded:

**T:** Very usual by the time. Right, let's have. What are you doing now?

**S2:** Nothing.

**T:** Nothing. OK, OK, that's very good English. What did you do last night, Rosa?

**T:** OK, don't worry. They didn't mind. Montse, did you watch "*Todos los hombres son iguales*"?

**S2:** Yesterday was the last, the last chapter.

**T:** Chapter. And did you study? And what are your plans for this weekend? Your plans?

**S1:** Well, the way people our products are five years old or the guarantee is not oport of the what they have. Mr. Angeline and brothers is... haven't eh... ninguna, any...

**T:** Any...

**S1:** Anyone.

**T:** Any, guarantee (writing on the blackboard), right.

**S1:** Eh, right. Mr. Peters and sisters, brother any guarantees. No, he has...

**T:** (writing on the blackboard) No one. Moment. You have (writing on the blackboard)... And...one point.

**S1:** There isn't!

**T:** Guarantee. We were talking about this import, ok? Guarantee, you have a watch and if it breaks, you have a valuable guarantee. You can check this to the mechanic, and they can mend it for you free.

**S4:** Eh, the transport lorry insurance, insurance of lorry are an insurance of...

**S2:** They didn't mind.

**T:** OK, OK, thank you. See treatment, payment. Remember, Dolores, M<sup>a</sup> Dolores, and Marisa, remember insurance, insurance (writing on the blackboard and stressing on the correct syllable). Right? Paying for is paying for. The Spanish way is paying a house, in English it's paying for... a house! And when you're talking about the amount, OK, the amount, what do you do? A ver, desde un millón hasta dos millones, how do you say that? Since or from? For candidates, what do we use? Distance de Valencia a Madrid?

**S3:** From...

**T:** OK, very good (writing on the blackboard). From... to England. There is a verb to express the amount in euros which is *plus*, OK. Amparo or Sandra, whoever. What do you sell?

**S4:** Eh, eh, since... eso... hasta (T. writes on the blackboard) since eleven hundred million until twenty-five million euros.

**T:** And what happens?

**S1:** Eh, they leave.

**T:** They leave.

**S1:** They open the window.

**T:** What about the man? The man. A man who is? There you are.

**S3:** I don't remember her... his name.

**T:** His name. Did you read the chapter?

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**T:** OK, you know, when you use, I don't know, you use *s* like this, for us it's very long. It's the same as *sss*, OK? They probably want to know what this is. You have said *SURS*, and how do you pronounce this word? (writing on the blackboard).

**S5:** El; Bl; EM

**T:** No, try again.

**S5:** Al; Bl; EM.

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**S4:** OK, a ver... eh, the limit time, eh... three weeks, three all in a mose-water black and two or three days infiltrated in chemical (/ˈkem.ɪ.kəl/) products.

**T:** Chemical? /ˈkem.ɪ.kəl/

**S4:** Chemical. /ˈkem.ɪ.kəl/

**T:** Chemical. /ˈkem.ɪ.kəl/ Very good.