



PRACTICE OF CORRECTING LEARNERS' ERROR IN HIGHER SECONDARY LEVEL EDUCATION IN NEPAL

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to investigate the practice of correcting learners' error in higher secondary level education in Nepal. The subject of this study comprises 552 learners from 22 higher secondary school of academic year 2015/6 and 27 ELT teachers engaged in teaching +2 level whom a questionnaire was administered. The data obtained were analyzed using cross tabulation of descriptive statistics. The result showed that ELT teachers of higher secondary level education in Nepal were found high practitioners of practicing instant, direct and teacher correction techniques giving high priority to global as well as local error focusing more on both linguistic and sociolinguistic errors.

Keywords: ELT students; error correction; higher secondary level education

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1. INTRODUCTION

Error refers to the deviated form of language committed at competence level by second language learners while learning second language and the correcting error is a task of providing learners a constructive feedback to improve their partial learning. There is a substantial body of literature carried out in error analysis. However, no research has been carried out in revealing the practice of correcting learners' errors in context of higher secondary level education in Nepal especially in the marginalized area of Bara district. Hence, the objective of this study is to accomplish the task of investigating the practice of correcting learners' errors in the aforementioned area.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Correcting Learners' Errors

Any of the languages consists of certain norms and deviation in such norms is generally

called mistakes. Mistake is an umbrella term that comprises both performance mistake and error. Mistake is generally committed at performance level and errors at competence level. Therefore, errors are more serious than mistakes and they are to be seriously taken into consideration in teaching learning activities.

Committing error in the beginning history of teaching learning activities used to be considered to be sin, however, attitude has been changed in the sense that "making mistakes plays an important and useful part in language learning" (Spratt, Pulverness and Williams 62) since "good learners use their mistakes to improve their own language abilities" (Roberts and Griffiths 291). It is learners' nature of committing error that gives teachers information about their partial learning and to treat them accordingly to overcome the issue.

2.2 Purpose of Correcting Errors

The main purpose of error correction is to prevent learners' errors from being fossilized and to use them as a basis for teaching whole class so as to prevent from committing similar types of errors (Ur 89). However, the major limitations and problems with the error correction is that it is reported to be unable to produce consistent result since students are found to be repeating the same errors though they are corrected. To prevent learners committing errors, it is suggested to provide the exposure of language giving them opportunities to focus on the form of language (Spratt, Pulverness and Williams 64).

2.3 Perspectives on Error Correction

There are different perspectives on error correction whether to tolerate or correct. Those who are in favor of tolerating errors view that learners' error is to be tolerated so that they can take risk in communicating even they are unsure about the correct language form; but those who are in its against view that there might be "the risk of fossilization of errors" (Sheilis 139). Truscott (qtd. in Roberts and Griffiths 286) suggests to avoid the error correction stating harmful impact in learning since "it may activate the 'affective filter' by raising the students' level of anxiety which in turn prevents the learner from actually acquiring communicative ability" (Schulz 49).

2.4 Techniques of Error Correction

There are different techniques applied for correcting learners. Regarding the time considered for correcting, there are instant and delayed techniques. In the instant techniques, the learners' errors are considered serious and they are corrected immediately whenever they commit errors; whereas in delayed techniques, learners' errors are considered as a part of learning and let them happen which might be checked later if necessary. But, some of the researchers (Chunhong and Griffiths 314; James 242) argue against delayed due to its ineffectiveness. It is suggested that serious types of errors are to be corrected immediately since post correction cannot make learners remember anything (Sharma).

Considering the psychological process adopted while correcting learners, there are face

saving and face threatening techniques. In face saving technique, learners' affective factors are considered while correcting whereas in face threatening technique such factors are not taken into consideration.

Regarding the type of error focused to correct, there are of two techniques namely local correction and global correction. It is suggested to correct only global type of error since it inhibits learning otherwise frequent correction for minor type of error might destroy the confidence level of learners. Regarding the form focused while correcting, correction techniques can be linguistic and sociolinguistic. In the linguistic techniques, emphasis is given to correct grammar and pronunciation whereas in sociolinguistic techniques, focus is given to correct even in register, voice, tone, body language etc. Mendelson (qtd. in Sharma) states that sociolinguistic correction is more important than linguistic correction.

Regarding the procedure of correcting learners, there are direct and indirect techniques. In the direct procedure technique, teacher identifies and corrects where learners' commit errors; but in indirect procedure, teacher highlights the area of error whether circling or underlining with red pencil and let learners correct themselves (Yoke, Rajendran and Sain 176). It is a conventional practice of providing corrective feedback in indicating the erroneous part with "the provision of the correct target language form or meta-linguistic information about the error" (Lo, Wang and Yeh 2). Krahnke and Christison recommend indirect technique of correcting errors instead of direct one for those errors which cause serious interference in comprehension "employing peers and generally assisting and encouraging students to use communicatively and interactionally modulated repair and clarification techniques to improve accuracy" (246). However, the techniques of correcting or providing corrective feedback, whether direct i.e. coded or indirect i.e. uncoded has almost the same impact on students' ability to detect and correct different grammatical error types" (Asassfeh 93).

Regarding the priority given while correcting, there are mainly three techniques for

error correction namely self correction, peer correction and teacher correction. In self correction techniques, learners correct their error themselves; in peer correction, the piece of work is corrected by each other and in teacher correction, teacher corrects learners' performance. Mesgar identifies the techniques of red-penciling techniques in which errors committed by learners are underlined by teacher "without feedback and guidance leaving all responsibility of correction to the students" (153). Self correction and peer correction techniques are considered to be motivating techniques. Students are found to have shown "great interest and willingness to contribute in writing activities when they are provided opportunity to correct their own mistakes" (Gulzar, Jilani and Javid 29). However, they are reported to be ineffective due to their incapability of correcting themselves (Chunhong and Griffiths 314; James 242). They suggest to provide non-threatening and positive feedback with caution and sensitivity to preserving the confidence and motivation.

2.5 Strategies for Correcting Spoken and Written Text

For the progressive achievement of language, learners' error is to be corrected being extreme patience with tactful intervention showing high concern emphasizing on the motivational influence-relaxing atmosphere (Agudo 207; Mishra 126)

Recasting the correct form of learners' erroneous expression without comment, getting learners to produce the correct form from their own side; requesting them for clarification of the meaning; repeating the learners' erroneous expression with rising intonation mixed with the expression of doubt so as to make them correct themselves are the strategies for oral correction (Ur 95). The significant thing to be considered while correcting is the avoidance of humiliating students or making them feel that making a mistake is bad (Sharma). Similarly, the procedures that can be applied for the correction of written work may consist of correcting a particular aspect of work at a time to make learners concentrate on a particular aspect to improve; underlining the erroneous statement providing written symbol in the margin in

order to make them correct themselves; providing inspiring comment at the end of their work and encouraging peer correction asking them to correct the work of each other (Sharma).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Questions

The research question to facilitate objective of this study is: 3.1.1 What is the practice of correcting learners' errors in context of higher secondary level education in Nepal?

3.2 Participants

The study consists of 579 participants. Among the respondents, 552 (95.33%) were ELT students of grade 12 from 22 higher secondary school of Bara district of Nepal and 27 (4.66%) were ELT teachers engaged in teaching +2 level. Respondents were sampled using multi-stage cluster sampling and the schools that of fish bowl procedure.

3.3 Instruments

The instrument used for this study was a questionnaire with 6 items coping major area in the practice of correcting errors. The instrument was dully designed to cover the content of practicing error correction to establish content validity and expert was consulted for maintaining face validity.

4. Results

Regarding the time considered for correcting students (Q1a), the result in Table 1 showed that 77.8% ELT teachers were found to have practiced correcting learners instantly; 14.8% were delayed and 7.4% both instant and delayed while 75.9% students responded that their ELT teachers preferred correcting instantly; 17.8% responded delayed and 6.3% responded both instant and delayed. In overall, the practice of instant correction (76.0%) was found high followed by delayed (17.6%) and both i.e. instant and delayed (6.4%).

Regarding the type of error focused to correct (Q1b), the result in Table 2 showed that 51.9% ELT teachers were found to have focused on correcting global errors; 40.7% on local errors and 7.4% on both local and global while 44.9% students responded that their ELT teachers focused on correcting both local and global errors; 33.2% responded global and 21.9% local. In overall, the practice of correcting both local and global error

(43.2%) was found high followed by global (34.0%) and local error (22.8 %).

Table 1. The Time Considered for Correcting

			Q1a. Time considered for correcting			Total
			Instant	Delayed	Both	
Respondents	Students	Count	419	98	35	552
		% within Respondents	75.9%	17.8%	6.3%	
	Teachers	Count	21	4	2	27
		% within Respondents	77.8%	14.8%	7.4%	100.0%
Total		Count	440	102	37	579
		% within Respondents	76.0%	17.6%	6.4%	100.0%

Table 2. The Type of Error Focused to Correct

			Q1b. Error focused to correct			Total
			Local	Global	Both	
Respondents	Students	Count	121	183	248	552
		% within Respondents	21.9%	33.2%	44.9%	
	Teachers	Count	11	14	2	27
		% within Respondents	40.7%	51.9%	7.4%	100.0%
Total		Count	132	197	250	579
		% within Respondents	22.8%	34.0%	43.2%	100.0%

Regarding the psychological process adopted while correcting learners (Q1c), the result in Table 3 showed that 81.5% ELT teachers were found to have adopted face saving techniques; 14.8% face threatening and 3.7% both face saving and face threatening while 86.6% responded that their ELT teachers adopted face saving; 10.0% face

threatening and 3.4% both face saving and face threatening. In overall, the practice of face saving techniques of correcting (86.4%) was found high followed by face threatening techniques (10.2%) and both face saving and face threatening techniques of correcting (3.5%).

Table 3. The Psychological Process Adopted while Correcting

			Q1c. Psychological process of correcting			Total
			Face Threatening	Face Saving	Both	
Respondents	Students	Count	55	478	19	552
		% within Respondents	10.0%	86.6%	3.4%	
	Teachers	Count	4	22	1	27
		% within Respondents	14.8%	81.5%	3.7%	100.0%
Total		Count	59	500	20	579
		% within Respondents	10.2%	86.4%	3.5%	100.0%

Regarding the form focused while correcting learners (Q1d), the result in Table 4 showed that 59.3% ELT teachers were found to have focused on linguistic form; 33.3% on sociolinguistic and 7.4% on both linguistic and sociolinguistic while 39.3% students responded that their ELT teachers focused

on both linguistic and sociolinguistic; 32.2% on linguistic and 28.4% sociolinguistic errors. In overall, the practice of both linguistic and sociolinguistic correction (37.8%) was found high followed by correcting linguistic (33.5%) and sociolinguistic errors (28.7%).

Table 4. The Form Focused while Correcting

			Q1d. Form focused while correcting			Total
			Linguistic	Sociolinguistic	Both	
Respondents	Students	Count	178	157	217	552
		% within Respondents	32.2%	28.4%	39.3%	
	Teachers	Count	16	9	2	27
		% within Respondents	59.3%	33.3%	7.4%	
Total		Count	194	166	219	579
		% within Respondents	33.5%	28.7%	37.8%	100.0%

Regarding the procedure followed by ELT teachers while correcting (Q1e), the result in Table 5 showed that 48.1% ELT teachers were found to have followed the procedure of direct correction techniques; 44.4% responded to have followed indirect and 7.4% responded both while 74.5%

students responded that their ELT teachers followed direct techniques; 16.1% indirect and 9.4% both direct and indirect. In overall, the practice of direct techniques of error correction (73.2%) was found high followed by indirect (17.4%) and both direct and indirect techniques of correction (9.3%).

Table 5 The Procedure Followed to Correct

			Q1e. Procedure followed to correct			Total
			Direct	Indirect	Both	
Respondents	Students	Count	411	89	52	552
		% within Respondents	74.5%	16.1%	9.4%	
	Teachers	Count	13	12	2	27
		% within Respondents	48.1%	44.4%	7.4%	
Total		Count	424	101	54	579
		% within Respondents	73.2%	17.4%	9.3%	100.0%

Regarding the priority given to error correction (Q1f), the result in Table 6 showed that 55.6% ELT teachers were found to have given priority to peer correction; 18.5% to self; 18.5% to peer; 3.7% to self & peer and 3.7% to self & teacher correction while 89.7% students responded that their ELT teachers gave priority to teacher correction techniques; 3.3% to self; 2.9% to self & teacher; 1.6% to peer & teacher correction; 1.3% to peer correction and 0.9% to all and 0.4% to self & peer. In overall, the practice of teacher correction techniques (86.4%)

was found high followed by self (4.0%), peer (3.8%), self & teacher (2.9%), peer & teacher (1.6%), all (0.9%) and self & peer correction techniques (0.5%).

5. Discussion

Regarding the time considered for correcting students, in overall, the practice of instant correction (76.0%) was found high followed by delayed (17.6%) and both i.e. instant and delayed (6.4%). Regarding the type of error focused to correct, the practice of correcting both local and global error (43.2%) was found high followed by

global (34.0%) and local error (22.8 %). Regarding the psychological process adopted while correcting learners, the practice of face saving techniques of correcting (86.4%) was found high followed by face threatening techniques (10.2%) and both face saving and face threatening techniques of correcting (3.5%). Regarding the form focused while correcting learners, the practice of both linguistic and sociolinguistic correction (37.8%) was found high followed by correcting linguistic (33.5%) and sociolinguistic errors (28.7%). Regarding the

procedure followed by ELT teachers while correcting, the practice of direct techniques of error correction (73.2%) was found high in comparison to indirect (17.4%) and both direct and indirect techniques of correction (9.3%). Regarding the priority given to error correction, the practice of teacher correction techniques (86.4%) was found high followed by self (4.0%), peer (3.8%), self & teacher (2.9%), peer & teacher (1.6%), all (0.9%) and self & peer correction techniques (0.5%).

Table 6. The Priority Given for Correcting Error

			Q1f. Priority given for correcting							Total
			Self	Peer	Teacher Correcting	Self & Peer	Self & Teacher	Peer & Teacher	All	
Respondent	Students	Count	18	7	495	2	16	9	5	552
		% within Respondents	3.3%	1.3%	89.7%	0.4%	2.9%	1.6%	0.9%	100.0%
	Teachers	Count	5	15	5	1	1	0	0	27
		% within Respondents	18.5%	55.6%	18.5%	3.7%	3.7%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	23	22	500	3	17	9	5	579
		% within Respondents	4.0%	3.8%	86.4%	0.5%	2.9%	1.6%	0.9%	100.0%

6. Conclusion

After all discussion, it can be concluded that ELT teachers engaged in teaching in higher secondary level were found high practitioners of adopting instant, direct and teacher correction techniques giving high priority to global as well as local error focusing on both linguistic and sociolinguistic errors.

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