

The Effect of Oral Corrective Feedback on Chinese Primary Students' English Learning Motivation

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Abstract—Oral corrective feedback (OCF) plays a significant role in affecting students' English learning motivation. However, limited studies were conducted in Chinese classrooms. To address the gap, the current study investigated how OCF influenced Chinese young English learners' motivation. The participants were 181 students from a Chinese primary school. They were divided into the younger group (98 Grade-three (G3) students) and the older group (84 Grade-five (G5) students). Questionnaires on motivation and OCF were administered first. Ten English lessons (5 for G3 and 5 for G5) were recorded later. Results showed that explicit feedback was more frequent and motivating than implicit feedback. Feedback frequency had no significant correlation with motivation.

Index Terms—China, English learning motivation, oral corrective feedback, young English learners.

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, English taught as a foreign language (EFL) has become an important subject in China's primary schools. In China's form-based classrooms, OCF not only corrects mistakes but also affects students' motivation. Though much research has examined factors that may influence students' learning motivation [1], how OCF affects Chinese young EFL learners' learning motivation is largely missing in current research of EFL teaching and learning.

Therefore, the present study aimed to investigate how OCF influenced the learning motivation of Chinese young EFL learners. The research located its context in China because the country has the largest number of children learning EFL in the world [1], which means that addressing the gap will bring benefits to a larger group of students.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Part 1: studies on OCF in second language classrooms

A. Types of OCF

Reference [2] first identified six types of OCF: recasts, elicitation, clarification requests, metalinguistic clues, explicit corrections, and repetitions. They were classified into two categories — reformulation and prompts — according to whether learn repair is encouraged [3]. Based on that, [4] classified OCF into explicit and implicit feedback. The difference is that explicit feedback provides overt indicators of mistakes whereas implicit one does not contain such indicators. Previous research argued that explicit indications

of mistakes may have an impact on students' motivation [5]. This means that the explicitness of OCF may be related to motivation level and needs to be investigated in more contexts. Therefore, this research adopted the explicit/implicit dichotomy [4].

B. OCF in Experimental and Intact Classroom Settings

Whether feedback should be conducted in laboratory or intact classroom settings needs to be considered. In the experimental settings, feedback types are generally consistent, and the intervening factors are strictly controlled [6], [7]. However, in intact classroom settings, there are more unavoidable intervening factors [8], [9]. Reference [10] argued that classroom-based studies are most likely to offer a better understanding of OCF occurring in classrooms. Therefore, this research also investigated OCF in an intact classroom setting because a well-controlled environment in laboratory settings is almost impossible for daily teaching. The implications gained from real classrooms can be more practical for future teaching practices.

Part 2: Crucial frameworks of learning motivation

Learning motivation has been widely investigated. Robert Gardner and Wallace Lambert, two Canadian psychologists, together made motivation a social psychological framework, bringing second language motivation research to maturity. Though the motivation theory by Gardner includes an educational dimension, it focuses on general motivational components instead of foreign language classrooms [11]. Therefore, Gardner's motivational framework is not suitable for the current research context. Dörnyei [12] developed L2 Motivational Self System, which has three components: the Ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self, and L2 learning experience. Dörnyei's framework requires participants to have a basic and stable understanding of selves, language learning targets, the culture of the target language, and sensitive observation of their learning environment [13], [14]. For younger EFL learners, the framework is too abstract to gain consistent data. Another framework is Martin's Adaptive and Maladaptive Constructs [15]. Adaptive motivation talks about factors that improve motivation whereas maladaptive motivation centers on demotivating conditions. It has been widely used to investigate various topics such as teachers' teaching motivation [16], self-efficacy and English learning outcomes [17], [18], the mastery orientation on learning [19], etc. Though comprehensively investigating both positive and negative factors [15], it does not target to investigate motivation in classroom settings.

This paper adopted the state and trait motivation framework by Christophel [20]. State motivation is an attitude towards a specific class [20]. Trait motivation is a general, enduring predisposition toward learning. Students with a higher level of trait motivation tend to study for

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themselves and enjoy the learning process. Lacking a sound and stable understanding of things around them, young learners tend to change their opinions towards English classrooms. Therefore, it would be more effective to examine their attitudes toward a specific class. However, though it has been proved to be an effective motivational framework [24], [22], little research has adopted the framework to investigate young EFL learners, especially those learners in Chinese form-focused classroom settings.

Part Three: the relationship between language learning motivation and feedback

Studies have proved that there is a significant correlation between motivation and feedback [23]–[25]. To investigate the relationship, researchers used different feedback frameworks. Reference [25] used questionnaires consisting of two scales. One was about monitoring, such as the frequency and form of feedback; another was about scaffolding such as feedback provision and support offered by teachers. Reference [26] compared different perceptions towards feedback between students and teachers in Australia. The scale they used investigated four dimensions: quality of feedback, use of feedback, peer-feedback, and involvement in assessment. The two studies both focused on a broader picture of feedback. However, it remains unclear how to define the “quality” and “form” of feedback in those frameworks. Reference [27] investigated seven feedback actions that will influence students’ self-regulation including thinking, motivation, and behavior during learning. Though the findings are inspiring, they still focus on the general suggestion of giving feedback instead of indicating which type of feedback is more effective in improving motivation, thus reducing the practical value.

Additionally, much fewer studies investigated how corrective feedback affected students’ motivation. Reference [28] concluded that students learning English for exams gained more motivation from CF than those for communication. This study examined how corrective feedback influenced students’ motivation, but it did not analyze the effect of different types of CF in detail. Reference [29] investigated how OCF influenced undergraduate students’ intrinsic motivation (IM), classroom behavior, and teachers’ motivational practices. This study found learners’ IM is promoted by implicit OCF. Though the findings are more specific, they still fail to discuss the effect of different types of feedback. Moreover, focusing on adult EFL learners, those studies did not investigate OCF and motivation in elementary schools.

III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To address the gaps, two research questions are explored in this study:

1. What EFL classroom OCF do elementary school students in one small Chinese provincial city receive?

A) What feedback do they receive most frequently?

B) Do the younger group (G3 students) and the older group (G5 students) receive different OCF? If so, what are the differences in terms of types and frequency?

2. How does the OCF influence their English learning motivation?

A) What OCF types and frequency can reduce or improve

students’ learning motivation?

B) Does the effect of OCF differ between the younger group and the older group? If so, what are the major differences?

IV. METHODOLOGY

A. Participants

The participants were 182 elementary students from a state-found primary school. The younger group (98 G3 students with an average age of 8.43) and the older group (84 G5 students with an average age of 10.89) have been learning English for six and thirty months respectively. The aim was grouping was to see the different effects of OCF across grades. All of the participants are native speakers of Chinese. They have five 40-minute English classes every week. The selection of the participants stays in line with the following criteria: First, the school classified students into ordinary and advanced classes according to the grades of their entrance examinations. Students in the same kind of class have similar learning performances. Due to a limited number of students in advanced classes, all the participants were from ordinary classes to ensure their English proficiency was similar to each other. Second, all the G3 students were taught by Miss Zhu, who has been working in the school for four years. All the G5 students were taught by Miss Chen, who has been working in the school for five years. This was designed to ensure the participants received similar feedback patterns within their grades.

B. Context

This study was conducted in a small provincial city in southwestern China. Most students are only exposed to English in classrooms, which means English was barely used in their daily life. OCF was provided in Chinese and English. The teachers used Chinese to correct mistakes involving metalanguage and English to identify simple errors. Design by the national education department, the English course was to improve students’ English proficiency, and the content for G5 was more diverse than that for G3. Centering on expressions and grammar, class time consisted of listening, speaking, reading, and writing tasks.

C. Procedures

First, a pilot classroom observation was conducted at the beginning of the semester to have a basic understanding of the courses. Then students completed feedback and motivation questionnaires under the guidance of English teachers. Questionnaires included a modified State Motivation Scale [20] and Feedback Scale [4]. Data were gathered during the eighth week of the semester when students were familiar with their English teachers and different types of OCF.

Second, five English lessons of G3 and five lessons of G5 were recorded from the tenth to the eleventh week when teachers have developed a stable OCF style. All of them were new lessons involving abundant OCF. The lessons were fully recorded via digital recorders. The recordings would serve as a supplement for the questionnaire survey.

D. Materials

4.1 The *Feedback Scale* contains 6 items that ask how

often participants received six types of OCF [4]. The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). There were three adaptations. First, write items in Chinese to help students could understand them without difficulties. Second, visualize the situation of giving OCF by providing cartoon pictures. Following every picture, there was a statement about how often they received this kind of feedback, such as “陈老师经常用这种方式给我们纠正错误。” (Miss Chen often gives us such type of corrective feedback.)” Number “1” means “strongly disagree” while number “5” means “strongly agree”

4.2 The *State Motivation Scale* has 18 items that investigate participants' state motivation in English classrooms. This questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). Three modifications were made. First, all the items were adapted in Chinese by the researcher based on the advice of students' Chinese teachers. Second, the 12 adjectives in the original version were adapted into descriptive sentences based on real teaching conditions. This was because these adjectives were too abstract for elementary students to understand. For example, “interested” in the original version was adapted into “陈老师用这种方式纠错时，我觉得学习英语很有趣。” (When Miss Chen gives me such corrective feedback, I feel learning English is interesting.)” Third, the researcher selected 3 positive adjectives — motivated, interested, and involved — from the original 12 adjectives. Based on pilot classroom observations, the three adjectives could fit in the research context well.

V. FINDINGS AND RESULTS

A. Findings from Questionnaires

1) G3

a) The frequency of OCF

Table 1 showed that explicit corrections were the most frequently used feedback for G3, followed by elicitations, metalinguistic clues, recasts, repetitions, and clarification requests.

b) Feedback types and motivation

The results of the one-way repeated measures ANOVA shown in Table II revealed that there was a significant main effect of Feedback Types on the means of students' motivation ($F = 11.117, p < 0.001, \eta_p^2 = 0.393$).

LSD (none) tests showed that participants had significantly higher motivation when they received recasts compared to receiving clarification requests, repetitions, and metalinguistic clues. Whereas repetitions could lead to significantly higher motivation than elicitations, they caused lower motivation than metalinguistic clues.

c) OCF frequency and motivation

According to Pearson Correlations, there was no significant correlation between the frequency of feedback and G3 students' motivation ($p > 0.05$).

2) G5

a) The frequency of OCF

Table I revealed that metalinguistic clues were the most frequent feedback, followed by explicit corrections, repetitions, recasts, elicitations, clarification requests.

b) OCF types and motivation

The results of the one-way repeated measures ANOVA shown in Table 2 revealed there was a significant main effect of Feedback Types on the means of students' motivation that participants reported ($F(5, 375) = 2.605, p < 0.05, \eta_p^2 = .034$).

LSD (none) tests showed that participants had significantly lower motivation when they received clarification requests compared to receiving elicitations, explicit corrections, and metalinguistic clues. Similarly, repetitions could also lead to significantly lower motivation compared to explicit corrections and metalinguistic clues.

c) OCF frequency and motivation

Using Pearson Correlations, Table II showed that the more the teacher used repetitions, elicitations, and explicit correlation, the higher students' motivation was.

3) The difference between G3 and G5 students' motivation

An independent sample T-test in Table II found that G3 students' motivation is different from G5 students. Results showed that G5 students had significantly higher motivation than G3 students did when they received clarification requests. Similarly, when teachers gave repetitions, G5 students had higher motivation than G3 students. When G5 participants received metalinguistic clues, they had higher motivation than G3 students.

Together, the findings suggested OCF types had a different impact on G3 and G5 students' English learning motivation.

4) The differences between the frequency of OCF received by G3 and G5 students

According to the independent sample T-test, there was no

TABLE I: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF OCF FREQUENCY AND STUDENTS' MOTIVATION

Scales	G3 OCF Frequency			G3 Student Motivation			G5 OCF Frequency			G5 Student Motivation		
	Mean	SD	AM	Mean	SD	AM	Mean	SD	AM	Mean	SD	AM
Explicit Feedback												
Recast	3.04	1.29		3.55	1.01		3.43	1.23		3.47	1.16	
Clarification Request	2.19	1.08		2.75	1.02		2.93	1.27		3.27	1.10	
Repetition	2.70	1.21	2.86	2.95	1.05	3.19	3.39	1.28	3.30	3.32	1.11	3.38
Elicitation	3.52	1.24		3.51	1.03		3.43	1.23		3.47	1.16	
Implicit Feedback												
Explicit Correction	3.71	1.28		3.43	1.02		3.39	1.35		3.57	1.24	
Metalinguistic Clues	3.51	1.26	3.61	3.20	1.03	3.32	3.76	1.20	3.58	3.58	1.26	3.56

SD: Standard Deviation; AM: Average of Means

TABLE II: THE RELATIONSHIP OF FEEDBACK OCF TYPES, FREQUENCY, AND MOTIVATION

		Sig. 1		Sig. 2		PC		Sig. 3	
Scale		G3 Students	G5 Students			G3 Students	G5 Students	G3 Students	G5 Students
Recast	Clarification Request	0.001*							
	Repetition	0.001*		0.338	-0.184	0.260		0.082	0.023*
	Metalinguistic Clue	0.010*							
Clarification Request	Elicitation	0.001*	0.040*						
	Explicit Correction	0.001*	0.010*	0.002*	-0.071	0.178		0.503	0.124
	Metalinguistic Clue	0.002*	0.008*						
Repetition	Elicitation	0.001*							
	Explicit Correction	0.001*	0.250*	0.030*	-0.082	0.363		0.438	0.001
	Metalinguistic Clue		0.240*						
Elicitation	Clarification Request	0.001*	0.040*	0.795	-0.056	0.260		0.600	0.023
	Metalinguistic Clue	0.024*							
Explicit Correction	Clarification Request	0.001*	0.010*						
	Repetition	0.001*	0.025*	0.433	-0.061	0.336		0.567	0.003
Metalinguistic Clue	Recast	0.010*							
	Clarification Request	0.002*	0.008*	0.031*	-0.115	0.216		0.276	0.034
	Repetition		0.024*						
	Elicitation	0.024*							

(1) Sig. 1: The significance of the correlations between feedback types and learning motivation (Tested by one-way repeated measures ANOVA)

(2) Sig. 2: The significance of the differences between the motivation of the G3 and G5 students (Tested by independent sample T-test)

(3) PC: Pearson correlation; * $p < 0.05$

(4) Sig. 3: The significance of the correlations between feedback frequency and learning motivation (Tested by Pearson correlations)

(5) Due to space limitation, the chart only shows the statistics of Sig. 1 with $p < 0.05$ significant difference between the OCF received by G3 and G5 students ($p > 0.05$).

B. Findings from Classroom Observations

G3: During two-week classroom observations, the English teacher provided explicit corrections (26.1%) most frequently, which was followed by repetitions (21.7%) and elicitations (21.7%), recasts (17.4%), clarification requests (8.7%), and metalinguistic clues (4.4%). The rank of the classroom observations generally responded to that of questionnaires. However, metalinguistic clues were the least provided feedback in the classroom observations whereas they were the third frequent in questionnaires. It can be explained by teaching strategies. The new lessons focused on the use of articles. However, the terms, “the definite article” and “the indefinite article” were too professional for third-year students to understand. Therefore, the teacher chose to provide fewer metalinguistic clues.

G5: Metalinguistic clues (24%) were the most frequently used feedback in the two-week teaching of new lessons, followed by recasts (20%), explicit corrections (20%), clarification requests (16%), elicitations (12%), and repetitions (8%). Overall, the data from classroom observations corresponded to the results from questionnaires. However, repetitions were the second frequently used feedback according to questionnaires while it was the least frequently used feedback in classroom observations. The reason might be that the recordings only showed a limited part of the teacher’s feedback-giving pattern. Thus the difference exists.

To sum up, the findings from classroom observations corresponded to those from the questionnaires, supporting that results from questionnaires were reliable.

VI. DISCUSSION

This study aimed to examine whether OCF types and frequency had impacts on primary students’ English learning motivation. The results showed that OCF types and frequency affected their learning motivation. Detailed findings are discussed in the following paragraphs.

A. OCF types and frequency in EFL classrooms

This research found that English teachers provided explicit feedback most frequently. This can be explained by [30] which claimed that students can make progress only when they mindfully pay attention to the feedback. With overt indication of the mistakes, explicit feedback can be better noticed by EFL learners [31], making it more effective [32]. Based on the current context, primary students are not cognitively mature to identify implicit feedback. Besides, explicit feedback is more suitable for form-based English classrooms because it can activate learners’ explicit second language knowledge, such as grammar rules [4]. Therefore, teachers in this research provided more explicit feedback.

Specifically, within explicit feedback, the teacher of the younger group provided explicit corrections most frequently whereas the teacher of the older group offered more metalinguistic clues. The difference between the two types of OCF is that explicit corrections do not involve grammatical metalanguage but metalinguistic clues include such language. This means that only students who understand grammatical metalanguage can correct their mistakes via metalinguistic clues. However, given that the younger group has only learned English for half a year, it is difficult for them to understand those professional terms. However, the older group has learned English for 30 months, which means that they have accumulated some grammar knowledge. This

makes them more capable of understanding metalinguistic clues. Therefore, the teacher of G5 students provided more metalinguistic clues than G3 students.

Additionally, in line with much research [33], [34], the clarification requests were the least frequently provided feedback type for both groups. This can be explained by the implicit nature of clarification requests. When providing clarification requests, the teachers pretend that they cannot figure out what the learners have said. Therefore, students may understand it as the clarification of meaning rather than the correction of mistakes, which causes confusion and ineffective learning in classrooms [35], [36]. This problem can even be more apparent for young EFL learners due to their developing cognitive ability and limited time of second language learning. Therefore, teachers in this research tend to provide a limited number of clarification requests.

B. The relationship between students' learning motivation and OCF

This research found that OCF types could significantly affect students' English learning motivation. First, the younger and the older groups had higher motivation when they received explicit feedback. The result is different from research on face threat mitigation (FTM). Researchers found that explicit feedback, which damages students' self-images, would decrease motivation [5]. The difference might be induced by different participants. The participants of FTM were most adults who have developed their self-images and were more sensitive to explicit feedback. However, explicit feedback is easier for young learners to avoid confusion and correct mistakes, thus improving their learning motivation [37]–[39].

Additionally, OCF frequency was significantly correlated with G5 students' motivation. The more frequent the teacher provided OCF, the higher participants' motivation was. Only the frequency of clarification requests was not correlated with motivation. The result is in line with reference [40] which showed that a majority of students expected their teachers to provide OCF "always". This is because less feedback will cause confusion, which leads to a lower level of motivation [41]. However, clarification requests are quite implicit [2]. Some students may ignore such kind of feedback and leave problems remained, but some students identified the feedback and corrected their mistakes. Therefore, clarification requests did not have an evident correlation with students' motivation.

However, OCF frequency did not have correlations with G3 students' motivation. This result is different from much research [34] which concluded that students preferred frequent feedback. This difference might be attributed to different participants. The participants of those studies were mostly adult learners who have more interactions with their teachers, thus increasing the possibility of making mistakes and leading to abundant feedback moves. However, the classroom observations of this research found the teacher-student interactions were notably less than previous research because students' limited English proficiency led to a limited amount of feedback, which makes it hard to identify the effect of feedback frequency on students' motivation.

Moreover, when students received implicit feedback, the motivation of G5 students was significantly higher than that

of G3 students. This result is in line with previous research [42], which concluded that learners with higher proficiency were more capable of figuring out mistakes and gaining motivation by implicit feedback. This tendency is understandable because the likelihood of self-correction improves as learners become more proficient in the target language.

VII. CONCLUSION

This paper investigated what OCF types and frequency were provided in the elementary EFL classrooms and how OCF types and frequency affected students' motivation.

Regarding OCF frequency, G5 and G3 students received more explicit feedback than implicit feedback, but there were two differences. First, the younger group received more explicit corrections whereas the older group preferred metalinguistic clues. Second, the older group received more implicit feedback than the younger group. Clarification requests were the least frequent in this research.

As for how OCF affected learning motivation, explicit feedback created higher motivation than did implicit feedback. This was consistent with COF frequency, which indicated that explicit feedback was more frequent than implicit feedback. Besides, implicit feedback could create a higher level of motivation for G5 students. This was also in line with OCF frequency — G5 students received more implicit feedback.

There are three implications for future teaching activities. First, teachers can provide more explicit feedback in the EFL classrooms. It is because explicit feedback is more direct and grammar-focused than implicit feedback, which can help students better locate their mistakes, correct errors, and improve their English learning motivation. Second, it suggests that teachers should offer more implicit feedback to older students with a higher level of English proficiency. For students with more advanced cognitive abilities, it can help them practice their listening and communication skills. Finally, providing too many clarification requests is not advisable because such feedback is the most implicit one. The implicitness may make students misunderstand corrective intentions and fail to solve their language problems. The unsolved problems may lead to a lower level of English learning motivation.

It is advisable for future studies to examine more EFL classes and teachers to draw a more comprehensive picture of corrective feedback and students' English learning motivation.

To conclude, this research shed light on the corrective feedback and English learning motivation of Chinese primary students in a small developing city. It has been found that explicit feedback, which was preferred by both teachers in the research, plays a more significant role in improving students' learning motivation. Compared with younger students, older students are more likely to be motivated by implicit feedback.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Zichun Li designed and conducted the research, collected and analyzed the data, interpreted the results, and prepared the draft manuscript. Zichun Li has reviewed the results and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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