

## A Comparison between Palestinian EFL Teachers' and Students' Attitudes toward Oral Errors and Their Correction

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**ملخص:** تقدم هذه الدراسة تقريراً عن نتائج البحث في اتجاهات المعلمين والطلاب الفلسطينيين في المرحلة الثانوية نحو الأخطاء الشفوية في اللغة الإنجليزية وطرق تصحيحها، ومدى تقارب أو تباعد هذه الاتجاهات. ولتحقيق هذه الغاية، استخدم الباحث منهج البحث المختلط الذي يجمع بين الأساليب الكمية والكيفية، حيث اشتمل الجانب الكمي للدراسة على اتجاهات (102) من معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية و(397) من طلابهم نحو الأخطاء الشفوية في اللغة وطرق علاجها، في حين هدف الجانب النوعي للدراسة لبحث تلك الاتجاهات بشكل أعمق لدى (5) معلمين و (5) طلاب، وفي ضوء نتائج الدراسة تقدم الورقة بعض التوصيات لكل المعنيين بتدريس ودراسة اللغة الإنجليزية في فلسطين.

### مقارنة بين اتجاهات المدرسين والطلبة في المدارس الثانوية في القطاع بخصوص

### الأخطاء اللفظية في اللغة الانجليزية وسبل تصحيحها

**Abstract:** The aim of this paper is to report the research results into Palestinian EFL teachers' and students' attitudes of oral errors and their correction and the extent to which these attitudes converge or diverge. To this end, a mixed-methods research design was used. The quantitative aspect of the study surveyed the attitudes of oral errors and their correction among (102) Palestinian EFL teachers and (397) students in the City of Gaza and produced quantified conclusions, while the qualitative aspect investigated those attitudes among (5) Palestinian EFL teachers and (5) secondary school students (aged between 17 and 18). In the light of the study findings, the papers concludes by providing some recommendations for all those involved in teaching and learning English in Palestine.

**Key terms:** attitudes – oral errors – error correction/treatment, correction strategies

## INTRODUCTION

Language in the age of globalization, of knowledge, of communication, of information super-highways, of networking, of the Internet, of electronic email, and of satellites is at the core of our existence as humans. It defines us and shapes our being more than any other asset we possess. Language builds and

cements our social relationships, helps us think and allows us to reflect, is used first to educate us and subsequently by us to educate others (van Lier, 1995). Language is also a vital area of study for a better understanding of ourselves, enriching our life, enlarging our vision, and improving our situation. This is exactly what English, the most powerful tool to communicate internationally, is expected to do for its learners (Brown, 2000; Borg, 2001). Learning English has become a significant priority for individuals who want to be prepared to better survive in this highly competitive world (Chrystal, 2003).

In Palestine, English is introduced to the Palestinian education system right from grade one. Theoretically, if Palestinian students study English for twelve years, they should be able to communicate fluently and accurately upon graduating from secondary school. Unfortunately, this is not the case. In reality, after spending so many years learning English, most Palestinian students cannot communicate fluently in English and their language is largely devoid of accuracy (Project Hope, 2009). No doubt, this is a rather unnatural and unexpected outcome and indicates that there is a missing link between expectation and achievement, theory and reality, teaching and learning.

Various interrelated factors influence students' success in foreign language (FL) learning. Top among these is the guidance teachers provide while correcting students' oral errors. How teachers perform this task is usually influenced by their attitudes to such errors. Another equally important factor influencing students' successes in learning an FL is students' attitudes toward the FL and the learning situation. Unfortunately, despite the key role which teachers' and students' attitudes play in the success (or failure), there has been a dearth of research investigating such attitudes (Kennedy & Kennedy, 1996), on the one hand, and research comparing attitudes held by teachers and students, on the other. This study endeavors to help fill this void.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In order to situate the study in a larger context and relate it to what has already been investigated in the field of oral errors and teachers' and learners' attitudes toward such errors and their treatment, pertinent literature will be reviewed and synthesized with the intention of providing a theoretical foundation to the study. The review will concentrate on the issues of oral error treatment in FL learning and teachers' and learners' attitudes to such errors.

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### **1. Oral Error Treatment**

The topic of error correction in the FL classroom tends to spark controversy among language teachers and researchers. In this vein, Major (1988) points out that the trends in language teaching tend to go from one extreme to another: Thus, throughout time, language teachers and researchers have tended to locate error correction on a continuum ranging from ineffective and possibly harmful (Truscott, 1999) to beneficial (Russell & Spada, 2006), and possibly even essential for some grammatical structures (White, 1991).

Contentions that tend to diminish the role of error correction in language learning have been challenged by empirical research conducted in both laboratory and classroom settings. The results of those studies have demonstrated a facilitative effect of error correction for second and FL development (Bell, 1992; Carroll and Swain, 1992; Lyster *et al.*, 1999; Mackey, 2006; Nunan & Lamb, 1996; Tomasello & Herron, 1989). For instance, the results of Carroll and Swain's (1992) study assert that corrections are helpful for language learners to acquire abstract linguistic generalizations because correction can help them narrow the range of possible hypotheses that can account for the data. Moreover, Nunan and Lamb (1996) note that making errors and subsequent teacher corrections can provide the learners with valuable information in the target language. In their study, Tomasello and Herron (1989) found that learners who were first allowed to make errors and were then corrected improved their target language performance more than learners who were given language rules in advance. In a similar vein, the results of Bargiel-Matusiewicz and Bargiel-Firlit's study (2009) indicated that making errors is something natural and unavoidable and that lack of errors equaled lack of progress.

Much literature in favour of error treatment has agreed with the effectiveness of selective error correction. For example, Hammerly (1991), Stern (1992) and Truscott (2001) assert that systematic and selective error correction, in which teachers prioritize which errors to be corrected, is one of the most effective teacher strategies. Although there are a number of different types of criteria available for the prioritization of errors, the most commonly prioritized errors are (1) those that are relevant to the pedagogical focus, (2) those that occur frequently, (3) those that are grave (e.g. impair communication or impact the overall comprehensibility of an utterance), and (4) those that relate to the learners' next stage of development (Hendrickson, 1980; and Walz, 1982).

## **2. Attitudes toward Error Correction**

Attitudes toward an educational issue are extremely influential in either facilitating or hindering how it is perceived and learned. Favorable feelings about and experiences with the teacher, classmates, materials, activities, tasks, procedures, and so on, can forge positive attitudes toward learning a foreign language. Conversely, unfavorable feelings and experiences of failure (e.g. correction of every oral error) can lead to negative attitudes as it might hurt students' feelings (McDonough, 1981). Many researchers (e.g. Green, 1993; Krashen, 1982) have noticed that one set of factors related to great achievement in the language classroom is the attitudes of those who participate in this process: both students and teachers. Research also shows that teachers' attitudes influence both their expectations for their students and their behavior toward them.

Although attitudes are not the only factors that impact the teaching and learning process, they direct learning and influence it most considerably (Hermann, 1980). This means that teachers' positive attitudes enhance students' learning, while their negative attitudes impede it. In this way, negative attitudes can prove to be very costly and detrimental for all stakeholders and replacing negative attitudes with more positive ones becomes mandatory. The good news, at this respect, is that although difficult, attitude change is not impossible as they are not set in concrete (Healey, 2005).

Research into the relationship between positive attitudes and successful learning of a second or foreign language supports this simple observation. However, it is important to understand that many variables are involved because we are dealing with complex social and psychological aspects of human behavior (Clemente, 2001). For instance, students' ability to learn an FL can be influenced by their attitudes toward the target language, the target language speakers and their culture, the social value of learning the FL, and also the students' attitudes toward themselves as members of their own culture (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005).

Brown (2000) describes several studies that highlight the effects of attitude on language learning and concludes that positive attitudes toward the self, the native language group, and the target language group enhance learners' proficiency in the FL as well as in their native language. Learners' attitudes also color their experiences (Marzano, 1992) because attitudes are the filter through which all learning occurs. When students with positive attitudes

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experience success, these attitudes are reinforced; whereas students with negative attitudes may fail to progress and become even more negative in their language learning attitudes. Because attitudes can be modified by experience, effective language teaching strategies can encourage students to be more positive toward the language they are learning (Mantle-Bromley, 1995).

Like teachers, learners also differ in their attitudes toward error correction. For some, no adverse affective effect is likely unless the corrections are delivered in a very aggressive or unfair manner; for others, there is a serious danger that correction will produce embarrassment, anger, inhibition, feelings of inferiority, and a generally negative attitude toward the class, the teacher, and possibly toward English (Truscott, 1999).

Teachers can reduce the harms of error correction, while, at the same time, taking their students' differences, preferences, and learning styles into consideration, if they create a low stress, friendly and supportive learning environment; foster a proactive role on the part of the students themselves to create an atmosphere of group solidarity and support; be sensitive to students' fears and insecurities and help them confront those fears; use gentle or non-threatening methods of error correction and offer encouragement; and consciously seek to promote student interest and enjoyment (von Wörde, 2003).

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The current study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. What is the nature of Palestinian EFL teachers' attitudes toward students' oral errors?
2. How do Palestinian EFL teachers' attitudes toward oral errors affect their choice of the strategies they use to treat students' errors?
3. What is the nature of Palestinian EFL students' attitudes oral errors?
4. To what extent do Palestinian EFL teachers' and students' attitudes toward oral errors and their correction converge or diverge?

### **STUDY POPULATIONS**

The study populations included secondary school Palestinian EFL teachers and students teaching and learning in governmental schools in Gaza during the school year (2009-2010). The number, distribution, and gender of the study populations are illustrated in Table 1 below.

**Table 1**

**Number, Distribution, and Gender of Study Populations**

Directorate	Number of EFL Teachers	Number of Secondary School Students	
		Males	Females
East Gaza	241	3486	4267
West Gaza	226	6534	6358
<b>Total</b>	<b>467</b>	<b>10020</b>	<b>10625</b>

## **STUDY SAMPLES**

One teacher and one student sample were drawn from the study populations as follows.

### **Teacher Sample**

The teacher sample, which comprised (102) (52 males and 50 females) Palestinian EFL secondary school teachers from Gaza City, responded to the teachers' questionnaire. Five of those teachers (3 males and 2 females) were interviewed and observed.

### **Student Sample**

A sample of (397) secondary school students (188 males and 209 females) responded to the students' questionnaire. Five students (3 males and 2 females) took part in the focus-group interviews aiming at eliciting qualitative data about their attitudes toward oral errors and the error treatment strategies used by their teachers.

## **DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS**

Consistent with mixed-methods research paradigms, various instruments of data collection (i.e. questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups) were used in this study. The questionnaires were used to facilitate responses to the research questions, while the interviews and focus groups were utilized to obtain a more thorough understanding of questionnaire responses, to provide teachers and students with an opportunity to express their feelings and opinions, and to help the researcher capture the teachers' and students' own voices and examine their words in an attempt to understand their attitudes more profoundly.

## **STUDY FINDINGS**

Findings are mapped out into four sections, each of which answers one of the research questions.

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### QUESTION ONE

*What is the nature of Palestinian EFL teachers' attitudes toward students' oral errors?*

Strong majorities of Palestinian EFL teachers had positive attitudes toward oral errors and their correction. This conclusion was evident from the analysis of teachers' responses to the attitude items of the questionnaire. This analysis revealed, as seen in Table 2 below, that the most dominant attitude among teacher respondents was that errors are a natural outcome of learning any language, which was ranked first with a percentage weight of (87.6%). This attitude was closely followed by the belief that EFL teachers should use different strategies for oral error correction, which was ranked second with a percentage weight of (86.1%). Stemming naturally from this last belief was the one that students differ in their reaction to oral error correction, which was ranked third with a percentage weight of (83.7%). This positive trend toward oral errors and their correction is enhanced by the teacher respondents' belief that teachers' corrections of oral errors help students learn and improve their English, which was ranked fourth with a percentage weight of (82.4%). Still a good majority of teacher respondents (i.e.78.6%) believed that students learn more through error correction.

**Table 2**  
**Teacher Questionnaire Mean, Standard Deviation, Percentage Weight and Rank of Each Item in the Attitude Field**

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	% weight	Rank
Errors are a natural part of learning any language.	4.382	0.912	87.6	1
EFL teachers should use different strategies for oral error correction.	4.304	1.032	86.1	2
Teachers' corrections of students' oral errors help students learn and improve their English.	4.186	0.931	83.7	3
Students differ in their reaction to oral error correction.	4.118	1.018	82.4	4
EFL teachers should encourage students to express themselves rather than continually correct their errors.	3.941	1.115	78.8	5
Students learn more through error correction.	3.931	1.017	78.6	6

<b>Items</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>% weight</b>	<b>Rank</b>
In general, it is important that my students make as few errors as possible in their oral English.	3.892	1.071	77.8	7
Learners' errors should be corrected as soon as they are made in order to prevent the formation of bad habits.	3.794	1.337	75.9	8
When EFL students make oral errors, it helps to correct them and later teach a short lesson explaining why they made that error.	3.647	1.123	72.9	9
When EFL students make oral errors, it usually helps to provide them with lots of oral practice with the language patterns that seem to cause them difficulty.	3.529	1.123	70.6	10
Students learn and understand more if they correct each other.	3.529	1.295	70.6	11
The teacher should use materials that expose students only to language they have already been taught in order to minimize their errors.	3.235	1.228	64.7	12
When learners are allowed to interact freely in groups or pairs, etc., they learn each other's errors.	3.235	1.268	64.7	13
Students do not make the same error again after the teacher corrects it.	3.118	1.261	62.4	14
If students are permitted to make errors in English, it will be difficult for them to speak correctly later on.	2.990	1.459	59.8	15
Teachers should correct all the oral errors students make because ignored errors result in imperfect learning.	2.971	1.389	59.4	16
Students should avoid making errors when learning English.	2.951	1.285	59.0	17
Since errors are a normal part of learning, much correction wastes time.	2.520	1.433	50.4	18
I think students are to blame for making oral errors in English.	2.069	1.171	41.4	19
<b>TOTAL</b>	66.343	8.253	69.8	

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Furthermore, the positive attitudes which Palestinian EFL teachers held regarding oral errors and their correction are clearly evident when we find that only a minority of those teachers (i.e. 41.4%) believed that students are to blame for making oral errors in English, while only (59.0%) of teacher respondents believed that students should avoid making errors. Moreover, extreme attitudes such as too much correction wastes time and teachers should correct all the oral errors students make because ignored errors resulted in imperfect learning were ranked relatively low on the attitude scale with a percentage weight of (50.4%) and (59.4%) for each of them respectively.

These positive attitudes toward oral errors and their correction were also maintained in what the (5) teacher interviewees recounted. For instance, Teacher Participant #1 equated making errors with learning, because, in his viewpoint, "... if you don't make any errors you can't learn, as many students learn from these errors." Viewing making errors and learning as inseparable companions also resonated with what Teacher Participant #4 clearly emphasized when she said, "There is no learning of a foreign language without making mistakes." Expressing the inevitability of learning a language without making errors and the compulsivity of such errors, Teacher Participant #4 asserted, "Errors can't be avoided when we study a foreign language. I mean to learn any language, you must make mistakes." Furthermore, the (5) teacher interviewees unanimously said that their students' errors informed their lesson planning and instruction.

In line with these positive attitudes held by Palestinian EFL teachers of oral errors and their correction, when asked how teachers could encourage their students to view errors positively, a number of teachers responded that the teacher should demonstrate to students that errors are a normal part of learning any language, that making errors is not the end of the world, and that he who makes no mistakes, does nothing. Such positive attitudes toward oral errors and their correction were also demonstrated in teacher responses to the question asking them if they considered error correction an essential part of their role as teachers. Ninety nine (i.e. 97.1%) of the 102 teachers responded to this question affirmatively.

### **QUESTION TWO**

*How do Palestinian EFL teachers' attitudes toward oral errors affect their choice of the strategies they use to treat students' errors?*

An analysis of the data obtained from the attitude and strategy items of the questionnaire revealed that Palestinian EFL teachers' attitudes toward oral errors strongly affected the oral error correction strategies they used when correcting such errors. As seen in Appendix (1), almost all of the teacher questionnaire responses indicated that error correction was an essential part of their role as EFL teachers. Furthermore, a strong majority of them adopted moderate attitudes toward such errors by trying to avoid the two extremes of error correction (i.e. correcting all or ignoring all errors). In this respect, it can be noticed that teachers who believed that correcting students' oral errors helps students learn and improve their English represented (83.7%) of the (102) teacher respondents, and those who believed that students learn more through error correction represented (78.6%) of the same respondents.

Conversely, the strategy entailing the teacher completely ignoring students' oral errors was ranked very low with a percentage weight of (28.2%) by teacher respondents. These same teachers ranked the strategy entailing the teacher correcting all the oral errors relatively low as only (59.4%) of them agreed with this strategy. In addition, (75.9%) of teachers believed that learners' errors should be corrected as soon as they are made, and thus (79.4%) of them ranked high the strategy entailing the teacher pointing out the error and providing the correct form. On the contrary, teachers of those beliefs ranked the strategies entailing the teacher using postponed and delayed correction relatively low with a percentage weight of (37.3%) and (60.6) respectively.

### **QUESTION THREE**

*What is the nature of Palestinian EFL students' attitudes toward oral errors and strategies of their correction?*

To answer this question, the researcher analyzed the data gathered from the student questionnaire and focus group interviews. The analysis showed that, like their teachers, Palestinian EFL students had positive attitudes toward oral errors and the strategies of their correction. Such positive attitudes manifested themselves in students' responses to the questionnaire open-ended question asking them whether or not they preferred their oral errors to be corrected. An overwhelming majority of student respondents (i.e. 92.2%) responded affirmatively to this question.

Moreover, a strong majority of students felt that oral errors and their correction helped them learn English better. Consequently, (89.62%) of those students, as seen in Table 9 below, believed that they learned more when their

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teachers corrected their peers' errors, and an identical percentage of them believed that the correction of their oral errors helped them improve their English. Still, another strong majority of students (i.e. 89.57%) believed that students learned more when their errors were corrected and (88.21%) of them considered errors a natural part of language learning.

**Table 3**  
Means, Standard Deviation, Percentage Weight and Rank of Each Item in the Attitude Field of Student Questionnaire

Item	Mean	Std. Deviation	% weight	Rank
I learn more when the teacher corrects the errors that my fellow students make in class.	4.481	0.857	89.62	1
When the teacher corrects my oral errors, it helps me learn and improves my English.	4.481	0.906	89.62	1
Students learn more when their errors are corrected.	4.479	0.909	89.57	3
Errors are a natural part of language learning.	4.411	0.916	88.21	4
I want to understand the reasons for my language errors.	4.340	0.971	86.80	5
I think the teacher should have different strategies for correcting students' oral errors.	4.184	1.084	83.68	6
The teacher should correct all oral errors I make because if they are ignored, I will not learn to speak correctly.	4.121	1.137	82.42	7
I do not make the same error again, once the teacher corrects it.	4.121	1.042	82.42	8
I encourage myself to speak English in class even when I am afraid of making errors.	4.071	1.059	81.41	9
Learners differ in their reaction to oral error correction.	3.927	1.116	78.54	10
Students learn and understand more if they correct each other.	3.630	1.397	72.59	11

<b>Item</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>% weight</b>	<b>Rank</b>
I feel cheated if the teacher does not correct the oral errors I make.	3.587	1.360	71.74	12
I think it is OK that the teacher interrupts me to correct my oral errors.	3.567	1.327	71.34	13
I believe it is important to avoid making errors in the process of learning English.	3.317	1.374	66.35	14
I don not worry about making errors in my English classes.	3.171	1.332	63.43	15
It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in our English class because I am afraid of making errors.	2.741	1.437	54.81	16
I am afraid other students will laugh at me when I make errors while speaking English.	2.728	1.501	54.56	17
The teacher should encourage students to express themselves without correcting oral errors.	2.652	1.367	53.05	18
I think the teacher is right when he/she blames me for making oral errors in English.	2.637	1.405	52.75	19
I think it is better if the teacher calls speaks to me privately at the end of class and corrects my errors.	2.584	1.534	51.69	20
I think my classmates think that I am not smart or competent when the teacher corrects my errors.	2.368	1.307	47.36	21
When my teacher corrects my oral errors, it makes me feel inadequate and not smart..	2.272	1.297	45.44	22
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>77.869</b>	<b>8.087</b>	<b>70.79</b>	

These findings resonate with the students' responses to the question asking them if they think oral error correction hinders their learning. In this vein, (73.6%) of the students responded negatively to this question. It seems that students' beliefs in correcting oral errors forced a good majority of them

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(i.e. 83.5%) to go to the extreme of demanding that the teacher correct all the oral errors they committed. This result is strongly aligned with students' response to the question asking them which teacher they preferred: the teacher correcting all, some, or no errors. A good majority (i.e. 78.8%) of student respondents preferred the correction of all of their oral errors and a strikingly remarkable minority of just (1.8%) preferred the non-correcting teacher.

Student focus group participants also expressed positive attitudes toward oral errors and their correction. In this respect, Student Participant #2 said, "Error correction has a positive effect on me because it pushes me to revise this piece of information." Participant #4 also said, "I want my teacher to correct my errors so as not to make the same error again... it is natural to make errors." These positive attitudes were also emphasized in students' responses to their questionnaire open-ended questions. A majority of respondents thought that they benefited and improved their learning from the correction of their oral errors. One respondent said, "I prefer that my errors be corrected because I am a kind of person who learns from her errors and if my errors are not corrected, I'll continue making the same errors." Another student said, "She who does not make errors, does not learn." Other students considered error correction an indication that their teacher cared for them; a means for becoming more knowledgeable and growing more aware of his points of weakness in English; and a motive for studying hard.

Moreover, a majority of focus group participants considered errors and their correction advantageous and beneficial. For instance, Student Participant #2 said, "When one makes an error, one will never forget the right answer, and it is impossible to make the same mistake again. When I make an error and the teacher corrects me, the right answer will be fixed in my mind. I'll benefit from the errors which my classmates make because when a classmate makes an error and the teacher corrects it, my attention will be drawn to this error and I will never forget the correction." Equally, in their responses to the questionnaire open-ended questions, some respondents expressed similar opinions such as, "When I make an error and the teacher corrects me I will be able to differentiate between what is correct and what is incorrect and this is beneficial for me", "When errors are corrected, I understand better and this will minimize the number of errors I commit", and "I feel satisfied when my errors are corrected because it helps me learn. I even feel curious when I have my errors clarified".

Students' preference for oral error correction made just a considerable minority of them (i.e. 45.44%), as shown in Table 9 above, feel inadequate and not smart when the teacher corrected their oral errors. Similarly, only a minority of (47.36%) thought that their classmates would think that they were not smart or competent enough when the teacher corrected their errors. Further, a small number of student questionnaire respondents underwent negative experiences when their errors were corrected. These experiences included feeling embarrassed, ashamed, annoyed, angered, tensed, frustrated, ridiculed, teased, confused, depressed, trivial, upset, and worried. At this respect, some of them said, "I lose my self-confidence," "I feel sad and resistant to participate," "I feel humiliated," and "It is psychologically painful." Some focus group participants expressed similar experiences. Student Participant #4, for example, said, "Sometimes the teacher won't allow the student who makes mistakes to go on with the activity and asks her to sit down and the teacher herself does the rest of the task. This makes the student feel embarrassed, ashamed, and extremely anxious. This student will refrain from participating in class another time for fear of making errors and the teacher causing her to feel embarrassed." Student Participant #5, in her turn, said, "Error correction may detract from the student's personality and standing inside the classroom."

#### **QUESTION FOUR**

*To what extent do Palestinian EFL teachers' and students' attitudes toward oral errors converge and/or diverge?*

As seen in Appendix (B), there appears to be a considerable discrepancy between teachers' and students' attitudes toward oral errors. Such discrepancy can be traced in three strategies. Firstly, while teachers ranked the strategy entailing the teacher pointing out the error and providing the correct form first with a percentage weight of (79.4%), students ranked it second with a percentage weight of (87.10%). Secondly, while students ranked the strategy entailing the teacher explaining why the utterance is incorrect fifth with a relatively low percentage weight of (65.9%), teachers ranked it third with a noticeably higher percentage weight of (72.9%). Finally, while teachers ranked the strategy entailing the teacher immediately correcting the error rather than taking time to discuss it eighth with a percentage weight of (53.8%), the students ranked it ninth with a percentage weight of (36.9%).

Still, more divergence between teachers' and students' attitudes toward oral error correction can be discerned in several strategies. For example, while the

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strategy entailing the teacher repeating the student's utterance up to the error and waiting for self-correction was ranked first with a percentage weight of (87.96%) by students, it was ranked fifth with a percentage weight of (70.6%) by teachers. Another instance of such discrepancy is clear in the strategy entailing the teacher correcting only the errors that interfere with communication, which was ranked fourth with a percentage weight of (78.24%) by students, while ranked seventh with a percentage weight of (52.9%) by teachers.

### **STUDY CONCLUSIONS**

The analysis of the different data sets collected in the course of the current study has resulted in the emergence of four overarching themes which interpret and summarize the present research findings. Following is a detailed account of these themes.

#### **Palestinian EFL teachers and students generally have positive attitudes toward oral errors and their correction.**

Data collected from both teachers and students showed clearly that the majority of them had positive attitudes toward oral errors and their correction. These attitudes were evident in what the majority of teacher and student participants expressed as an overwhelming majority of them considered errors inevitable and integral to the process of learning an FL.

In this vein, a great majority (i.e. 86.4%) of teacher respondents considered errors a natural outcome of learning any language and (81.9%) of them believed, that teachers' corrections of oral errors helped students learn and improve their English. In line with this, Teacher Participant #1 said, "Making errors means that the students are learning, and if you don't make errors, you can't learn." Similarly, Teacher Participant #3 considered errors a natural occurrence in the language classroom, and teachers had to believe in that." Furthermore, in their responses to the questionnaire open-ended questions, many teachers expressed favorable attitudes toward oral errors and their correction. One teacher considered making errors an integral part of language learning and error correction an essential part of a teacher's work. Another teacher stated that error correction played a facilitative role in the learning process as "error correction helps students improve their language."

In a similar vein, the majority of Palestinian EFL students also maintained positive attitudes toward oral errors and their correction. Agreeing with their teachers, an exceptionally large number of Palestinian EFL students expressed

positive attitudes toward oral errors and their correction. This is evident in the overwhelming majority (i.e. 91.73%) of the student questionnaire respondents who said that they wanted their oral errors to be corrected. Almost a similar majority (i.e. 91.0%) of those students felt that oral error correction helped them learn English better. Similarly, a slightly smaller percentage (i.e. 90.5%) of students believed that they learned more when their errors were corrected. Still, (87.9%) of them considered errors a natural part of language learning.

In line with this, in their response to the questionnaire, some students said that when their oral errors were corrected, they felt that the teacher cared for them; others felt comfortable, pleased, and glad. One student respondent even equated making errors with learning when she said, "She who doesn't make errors doesn't learn." These positive attitudes were also emphasized by Student Participant #5, who said, "I want my teacher to correct my errors so as not to make the same error again. There is a little shame when I fail to give a correct answer, but it is natural." What is more, some students considered oral error correction as advantageous because it sharpened their attention, encouraged them to learn, developed their faculties, pushed them to work hard to become more diligent, and sped up their learning. In this respect, a student questionnaire respondent said, "As long as my oral errors are corrected, they will become fewer and my language will become more accurate." In a similar vein, Student Participant #4 said, "The advantage of error correction is that I remember the point I erred in and never forget it."

#### **Error correction is never 'one-size fits all'**

Educational research asserts that teaching and error correction strategies are highly context- and individual-specific. Students possess diverse learning styles and prefer different instructional practices (Katayama, 2007). Therefore, teachers should realize that error correction is never 'one size fits all'. This theme was clear in different accounts of teachers' interviews and questionnaire as well as students' focus groups and questionnaire. In this vein, (86.1%) of teacher respondents believed that EFL teachers should use different strategies for correcting students' oral errors and (82.4%) of them saw that students differ in their reaction to oral error correction. These attitudes were also stressed by Teacher Participant #4 when she said, "Different students learn in different ways, and I know that some students insist that you correct them, and I have no problem doing that." In another context she assured, "It depends on the students. Some students were definitely surer of themselves and sure of what

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they wanted and had no problem of me stepping in and correcting them.” Teacher Participant #1 expressed a similar opinion by asserting, "It really depends. Some students feel OK when they are stopped and corrected, but I think others become very furious; they don't feel good. Some students feel ashamed, while others feel normal when the teacher corrects their errors." Similar opinions were also reflected in teachers' responses to the open-ended items of their questionnaire. For example, one teacher respondent said, "Some students accept correction; others feel embarrassed." Another teacher said, "Students' reactions to error correction depend on their levels: weak students feel OK when they are corrected, but good ones feel embarrassed."

Differences among students in their preferences for different error correction strategies were crystal clear in their responses to the focus group and questionnaire different items. In their responses to the questionnaire Likert-scale items, (86.80%) of student respondents favored explicit error correction that entailed metalinguistic explanation because they wanted to know why they made those errors, (83.68%) thought that the teacher should use different strategies for correcting students' oral errors, (71.34%) were in favor of immediate correction as they thought that it was okay if the teacher interrupted them to correct their errors, and (49.67%) were in favor of delayed and confidential correction.

Similarly, Student Participant #1 expressed preference for immediate and explicit error correction by saying, "In my opinion, the best strategy is when the teacher corrects my error soon after I make it and then writes the correct form on the board so that I can write it in my notebook. In this case, I will not forget the correction." Student Participant #2, on the other hand, preferred delayed and confidential error correction. He qualified this preference by saying, "The teacher should take the student aside, not in front of other teachers either, the student tells the teacher about the difficulties he faces and the teacher helps correct them for him." Student Participant #5 expressed another preference when she said, "I think the best strategy is that the teacher gives the student the chance to self-correct."

### **Selectivity should be the norm in oral error correction**

Research on oral errors suggests that errors are indispensable in foreign language learning and their correction may result in improved learning. However, if a teacher keeps stopping students amid stream to correct their errors, this may be counterproductive as students may lose self-confidence,

become reluctant to take risks, grow dependent on the teacher for correction or get discouraged and confused. A number of language teaching theoreticians (Celce-Murcia, 1985; Hammerly, 1991; Ur, 1996, among others) advocate the significance of the use of selective correction techniques for responding to students' errors. They maintain that teachers should correct only the most important errors or those of a certain type. Research on teacher treatment of students' errors shows that students would rather not be marked down for each oral error because it destroys their confidence (Carroll et al. 1992). Research also shows that teachers do not treat all the errors that do occur (Hairston, 1986). If correction has to be done selectively, it implies that teachers have to decide which errors should be prioritized for correction (Walz, 1982). Bartram and Walton (1991) assert that certain types of errors are more important than others. Therefore, it would be necessary for teachers to know the hierarchies of those errors. The most important errors commonly ranked by researchers and educators are (a) those that are relevant to the pedagogical focus, (b) those that occur frequently, and (c) those that hinder communication (Truscott, 2001).

However, teachers are often faced with difficult choices about how best to correct oral errors without discouraging learners and thwarting their desire to learn (Allwright & Bailey, 1991). They also need to be confident that they treat errors in such a way that the learners will, in fact, alter their output for the better. Therefore, teachers must provide learners with appropriate cognitive feedback as well as affective support (Brown, 1994). As oral activities generally aim at encouraging students to speak using whatever language they have at their disposal, a teacher should not keep interrupting them to correct their errors. This may result in shifting the activity focus from concentration on communication to concentration on some grammatical or phonological issues (Scrivener, 2005; Ur, 1996). Therefore, teachers should avoid interrupting the flow of the conversation or discussion; instead they may select some major errors made by the majority of students or individual students and then choose the appropriate time for dealing with them.

This theme of selectivity emerged in various areas of the data sets: teacher questionnaire, student questionnaire, and student focus groups. For example, when asked about whether teachers should correct all, some, or none of students' oral errors, Teacher Participant #4 said, "Oral errors usually occur when we have classroom discussion and my main aim then is to have people talk and participate as much as possible ... So I wouldn't stop them as soon as

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they make an error and correct them... It [error correction] changes the topic of the conversation from what we were talking about into a grammar or a pronunciation issue". The impossibility and impracticality of correcting all errors were also emphasized by Teacher Participant #3 when he said, "I correct some mistakes because it is impossible to correct all errors ... You have (44) students in class, so you just correct the most common and important errors." Teacher Participant #5 gave another reason for correcting some, rather than all, oral errors, when she said, "In fact, I correct some errors, not all of them because students will be shy and hesitant, which creates an obstacle or a problem."

Even when the focus is to help students become more accurate in their use of oral English, the number of times teachers interfere in the course of the discussion is important. Even here teachers should be selective. Teacher Participant #1 emphasized, "And there is the issue of how many times you correct. I think that it is useful to be alerted about some mistakes that you have made, but it is not useful being corrected five times in a minute as you can't remember all of them, so I try to be selective. I come with some errors students made in general in class and some errors which individual students made and try to correct just two or three of them.... You can't just overwhelm students. Just have them consciously think about one or two things and let them practice a lot of reading, a lot of writing, and a lot of speaking, and they can move on."

Student participants also emphasized the theme of selectivity. For example, while recalling one of her previous teachers, Student Participant #4 said, "She was really good. She really made this point about selecting oral errors, taking one or two things, and thinking about errors systematically. Just hitting one or two that you are going to focus on, and just focus on those and don't overwhelm the students with fifteen kinds of errors that they make." Similarly, Student Participant #3 said, "If I make six errors, the teacher mustn't correct all of six errors. The teacher should correct the things we have studied and just give hints about things we haven't studied yet so as to make understanding them easier in the future when we study them." This issue of restricting teacher's correction to a small number of errors focusing mainly on language points students have already studied was also evident in what Student Participant #1 said, "The teacher is obliged to correct errors related to what he has taught me, but he is not obliged to correct errors related to things he hasn't taught us yet." Student preference for selectivity in oral error correction was affirmed by one

student questionnaire respondent: "If too many of my errors are corrected, I'll feel embarrassed. However, if just a few errors are corrected, I accept this because I like to learn from my errors." Other student respondents qualified their preference for selective error correction by statements such as "A lot of corrections and explanations complicate the learning process," and "Class time is not enough for correcting all errors."

### **Palestinian EFL Teacher Preparation Programs Should Implant in Would-be Teachers Lifelong Learning Skills**

Dissatisfaction with the teacher preparation programs which the study participants attended was expressed by a good majority of teacher participants. Such dissatisfaction, resulting from some serious inadequacies and deficiencies of those programs, was emphasized by Teacher Participant #3, who said, "I need to know more about methodology, to know how to prepare lessons, to focus on problems faced by students." Teacher Participant #4 also expressed a similar dissatisfaction when she said, "I think I was not prepared well enough to be a good teacher of English. I have a BA in English language teaching, but I graduated without having the ability to prepare a good lesson plan. Even though we had practicum at schools, we felt confused all the time."

It seems that the EFL teacher preparation programs which the majority of teacher participants attended suffered from the chronic disease with which programs intended for preparing practitioners are usually plagued. Those EFL teacher preparation programs most often "consist of bits of psychology, bits of linguistics, [bits of literature], methodological tips, and chunks of teaching practice with the result that student teachers rarely see for themselves the process of integration which by implication they themselves are supposed to exemplify" (Brumfit, 1983: 202). Some teacher participants stressed this disintegration between the theory and practice of teaching. In this vein, Teacher Participant #4 said, "What we studied at the university is different from what we need in order to be able to teach at school.... The theory is totally different from practice." This opinion was confirmed by Teacher Participant #5, who, while thinking back of her teacher preparation program, said, "There were huge gaps between theory and its application."

Palestinian EFL teacher preparation programs should not be confined to imparting knowledge and theoretical contents divorced from practice. These programs need to implant in student teachers the seeds of learning how to learn. In other words, these programs should equip student teachers with the skills and

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tools that may help them become lifelong learners, inquirers, and researchers in their own classrooms. This kind of teacher preparation has become an indispensable necessity in an ever-changing life and school context where, according to Toffler (1980), knowledge grows increasingly perishable as today's "fact" becomes tomorrow's misinformation, and where, according to Rogers (1969):

The only man who is educated is the man who has learned how to learn; the man who has learned how to adapt and change; the man who has realized that no knowledge is secure, that the only process of seeking knowledge gives a basis for security (104).

Furthermore, schools should be able to address students' intellectual needs in the twenty-first century (Darling-Hammond, 2000) and provide students with an access to quality education, where teachers prepare them well for their futures. To prepare teachers for unceasingly emerging and changeable needs, teacher preparation programs must not teach merely knowledge - although research by Olsen (2000) indicates that a knowledgeable teacher is better equipped to facilitate student learning than teachers who have not been academically prepared - but also ways to manipulate, enhance, and apply this knowledge. This means student teachers must learn how to learn, and their preparation should be viewed as an inquiry-oriented endeavor (Claudet, 1999).

Preparing student teachers along these lines should enable them to address emerging needs through endlessly acquiring new knowledge and skills. This necessitates that teacher preparation programs adapt their traditional models of teacher education in a way that may help their graduates become better teachers, particularly of young children, through providing purposeful and systematic preparation aimed at enabling student teachers to become lifelong learners. This kind of teacher preparation will be helpful in two ways. First, teachers will be able to make up for any inadequacies or deficiencies in their teacher preparation programs. Teacher preparation programs, however comprehensive and ambitious they are, may fail to provide student teachers with all the tools, skills, and knowledge they may need to perform their work professionally and satisfactorily throughout their different teaching career trajectories. Thus, to make up for any deficiencies or inadequacies in their teacher preparation programs or to cope efficiently with new contents and/or skills, student teachers should be trained to be inquirers and researchers inside and outside their classrooms. Assuming such roles, Teacher Participant #3 said,

"I surf the Internet to find out what other teachers would do and try to figure out what other people think as effective because it was not explicitly taught to me in my own teacher preparation program."

Second, teachers can make up for any shortage in instructional materials or activities. When set textbook contents do not cater to the needs and individual differences of their students, then it becomes teachers' responsibility to devise and/or search for complementary materials that may meet different students' needs. Once more teachers need to become inquirers, researchers, and even material writers to devise and make available appropriate materials and activities for their students. Teacher Participant #5 capitalizes on this point by saying, "When my students need help, and I don't necessarily have the tools, I have to go to the Internet or to some reference books or journal articles to figure out what I think should work out."

No doubt, teacher preparation programs with their various roles and tasks are the cornerstone in the process of education enhancement at all levels, especially since good preparation of teachers contributes directly and decisively to the enhancement of quality of education, of which teachers constitute a main pillar. Nonetheless, despite the decisive role played by teacher preparation programs, research reveals that they are faced with serious problems that affect their performance and the efficiency of their teacher graduates. Therefore, restless efforts should be made to achieve a comprehensive modernization of teacher preparation programs in the Palestinian faculties of education, so as to be able to go in tandem with world scientific and professional development, while taking into consideration the Palestinian context in general, and each program's environment in particular, on a systematic basis that guarantees effectiveness of teaching and learning, and total quality as an approach to educational reform.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

In the light of the findings and conclusions, following are some recommendations to the different stakeholders in teaching and learning English as an FL in Palestinian: EFL teachers and students, and EFL teacher preparation programs.

#### **Recommendations for Palestinian EFL teachers**

- Palestinian EFL teachers should be tolerant of students' oral errors, develop positive attitudes toward them, and perceive them as an inevitable and integral part of the FL learning road and not wrong turns on that road.

## **A Comparison between Palestinian EFL Teachers**

- Palestinian EFL teachers should be able to create a friendly, stress-free, student-sensitive, safe and supportive environment conducive to learning where errors are perceived as a natural occurrence in the process of FL learning.
- Palestinian EFL teachers should expect that their students are prone to making even more errors than their counterparts in other contexts worldwide because errors tend to occur more if the elements of the target language are different from those of the students' mother tongue, as it is the case with Arabic and English.
- Palestinian EFL teachers should believe in the usefulness of oral errors.
- Palestinian EFL teachers should be aware of and have at their disposal a wide range of oral error correction strategies because different students learn in different ways.
- When correcting students' oral errors, Palestinian EFL teachers should use individualized correction that entails tailoring correction in accordance with students' learning styles, personalities, preferences, proficiency level in English, etc.
- Palestinian EFL teachers should realize that oral error correction aims at building confidence, raising awareness, acknowledging achievement and progress, and helping students become more accurate in their use of English.
- Palestinian EFL teachers should use more explicit and direct rather than implicit and indirect oral error correction strategies.
- Palestinian EFL teachers should avoid the extremes of oral error correction. Over-correction of students' errors results in intimidation, embarrassment, frustration, anxiety, confusion, humiliation, and low self-esteem. Non-correction makes the students think that the teacher is incompetent and/or careless. In addition, absence of error correction may lower students' achievement on the accuracy-oriented tests they are obliged to sit for
- EFL teachers should choose the most appropriate time to correct student errors because mistimed error correction could be harmful for the students.
- Palestinian EFL teachers should have a dialogic interaction (Aljaafreh & Lamtolf, 1994) with their students. The aim of such interaction should be obtaining firsthand knowledge of how students prefer their oral errors to be corrected in order to make the best use of oral error correction.

- Teachers should motivate students' self-learning and encourage them to participate in the correction of their oral errors.

### **Recommendations for Palestinian EFL Students**

- Palestinian EFL students should welcome and be open to oral errors and their correction because correction helps them clarify their understanding of the meaning and construction of the language.
- Palestinian EFL students should not view errors as inhibitory, but rather as evidence that they are learning.
- Palestinian EFL students should have a voice in how their oral errors should be corrected through working together with their teachers so that error correction can be integrated in a meaningful way.
- Palestinian EFL students should take some responsibility for error correction, as it should not be the responsibility of the teacher alone.
- Palestinian EFL students should remember that they definitely benefit from error correction, deepen their understanding, avoid errors and learn more effectively.
- Palestinian EFL students should not be afraid of error correction as it helps them become more aware of where, when, and why they make errors regardless of the error correction strategies their teachers use.
- Palestinian EFL students should realize that the most efficient way to learn from errors is not by simply waiting for the teacher to provide them with the correct forms, but by attempting to discover them and test different hypotheses (Carroll, et al, 1992).

### **Recommendations for EFL Teacher Preparation Programs**

- When hiring instructors for educating and training Palestine EFL teachers, teacher preparation programs should pay special attention to those instructors' attitudes toward errors and their correction.
- Teacher preparation programs should use accurate selection procedures capable of allowing into them only student teachers whose personalities and attitudes do not "run counter to those which the collective experience of educators regards as necessary or acceptable" (Stevens, 1977, 72).
- If EFL teacher preparation programs fail to identify prospective teachers' negative attitudes and attitudes at the admission stage, they should work hard on changing such attitudes and attitudes throughout the program's lifespan.
- Teacher preparation programs should put error correction top on their list of priorities and provide courses concerned with effective error correction

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aimed at equipping student teachers with a wide array of effective oral correction strategies.

- Teacher preparation programs should have and develop a sound philosophy and educational methodology concerning error correction in particular.

### **CONCLUSION**

In order to achieve maximal benefit from teaching and learning English in Palestinian schools, it becomes the responsibility of all parties involved to create the best conditions conducive to constructive and effective learning through using the best available resources and teaching-learning strategies. Chief among these are the strategies used for correcting students' oral errors. The current study results emphasize the importance of teachers being familiar with a variety of oral correction strategies so as to cater for students' individual factors such as learning styles, personalities, preferences, attitudes, and attitudes. Moreover, teachers should be able to create a classroom environment which is unthreatening and conducive to effective learning. Further, students' voices should be encouraged and their attitudes and feelings should be taken seriously because error correction is provided for their sake, and thus they should have a say in the 'who,' 'when,' 'how,' and 'what' of their error correction.

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**Appendix (A)**  
**Relationship between Teachers' Attitudes toward Oral Errors and the Strategies Teachers Prefer to Use to Correct Errors**

<b>Oral Correction Strategy</b>	<b>% weight</b>	<b>Teachers' Attitudes toward Oral Errors</b>	<b>% weight</b>
The teacher points out the error and provides the correct form.	79.4	Learners' errors should be corrected as soon as they are made in order to prevent the formation of bad habits.	75.9
The teacher immediately corrects the error, rather than taking time to discuss it.	54.1	Learners' errors should be corrected as soon as they are made in order to prevent the formation of bad habits.	75.9
The teacher corrects only the errors that interfere with communication.	52.9	EFL teachers should encourage students to express themselves rather than continually correct their errors.  Teachers should correct all the oral errors students make because ignored errors result in imperfect learning.	78.8  59.4
The teacher uses delayed error correction (i.e. provides correction at the end of the task).	60.6	Learners' errors should be corrected as soon as they are made in order to prevent the formation of bad habits.	75.9
The teacher uses postponed error correction (i.e. provides correction the following day or week).	37.3	Learners' errors should be corrected as soon as they are made in order to prevent the formation of bad habits	75.9

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The teacher completely ignores students' oral errors.	28.2	Students learn more through error correction.	78.6
		Teachers' corrections of students' oral errors help students learn and improve their English.	83.7
		Teachers should correct all the oral errors students make because ignored errors result in imperfect learning.	59.4

**. Appendix (B)**  
**Comparison between Palestinian EFL Teachers' and Students' Preferences for Oral Correction Strategies**

	Oral Correction Strategy	Teachers		Students	
		% Weight	Rank	% Weight	Rank
1.	The teacher gives some clue or example rather than immediate correction.	79.4	1	63.53	6
2.	The teacher explains why the utterance is incorrect.	72.9	--	84.53	3
3.	The teacher points out the error and provides the correct form.	79.2	2	87.10	2
4.	The teacher immediately corrects the error rather than taking time to discuss it.	54.1	6	38.24	9
5.	The teacher repeats the student's utterance up to the error and waits for self-correction.	70.6	4	87.96	1
6.	The teacher indicates the occurrence of errors by nonverbal behavior, such as gestures or facial expressions.	75.5	3	66.55	5
7.	The teacher corrects only the errors that interfere with communication.	52.9	7	78.24	4
8.	The teacher interrupts me to correct my oral errors.	39.4	8	59.35	7
9.	The teacher uses delayed error correction (i.e. provides correction at the end of the task).	60.6	5	49.67	8
10.	The teacher uses postponed error correction (i.e. provides correction the following day or week).	37.3	9	28.21	10