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Rhythm and pronunciation of American English: Jazzing up EFL teaching through Jazz Chants

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Bio Data

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to explore EFL learners' L2 listening and speaking skills using Jazz Chants, which are rhythmic expressions of American English designed for ESL learners to speak and understand with special attention to the sound system (Graham, 1978). However, research empirically documenting the link between the use of Jazz Chants to develop EFL students listening and speaking competence in Taiwan has been scant. In this study, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analyzed to ascertain the effectiveness of using Jazz Chants-blended instruction. The results revealed that Jazz Chants helped students to become more fluent and willing to speak English with better listening comprehension, and their interests and confidence were also strengthened. Music was also found to complement Jazz Chants well to stimulate students' learning motivation. The findings provide useful information and pedagogical implications for English language teaching professionals.

Key Words

Jazz Chants, authentic input, L2 exposure, speaking, rhythms, intonation, suprasegmental, pronunciation, musical intelligence

Introduction

Traditional EFL learning in Taiwan

How to teach L2 speaking skills effectively has been a fiercely discussed topic in Taiwan for decades. Taiwanese students are known for their test-taking strategies on several standardized tests such as the High School and College Entrance Exams. However, getting high scores on these tests does not equal the same English oral proficiency for many Taiwanese students. Traditional EFL education in Taiwan has been rather monotonous and grammar-oriented, which was designed to prepare students for various standardized tests for academic purposes. Given the fact that English is taught as a foreign language not a second language in Taiwan, acquiring fluent and native like speaking competence has been a challenge for many students.

This issue is important because the typical Asian EFL settings lack environmental opportunities for actual L2 use (Chen, Warden & Chang, 2005). In Taiwan where a teacher-centered teaching and learning environment is the mainstream, Taiwanese EFL learners are doomed to reticence and passivity (Cheng, 2000). For many EFL teachers and students, one special aspect of assessing ESL/EFL students' English speaking skills in Taiwan is through pronunciation, including sounds, intonation, and stress. According to the researcher's experiences of teaching several English standardized tests such as TOEFL, IELTS and GEPT (General English Proficiency Test; an English standardized test administered by the Language Training and Testing Center and sponsored by the Ministry of Education in Taiwan) where speaking skills are assessed, many students still have difficulties mastering the test by scoring high. However, seeing that most college students these days have been learning English as a foreign language for more than a decade or two since elementary school or kindergarten; it is thus worth noting that effective teaching of L2 speaking skills are not only necessary, but also urgent. Statistics by ETS (TOEFL administer and developer) also show that Taiwanese candidates received the average score of 72 out of 120 in 2007, lower than 77 in Mainland China, and 78 in South Korea. The overall ranking for Taiwanese students' scores was the 17th out of 30 countries in Asia, showing an embarrassingly low performance. As it turns out, the speaking task was and is still the most difficult part in the new TOEFL internet-based Test (iBT) for students in Taiwan, and it has been regarded as the cause for the unsatisfactory result of the overall performance as speaking accounts for 30 out of 120 points in total. It is also known by both language teachers and students that being able to speak fluently would give test candidates more opportunities to get a higher grade. However, Taiwanese EFL settings tend to emphasize the visual channels more than the communicative and kinesthetic, affecting students' learning dimensions at various levels (Oxford, Holloway & Horton-Murillo, 1992).

Learning constraints for Taiwanese EFL students

Taiwanese students used to be famous for their outstanding TOEFL scores compared with other European countries before 2005, where the Computer-based Test

(CBT) and Paper-based Test (PBT) did not have a speaking task and the focus was on grammatical and syntactical analysis. Therefore, this showed that Taiwanese EFL students were taught in a way different from how the speaking task was assessed, which did not focus on critical and analytical thinking of communicative as well as reasoning skills. At the same time, many English teachers and policy makers in Taiwan have also noticed this phenomenon where students are only good at answering multiple-choice questions because they are used to the traditional Grammar Translation Method in which translation from L2 to L1 is sufficient with no practical or actual L2 communicative application. Because the Taiwanese educational system depends heavily on grammatical analysis, it gives students almost no chance to speak in class (Ha, 2004). Hence, this has made students passive and unwilling to step out of their comfort zone by learning how to speak because the test didn't require them to do so. Empirical research also suggests that a lack of integrated curriculum and learning motivation among Taiwanese EFL learners have a negative impact on English education in Taiwan, since most teaching materials are derived from western ESL materials or the Grammar Translation Method where memorization is the main focus (Warden, 2008). Therefore, Taiwanese EFL students are pampered by spoon-fed rules, some of which are obsolete, and at the same time their appetite for acquiring and using English as a natural and living language is spoiled (Hwang, 2005).

Likewise, some standardized tests in Taiwan such as the Basic Competence Test for entering high schools and the College Entrance Exam both don't assess students' English language listening and speaking skills. Great attention has been paid to teaching students' academic literacy skills they only need on campus not about daily communication (Ferris & Tagg, 1996). This not only leads to students' low English communicative ability, but also inadequate listening comprehension skills. Due to technical difficulty and financial consideration, listening and speaking assessments are so far not very popular at this moment for standardized admission tests in Taiwan, so it seems unnecessary for students to acquire their speaking competence. Under these circumstances, students in Taiwan have become passive language learners, but they were still able to pass the tests with flying colors.

Time to change

Unfortunately, everything was changed when ETS decided to change the test format by reducing the traditional grammatical and structural analysis and increasing communicative tasks. Students in Taiwan panicked in 2006 when the latest version TOEFL iBT was introduced with speaking component and integrated writing task including both reading and listening tasks combined. Students at that time were unprepared because of their traditional teaching and learning mode, and as if that was not enough, the introduction of the newly-designed TOEIC (with both writing and speaking tasks) also made English learning scary for many students in Taiwan. Therefore, in order to make Taiwan's EFL education more effective for various reasons including academic purposes or employment requirements; every teacher in Taiwan should strive to teach L2 speaking skills effectively. Seeing that all the English standardized tests require candidates to be able to speak English freely with confidence, it is necessary to improve students' speaking skills as one of the course objectives. From the researcher's observations and experiences teaching ESL in New York, it was very popular for language teachers to utilize Jazz Chants, poems which

used jazz rhythms to illustrate the natural stress and intonation patterns of conversational American English, to improve students' listening and speaking competence. This echoes several empirical studies which reveal that using songs in ESL/EFL classrooms has been proven to be effective in developing students' L2 listening and speaking skills since they are composed of varying rhythms and tempos that create a more relaxing and less inhibiting environment for language learners (Griffith & Olson, 1992).

Hence, teaching Jazz Chants has become more popular in many ESL classrooms because they are useful tools for working on the sound system in English, especially for developing an ear for the correct stress along with intonation patterns of the spoken language (Graham, 1994). As Lee (2010) also suggests, teaching ESL students L2 rhythms provides them with a lot of features such as deleting, blending, shortening, lengthening and rhyming sounds in spoken English, which are essential for students to acquire English stress and intonation. This shows why Jazz Chants have caught the attention of many ESL teachers around the world. However, research on the use of Jazz Chants in Taiwanese EFL classrooms has been scant and there are several unanswered questions left in terms of how they could be applied in the country. In an attempt to answer these questions, this study was conducted not only to probe the effectiveness of employing Jazz Chants to improve Taiwanese EFL learners' listening and speaking competence, but also their perceptions, attitudes and confidence in speaking English. Therefore, three research questions are proposed as follows:

1. Can Jazz Chants be used to improve Taiwanese EFL learners' English listening and speaking competence?
2. Can Jazz Chants be used to boost Taiwanese EFL learners' interests and motivations of learning English?
3. Can Jazz Chants give Taiwanese EFL learners more confidence in speaking English?

Literature review

Current EFL education in Taiwan

College English majors in Taiwan arduously study classical English Literature. Granted, classical literature is something to be treasured and relished as well as to be read for gaining passive knowledge, but it has nothing to do with the base of basic and active communication (Hwang, 2005). This is not only true for English majors in Taiwan, but many Taiwanese college students also have little or no English exposure to communicate in English after the freshman year. Research also shows that many Taiwanese EFL students have long been "indoctrinated" to the point that unless a certain grammatical point is clearly explained, they subconsciously reject to learn (Shrum & Glisan, 1994). Because of this learning method, students in Taiwan are jaded with memorization of grammatical rules and structural analysis (Hwang, 2005).

Other variety of English uses such as the degree between formal and informal usages, and expressions used in different contexts are rarely discussed in class. Therefore, students' English language repertoire is thin and flat, "resulting in the fossilization in the form of vocabulary book English" (Nunan, 1999: p. 154). As Norton & Toohy (2001) point out, a successful language learner is not measured solely by mastery of linguistic knowledge but by participation in multiple and various conversations in the target language communities.

Cultivating students' L2 speaking competence

As the accent of a speaker is typically characterized by a description of the pronunciation of each individual sound, the placement of stress and of rhythm and intonation; it is worth considering using the teaching materials that are related to these aspects and can address ESL/EFL learners' needs (Esling & Wong, 1983). Chen, Fan & Lin (1995) recommend that language teachers spend more time working on individual sounds by teaching English rhythms because they may find a surprising progress in students' English pronunciation. According to Chen, Fan & Lin (1995), Chinese EFL students tend to have difficulties differentiating sentence rhythms, stress and syllable grouping. Many students in Taiwan also tend to stress every word, making it sound as if they were speaking Chinese when they speak English (Kung, 2012). Shih (1999) warns that the instruction could be time-consuming and unproductive if learners did not receive enough training for stress and syllable grouping. Under these circumstances, many ESL/EFL learners tend to sound abrupt, angry, adamant or impatient without intending to (Grant, 1993). Another common problem is that students in Taiwan tend to pronounce words separately with unsystematic and unnecessary pauses, making them sound choppy and unnatural as a result (Shih, 1999). Browne and Huckin (1987) and Grant (1993) also mention that such overuse and misuse of stress could make students' speech rhythms difficult to comprehend.

Incorporating Jazz Chants into Taiwanese EFL settings

In order to teach L2 speaking skills more effectively, many language teachers have noted the use of Carolyn Graham's Jazz Chants in many ESL classrooms (Pennington & Richards, 1986). A Jazz Chant is a rhythmic expression of spoken American English composed and proposed by Graham (1978) for ESL learners to improve their speaking skills. It was designed to raise learners' awareness of the sound system, which reflects the rhythms of traditional American Jazz proposed by Graham (1978). As far as its uses in class, teachers would encourage students to participate in communicative activities centered on the sound system with rehearsing dialogues (Graham, 1978). There are also several advantages of using Jazz Chants as Graham (1978) points out. Firstly, they could be used as a warm-up activity for students to get ready and prepared for the class. Secondly, Huber (1994) points out that the speed of the chants is at a natural to slightly fast rate that pushes learners beyond their current fossilized pronunciation. Thirdly, it gives language teachers more chances to pick out students' problems when it is given as a dictation activity (Huber, 1994). Seeing the advantages above, its popularity has soared around the world to foster ESL students' speaking competence (Pennington & Richards, 1986). For

example, Arima and Sato (2008) mention that Jazz Chants have been used as one important approach to familiarizing students with English sounds and rhythms in Asia after 2001. Also, the examination of the effects of pausing, stress and intonation on the comprehensibility of non-native English speech has prompted language teachers and materials developers to devise different techniques for incorporating suprasegmental practice into the classrooms (Tanner & Landon, 2009).

The use of Jazz Chants provides features of stress and intonation which are included in the realm of the so-called prosodic or suprasegmental domain which can be used together with the related coarticulatory phenomena of the blending and overlapping of sounds in fluent speech (Pennington & Richards, 1986). As a result, the involvement of relative levels of stress and pitch within syllables, words, phrases and longer stretches of speech can be produced more effectively (Huber, 1994). Likewise, other oral techniques have also been advocated as means to improve learners' use of prosodic features such as mirroring, tracking, and shadowing native speaker discourse modules (Celce-Murcia, Brinton & Goodwin, 1996). While there are several methods that can promote students' contextualized awareness in L2 speaking, according to some researchers such as Celce-Murcia, Brinton & Goodwin, (1996), Pennington & Richards (1986) and Tanner & Landon (2009), the knowledge of which strategy works the best has not been officially confirmed. Meanwhile, one of the earliest techniques, Jazz Chants have continued to be used by teachers who have students chant poems and songs to gain awareness of English rhythm, stress and intonation (Richman, 2005).

While the popularity of using Jazz Chants in many ESL contexts is increasing as Pennington and Richards (1986) and Graham (1978) suggest, there are still several drawbacks of using Jazz Chants seen from several empirical studies. First of all, it is relatively difficult for teachers to get to know each student in different classes because the focus is placed on sounds and rhythms; students are sometimes asked to solely imitate what they have just heard during this practice (Berry & Williams, 1992). Then, the more proficient learners may dominate the class because they are more aware of the sound system, making the less fluent students discouraged and frustrated at the beginning of the instruction (Tanner & Landon, 2009).

From the research discussed above, it is important to note that the pros and cons of Jazz Chants have been identified in the field of ELT. However, the use of Jazz Chants and how it impacts learners' English learning and feedback have not been fully investigated so far in Taiwanese EFL context. In order to fill this gap, the present study aims to probe the relationship between Jazz Chants and Taiwanese EFL learners' English learning including their listening and speaking skills, perceptions, motivation and confidence.

Methodology

Participants

Thirty participants were recruited in this study (19 females and 11 males), and all of them were enrolled in an intermediate EFL speaking class at a language institute

in Taiwan. All of the students had been assessed by the Institutional English Listening and Speaking Test before they were placed at the intermediate level ranging from TOEIC 550 to 650 (CEFR B1). They were all college or graduate students in their early twenties hoping to improve their English speaking skills. On average, all of them have been learning English for about thirteen years in Taiwan, and none of them had been to an English-speaking country for more than three months. This study was conducted over the course of 12 weeks with three hours per week, 36 hours in total. A textbook was given with occasional handouts during the instruction. All participants were asked to fill out a Pre-questionnaire before the study eliciting their experiences, perceptions and confidence in speaking English with their self-assessed speaking skills. From the Pre-questionnaires, the most common way for them to practice speaking was through reading aloud in class back in high school. In addition, the instructor in this study was also a researcher and observer.

Procedures

During this study, Jazz Chants were used as a warm-up activity before the weekly instruction for 12 weeks, and it lasted for about twenty minutes for each meeting. The source of the materials was taken and adapted from the Jazz Chants series: Jazz Chants (1978), Small Talk (1986) and Holiday Jazz Chants (1999). They were chosen to suit students' needs in each class every week (see Appendix D for the selected materials) by the instructor based on the course contents, and the focus of the instruction was mainly mimic-based with no explicit explanation of grammar or sentence structures. In order to make this activity more interesting and useful for students, blanks were made for dictation practice. Participants were asked to listen to the chants for the first time attentively without any worksheets to improve their listening comprehension skills. Then, a worksheet with blanks was handed out for a dictation practice. To improve students' performance, everyone was asked to repeat after the teacher sentence by sentence for three times before they were asked to do it in groups with two members for approximately five minutes. The entire procedures included firstly, repeating with the instructor; secondly, repeating after the instructor; thirdly, chanting out loud without the instructor; and finally, chanting out loud with each group member. The purpose of doing so was to create an independent and comfortable learning experience with foreseeable improvements when they could chant with comfort in groups, followed by a vocabulary and grammar instruction at the end of this activity. Meanwhile, the instructor would make the chants more rhythmic by tapping a beat and playing a song at the same time during this activity. Normally, each chant was performed for 12 times in total. Students were also encouraged to practice the chants after class on a daily basis.

Instruments

Both qualitative and quantitative analyses were conducted by the Pre- and Post-questionnaires (see Appendices A and B) eliciting their experiences and feedback before and after this study, along with the Pre and Post-tests followed by a semi-structured interview (see Appendix C) with each participant at the end of the instruction. All participants' listening and speaking skills were also assessed during the interview by the researcher at the end of this study regarding their performance on

intonation and pronunciation. All responses and feedback were recorded verbatim and analyzed under every participant's consent. Due to the fact that all participants in this study were adults over the age of 18, a Participant Consent Form was used for each student for their authorized permission before this study started.

The statistical significance of the descriptive statistical data was analyzed using the paired samples t-test. All data were processed using the statistical software package, SPSS17 (Chicago, IL, USA). The level of statistical significance was set to a P value less than 0.05.

Results and discussion

To examine the development of interests and motivation of learning before and after the instruction of Jazz Chants, the Pre- and Post-questionnaires (a five-point Likert scale asking students to respond to the statements with agreement or disagreement) were designed to elicit students' self-assessed speaking improvements over the course of 12 weeks. Also, a paired samples t-test was run in order to answer the second research question whether Jazz Chants could be used to boost students' interests and motivation to learn English. The answers to questions two and three on the surveys were used to evaluate whether the participants' interests and motivation had been affected after 12 weeks of Jazz Chants instruction. From item two: I am interested in learning English through Jazz Chants; and item three: I am motivated and active in learning English; the mean scores in the Post-questionnaires (question 2, M= 3.92; question 3, M= 3.64) were higher than those in the Pre-questionnaires (question 2, M= 3.24; question 3, M= 3.08). From the statistical analysis, item 2's p-value was .013, and item 3's p-value was .021; both of which were less than .05 ($P < .05$). This implies that the participants were generally more interested, motivated and active in learning English after the instruction. The first item: I like to speak English also had similar feedback that showed participants were more willing to speak English after this study. The mean score was 3.24 in the Pre-questionnaire and rose noticeably to 3.82 in the Post-questionnaire, showing their preference to speak English had increased with a p-value at .044 ($P < .05$), slightly higher than items two and three. This could also be seen from the interview session in which participants admitted being intimidated to speak English as a result of their previous learning mode which focused solely on grammar analysis and vocabulary memorization. Though their progress could still be observed from the results, it might take more time for them to really speak up without worrying about making any mistakes.

Item four which attempted to find out whether listening to English every day could improve participants' listening and speaking competence showed that listening to English every day became more important for students after this study because of Jazz Chants instruction. They valued daily authentic exposure more after this study and would love to make it a habit to do so on a daily basis ($P < .05$). From the results, the Post-questionnaire mean score (M= 4.64) was higher than that of the Pre-questionnaire mean score (M= 4.20). Simply put, all participants were more convinced the importance of listening to English on a daily basis. The statistical data are shown in Table 1 as follows:

Table1. Comparison of the participants' opinions and experiences of learning English before and after learning Jazz Chants

Question	Number	Mean	SD	<i>p</i>
1. I like to speak English.				
Pre-questionnaire	30	3.24	1.093	.044*
Post-questionnaire	30	3.82	0.839	
2. I am interested in learning English through Jazz Chants.				
Pre-questionnaire	30	3.24	1.165	.013*
Post-questionnaire	30	3.92	0.790	
3. I am motivated and active in learning English.				
Pre-questionnaire	30	3.08	1.125	.021*
Post-questionnaire	30	3.64	0.682	
4. I think listening to English every day could improve my listening and speaking skills.				
Pre-questionnaire	30	4.20	1.193	.033*
Post-questionnaire	30	4.64	0.735	
5. I am confident in speaking English				
Pre-questionnaire	30	2.92	1.068	.034*
Post-questionnaire	30	3.68	0.892	
6. I like to speak English in public actively and independently.				
Pre-questionnaire	30	3.02	1.224	.023*
Post-questionnaire	30	3.84	0.619	
7. I think I am fluent in speaking English when expressing my opinions.				
Pre-questionnaire	30	4.25	0.877	.043*
Post-questionnaire	30	4.64	0.812	

**p* < .05

With regards to students' confidence and self-assessed English speaking skills, items five to seven were designed to elicit their opinions before and after this study. From the surveys, there was a significant difference between the Pre- and Post-questionnaires in the participants' responses to item 5 ($p = .034$), item 6 ($p = .023$), and item 7 ($p = .043$). All the p-value was less than 0.05 ($P < .05$). The mean scores from items five to seven in the Pre-questionnaire were 2.92, 3.02 and 4.25, which were lower than the scores in the Post-questionnaire at 3.68, 3.84 and 4.64 respectively. That is, with all p-values under 0.05 and the higher mean scores in the end, it is thus possible to interpret that the learning results were positive because of Jazz Chants. Furthermore, from the participants' responses to question 5, it could be inferred that they became more confident in speaking English after this study. The mean scores showed a considerable difference between the Pre- and Post-questionnaires. Also, all participants' feedback was collected during the semi-structured interview, and approximately more than three quarters (22 out of 30 participants in total; 9 males and 13 females) of them reported that they were satisfied to be able to learn English through Jazz Chants, and they became more courageous to speak English even though they still encountered occasional word loss from time to time. The following responses were recorded from the interview about their self-assessed speaking improvements under every participant's consent:

I think speaking English is not that scary because I am more willing to learn from my mistakes.

(Participant 7)

I am not afraid of speaking English in class because the teacher encouraged us to chant together as a group, and learning how to speak like Americans through Jazz Chants is fun.

(Participant 11)

I think I am more confident in speaking English in public after learning Jazz Chants and how it could be used to improve not only my pronunciation, but also intonation.

(Participant 19)

Moreover, it could also be found from items six ($p = .023$) and seven ($p = .043$) that all participants could speak English more actively and independently; and they thought their speaking competence had been improved after learning through Jazz Chants ($P < .05$). Likewise, the mean scores of items six and seven were 3.02 and 4.25 in the Pre-questionnaire, which were lower than 3.84 and 4.64 in the Post-questionnaire. Thus, a conclusion could be reached that participants generally felt the improvements after this study. Many participants mentioned during the interview sessions that they used to be afraid of speaking English in class because they did not want to make any grammatical mistakes, and they were not sure if their pronunciation

was correct. As a result, they became unwilling to speak and relied on monotonous memorization to acquire new vocabulary. However, their attitudes changed after this study and they were also more independent and willing to learn English on their own. Furthermore, speaking English was no longer that daunting at all after this study. Almost seventy percent of participants (8 males and 12 females out of 30) strongly agreed that they became more willing to talk about their experience of learning English through Jazz Chants because it had been helpful and rewarding. They were also more motivated to speak English in public. In addition, their attitudes and experiences about this instruction were also assessed by the researcher during the interview, which are illustrated as follows under every participant's consent:

I could speak more fluently after learning Jazz Chants because I am used to the structures and rhythms of American English.

(Participant 3)

I am more willing to learn English using Jazz Chants because it taught me how to speak well, and I can always practice by myself anytime and anywhere.

(Participant 7)

I think I know how to speak English well more effectively by becoming an active learner.

(Participant 12)

I think my speaking skills have improved and I am now more fluent to speak English with more confidence.

(Participant 18)

I was scared to speak English in front of other people in the past because I thought my pronunciation was not correct, but now words just come out automatically thanks to the chanting we did in class.

(Participant 21)

I really enjoyed learning how rhythms and words came together and how I could improve from that next time when I speak.

(Participant 24)

Similar results could also be found from the Pre and Post-tests, where the paired samples t test indicated that $p < .001$ ($p = .000$) on the Institutional Listening Test with the mean score increasing from 76.06 to 79.75 at the end of this study. In other words, the results once again showed that students' listening comprehension had been improved because of Jazz Chants over the course of 12 weeks. On the same note, according to the results from the Institutional Speaking Test, participants also showed substantial improvements in their speaking proficiency. The paired samples t test also revealed a considerable difference at $p < .001$ ($p = .000$) with the mean score enhancing from 76.63 to 81.25 at the end. Simply put, this just explains that students' speaking improvements had been strengthened because of Jazz Chants. Based on the results of both the Pre and Post-tests, it is possible to interpret that Jazz Chants indeed had a positive influence on their English learning, especially on their listening and speaking improvements. The statistical data are compared and illustrated in Table 2 and 3.

Table 2. Comparison of participants' listening proficiency before and after learning through Jazz Chants

Institutional Listening Test	Number	Mean	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Pre-test	30	76.06	6.919	4.738	.000*
Post-test	30	79.75	5.442		

* $p < .001$

Table 3. Comparison of participants' speaking proficiency before and after learning through Jazz Chants

Institutional Speaking Test	Number	Mean	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>
Pre-test	30	76.63	5.104	6.766	.000*
Post-test	30	81.25	5.249		

* $p < .001$

Music and language learning

This study revealed that many participants found themselves more engaged in class through Jazz Chants in various ways. One specific example was when the researcher combined music with the poems for them to chant, they generally did a better job at remembering the entire chants including the vocabulary and structures. As Abbott (2002) suggests, many successful ESL/EFL teachers have found that music could be used to facilitate language learning by increasing learning retention. Music is also widely used along with chants to help students remember structures of the target language. Songs naturally aid memory, and the fact that they provide students with more sound awareness and intonation nuance plays a paramount role in effective ESL/EFL teaching (Oxford, 1989). Also, since all linguistic features are all included in songs, language learners can even benefit from a choral or individual reading of the lyrics in each song (Crawford & Al-Khattab, 2009). From the interview sessions in this study, participants also reported that the use of music with the chants positively affected their accents, memory, grammar, mood and motivation from its relaxing nature. Jourdain (1997) also claims that songs comprise complimentary systems of structured linguistic communication that can evoke emotion as well as enthusiasm in learning a foreign language. Feedback from almost all participants showed they enjoyed learning English through Jazz Chants in conjunction with music. Whittaker (1981) thus asserts that songs aid in all four language learning areas including listening, speaking, reading and writing. She recommends that teachers “ 1) play the songs as students silently look at the words; 2) have students repeat the words without singing them; 3) point out new vocabulary, idioms, grammar items and give needed pronunciation cues; 4) play the song again, letting the students join in when they feel confident about singing along” (Whittaker, 1981; p.57). Bancroft (1985) also suggests that it is worth encouraging language teachers to employ music and Jazz Chants for better and more effective L2 learning results.

Musical-rhythmic intelligence

Though the previous paragraph is centered on music and L2 learning, other underlying factors in language learning; namely, multiple intelligences are also worth taking into account. Gardener (1993) proposes that there are eight distinct domains of intelligences that facilitate students’ language learning, including verbal-linguistic, mathematical-logical, visual-spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical-rhythmic, interpersonal, intrapersonal and finally naturalistic. Musical-rhythmic intelligence is the ability to perceive, transform and discriminate between musical forms with sensitivity to rhythm, pitch and timber (Mahdavy, 2008). The findings of this research also lend support to empirical studies revealing that though the linguistic and musical intelligences seem separate, they work and complement well with each other in that language intonation relies heavily on the perception of musicality (Bamberger, 1995; Gardener, 1993; Stansell, 2005; Stollery & McPhee, 2002). Ahrens (2002) identifies that teaching L2 through music lays a strong emphasis on ear training before asking students to produce individual sounds or rhythmic patterns themselves, making them more comfortable and relaxed to some degree. The present study once again identifies a strong correlation between music and language learning.

As a music lover, the researcher also identifies that music could also help him learn a foreign language if he puts the words he tries to learn in a song and later tries to remember them since the rhythms and tempos help him remember the new

vocabulary words with ease as opposed to mechanical memorization. Having this said, the present study was devised to use music with chants to make the lessons more interesting. Though students still preferred pop music to which they have access every day on Youtube or iTunes, classical music also worked because it's generally more calming with therapeutic effects (Mahdavy, 2008). Students' positive feedback also showed that Jazz Chants could be used to improve not only students' listening and speaking skills, but also their learning attitudes. This strategy also worked especially well for many participants who were musically-talented in this study; that is, the utilization of music made it easier for them to retain the new vocabulary and sentence structures taught in class. At the end of the present study, they all identified their improvements and wished to keep learning through music and Jazz Chants.

Conclusion

Ideal EFL learning environments

In order to improve students' communicative competence more effectively, Ellis and Tanaka (1994) suggest that it is essential for them to have enough L2 input (reading comprehension and the traditional grammar drills) and output (communicative competence and writing skills) at the same time. That is, language teachers and policy makers need to think again the purpose of EFL learning and how standardized tests were made in Taiwan. The questions regarding students' improvements and motivation of English learning also need to be considered. Therefore, Hwang (2005) proposes that ideally, a good EFL class should have at least 70% of abundant L2 exposure to stimulate subconscious language acquisition, and the rest 30% for usage and vocabulary explanation. However, it seems to be the opposite in reality in many EFL classrooms in Taiwan because the tests barely assess their speaking abilities. Empirical studies also call on teachers to employ all modes of communication (reading, writing, listening and speaking) because students learn better and faster when surrounded by real language input in class (Blanton, 1992; Dulay, Burt & Krashen, 1982).

Music and Jazz Chants

The present study echoes the existing literature by showing that Jazz Chants can be used to give students more authentic and rhythmic input since more opportunities for practice can be generated. Three findings can thus be identified at this point: to begin with, the use of Jazz Chants not only improved EFL learners' listening, but also speaking skills. Second, music was found to complement well with Jazz Chants to strengthen EFL students' learning interests and motivation. Third, the use of Jazz Chants could give students more confidence in speaking English from the authentic input they received during this study. Many students also reported their appreciation of the weekly practice of English pronunciation and intonation through Jazz Chants. It was clear from their feedback that speaking English confidently is no longer that difficult afterwards. They also felt more comfortable and empowered to speak English in public. The results yielded from this study also support previous research which

suggests that Jazz Chants can not only be used as an effective source of language input for ESL/EFL students, but also a tool to boost students' interests in learning how to improve their speaking competence. As Acton (1984), Chen, Fan and Liu (1995) and Chen-Hafteck (1997) claim that having the capability and flexibility to sound like a native speaker of the target language is the most obvious and outward desire for many foreign language learners, this study also adds to the current literature which doesn't have enough evidence as to how Jazz Chants could be used in Taiwanese EFL context to strengthen students' interests, motivation and confidence. The results from this study clearly address these unanswered questions.

To conclude, it is thus hoped that Jazz Chants can be adapted by more English teachers to improve and foster ESL/EFL students' L2 proficiency in various settings. One thing to note is that though this study was conducted based on Taiwanese EFL learners, the pedagogical implications can be widely applied to other ESL/EFL classrooms not merely to improve students' L2 listening and speaking competence, but their willingness to communicate, and their perceptions of and attitudes toward L2 learning. Also, teachers are advised to make English learning more than just a required subject in schools because it could be a practical skill that is going to help them enter the workforce in the future.

Limitations of this study

This study was limited in the following three aspects: number of participants, time and assessment. First, for the consistency of time and space for data collection, the number of participants was limited to a class of 30 college students only at a language institute in Taiwan. In other words, the results of this research might not be generalized.

The second limitation was rooted in the short time allowed for this study. As all participants had their school syllabi to follow during the semester, this study was conducted only in the weekly 3-hour class for 12 weeks. Hence, it was not a longitudinal study for any persuasive conclusion to be reached at this point.

Third, the assessment in this study was mainly through the Institutional Listening and Speaking Tests administered before and after this study. Though both the Pre- and Post-questionnaires were included, it would be more convincing if more formal assessments were administered. They were not considered in this study due to the school's policy and budget.

Suggestions for future study

The purpose of this study was to explore the effectiveness of using Jazz Chants to improve Taiwanese EFL students' listening and speaking competence. It is thus hoped that the findings of this study could be applied and combined with other teaching methods by English teachers for more effective learning outcomes. A further and more detailed study is absolutely necessary to prolong the research duration; therefore, a longitudinal study is definitely needed for more persuasive outcomes.

Next, the participants were chosen haphazardly from only one language institute in Taiwan; hence, the generalizability of the findings was somewhat inadequate to be convincing. To shed more light on whether Jazz Chants could improve learners' language proficiency and strengthen their learning motivation, further research is needed to increase the number of participants to gain more representative outcomes. In addition, comparisons between students of different proficiency levels could also be obtained.

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Appendix A

Pre-questionnaire

Please circle the letter that best describes your experience of learning English

SA (strongly agree), A (agree), N (neutral), D (disagree), SD (strongly disagree).

1. I like to speak English. SA A N D SD
2. I am interested in learning English. SA A N D SD
3. I am motivated and active in learning English. SA A N D SD
4. I think listening to English every day could improve my listening and speaking skills.
SA A N D SD
5. I am confident in speaking English. SA A N D SD
6. I like to speak English in public actively and independently.
SA A N D SD
7. I think I am fluent in speaking English when expressing my opinions.
SA A N D SD

Appendix B

Post-questionnaire

Name: _____ Age: _____ Sex: M F

Please circle the letter that best describes your experience after learning English through Jazz Chants. Check the letter that indicates your preference after this course. SA (strongly agree), A (agree), N (neutral), D (disagree), SD (strongly disagree).

1. After learning English through Jazz Chants, I like to speak English more.
SA A N D SD

2. After learning English through Jazz Chants, I am more interested in learning English.
SA A N D SD

3. After learning English through Jazz Chants, I am more motivated and active in learning English.
SA A N D SD

4. After learning English through Jazz Chants, I think listening to English every day could improve my listening and speaking skills. SA A N D SD

5. After learning English through Jazz Chants, I am more confident in speaking English.
SA A N D SD

6. After learning English through Jazz Chants, I like to speak English in public more actively and independently.
SA A N D SD

7. After learning English through Jazz Chants, I think I am more fluent in speaking English when expressing my opinions. SA A N D SD

Appendix C

Interview Guide

Name:

Number:

Date:

1. What are your perceptions and reactions of learning through Jazz Chants?
2. What is the effect on or change of your listening ability after learning through Jazz Chants?
3. What is the effect on or change of your speaking ability after learning through Jazz Chants?
4. Do you think your English listening and speaking skills have improved after this course? Please explain.
5. Will you keep learning English through Jazz Chants? Why or why not, please explain.

Appendix D

Selected Jazz Chants materials used in class

Things I used to be

I used to be a star but now I'm dust.

I used to be a Honda but now I'm a Rolls Royce.

I used to be a color but now I'm a smell.

I used to be your brain but now I'm your heart.

I used to be a book but now I'm a library.

I used to be a raindrop but now I'm an ocean.

I used to be a mouth but now I'm a smile.

I used to be whiskey but now I'm dishwasher.

I used to be a chip but now I'm a computer.

I used to be water but now I'm an ice cream cone.

I used to be a smell but now I'm perfume.

I used to be a river but now I'm the moon.

I used to be paper but now I'm a love letter.

I used to be a garden but now I'm a gun.

Small Talk: More Jazz Chants by Carolyn Graham, Oxford
University Press, 1986.

I wish I had a crocodile

I wish I had a crocodile
With a green and purple tail
I wish I had a yellow boat
With a green and purple sail
I've never seen an octopus
I've never seen a whale
And I've never seen a crocodile
With a green and purple tail
But if I had a yellow boat
With a green and purple sail
I'm sure I'd find my crocodile
With the green and purple tail
We'd sail around the ocean blue
We'd sail from sea to sea
We'd sail and sail around the world
My crocodile and me

Jazz Chants: Holiday Jazz Chants by Carolyn Graham,
Oxford University Press, 1999.

Student Perceptions and Preferences Concerning Instructors' Corrective Feedback

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Abstract

Because of calls for further research on student perceptions and preferences around instructors' feedback, the present study sought to discover the type of written corrective feedback students liked best. To collect data, questionnaires were administered to 60 freshmen at Sultan Qaboos University enrolled in the Language Centre's Foundation Program. Data, analyzed by SPSS, clearly revealed that students agreed on a preference for comprehensible, selective, positive-sounding and grammatically-focused feedback. Consequently, it is suggested that teachers adjust their correction practices to suit students' immediate needs, taking into consideration the fact that they are EFL learners of English. Providing feedback that is favorable and, hence, more comprehensible to students, is highly recommended .

Key words: corrective feedback, direct, focused, foundation students, writing accuracy.

1. Introduction

Mastering a second language is a gradual, time-consuming and complex task since language acquisition undergoes many stages and different processes. For example, writing, the most difficult skill to master, requires an enormous amount of effort, time and tuition (i.e. feedback provision). Most classroom practitioners argue that L2 learners have the right to get their writing corrected and their errors identified, whereas some scholars working outside the classroom insist that students need actually to make writing mistakes as part of the language acquisition process and that error correction in L2 writing classes may indeed be harmful (Bitchener, Young & Cameron, 2005). Thus, the usefulness of written corrective feedback is still a debatable issue. Contradictory perspectives on its impact on students writing accuracy can be interpreted by a range of diverse variables. These include the variety of corrective feedback styles, students' proficiency levels, instructors' teaching skills, the nature of linguistic errors detected, and, most importantly, students' attitudes to feedback. Believing that the latter overwhelmingly determines the effectiveness of feedback, the main concern of the current study was to reveal how students perceive feedback and what they think is its most effective form.

Hattie and Timperley, (as cited in Blair, Curtis, Goodwin & Shields, 2012, p.67), view feedback as the "information provided by an agent (e.g. teacher, peer, book, parent, self-experience) regarding aspects of one's performance or understanding." Feedback is "thus a consequence of performance". This definition suggests that feedback is about a "gap" between the expected and actual performance and that it leads receivers, i.e. learners in the educational context, to reach the desired level expected of them (ibid). The importance of feedback thus emerges from the belief that it serves both educational and evaluative purposes. Pedagogically, it improves students' general performance and task management besides its significance in terms of providing an assessment of learners' performance (Wilson & Lizzio, 2008).

Since the 1980s, various types of feedback have been thoroughly investigated by researchers and ESL teachers yet, until very recently, the benefit of written correction has remained in doubt. This uncertainty was generated by conflicting findings from studies that examined the matter. Numerous empirical studies demonstrated that although students received feedback on their writing assignments, there was no significant improvement in their writing proficiency (Bitchener, Young, & Cameron, 2005). However, other studies (Bitchener, Young, & Cameron, 2005; Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener & Knoch, 2010; Younghee, Wright, & Moldawa, 2009; Evans, Hartshorn, & Strong-Krause, 2011) reported that providing ESL learners with written corrective feedback, either focused or unfocused, enhanced their writing accuracy.

Meanwhile, little attention has been given to students' perceptions and preferences (Weaver, 2006) and how these might compare with their ESL/EFL teachers' views. Guénette (2007), in a thoughtful piece, suggests that knowing students' perceptions and preferences might open up new areas for investigation around feedback on written compositions. Therefore, a research insufficiency on student perspectives provides a basis for the present study.

It mainly included the views of Omani Foundation students studying English at Sultan Qaboos University's (SQU) Language Center. The majority of such students (especially those graduating from public schools) have not yet reached a high standard of English mastery (Al-Mahrooqi, 2012a & b), and thus still face difficulty in improving their writing skills in particular (Al-Mahrooqi & Tuzlukova, 2012; Sergon, 2011). Since assessing English proficiency depends mainly on written tests, it is of high importance to help our students enhance their writing accuracy and it is believed that providing corrective feedback can play an effective role in this (Evans, Hartshorn & Strong-Krause, 2011). Thus, we endeavored to explore these Omani students' perceptions on corrective written feedback in the hope that comparing them might shed light on both feedback effectiveness and writing accuracy development.

Hence, the current study attempted to find an answer for the following question:

- What types of corrective written feedback are most favored by SQU's English Foundation students?

2. Corrective feedback: An overview

The written literature is replete with studies on corrective feedback (CF) that have addressed issues related to it. A review of this literature will now be presented, highlighting the most important issues raised, such as the appropriateness of CF and related aspects such as different strategies of C, different error domains, and corrective feedback focus.

2.1 The effectiveness of corrective feedback: Certainties and doubts

As mentioned above, whether or not to provide L2 writers with corrective feedback has ignited a fierce debate in second language acquisition (SLA). Truscott (as cited in Hartshorn, Strong-Krause, & W. Evan, 2011) argues that error correction is not only an ineffective pedagogical tool for improving writing, but is potentially harmful and should be abandoned. Arguments against this practice are based on students' negative reaction to it, which suggests that it generates hesitation when they try out the form or feature they have used incorrectly. They maintain that providing feedback, "which indicates to learners that there is an error in their linguistic output" (Sheen, Wright & Moldawa, 2009, p. 556) leads them to avoid using complex structures and, accordingly, those who receive CF are likely to suffer deterioration in their written accuracy (*ibid*).

Nevertheless, a critical reading of their studies makes it clear that they lack accuracy since they suffer methodological limitations (e.g. no control group, using text revision as an indicator of improvement). Additionally, many other studies (Bitchener, Young, & Cameron, 2005; Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener, & Knoch, 2010; Younghee, Wright, & Moldawa, 2009; Evans, Hartshorn, & Strong-Krause, 2011; Van Beuningen, De Jong, & Kuiken, 2012) have, they believe, ascertained the importance of CF for L2 writers. Their experiments clearly revealed that "comprehensive CF is an effective means of improving learners' accuracy over time and, furthermore, do not support Truscott's assumption that CF has detrimental side effects" (Van Beuningen et al., 2012, p.31).

These conflicting contributions can perhaps be explained by more than one factor influencing the output of teachers' corrective feedback.

2.2 Factors affecting the impact of feedback on L2 learners' accuracy

The extent to which any teacher feedback can influence student's improvement mainly depends on several intervening elements. Guénette (2007) suggests that some of those are participants' proficiency levels and their variations, longitudinal or cross-sectional design, feedback types, the scope of errors detected by teachers' CF or students' motivation and perceptions. This section briefly reviews those aspects.

2.2.1 Learners' proficiency level

To start with, L2 learners selected to be participants in the previously-mentioned studies were usually already enrolled in ESL programs. Their level of proficiency varied so vastly that it was difficult to compare results (Guénette, 2007). To cite an example, Bitchener and Knoch (2009) conducted two separate longitudinal studies, one on advanced and the other on low-intermediate students. They compared two types of direct CF, i.e. written and oral meta-linguistic explanations and indirect CF errors codes. The results indicated that, for advanced learners, receiving written explanation markedly improved their written accuracy. By contrast, for low-intermediate students "direct error correction alone may be as effective as direct error corrective with written meta-linguistic explanation or direct error corrective with both written and spoken meta-linguistic explanation" (Bitchener, & Knoch, 2009, p.328).

Such findings demonstrate that students' own writing proficiency is likely to determine the efficacy of CF and that therefore L2 teachers need to take this into consideration when selecting suitable CF.

2.2.2 Types of errors detected in teachers' CF on written assignments

Another factor likely to influence the CF effectiveness reported by different studies is the scope of errors covered and the effects of CF on different error types.

Errors can be classified according to different criteria. Ferris (1999) says that there are two types - treatable and untreatable. The former (e.g. verb tense, subject-verb agreement, article usage and sentence fragments) refers to errors based on specific grammar which learners can avoid by referring to the rules. On the other hand, untreatable errors “are idiosyncratic and so require learners to utilize acquired knowledge of the language to correct them” (Bitchener, Young & Cameron, 2005, p.193). Truscott agrees that “untreatable” errors “might not be amenable to correction, because they are integral parts of a complex system” (cited in Kuiken, Jong, & Beunineg, 2012, p.8).

Moreover, there are two types of errors with regard to the focus of corrective feedback. The first kind are errors around form (local issues) such as grammar and mechanics and the second are around content (global issues), i.e. content and organization. Generally, teachers tend to focus more on form, although they believe that they need to correct globally, that is, concentrating on content as well. Evidence shows that even students generally prefer receiving CF on local issues (Blair, Curtis, Goodwin & Shields, 2013).

2.2.3 Different styles of feedback on written assignments

Teachers of English may provide their students with different types of CF. These include the following:

Direct versus indirect

The effects of CF basically differ as a result of the kind of CF used. Bitchener (2008), citing Ferris (2003), distinguishes two types of CF: direct and indirect. Direct feedback involves providing “the correct linguistic form or structure by the teacher to the students” (Bitchener, 2008, p.105) on the error made or a code to indicate the error category (Bitchener, & Knoch, 2010). By contrast, indirect feedback merely points to the error made without highlighting it. Teachers typically provide such feedback by “underlining or circling an error [or] recording in the margins the number of errors in a given line” (Bitchener & Knoch, 2010, p.209).

A growing body of research has attempted to determine if different types of feedback contribute differently to L2 writers' improvement. But scholars and researchers cannot agree. Those who support the direct form argue that guiding students to their mistakes reduces cognitive load and confusion as it clearly shows them how to correct their mistakes. Other studies focusing on the merits of indirect feedback report that indirect CF motivates students to analyze their errors, thus honing their problem-solving skills. Consequently, it "promotes the type of reflection on existing knowledge that is more likely to foster long-term acquisition and written accuracy" (ibid, p.209).

According to Ferris (2010), because writing class goals differ so must the types of feedback needed to fulfill them. For example, if the main goal is to improve editing skills, then it is better to provide students with indirect error correction. On the other hand, direct feedback can be more helpful if learners are trying to enhance their written composition skills (Bitchener, & Knoch, 2010). Van Beuningen et al. (2012, p.33) in their study conclude that "both grammatical and non-grammatical errors are amenable to CF, but that they benefit from different types of correction. Direct correction is better suited to grammatical errors and indirect correction to non-grammatical errors". Thus, it is teachers' responsibility to be selective when providing CF, using different strategies to target different errors.

Focused versus unfocused CF

Sheen et al. (2009) make a further distinction between types of direct corrective feedback in terms of error scope. They say that, traditionally, students received correction on a wide range of linguistic errors, which is called unfocused feedback. The other form of feedback, the focused kind, specifically directs students' attention to one repeatedly-occurring error, either grammatical or structural. And recent studies have proved that focusing on one specific error at a time seems to be better for both short and long-term written accuracy (Bitchener, Young & Cameron, 2005; Bitchener & Knoch, 2009; 2010; Sheen et al., 2009; Bitchener, 2008). Sheen et al. (2009) suggest that focused CF is "systematic" and extensive and thus "it (1) monitors language use, thereby, improve[ing] accuracy in output, and (2) facilitates the noticing of new forms and new form-function mappings in the input" (p.566). Besides, as far as second language acquisition is concerned, the components of a language are

mastered differently and so students need to be guided to focus on one type of error at a time and then be left to work on it (Sheen et al., 2009).

On the other hand, Evans, Hartshorn and Strong-Krause (2011) maintain that focused CF can be “too focused to be practical” (p.231.) To mainly provide feedback based on one specific error at a time sounds pedagogically unworkable. They further suggest that “L2 writing teachers and their students must deal with writing that contains many error types, some of which are far more distracting than misused or missing definite articles, [for example]” (Evans, Hartshorn & Strong-Krause, 2011, p. 231).

2.3 Students’ and teachers’ views on corrective feedback

Despite the fact that the appropriateness and effectiveness of corrective feedback practices have been intensively explored, most studies have depended on researchers’ judgments, scarcely referring to student or teacher perspectives. Recently, however, there have been calls for research that examines student perceptions and responses to teachers’ feedback and compares them with their teachers’ opinions. As mentioned in Sheen et al. (2009), many researchers doubt teachers’ ability to provide a consistent and sufficient amount of feedback. Similarly, they are unsure of students’ ability and “willingness” to receive feedback and respond to it. Nevertheless, both students and teachers feel that corrective feedback is very important for EFL writing improvement (Montgomery & Baker, 2008). According to Hyland (2000), students believe that feedback helps them “identifying their strengths and weaknesses, enhancing motivation and improving future grades” (ibid, 2008). However, with written feedback, as it is a “written message”, students may tend to misinterpret what exactly it is highlighting. Indeed, corrective feedback needs to be tackled very carefully.

Therefore, it is important to discover the characteristics of feedback which advance student learning in general and writing proficiency in particular. When surveyed, students tend to prefer certain features of corrective feedback on their assignments (Lizzio, & Wilson, 2008; Blair, Curtis, Goodwin & Shields, 2013). In particular, most find CF helpful if it is clear (in terms of content and form i.e. handwriting), timely, “constructive”, thorough, encouraging, (Blair, Curtis, Goodwin & Shields, 2013), critical, deep in focus, informative and consistent (Lizzio, &

Wilson, 2008). This is called “dynamic” feedback which is believed to be more effective than random feedback. Evans, Hartshorn and Strong-Krause hold that “It is based on the concept that feedback must focus on the most intermediate needs of the learner as demonstrated by specific errors that the learner produces” (2011, p. 39). The recent approach calls for “meaningful, timely, constant and manageable” written corrective feedback. It helps L2 learners to immediately understand what they are supposed to refine in their written structures and organization on a regular basis. It undoubtedly leads students to raise their written accuracy and potentially retain it over time (ibid).

In fact, student perceptions on the feedback type they find most beneficial is influenced by their differences in terms of proficiency, learning styles and general preferences. It seems that there is no one form of written corrective feedback that will suit all students at all levels. Preferences and perceptions differ and so does the effect of feedback on each student's written accuracy. This is not to claim, however, that teachers should not consider student opinions. After all, their views are usually defined by shared principles. A questionnaire used by Lizzio and Wilson revealed that “students’ perceptions of assessment feedback can be meaningfully understood in terms of three dimensions: developmental, encouraging and fair feedback” (Lizzio & Wilson, 2008, p. 273). So, by means of the present study, the form of feedback preferred by Foundation Students at SQU was revealed.

3. Methodology

Sixty students (24 male, 36 female) registered in Sultan Qaboos University’s Foundation Program participated in the study. They were all enrolled in the advanced levels (5 and 6) and the reason for their selection was that they had already been through an intensive program of English study and so had more writing experience than their lower level peers. The selection of the sample was based on participants’ willingness to take part in the study.

A 5-point Likert scale questionnaire was used for data collection due to its suitability for the study’s purpose. It had six sections, of which the first sought participants’ level of English and gender and the remaining five addressed different

issues relevant to CF. The first of these five concerned student views on teachers' feedback and the characteristics of helpful feedback. The other sections investigated student preferences in terms of feedback content, type and focus.

The questionnaire was validated twice by two professors from the Department of English at Sultan Qaboos University, who assessed the relevance, clarity and linguistic accuracy of each item. Additionally, a pilot study was conducted whose purpose was to ensure that the questionnaire was coherent, comprehensible, valid and reliable. Furthermore, it was meant to obtain feedback on any difficulties encountered in doing the survey. Thus, five students from the Foundation English Program's level six answered the questionnaire in the pilot exercise.

Frequent comments on the questionnaire were that some questions were repetitive. Besides, respondents faced difficulty in understanding some of them. Most respondents reported that such concepts as mechanics, cohesion and coherence were too complicated for them. This is reasonable because these concepts are mainly discussed later when students start taking credit courses after completing the English Foundation program. Consequently, some sentences were reworded and brief explanations of difficult concepts provided.

The second instrument used was a semi-structured interview, the findings of which were meant to validate the questionnaire's results. Respondents were encouraged to talk freely and reveal everything they felt and thought about points that the researcher raised. The interview focus and questions were determined by the researchers and validated by the same professors who validated the questionnaire. Interviewing a sample of the respondents was intended to examine deeply their views on teachers' written corrective feedback.

3.3. Procedures.

- Data Collection

The sixty participants were approached via a snowball sampling technique and it was assumed that they would be able to describe their perceptions after having successfully finished at least one level of the Foundation Program.

- *Data analysis*

Data obtained was analyzed quantitatively using the SPSS program. The researchers did numerical coding of 60 responses, having assigned numerical values for each scale as follows: strongly agree = 1, agree = 2, undecided = 3, disagree = 4, and strongly disagree = 5. They then entered the data in the SPSS program to obtain descriptive statistics such as means and standard deviation, which are important for discussion of the findings. Percentages and numbers for participants from both levels 5 and 6, and their division by gender, were then obtained. Moreover, comparisons between means were made using one way ANOVA to determine correlations between gender and their perceptions of CF types.

4. Results:

The results of the questionnaire analysis showed that the second category, which asked if students preferred feedback on content or form, achieved the highest mean ($M= 4.26$), while the category covering student preferences in terms of focused or unfocused feedback scored (3.83), a mean that is the lowest. These statistics demonstrated that students shared strong agreement with respect to their preference for having their grammar and vocabulary errors corrected. However, they did not all agree on the approach to handling them. Some liked to get one type of error corrected at a time, while the rest liked to get all their errors corrected for every assignment.

The first category of the questionnaire included items that elicited student preferences for feedback in general. The results are shown in table 1 below.

Table 1: Do students believe in the importance of corrective feedback? What characteristics of feedback are most appreciated by foundation students?

Item No.	Strongly agree	Std. Deviation	Mean
1	I think teachers' corrections are important to improve my writings.	.55866	4.71
2	I pay much attention to my teachers' corrections	.83733	4.22
3	I think teachers' corrections help me improve my future grades in writing.	.94625	4.37

4	I can improve my writing without my teachers' corrections.	.65942	3.17
5	I think teachers' corrections motivate me to be a better writer.	.81087	4.03
6	I think teachers' corrections show me my strengths and weaknesses in my essays.	1.21984	4.03
7	In general, teachers' corrections are helpful.	.99942	4.34

Obviously, students believed that feedback is a crucial part of their learning to write processes, as item 1 took the highest score (4.71), revealing strong agreement on the importance of teachers' corrective feedback. The low value for item 4 (M= 3.17) demonstrated students' need for their teachers' guidance since they said they look critically at their essays in order to find out how they can improve them. This perception matches the view mentioned in previous studies (Al Shabibi, 2008; Montgomery, & Baker, 2008; Hyland, 2000). It can be justified by the fact that Omani students strive to have their written work as error-free as possible, as Al Shabibi's study revealed (2008). Given that error correction has been found effective for the improvement of writing accuracy, if used properly, as consistently reported by previous studies (Bitchener, Young, & Cameron, 2005; Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener & Knoch, 2010; Younghee, Wright, & Moldawa, 2009; Evans, Hartshorn and Strong-Krause, 2011), students believe in the effectiveness of feedback since it leads them to discover strengths and weaknesses in their written discourse and helps them to enhance their writing accuracy - as revealed by the means of items 3 (M=4.36), 5 (M= 4.033), 6 (M= 4.033).

Table 2: Do students prefer feedback in content or in form?

Item No.	Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	I like teachers to correct my ideas in my essays	4.29	.89155
2	I like teachers to correct my grammatical errors in my essays	5.00	6.61301

3	I like teachers to correct my spelling errors in my essays	4.32	.95485
4	I like teachers to correct the organization of my essays.	4.00	.87860
5	I like teachers to correct the coherence and cohesion problems in my essays. (how ideas are connected)	4.18	.85354
6	I focus on the teachers' corrections of spelling, grammar errors.	4.05	1.04840

Interestingly, item 2 in this section, which aims to see if students prefer feedback in content or in form, received the highest mean among all items in the questionnaire ($M= 5$), demonstrating that students place high importance on grammar acquisition. They tend to pay closer attention to their grammatical errors than to such global issues as ideas, organization, coherence and cohesion ($M= 3.9$). This result is consistent with previous studies that have examined students' perceptions on what language components CF covers (Al Said, 1996; Al Shabibi, 2008). Researchers have found that surface-level corrections are usually what learners look for and expect from their instructors (Al Shabibi, 2008). In our study, the five interviewed students said they believed grammar was significant and that they needed time to improve it and therefore they tended to follow teachers' remarks on grammar in particular. Cohen and Cavalcanti (1990) suggest that "learners' expectations and preferences may derive from previous instructional experience, experience that may not necessarily be beneficial for the development of the writing" (Cohen, Cavalcanti, 1990. p. 173). The fact is that students have been taught language in schools for many years with complete emphasis on grammar rather than on global issues related to the writing process. As Al Mahrooqi, Abrar-Ul-Hassan, and Asante's (2012) study revealed, teachers do not clarify for their students the importance of communicative competence over grammatical accuracy. Omani English instructors usually hold the belief that their students' errors in grammar and mechanics should be corrected even when communication is the goal (Al Mekhlafi, & Nagaratnam, 2011, Al Shabibi, 2004). This tendency has prioritized grammar and made it the focus of instruction in writing classes. Although students concentrate on grammar and vocabulary problems when they get their essays back ($M =4.05$), they like their teacher to provide global corrections for them too, as the means for items 4 and 5 indicate ($M= 4$, & 4.1). This reflects their perceptions on the importance of striking a balance between grammatically-focused corrections and global concerns in writing such as ideas

connections and transitions, analysis and organization, “ depending on the need of each student, text and task” (Ferris et al, 2011, p. 220).

Table 3: Do students prefer feedback that focuses on praise, criticism or suggestions?

Item No.	Items	The mean	Std. Deviation
1	I would like teachers to highlight the good points in my essays.	4.12	1.02662
2	I would like teachers to show me only my weaknesses in my essays.	3.28	1.24997
3	I would like teachers to show me both the strengths and weaknesses in my essays.	4.47	.75100
4	When teachers give me positive feedback, I become motivated to write better.	4.12	.86537
5	When teachers focus only on my errors, I lose confidence and motivation to write in English.	3.47	1.18560
6	When the feedback shows me my mistakes only, and not my good points, I learn more and become a better writer.	3.70	1.18322
7	I like teachers to make suggestions or offer alternatives on how improve my writing.	4.38	.90370

With respect to the types of feedback in terms of comment tone, participants seemed to prefer to be “kindly” notified of both good points and weaknesses in their essays as indicated by the highest mean in the table for item 3 (M= 4.48). It is worth noting that both items 1 and 4 received the same mean (4.12), a similarity that reveals students’ belief that positively-constructed feedback motivates them to be better writers. Psychologically speaking, English Foundation students have a tough time in their writing classes for two reasons. First, they are not familiar with the university system, so very different from the school’s, and so they are still locked into a process of adjustment to the new environment. In addition, “for the novice writer, especially, writing may seem excruciatingly slow and the products, filled with erasures and strikeouts, bleak testimonies to the writer’s lack of skill” (Bruning & Horn, 2000, p. 33). Therefore, students view kindly-constructed comments on their essays that guide them on how to write better as helpful and important.

Thus, students do not like being given feedback that only highlights weaknesses in their compositions (M= 3.2). Teachers' provision of negative feedback to some extent affects their confidence and motivation (M= 3.4), which is understandable as Hyland (1998) points out, quoting Diaker: "Adverse response of any kind may encourage high writing apprehension and lock a student into a cycle of failure, lack of motivation and further failure" (Hyland, 1998, p. 279).

Moreover, suggestive feedback is preferred by a large number of students as item 7 mean indicates. Listing alternatives and suggestions for improvement is considered helpful.

Table 4: Do foundation students prefer direct or indirect feedback?

Item No.	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	I like teachers to only underline my errors	3.33	1.12997
2	I like teachers to underline my errors and give me the corrections.	4.07	.97192
3	I like teachers to underline my errors and give codes for the error types. For example, SP= spelling error, WC=wrong words choice, WO= word order without giving me the corrections.	4.28	.84556
4	I like teachers to give me a full description of the types of errors I make.	4.05	.96419
5	I like teachers to give me the rule for using structures in which I make mistakes.	4.12	.84556
6	I like teachers to give me examples of how structures are accurately used.	4.18	.91117

Results presented in table 4 demonstrate that students do not like teachers underlining their mistakes without giving clues about the errors made (item 1, M= 3.33). Rather, they like getting their mistakes underlined and accompanied with codes indicating their errors' types, as the high mean received by item 3 shows (M= 4.28). This echoes both Al Kindy's (2007) findings and Al Said's (1996) in studies conducted among Omani university students. This practice in error correction helps students to easily identify their errors using systematic codes. Students in Al Kindy's study expressed a preference for coded feedback because it is a "useful alternative to the random lines and circles that were used by their teachers" (ibid, p. 56). Items 4, 5,

and 6 indicated that students also prefer full descriptions of errors and ways to correct them and being given some examples of how to use some complex structures as well. As illustrated, there are many different means of feedback provision and it is the teachers' responsibility to adopt strategies that accord with their diagnosis of each student's case (e.g. needs, strengths, challenges and preferences) (Ferris et al, 2011). As proved in the study by Evans et al. (2008, p. 232), dynamic WCF that “focus[es] on the most intermediate needs of the learner as demonstrated by the specific errors the learner produces”, enhances students' writing competences.

Table 5: Do students prefer focused or unfocused feedback?

Item No.	Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	I like teachers to correct one type of error at a time.	3.55	1.15605
2	I like teachers to correct all my errors.	4.22	.94046
3	When I receive feedback on all my errors, I can make connections between them and improve faster.	4.35	.73242
4	I like teachers to focus mainly on grammar errors.	4.48	1.35911
5	I like teachers to focus mainly on vocabulary errors.	3.53	1.30795

Again, students expressed their preference for receiving extensive feedback on grammar mainly (M= 4.49) and then on vocabulary (M= 3.53).

Another important issue revealed in this section is the approach to feedback provision. Students prefer to get all errors identified, as items 2 (M= 4.2) and 3 (M=4.3) revealed. The five students who were interviewed in this study said that having whole essays marked in red is better than getting only one mistake corrected at a time, an opinion with which students who participated in Hyland's case study agreed (Hyland, 2011). However, this should be dealt with cautiously, since research has proved (Sheen, Wright & Moldawa, 2009) that over-commenting is not a healthy practice for either teacher or student. It demoralizes students to see their papers full of corrections, as the five interviewed students emphasized. Moreover, students cannot handle every point raised in the feedback at one time. Therefore, it is better to focus

on the most important issues arising from each paper, depending on the priority of each task (Ferris et al, 2011).

Interview data also revealed that students view very positively the feedback they get through peer tutoring at Sultan Qaboos University's Writing Center. In fact, they suggested an extension of the Writing Center's activity. They all reported its effectiveness, but complained that its schedule was crowded due to the huge demand on it by students enrolled at the Language Center.

Gender difference in feedback preferences

Table 6: One Way ANOVA by gender

Sig.	F	Mean Square	Df	Sum of Squares	
.881	.023	.004	1	.004	Between Groups direct or indirect feedback
		.190	58	10.994	Within Groups
			59	10.998	Total
.718	.132	.020	1	.020	Between Groups the importance of feedback
		.153	57	8.694	Within Groups
			58	8.714	Total
.139	2.251	2.729	1	2.729	Between Groups form or content
		1.212	58	70.320	Within Groups
			59	73.049	Total
.205	1.641	.281	1	.281	Between Groups feedback to be praise, criticism or suggestions
		.171	58	9.925	Within Groups
			59	10.205	Total
.000	15.694	5.494	1	5.494	Between Groups the focus of feedback
		.350	58	20.303	Within Groups
			59	25.797	Total

Table 6 above shows differences calculated for male and female means for the questionnaire's items as clusters for each category. According to the statistics, there were no significant differences between male and female students' perceptions of the importance of feedback, whether in content or tone. However, there is a significant difference at the 0.05 level of significance (sig= 0.00) between them with respect to the selectivity of corrective feedback. Male students more than females tend to prefer selective feedback. This was not consistent with Al Said's study (1996), which reported that female and male preferences were not significantly different.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

Triggered by the belief that students play a vital role in their own learning process, this study attempted to find out how English Foundation students perceive teachers' corrections in their written assignments and what characterizes the feedback they favor most. The results demonstrate that students view feedback positively, for they contend that feedback is essential for their writing development. They also prefer comprehensible feedback that targets as many errors as possible by underlining them and providing codes for each error type. In addition, they like receiving feedback that is encouraging and which detects their weaknesses while at the same time acknowledging their good points as well. In other words, students need individual dynamic written feedback that addresses their basic needs in accordance with their progress or level of writing accuracy.

Based on the findings of the current study, we recommend that teachers involve their students in a discussion about the different types of corrective feedback. They can pinpoint to them the usefulness of each type and why it is important. On the whole, teachers should provide a suitable amount of feedback. Over-commenting and under-commenting do students no good. Feedback should be organized and classified according to certain criteria, as agreed with students.

In addition, teachers should strike a balance. While feedback guides students to improve their work, pages crowded with comment discourage students from figuring out how they can find a way to solve their problems and hence improve their work.

Since previous studies found peer feedback to be effective with Omani students, as proved in Al Kindy's study (2007), and because the interviewed students in this study said they benefited much from peer tutoring, more chances should be given for students to correct each other's essays before final submission to the teacher. Students find this helpful because it allows them to be exposed to a greater amount of writing and thereby to be confronted by a variety of writing models and styles.

Because students viewed positively the feedback they got from peer tutors at the Writing Center and suggested the extension of the center's activities and services for students, the Center's management should perhaps try to expand its activities and take in as many students as possible. Other language programs could benefit from this experience by opening their Writing Centers and equipping them with the resources and student tutors who are proficient in English so that weaker students can benefit from their experiences and insights.

Recommendations for further research

The following are suggested studies to further explore issues related to corrective feedback practices:

- Comparison between students' perceptions of teachers' written feedback and how they actually use this feedback in their rewriting or redrafting.
- Examination of the impact of praise, criticism and suggestions on the improvement of students' writing accuracy over a long period of time.

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Appendix

Questionnaire

Student Perceptions and Preferences Concerning Instructors' Corrective Feedback

Dear student

This study investigates the type of feedback students need and value the most.

Therefore, we would be grateful if you could kindly complete this questionnaire. Your **candid** answers will be highly appreciated. Please be assured that whatever information you provide will remain **confidential** and will only be used for **research purposes**.

Thank you for your sincere help.

Section one: background information

Please complete the following questions.

You level *when you started* with the Foundation Program:

Your level *now*: five \ six

Your college:

Age:

Home town:

Gender: female\ male

Section two: students' perceptions of teachers' corrective feedback.

How much do you agree with each of the following statements? Please state whether you strongly agree (5), agree (4), don't know (3), disagree (2), or strongly disagree (1).

I. Do students believe in the importance of corrective feedback? What characteristics of feedback are most appreciated by foundation students?

	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Agree	I don't know	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	I think teachers' corrections are important to improve my writings.					
2	I pay much attention to my teachers' corrections					
3	I think teachers' corrections help me improve my future grades in writing.					
4	I can improve my writing without my teachers' corrections.					
5	I think teachers' corrections motivate me to be a better writer.					
6	I think teachers' corrections show me my strengths and weaknesses in my essays.					
7	In general, teachers' corrections are helpful.					

II. Do students prefer feedback in content or in form?

		Strongly agree	Agree	I don't know	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	I like teachers to correct my ideas in my essays					
2	I like teachers to correct my grammatical errors in my essays					
3	I like teachers to correct my					

	spelling errors in my essays					
4	I like teachers to correct the organization of my essays.					
5	I like teachers to correct the coherence and cohesion problems in my essays. (how ideas are connected)					
6	I focus on the teachers' corrections of spelling and grammar errors.					
7	I focus on teachers' correction of ideas and organization errors.					

III. Do students prefer feedback that focuses on praise, criticism or suggestions?

		Strongly agree	Agree	I don't know	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	I would like teachers to highlight the good points in my essays.					
2	I would like teachers to show me only my weaknesses in my essays.					
3	I would like teachers to show me both the strengths and weaknesses in my essays.					
4	When teachers give me positive feedback, I become motivated to write better.					
5	When teachers focus only on my errors, I lose confidence and motivation to write in English.					
6	When the feedback shows me my mistakes only, and not my good points, I learn more and become a better writer.					
7	I like teachers to make suggestions or offer alternatives on how to improve my writing.					

IV. Do foundation students prefer direct or indirect feedback?

		Strongly agree	Agree	I don't know	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	I like teachers to only underline my errors.					
2	I like teachers to underline my errors and give me the					

	corrections.					
3	I like teachers to underline my errors and give codes for the error types. For example, SP= spelling error, WC=wrong word choice, WO= word order without giving me the corrections.					
4	I like teachers to give me a full description of the types of errors I make.					
5	I like teachers to give me the rule for using structures in which I make mistakes.					
6	I like teachers to give me examples of how structures are accurately used.					

V. Do students prefer focused or unfocused feedback ?

		Strongly agree	Agree	I don't know	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	I like teachers to correct one type of error at a time.					
2	I like teachers to correct all my errors.					
3	When I receive feedback on all my errors, I can make connections between them and improve faster.					
4	I like teachers to focus mainly on grammar errors.					
5	I like teachers' to focus mainly on vocabulary errors.					

Thank you for your participation