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**TITLE:**

Improving Written Linguistic Competence in EFL  
classrooms through Self Regulated Error Correction  
activities for young upper beginner Ecuadorean learners  
from the teens programme at the English Learning Institute  
COPEI

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## **ABSTRACT**

To assess the academic and emotional effects grammar error correction techniques were having in the writing skills of students from the English Language Institute COPEI in the city of Guayaquil, in Ecuador, the objective of this thesis work was to analyse the direct error correction approach used therein with three groups of upper intermediate EFL teenage students.

After having collected information from teachers and students using different instruments such as surveys and interviews, a worksheet that combined self regulated learning (SRL) and metalinguistic comments based on recent research was developed and applied to a fourth group.

From the assessments to these four groups under study it was discovered that direct feedback helped the learners improve their grammatical knowledge but had no effect in long term learning. On the other hand; the application of the proposed research-based error correction activity helped the learners improve their grammar in writing on both short and long term.

The findings of this work are relevant to EFL teacher and educational researchers who could use the proposed activity to deepen improved corrective feedback and foster learning.

**Key Words:** Error Correction, Corrective Feedback, Affective Filter, Indirect Correction, Educational Improvement, English Teaching, Improving Writing

## INTRODUCTION

Second Language Acquisition is an error prone process where teachers do their best to help their students learn the right way and gain proficiency in the language performing as flawlessly as possible every linguistic task. On this view, the Ministry of Education of Ecuador, after having laid dormant for several years, has awoken to its duty and has established new guidelines as part of a massive project to enliven the quality of education, teaching and learning of the English language in the nation.

Through the project *“Fortalecimiento de Enseñanza de Inglés”*, the Ministry of Education of Ecuador seeks to develop a new curriculum and help English teachers and students meet new standards to be able to respond more efficiently to the challenges the world in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has (Ministerio de Educación del Ecuador, 2014).

According to these guidelines, every secondary level student must reach, by the time they finish their compulsory education and graduate from school, a minimum level of language competence before attending university (Ministerio de Educación del Ecuador, 2012). This level has been framed as B1 into the Common European Framework of Reference for Language: Learning, Teaching, Assessment. This framework more commonly known as CEFR, is the standard guideline put together by the Council of Europe to provide a reliable assessing

measurement on the level of European languages' ability and proficiency, amongst them English, of an individual.

Divided into six different scale levels of language expertise going from the level A1 at the stage of beginners to the level C2 for those who have mastered the language, the CEFR has growing relevance in the ELT world, being accepted not only in several educational institutions but also in work places (Council of Europe, 2001).

At level B1, according to the framework, students can *cope with daily life situations at work, school, leisure and their setbacks*. They can understand factual texts and relatively slow and clear radio and TV programmes and keep up with a basic conversation in the target language, following the main parts of the interaction which might be blurred by either unknown vocabulary or accent and communicate what they mean to express giving reasons and explanations in clearly articulated speaking although grammar might not be perfectly accurate (Council of Europe, 2001).

In order to achieve this level of language proficiency, the work of teachers is essential; however, when incorrectly addressed, error correction can raise the learners' affective filter, which could damage their confidence and make them unable to generate any kind of linguistic production. For this reason, enhancing written linguistic competence through EFL grammar error correction activities is central to this project because learners will not only improve proficiency in the

language but also turn feelings of discouragement and disheartening into learning opportunities to better performance.

In the first chapter we will find a detailed description of this problem, together with the objectives of this study and the research questions that led the author point a possible strategy for overcoming it.

In chapter 2 we will read how error correction techniques were applied throughout time and in different teaching methods, followed by a definition of terms used in this thesis work.

Chapters 3 and 4 will provide us of the core of the investigation; that is, the participants, the procedure, the methodology used and the findings after the application of the independent variable.

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **THE PROBLEM**

### **CONTEXT OF THE PROBLEM**

Learning is a lifetime process in which every person tries to understand and make sense of the world they live in to coexist and improve it perhaps in its own particular way. It happens every day at any time, both willingly and unwillingly, in groups or individually, and in several unexpected ways. Teachers throughout the years have played an important role to guide learners through the path of success so they could learn in better and improved ways, always enriching the process with new methodologies and approaches that promise to make learners more thorough and proficient in their production.

Although mistakes are a natural, often unwanted yet unavoidable outcome of learning, students turn to their teachers for tips to help them correct those errors and improve their performance not only because they thirst for perfection but also because they want to improve every day and the teachers' response is a way to show care about the learning progress of the student.

Error correction techniques can enable learners revise their own written work and thus produce a more thorough text for any particular purpose they may have, and it also assists them with internalising structures and rules so they

will not make the same mistakes again over time; nevertheless, corrections need to be carefully addressed and in the most sensitive and professional way by the correctors, teachers in this case, in order not to, though not deliberately, hurt the person being corrected as a result of wrongly approached methods.

When badly applied, error correction could lead to major serious issues in teaching and learning such as student dependence on their teachers for proper written production, feelings of frustration resulting from a not well-learned lesson, resentment to their teachers because of their inadequate and ineffective methodology, and disheartening towards their education and learning process in general as no progress is perceived.

This is a serious matter in all areas of knowledge since they all help us be competent to the tasks we perform in our lives; however, when it comes to communication, it is absolutely necessary to achieve a degree of competence in which errors do not blur our performance or contributions making them incomprehensible or inaccurate in any imaginable way for this could lead to disastrous misunderstandings depending on our stewardship and the magnitude and scope of our production.

Furthermore, in the intertwined world we have today thanks to the internet which has drawn us closer facilitating the exchange of information, the learning of the English language, considering the importance and the impact that it has as the *lingua franca* of the world in order to obtain and share information, is a matter of utmost importance and its level of proficiency in the learners is

something that must be carefully addressed in order to reach both efficient and effective communication.

For this reason, English teachers, having been schooled and trained to respond to their students' needs, must be always ready to oblige their students in the most appropriate manner, following academic standards and heeding on previous research work that has proven to be effective in order for them to make the best of their work; however, as error correction is yet an area in which research findings are so diverse, unclear and contradictory, we cannot help but have several questions on this regard.

Some of the most common struggle for teachers at the moment of making correction is, for instance, what to correct, when to correct, to what extend correct errors, how to correct them and if, after all, all the time and effort teachers put on revising and correcting learners' error really help students correct their own errors and if this also has a long-term effect on preventing the same kind of errors in the future, eventually reaching thus little by little the so desired proficiency and accuracy.

None of these questions are new in the EFL teaching field; as a matter of fact, back in 1978 Hendrickson had already pondered upon them and since then a great deal of error correction techniques have been designed and applied throughout time, and with the emergence of different teaching approaches, they have mutated together with them. Although it is true that there cannot possibly be an error correction technique that works perfectly well with all students at all

ages and that matches all needs, it is also true that in spite of numberless studies examining several aspects of written feedback, error correction has never been static and renews itself as new teachers and teaching approaches emerge; for this reason continues research is also needed to determine whether the time teachers take to realise what technique works better with one or another student is a valuable time or if they could be using that amount of time to focus on something else given the case that error correction proved to be little effective or ineffective at all.

For this reason, a study that aims to test the effectiveness of new research-based error correction techniques used by EFL teachers is of great importance for educational researchers who could use the findings to construct new paradigms applicable to the language acquisition process; to teachers and students since they both could benefit from it to enable students correct their own written production and thus acquire higher proficiency in the language which is needed, as stated before, in the globalised and competitive world we live in today.

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Grammar Error Correction activities, when applied in an EFL classroom to a great variety of learners, have shown divergent results from very useful at

helping students improve their language competence giving either a feeling of accomplishment to both teachers and learners, to completely useless and even dangerous when poorly applied and incorrectly approached, encompassing harmful consequences in both teachers and learners since the first ones may think they might not be skilled enough to teach students properly or correct them effectively and reach their teaching outcomes, and the latter may feel overwhelmed by the learning process thinking that it is too difficult and fruitless, causing thus very little, if any, improvement in the language and it could even in the worst scenario cause a drop-off.

Although error correction activities were believed to be effective from a behaviourism viewpoint, being included in the syllabi of more than a few language courses and being a practice rather expected to take place by both teachers and learners, EFL research findings on the application of the said activities are not astonishing favourable per se in helping the learners acquire a better grammar and thus become able to correct their own errors in future written production; furthermore, having a broad range of corrective feedback strategies and foci has made it difficult to test them all so there is a lot of information still needed to determine the effectiveness of the application of several correction techniques.

For this reason, a study that aimed to analyse how the application of specific EFL grammar correction techniques that take into consideration the light

new research has brought to the teaching field on a target age group of EFL young learners from the Language Institute COPEI during the year 2014 could help to improve the students' written competence through grammar accuracy, reach better proficiency and foster learning not only on a short term basis but also in the long term.

## **JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY**

This study analysing the types of EFL grammar error correction techniques used by English teachers in the Ecuadorean English Language Institute COPEI aims to provide useful insights on the effectiveness of such activities in improving students' grammar written production compared to the activity proposed in this work that compiles corrective feedback findings from previous research work and observe which one works better on turning tables on erroneous written outcomes improving grammar to develop better writing skills and, at the same time, create an enhanced learning environment thus helping learners reach the desired outcomes of the programme and meet the demands of the Ministry of Education of Ecuador, their own expectations and society in general.

If the application of the research based EFL error correction activity in the learning process produces a considerable enhancement in the students' grammar written performance not only in a short but also in a long term, then the application of such activities in the classroom will benefit both teachers and learners helping them reach the desired outcomes of teaching and learning; furthermore, if the application of research based EFL error correction activities in the learning process shows a better students' acceptance and desire for learning then the application of such activities will leave behind negative outcomes resulting from the process of correction. For this reason, it is considered that this study pertaining to the proper approach of error correction and form feedback will make learners achieve enhanced linguistic skills and better communication thereof.

## **OBJECTIVES**

### **GENERAL OBJECTIVE**

The general objective of this study is to determine the effectiveness of the use of grammar error correction activities in EFL classrooms with young upper beginner Ecuadorean learners in improving their written competence through grammar accuracy, carrying out a case study at the TEENS programme from the English language institute COPEI in the cycle 71 during the year 2014

## **SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES**

1. To find out what types of corrective feedback EFL teachers at the English language institute COPEI use and their motivation to use them through personal interviews conducted to sense the teachers' perception on the successfulness of such activities.
2. To observe students' responses to the error correction techniques currently used at the English language institute COPEI in terms of grammar improvement through classroom observation focused on students' behaviours to discern how their effective filter is altered.
3. To evaluate different grammar correction activities used with upper beginner English learners from the TEENS programme at the English language institute COPEI through the use of data collection instruments to verify their effectiveness.
4. To analyse students' attitudes towards the feedback they receive through classroom observations to perceive the effect on their language acquisition process to improve their grammar production.

## INVESTIGATION QUESTIONS

- How do EFL teachers at the English Language Institute COPEI apply error correction techniques?
- What results have EFL teachers at the English Language Institute COPEI seen from the error correction techniques they apply?
- How do students feel when being corrected?
- In what ways can EFL teachers at the English Language Institute COPEI improve their error correction techniques?
- Why is it important to correct grammatical errors?
- How can EFL teachers at the English Language Institute COPEI make students participate in their own corrections?
- What is the importance of SRL (Self Regulated learning) in the error correction process?
- What is the role of metalinguistic comments in helping students improve their linguistic accuracy?

## CHAPTER 2

### THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Every language acquisition process involves the mastery of linguistic skills and sub-skills; writing is one of these and the correct use of grammar in it makes outcomes both cohesive and coherent meeting the goals of communication; on the other hand, poor morphosyntactic knowledge of the language and an excessive amount of errors will blur communication and may cause misinterpretation and undesired confusion. For this reason grammar instruction has been a fundamental aspect of language courses and, together with it, feedback to consolidate learning.

Although from a behaviourist viewpoint it was believed to be effective giving both positive and negative criticism and it has been used as a key component of more than a few second language writing programmes around the world, corrective feedback has not always actually been effective (Brookhart, 2008) and its research literature has not been overwhelmingly positive about its role in writing development. (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). In fact, some research has found error correction practices rather ineffective and even, at some degree, harmful for both the students and teachers involved in the process (Truscott & Hsu, 2008).

Since the teaching and learning of foreign languages back in the mid 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries began to rapidly gain importance in a world that changed and grew almost at the same speed as globalisation and the technological revolution, so did different methods and approaches to EFL teaching like the Grammar Translation method, the Direct method, the Audiolingual method, Suggestopaedia, Total Physical Response, The Silent Way, and the Natural Approach, just to mention some of the most relevant ones, including in this list the current Communicative Language Teaching approach, whose emphasis is on competence rather than knowledge (Sárosdy, Bencze, Poór, & Vadnay, 2006). All these methods focused on learning the target language to respond to the needs of the world and they approached learning in a very particular way, using varied techniques and showing different results, always improving, adding or modifying something the previous approach, in their view, had neglected or failed to do.

From the very beginning, the Grammar Translation method (Howatt, 2004), also called the Classical Method, emerged to teach ancient languages or languages no longer in use in the modern world such as Latin and Greek only for the sake of knowing without any communicative intention behind. Although not being the most recommendable teaching method nowadays, at least in programmes that do not focus on translation because of its high focus on accuracy rather than communication or fluency, this method is perhaps the one

in which grammar played the most important role and so did corrections therefore.

Students under this method had to learn all grammar rules by heart and use them on the direct translation of texts and passages. The rules were taught exhaustively and extensively with elaborated explanations of word inflections, verb conjugation, morphology, and grammatical analysis until the learners reached a full understanding of them. Here, the concept of “practice makes perfect” was applied in teaching through extensive exercises of sentence translation, drilling, vocabulary rote memorisation, among others.

Errors were not tolerated and an explicit correction of errors took place strictly and basically under a situation where, if a student made a mistake or failed to give an accurate answer to a question, the teacher would provide a correct answer or could give another student the opportunity to correct their classmate showing off his or her knowledge thus creating an atmosphere of praised superiority and reprehensible inferiority which could have encouraged learners either to drastically improve or to drop off.

As a response to the lack of emphasis on the other language skills such as listening and speaking, the Direct Method was born. Also known as the Reform Method or the Anti-Grammatical Method, in the Direct Method learners were expected to learn the target language in the same manner they did their first language without focusing on the mechanics of the language (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Here, learners were not compelled to memorise grammar rules

but induced them instead from demonstrations and example; though, because the method focused mainly on oral production and communication, some incorrect rules could have been internalised and fossilised as so.

Self correction of errors was highly encouraged since it was perceived as facilitating of language learning; techniques such as elicitation were used, in which teacher, providing the learners of options, got him or her to correct his or her own error.

Although totally different for some, for others both the Grammar Translation Method and the Direct Method were both teacher-centred and had several things in common; nevertheless, a method that defied the teaching trends used until that time and whose philosophy was to foster communication rather than grammar perfection was the Natural Approach.

Born in the 20<sup>th</sup> century from the linguists Tracy D. Terrell and Stephen Krashen (Krashen & Terrell, 1995) who believed that competence in a language *“could not be learnt but only acquired in a process that sought to develop communication skills”*, this language teaching method emphasised listening and understanding over the memorisation of grammar rules in which spoken production came out little by little first with one word answer, or non verbal answer even, until it got a well-structured and comprehensible answer.

Through the use of topics that would interest the learners, teachers put as much input as necessary for the students to become conscious of how the language worked. In this method, the span of attention was usually higher than

in others that simply presented topics that did not connect with the learners or helped the teacher build any rapport and class participation became something learners wanted to do rather than felt pressured to do.

Here Krashen (1995) talks about the theoretical construct of a psychological filter known as the “*affective filter*”. This abstract filter is believed to be the reason that can either trigger or hamper second language acquisition and production since, when high, it can create feelings of anxiety, stress and lack of self confidence that will halt learners’ communication. Overemphasis on the correction of errors is believed to raise this filter and hence the importance of creating an environment where it is accepted to make mistakes though at the same time correct them in the most appropriate way to avoid bad grammar fossilisation.

Error correction in the Natural Approach was believed to appear naturally as the student received more and more correct input and subconsciously corrected himself; language production was only corrected as long as it hindered understanding or blurred communication because of phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, or any other factor, always taking into consideration not to trigger the affective filter for this could be disastrous and could take years to repair.

Such was the importance of students’ feelings towards their second language acquisition process that a teaching method was developed to help learners keep a low affective filter and eradicate negative feelings associated

with unsuccessful outcomes to make them overcome the barriers of learning; this method is known as Suggestopaedia. (Richards & Rodgers, 2001)

Introduced by Bulgarian psychologist and educator George Lezanov, in this method the teacher and the learners interact not only between each other but also with the environment surrounding them as everything is seen as a positive input and thus the concept of “*peripheral learning*” makes the classroom, specially decorated to build a good atmosphere, also an active participant in the learning process. Just like in previous methods the teacher plays an important role building rapport and telling students they can learn and have fun and earning thus their respect and trust. Students also feel less threatened to be judged by their erroneous utterances since they are given the chance to create an alter ego that will accept the blame instead of them. Error correction here, according to this approach, takes place indirectly and in a gentle manner not using a harsh voice and making the correction sound like a suggestion; it is believed that language use has a much higher priority than language form anyways.

A method that contradicted Suggestopaedia regarding on peripheral learning was the Silent Way. Created in the early 70s, The Silent Way is a teaching method in which students, instead of responding to stimuli to create meaning like in other methods, are responsible for their own learning *actively searching for meaning in the target language* (Cattagno, 2010) and the language acquisition process takes place deductively and, therefore, at a different pace in

every student since every individual uses his or her own thinking process to make sense of the grammar rules which are taught to serve the learning process and clarify rather than to dominate it.

Teachers take a passive role in this method trying to take over the class as less as possible giving thus students the chance to use the language to express themselves and interact amongst each other and use their own criteria to correct their mistakes.

Another language teaching method that came forward emphasising the need for communication, as it was necessary during the time of war, was the Audiolingual method (Larsen-Freeman, 2000) in which the teacher introduced dialogues so students could learn language forms within contexts by repetition that would help them in specific situations to perform as learnt.

Similar to the Direct Method, the teacher used realia and descriptive examples to evoke meaning trying not to use the students' first language but only the target language. Errors are regarded as a bad thing that could lead to fossilisation of bad grammar and therefore teachers using this method must be always aware of them and work to keep learners from errors and, in case they might pop up, they must be immediately corrected. Interestingly, in this method grammar rules are not given as such but interpreted by the students through examples.

Positive reinforcement was used when learners did a good job verbally acknowledging it (Larsen-Freeman, 2000); however, teachers had to keep the

control of the class and be aware of every student's utterance either to praise or reproach. This environment might not have been the most relaxing for the teacher or conducive for the students to keep the affective filter low and one can construe that learners struggled to learn in spite of the lack of principles of this method to relate to this area.

All of this shows that, for several years and in all the teaching methods and approaches developed in the past, error correction has played an important role in the second language acquisition process; up to the point of being strictly applied in order to brutally eliminate all errors before they can take root, or carefully addressed them in order not to alter the learners' affective filter. There is no wonder why corrective feedback is a central aspect of L2 writing programmes across the world; however, the effectiveness of the error correction practice has been called into question by more than a few researchers who have not taken for granted its usefulness but rather wondered if it really helped to the language acquisition process in long term learning and not only to improve a written draft that would soon fall into oblivion.

If research shows that error correction feedback proves to be effective and helps learners gain competence and proficiency in the target language, then its application at full pelt of its potential in the second language acquisition curriculum becomes absolutely necessary to achieve teaching and learning goals; on the other hand, if it proves to be ineffective and causes more damages than assistance, then its application should not be encouraged but rather

abandoned for students not to raise their affective filter and for teacher not to waste their time.

For instance, error correction has been considered as a useful practice that could help students gain accuracy and proficiency in the English language. Even authors like Chandler, Ferris and Roberts, Ashwell, Frantzen, and Fathman and Whalley (Ferris, 2004) have pointed out in their research that students who received error correction produced more accurate texts and improved writing better over time than those who did not.

This, however, was strongly rejected by John Truscott (Truscott & Hsu, 2008), whose research and analysis produced opposite results proving to be disastrous for both teachers and learners regarding error correction as a practice that should be totally abandoned. One of the theories proposed by John Truscott which was published in the research journal *Language Learning* and that is associated with error correction states that there are *“few serious attempts to justify its practice and they offer few evidence with no critical assessment overlooking substantial research that has found correction ineffective”*.

To this very controversial assertion, Truscott received several responses rebutting his position such as Jean Chandler, Dana R. Ferris, and Michael J. Alroe (Alroe, 2011) who supported evidence from the available research that favoured error correction and agreed on the fact that it can produce noteworthy benefits for both the teachers and the learners; nevertheless, in Truscott's view,

*their work failed to demonstrate so. Furthermore, he claimed it not to be “amenable to intervention by a teacher through corrective input” (Alroe, 2011)*

This theory basically derived from Noam Chomsky’s view on language acquisition as a natural process to which humans are *innately programmed*, regarding thus correction practices as of little value since flaws were seemed to naturally disappear as learners continued progressing in the language; however, several researchers have questioned Chomsky’s theory’s applicability to a second language acquisition process because the learning circumstances might be completely different.

It is important, nevertheless, to analyse the types of correction used in order to improve linguistic competence, in other words, corrective feedback. Among other types, Direct and Indirect Feedback, Error Code, and Metalinguistic Comments are probably the most commonly used methods by teachers (Dr. Ellis, 2012); all of them have strong advantages and disadvantages worth considering at the moment of applying them to the learners regarding their age and level of proficiency and also the teachers’ time and expertise.

Research is not very clear on the efficacy of these methods since a group of learners of L2 German that received correction using Error Code improved in accuracy in subsequent writing; whereas a group receiving Direct Correction made more errors (Lalande, 2011); however, on some other research the

application of this method was no more effective than Direct or even Indirect Correction (Robb, Ross, & Shortreed, 1986).

Ferris and Robert (Ferris, 2004) later on discovered that Error Code helped learners to self edit their writing just in the same way Indirect Correction did but it was only effective in two out of the four categories she investigated; this is total errors and verb errors, but not in noun, article, lexical or sentence errors; Ferris (2006). All in all there's very little evidence to prove that one form of error correction is more or less effective than the other to help students achieve a higher level of proficiency in the language.

On a different study Sheen (Sheen, 2007) proved that both Direct and Metalinguistic Correction Feedback increased language accuracy in the learners but only in a short term whilst out of the two, metalinguistic had a longer effect, (Dr. Ellis, 2012). The reason for this is that Metalinguistic Error Correction helps the learners understand and internalise grammatical rules, it is important to point out, though, that this method requires a lot of effort from the teacher who must devote a great amount of time to give personalised explanations on errors and he or she must be skilled enough to do so.

With all types of correction, teachers have the choice of making a focused and unfocused correction, meaning that they can either concentrate on a particular type of error and correct it, or correct all, or most of, the incorrect production in their students' written work. Choosing to do either or also has some advantages and disadvantages for both the teachers and learners; while

focused correction might prove to be effective in helping learners develop an understanding on the nature of their errors, unfocused correction might be superior in a long term (Dr. Ellis, 2012).

Nevertheless this is an area of work that demands for more research to be carried out since there are no studies comparing and contrasting the effectiveness of these correction methods to pinpoint which one is better to be used in the classroom; it must be said, nonetheless, that unfocused feedback is the one that usually takes place in most second language acquisition programmes.

Be it content, organisation or language feedback, the purpose of making corrections in the students' work is not to keep students from making errors since they are believed to be a natural outcome of learning and, if properly used, a motivation to improve in the learning process but to help students learn from those errors, revising their work and acquiring correct grammar to have better and more proficient results in their future written production.

Agreeing on Truscott's argument that error correction could be not only harmful but severely destructive for both the students and the teacher, the importance of analysing current error correction activities and their usefulness in order to have a framework to test hypothesis and apply them so the understanding of error correction grows in a way that allows pedagogical practices cause no demoralisation to EFL learners is of utmost importance and very much related to, and supported by, Chandler who attests on the efficacy of

various kinds of error feedback for improvement in the accuracy and fluency of L2 student (Chandler, 2003). Ferris herself has as well re-examined error correction studies and analysed new research concluding that the approach to the question whether error correction help L2 students is inadequate and that current research foretells positive effects for written error correction (Ferris, 2004).

As learning a foreign language is a process through which new linguistic knowledge and competences are acquired and they empower people to attain desired outcomes in the language under study, a fundamental aspect of it is the amount of errors one is able to detect and rub out in order to produce a more thorough communication. This is something not only encouraged by a carefully developed teaching programme in an academy or a single school that offers better education but also by the governments and ministries of education themselves that want their citizens to interact with the world, getting from it and contributing to its development individually and collectively.

## DEFINITIONS

### Affective Filter

All learners in the process of acquiring a second language have an invisible filter inside of them that has the potential to result in anxiety, stress, and lack of self-confidence. This invisible filter is theoretically called the affective filter (Multilingualmania, 2011)

“A mental block, caused by affective factors ... that prevents input from reaching the language acquisition device” (Krashen, 1985, page 100)

### Common European Framework of Reference for Language: Learning, Teaching, Assessment

It is a framework that “describes in a comprehensive way what language learners have to learn to do in order to use a language for communication and what knowledge and skills they have to develop so as to be able to act effectively” (Council of Europe, 2001)

### Corrective Feedback

It has been defined as “any indication to the learners that their use of the target language is incorrect. This includes various responses that the learners receive which can be explicit and may or may not include metalinguistic information”. (Lightbown & Spada, 1990)

## Elicitation

Elicitation is a technique by which the teacher gets the learners to give information rather than giving it to them (British Council)

It basically means that instead of providing information yourself, you draw it out from the learners. This is best achieved through a kind of question and answer dialogue (Davies, 2010)

## Feedback

Important component of the formative assessment process that gives information to teachers and learners about how students are doing related to their learning goals (Brookhart, 2008)

## Grammar Fossilisation

“Fossilization” means that usage errors have become embedded (i.e., habitual) in L2 learners’ language production. It occurs when learners get no corrective feedback. (Azar, 2012)

## Peripheral Learning

The students learn English not only from direct instruction but also from indirect instruction. It is encouraged through the presence in the learning environment of posters and decoration featuring the target language and

various grammatical pieces of information; they are changed every day. By doing this, the students can learn many things indirectly in the classroom or outside classroom. (Apriana & Islamiyah, 2011)

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

After having analysed how error correction techniques have taken place throughout time in a great variety of teaching approaches and after having reviewed both old and new research insights on the matter that helps us understand the results error correction has had on the EFL learners in terms of language accuracy improvement, as language learning is an area of study where progress in people is measured both cognitively and sensibly through different variables, and as more research that focuses on specific types and effects of corrective feedback is necessary; in order to study the relationships of the results that grammar-focused student-centred corrective feedback integrating metalinguistic comments had on the improvement of grammar written accuracy of the learners, a Qualitative Methodology Research Approach through the use of a Case Study Method was chosen to understand and interpret the effects written indirect corrective feedback had on the attitude of the learners towards being corrected and analyse at the same time cause and effect relationships of these corrections and the improvement of both the marks and the affective filter of the group under study, using statistic charts to offer graphic and concrete support to the findings.

## **JUSTIFICATION OF THE ELECTION OF THE METHOD**

As the goal of this study is to determine the effects of stress-free error correction activities in improving written linguistic competence on young upper beginner Ecuadorean learners from the TEENS programme at English Learning Institute COPEI, a Qualitative Methodology Research Approach through the use of a Case Study Method was chosen for this research project because it allows to see how the provided corrective feedback affects both the learners' attitudes and their grades, offering the possibility to use and manipulate variables to study cause and consequence relationships from the results obtained and thus draw assertive conclusions on the efficacy of the study. This methodology will also give the researcher the opportunity to provide a detailed description of the reality of the phenomena as it was experienced by the participants and the treatment given to obtain the ending results, which could help other educators not only understand educational topics but also reproduce the treatment and set a basis for practice and further research.

## **DESIGN OF THE INVESTIGATION**

This research aimed to investigate the effects of stress-free error correction activities in improving written linguistic competence in EFL

classrooms including the independent variable of the error correction approach used by the educative researcher with the two dependent variables of the marks and the affective filter; both of which support one another to arrive at qualitative assertive conclusions on the effectiveness of the study. The independent variable of the new approach to error correction using a research-based technique applied in class during the cycle 71 at the English Language Institute COPEI, and the dependent variable of the marks, considering the number of errors students make, can be measured through the learners' scores in the assignments and their response to the metalinguistic comment corrections received which can also be a determinant factor in learning.

Since theoreticians seem to agree on the fact that most effective learners are the ones who self regulate their learning (Butler & Winne, 1995), for this research a worksheet that embodied in the form of a progress table a combination of SRL (Self-Regulated Learning) and metalinguistic comments was developed and tested to determine its efficacy in fostering stress-free corrective feedback.

## **POPULATION AND SAMPLE**

English, the 21<sup>st</sup> century lingua franca of the world, is a compulsory subject in several developing nations around the world, encouraged to be learnt from the very early years of cognitive development since numerous studies have

shown the receptiveness of the human brain for language acquisition during this stage; nevertheless, it is not until later on that a language is shaped and better understood as we gain an understanding of its structure and particular rules. For this reason, English learners from the TEENS programme at the English Language Institute COPEI located in the city of Guayaquil, in Ecuador, were chosen to participate in this study and, through the data collected, better understand the effects that corrective feedback had in improving their written linguistic competence and in helping them become more proficient in the language.

## **SELECTION OF THE PARTICIPANTS**

This research took place in the English Language Institute COPEI in the city of Guayaquil during the cycle 71 in the year 2014 with participants from the TEENS programme in cluster trials, meaning that groups and not individuals were studied. Four groups were selected for this study with participants chosen randomly to equalise the groups; three control groups where no other intervention rather than the regularly applied error correction technique was done and a treatment group which received an intervention through the manipulation of a variable. Students in all groups, whose ages ranged from 13 to 15, consisted of an average of 12 students in each group encountering both

males and females; to add validity and reliability to this study, size and homogeneity of the population have been taken into consideration.

In order to understand not only the students' side but also their educators', the teachers of these study groups were interviewed to detect their impressions on the response their students had towards the corrective feedback they gave unto them and the progress they were making to achieve language proficiency; this would also help gain insight of the teachers' feelings towards error correction activities and their motivation to use them in the classroom. (Appendix 1)

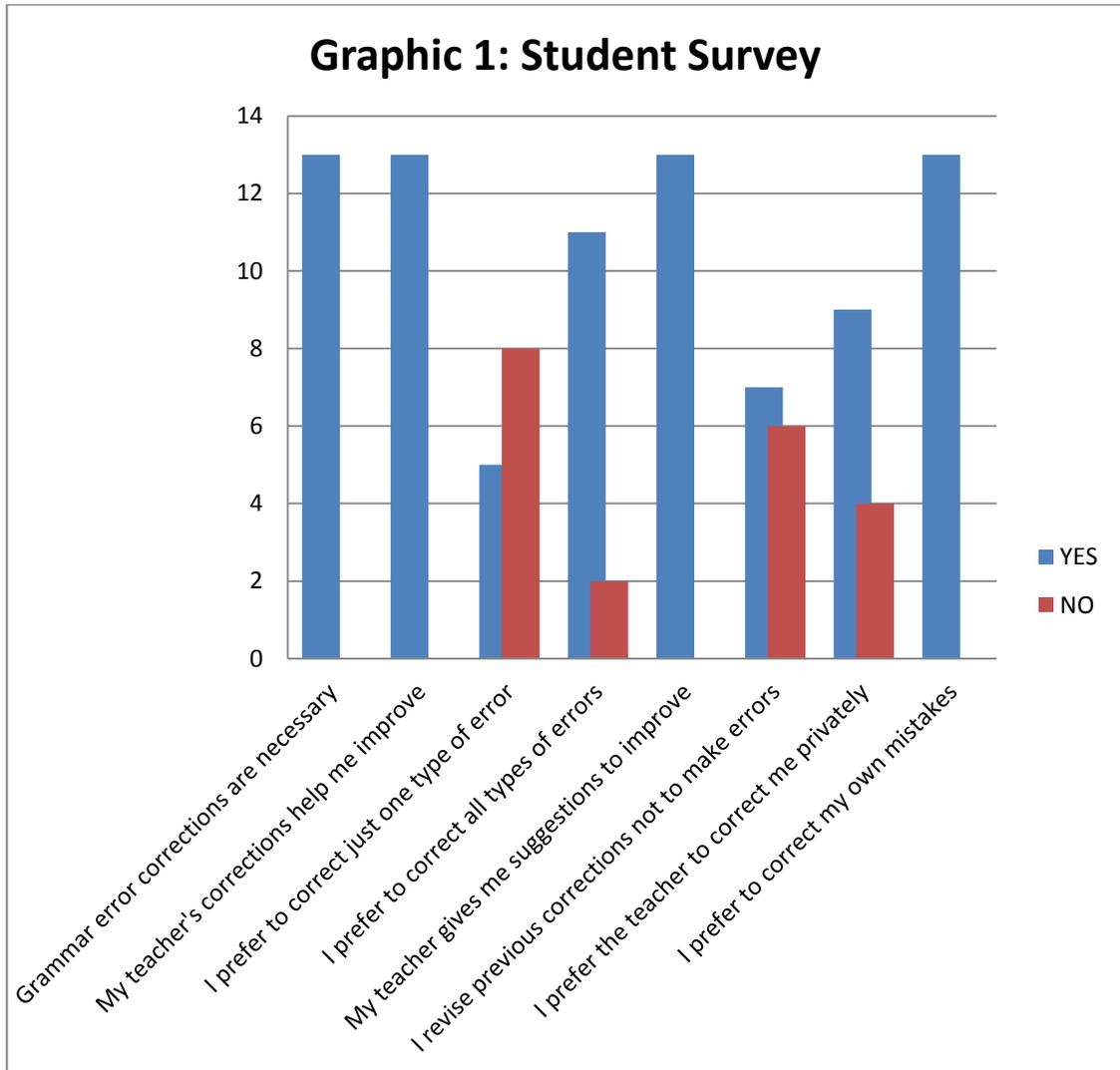
## **PROCEDURE**

The first step in this study was to explore the perceptions of the students and the teachers from the TEENS programme at the English Language Institute COPEI regarding corrective feedback to find out how they both approached it and felt towards it. First of all, considering the researcher's resources and facilities, four cluster trials were selected to start the study. This selection of the cluster trials took place through a survey which helped identify the learners' perceptions of the corrective feedback they have received and how they felt towards it regarding to their writing skills proficiency level improvement and their affective filter (Appendix 2).

As the focus of this study was to analyse the effects of the feedback provided to students from their teachers based on the students' work to determine its degree of effectiveness based not only on the improvement of their academic scores but also taking into consideration the students' affective filter, the survey and later diagnostic assessment set a basis to start measuring and evaluating the learners' progress throughout the study.

The surveys showed that all the students found corrective feedback to be necessary for them to learn from their mistakes and thought error correction activities were helping them achieve better grammar and greater proficiency. They also acknowledged their teachers did activities to correct their errors and gave them recommendations on how to improve, which they believe was helping them; however, after the corrections were done, they seemed to fall into oblivion for almost half of the students surveyed in the subsequent weeks, which was confirmed through recurrent errors perceived in summative assessments and evaluations.

The bar chart below shows the results of the Yes-No question survey the students answered in order to understand their perception on corrective feedback as it has been just previously exposed herewith.



Source: Rivera, 2014

Once the results of the survey were obtained and were carefully analysed, an activity based on the research work by Butler and Winne (Butler & Winne, 1995) that tried to comprise self regulated feedback, metalinguistic comments, and the generation of tactics and strategies to monitor and foster learning was developed as a form of progress sheet that the students and their teacher were

to use every class after every assessment in order for the learners to mark themselves their own progress and for the teacher to write metalinguistic comments to them as suggestions to improve their proficiency in the language. Then, the students were to revise at home those comments their teacher wrote to guide them into SRL, self regulated learning (Appendix 3). This progress sheet was applied only to the controlled group who was explained by their teacher how to use it, while the other two groups received direct feedback on their assessments with no metalinguistic comments as it is commonly done at the English language Institute COPEI.

Each cluster trial was taught the grammar point of Passive Voice found in the units 4 and 5 of the book “Times Zones Student book 4” by Carmella Lieske, according to the Institute’s lesson plan for the TEENS programme. The teachers in the study explained to their students the grammatical points and morpho-syntax of the language related to the content and students discovered the grammar through listening, speaking, reading, writing and grammatical exercises found on the book. All students had to work in class exercises both on the board and individual worksheets, write compositions about the topic using the grammar required and do homework from their workbooks. The way in which error correction took place was as follows:

## **Corrections on students' workbooks**

The learners had to do some homework found in their workbooks. This homework addressed a revision of the vocabulary and grammar of the unit through different exercises such as fill in the gaps, matching, and paraphrasing; the homework also included short writing assignments. Every student in the first three cluster trials was handed an answer sheet to self correct their mistakes on their workbook while the teacher checked that the homework was done and checking superficially on the students' understanding; with this answer sheet the students reviewed their work and were expected to correct their own errors with no further explanation or intervention of their teachers, unless if requested by the student, about what kind of mistake they had made or a hint of why it was erroneous.

## **Corrections on students' compositions**

All students had to write, as a part of their lesson plan homework, short compositions about the topic under study; in other words the passive voice. The topic of the writing was proposed by the book and the number of words ranged from 50 to 80; the composition had an essay format with title, topic sentence, supportive ideas and a conclusion. The teachers collected the compositions their students had written and corrected the mistakes on them afterwards using direct correction; crossing out all erroneous written production and writing over the correct answer so the students could check it if desired but provided no

further explanation on the nature of the error, either written or verbal. An overall review of the class, however, took place to correct repetitive errors found on the students' writing.

### **Corrections on students' classwork**

Teachers prepared exercises that compiled the grammar and vocabulary of the unit to be worked on the board as a group activity. Students had to read the exercise and mentally work on it using their own prior knowledge or checking on their classmates understanding too. One student at a time was selected to go to the board and complete the task the exercise required. If a student did not know the answer or wrote an erroneous answer, peer direct correction was used in these exercises worked in class where students could, although were not required to, take notes to remember later on and thus check general understanding and comprehension.

In this way corrective feedback was addressed to all three cluster trials where the progress sheet based on the research work by Butler and Winne (Butler & Winne, 1995) that comprised self regulated feedback, metalinguistic comments, and the generation of tactics and strategies to monitor and foster learning was not applied; which is the regular way in which EFL teachers at the English Language Institute COPEI are expected to correct their students' errors. On the other hand, the fourth and last cluster trial consisting of the 12 learners

where the dependent variable of the research-based error-correction activity previously explained was applied underwent a different treatment explained below.

### **Corrections on students' workbooks**

The teacher explained to the class the new grammar point of the lesson, that is, passive voice, following the lesson plan provided by the English Language Institute COPEI using a warm-up activity to engage the learners, practice and evaluation. After the lesson ended, students were assigned homework on their workbooks to test their understanding. Homework was the very same the other groups had which comprised a revision of the vocabulary and grammar of the unit through different exercises such as fill in the gaps, matching, and paraphrasing; the homework also included short writing assignments. It was checked on the following class and every student received an answer sheet to check their homework more efficiently in terms of time instead of having the teacher going student by student correcting all errors just like the other groups; however, differently here the learners were instructed not to correct any error but simply put a ✓ on their correct answers and an ✗ on their erroneous ones and calculate the amount of errors they had afterwards.

After the process of self correction had taken place, students were handed the progress worksheet based on the research work of Deborah Butler and Philip Winne (Butler & Winne, 1995) which comprise self regulated feedback,

metalinguistic comments, and the generation of tactics and strategies to monitor and foster learning and showed that the application of feedback and self regulated learning positively influenced learning. The students were explained how to illustrate on their progress sheet in the form of a bar chart the number of mistakes they had previously computed.

On the worksheet, the number of mistakes could add up to ten and, depending on the number of errors the students had, they were asked to draw a bar chart illustrating from zero to the number of errors on their homework. The ideal chart would be the one with the less number of errors; or better off, no errors at all.

This would be the basis to start with and get to know the flaws in understanding of every student. The teacher then went on reviewing the grammar content from the previous class, eliciting answers and working in class activities to reinforce learning; at the end of the lesson the students were asked to return to their workbooks where they had marked with an ✘ all their erroneous answers and they were given the chance to correct themselves using the knowledge they have gained and reinforced in class. After this, the answer sheet was handed once again to every student for them to check that they had actually accurately corrected their errors; should there be any incorrect correction, it was highlighted for the teacher to write some metalinguistic comments on it for the students to review at home and revise points of grammar that were weak.

In this way error correction was addressed, giving private personalised suggestions for students to improve their grammar and level of proficiency in the language and allowing them the chance to correct their own errors just like the survey showed the students expressed they wanted to do.

### **Corrections on students' compositions**

For written compositions, the teacher collected the students' progress sheet together with the students' work and checked every piece of writing using indirect feedback, pointing out erroneous written production without giving an explicit answer and computing the total amount of mistakes onto the progress sheet in the form of a bar chart; metalinguistic comments were also written there and it was returned to the students for them to do further study on their own once they arrive home and correct their work themselves. This composition was checked once again and revised with the students to see if they understood the corrections and clear up any remaining doubts.

### **Corrections on students' class work**

To correct class work, just like before, students were asked to solve some grammatical exercises on the board prepared by the teacher either filling in the blanks or correcting mistakes; the amount of errors was not computed here since the aim of the activity was to reinforce grammatical knowledge. Students were not only asked to complete the exercises but to give a short explanation on

their choices for the correction; when students could not achieve this, peer correction was used under the same terms and students had to use their progress sheets to help them with their explanations on grammatical points.

The teaching and corrections applied in this study took place throughout the cycle 71 at the English Language Institute COPEI in the course of the year 2014 using different assessment methods such as homework, compositions, and quizzes, described in this study with the term “test”.

## **RESULTS AFTER APPLYING THE ACTIVITY**

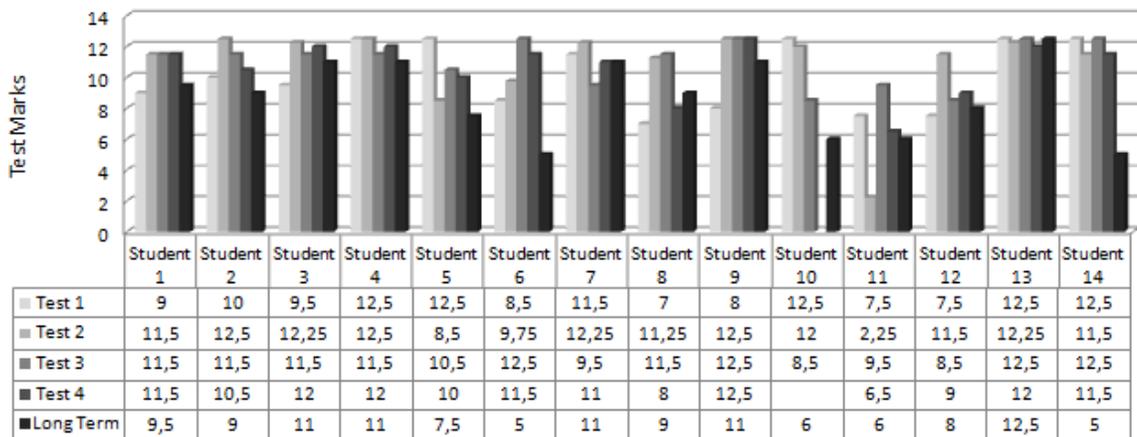
In this part, all the students’ work is presented in a quantitative form and the code used to refer to it will be explained. In order to illustrate and be able to see the progress students made through time from one test to another, bar charts were selected to present the numeric data and appreciate both individual and overall development of the trial clusters under study.

After several weeks of applying the treatment to the controlled group and monitoring the clusters trials where the treatment was not applied to determine the effectiveness of the use of grammar error correction activities to improve the students’ grammar production; through tests and classroom observations during

the cycle 71 in the year 2014 at the English language institute COPEI, the results were as follows:

The first cluster trial consisting of a group of 14 students aged from 13 to 15 years old that received classes on Saturdays from 8h20 to 12h50 with no treatment but only direct feedback as explained on the previous chapter were exposed to four different types of assessments called “tests” and one final summative assessment, all of them marked out of 12,5 points, to measure their retention of knowledge, or long term learning. They presented the following marks on their tests:

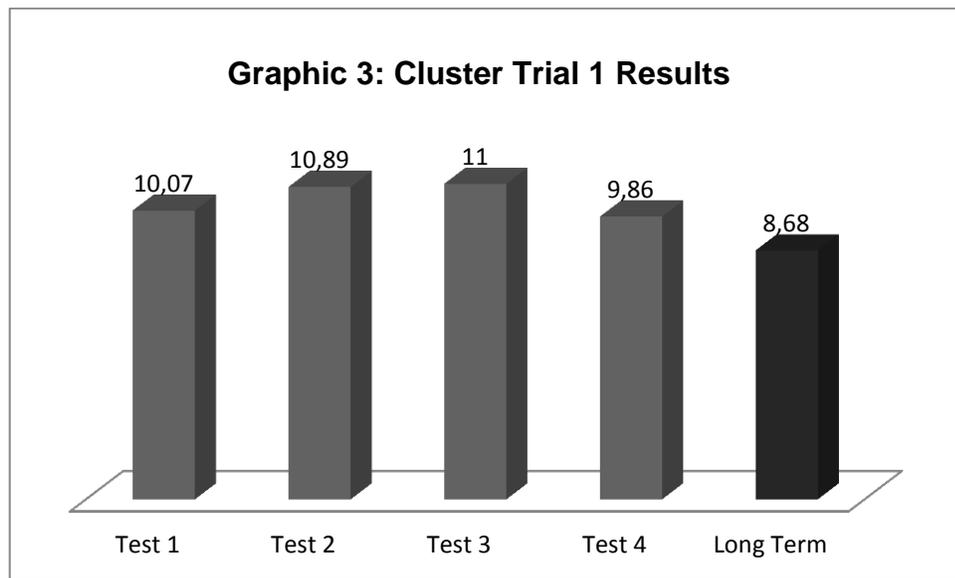
**Graphic 2: Cluster Trial 1 Marks**



Source: Rivera, 2014

As the following chart shows, the teaching provided helped the learners understand the grammar point under study and as a result the students' marks

on the tests were achieving enough to get a passing grade; however, their performance decreased when their grammatical knowledge was tested after a period of time in a long term learning test as seen in the following overall class performance chart.

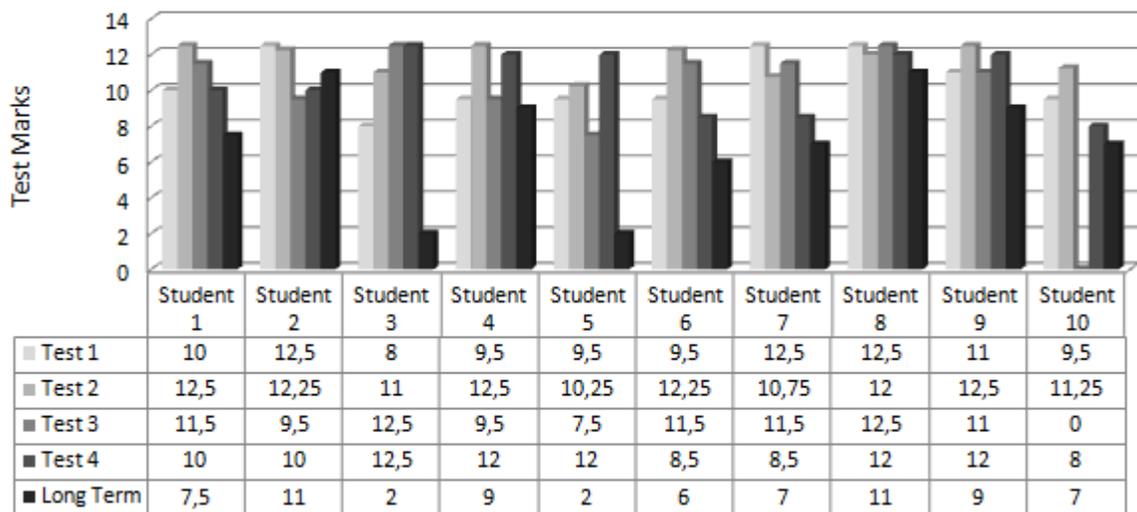


Source: Rivera, 2014

The second cluster trial received exactly the same instruction in almost the same manner as the first group following COPEI's standards, with the difference that it was given by a different EFL teacher who contributed with its own personal experience and expertise. This group consisted of 10 students aged from 13 to 15 years old that were given classes on Saturdays from 13h20 to 17h50 with no treatment but only direct feedback as explained on the previous chapter. It is important to mention that the perception of the teacher regarding these students was that the learners were discouraged to be receiving

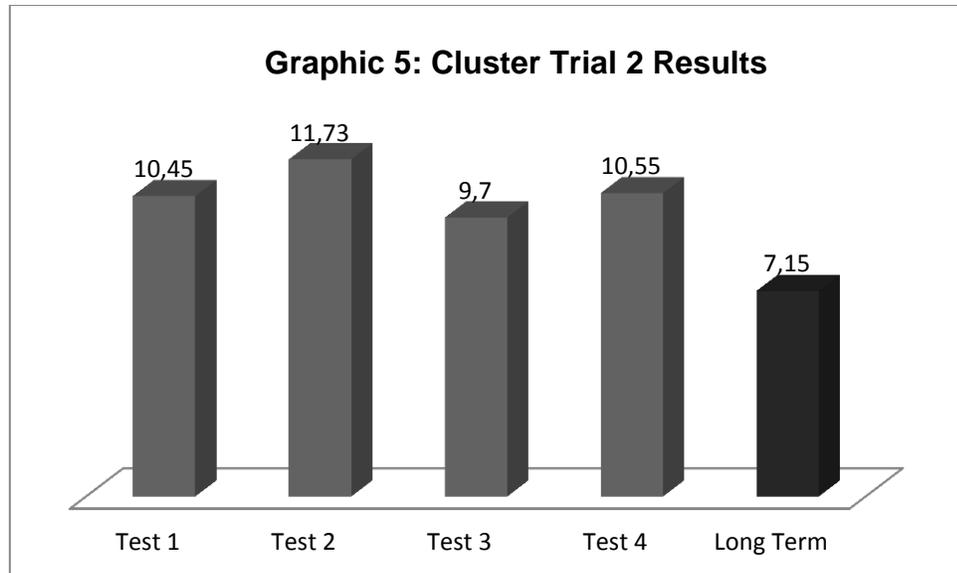
classes at this time since they preferred not to be enclosed in a classroom. This cluster trial presented the following marks on their tests:

**Graphic 4: Cluster Trial 2 Marks**



Source: Rivera, 2014

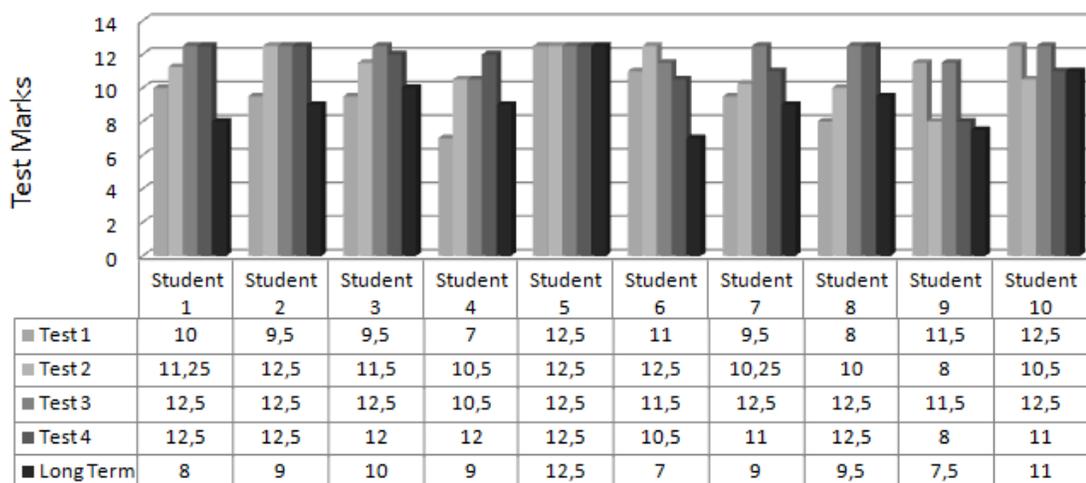
In spite of the students' poor enthusiasm towards being in the classroom on a Saturday afternoon, they made a good effort to understand the teacher's explanations and learn. Just like the previous group, their grades individually and in an overall were achieving enough; nevertheless, their marks also decreased when testing the students' grammatical knowledge after a period of time but in this case their numbers plunged more dramatically; this shows that over a top grade of 12.5 the overall class performance was 7.5 which falls under the category of under average, as seen in the bar chart below:



Source: Rivera, 2014

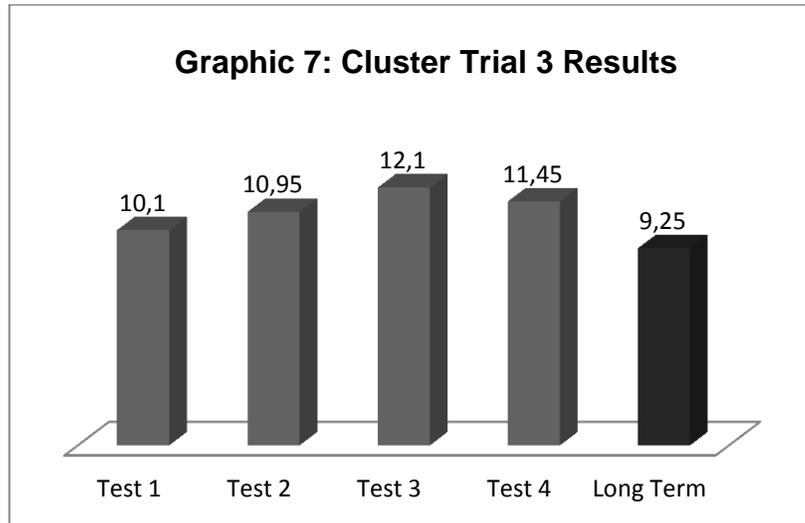
The last cluster trial under study receiving no treatment but only direct feedback and consisting of a group of 14 students aged from 13 to 15 years old that received classes on Sundays from 8h20 to 12h50 presented the following marks on their tests:

**Graphic 6: Cluster Trial 3 Marks**



Source: Rivera, 2014

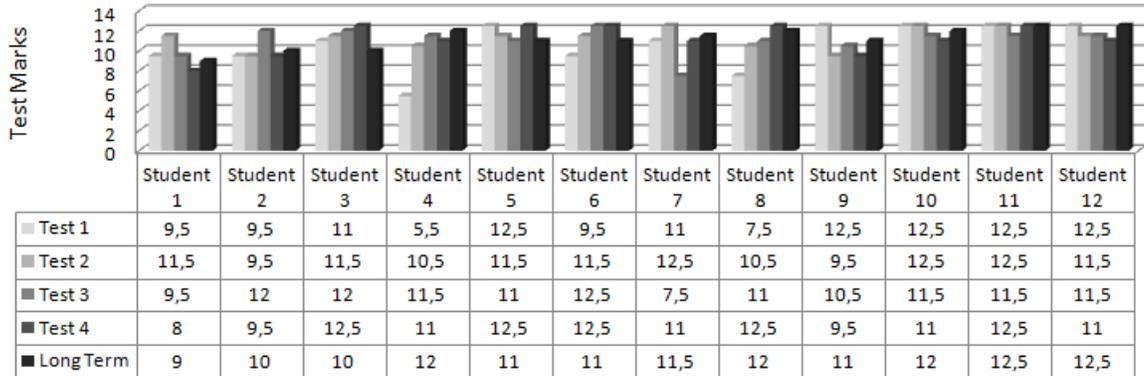
The students in this group also expressed some discontentment about the fact of receiving classes on a Sunday morning and their teacher also felt a little discouraged of having to assess and correct their work; corrections to which the majority of the learners expressed very little importance by not even taking the time to look at them but simply putting it away as soon as handed. The overall class performance of this group also decreased when testing the students' grammatical knowledge after a period of time as it can be seen in the bar chart below:



Source: Rivera, 2014

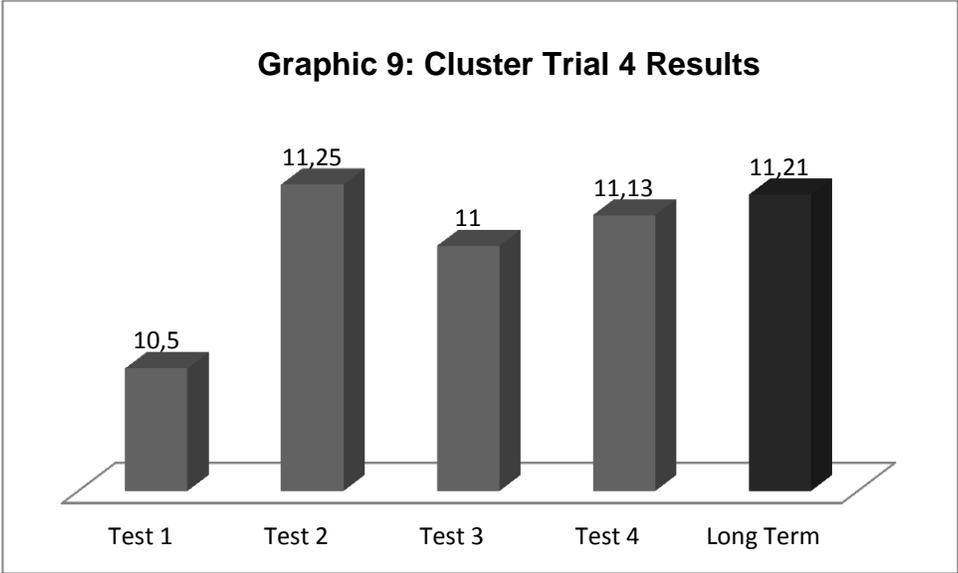
Finally, the data of the last trial cluster under study was collected and analysed; it consisted of a group of 12 students who did receive the treatment, in other words, were exposed to error correction through the new research-based approached worksheet comprising self regulated feedback, metalinguistic comments, and the generation of tactics and strategies to monitor and foster learning which was proposed in this thesis work as explained afore and the results of the use of this technique are shown thereof:

**Graphic 8: Cluster Trial 4 Marks**



Source: Rivera, 2014

Some students needed some time to adapt to this technique but as they started to understand how to use it, not only their scores on their tests perked up but also their affective filter did which was perceived by their teacher who could see the students' willingness to use the progress worksheet and thus actively participate in their own corrections. Test taken in a long term basis to assess retention of the information taught and long-term learning shows an increase in 7 students out of a total of 12; this is to say the 58,3% of the students remembered and succeeded in a test and the class overall also perked up as seen in the bar chart below



Source: Rivera, 2014

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

After having analysed the data collected through the different types of assessments used to test students' understanding on the grammar topic of the passive voice, we can conclude from the results that in all cases where error correction was addressed only in a direct form with no further explanation or practice from the teacher just like it is commonly practiced in the English Language Institute COPEI, the knowledge students received, in the majority of cases, only helped them understand the grammatical point reviewed in that time but produced no long term retention of the information and, therefore, the marks on a summative evaluation were not as successful as the ones taken at the time the teaching was given, which is something to worry about since the goal of education is not to pass an examination at a specific moment and time but to be able to remember the information learnt and use it in any real life situation required.

Cluster Trial 1 showed an overall slow increasing progress in their marks of a 6,56% from the first assessment test to the second assessment, an increasing of 0,88% from the second assessing test to the third but a decrease of the 9,12% on their fourth assessing test in an overall class performance although individually some students improved, some students kept their marks and some students lowered their grades as they were being taught, corrected their own

grammar written mistakes, participated in class to build a strong understanding, and complied with their homework both in their workbooks and written compositions. The class performance went from 81% of total achievement to 87%, 88%, 79%; however, after a period of time, students showed a decrease in their marks of 69% of total class achievement with an overall class mark of 8,68 over 12,5 points under a grammatical point they did not remember very well because it was either not reinforced enough or simply no longer relevant to the learners' immediate need.

We can infer from this that an error correction technique through direct feedback mainly helps students realise their mistakes and apply a correction on a subsequent task but does not help knowledge to really sink in to be embedded in every following task the learners are to perform and thus keep making the same errors fossilising bad grammar which will later on have repercussions in their academic performance which will damage their confidence at the moment of using the language for whatever purpose it was studied.

Cluster Trial 2 was a group that experienced the same treatment as the previous one in terms of how error correction was addressed. They showed an overall slow increasing progress in their marks of a 10,24% from the first assessing test to the second assessment, a big plunging mark of 16,24% from the second assessing test to the third and a little increase of the 6,8% on their fourth assessing test in an overall class performance although individually some students improved, some students kept their marks and some students lowered

their grades; which represents the 84%, 94%, 78%, 84% of the total marking respectively; nevertheless, the test taken to assess their grammatical knowledge retention projected achieving results of the 57% of total mark. This means that only a little bit more than half of the class could actually remembered what they had been previously taught while the grammatical knowledge of other half of students unhappily fell into oblivion.

This might have been due to the fact that students were not very happy to be in class because of the schedule which was not convenient for a teenager's lifestyle and therefore their attention span was placed somewhere but in the subject under study. We can conclude from this that motivation and a desire for learning could be closely linked to the students' attitude affected by several internal and external factors and hence the reason why the affective filter can be influenced not only by a sense of discouragement provoked by an incorrect approach that damages the learner's confidence but also by aspects like desire for learning which does not always depends on the teacher's lesson drive or planning.

The last cluster trial that received no treatment and underwent error correction exactly in the same way the other groups did showing an overall slow increasing progress in their marks of a 6,8% from the first assessing test to the second assessment, a continuous rising mark of 9,12% from the second assessing test to the third and a little decrease of the 5,2% on their fourth assessing test in an overall class performance although individually some

students improved, some students kept their marks and some students lowered their grades; yet again a decrease in academic performance was observed in a test assessing long term learning which scored 9,25 over 12,5 points; this is to say the 74% of the total mark.

This group was also discouraged to study by the schedule in which the lessons took place; however, compared to the cluster trial 2, did better academically speaking yet information retention was still an issue.

In all of the previous groups students were basically in charge of their own corrections and learning but this was not driven or tracked to see that everybody actually applied and learnt from their corrections.

Finally, the cluster trial where the variable of error correction took place showed a considerable increase from 10,5 point to 11,25 points over a total of 12,5 after the first test in which students were given the chance to correct their own errors and also received written metalinguistics comments from their teacher in order to self study and improve. This improvement showed a steady progress of 11 and 11,13 points on following tests; but, more importantly, the test that assessed their knowledge on a long term, contrary to the other cluster trials, showed that 67% of the students remembered the grammatical points they had previously learnt and the overall performance of the class was of a 90% of achievement, evidencing a positive learning outcome from the use of error correction activity proposed in this research work.

From this we can deduce that, when students took charge of their own progress through a worksheet specially designed to help them measure their learning and receive comments from their teacher on how to improve and what specifically do to achieve it, they not only learn but remember their corrections and used them to improve their subsequent writing skills which helped them see their progress and feel better about themselves, having a sense of achievement that lowers their affective filter.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **CONCLUSIONS**

In this study about improving grammar skills in the EFL classroom through stress-free error correction activities for young upper beginner teenage learners from the TEENS programme at the English Language Institute COPEI error correction activities using direct feedback, which are the ones compulsory used at the institute, were compared and contrasted with an error correction activity worksheet designed based on the research work of Butler & Winne (1995) that comprised self regulated feedback, metalinguistic comments, and the generation of tactics and strategies to monitor and foster learning and showed that the application of feedback and self regulated learning positively influenced and fostered learning.

After having applied this study and analysed the data collected from the teachers and learners under study through surveys, interviews and different assessment instruments, the analysis of all the cluster trials under study showed that the application of direct feedback for the correction of grammatical errors in students from the TEENS programme during the cycle 71 at the English Language Institute COPEI helped the learners understand the language and achieve good marks in their tests; however, as other studies have shown, they turned out to be ineffective in a long term learning.

Also, as students were left to be their own agents in correcting their own mistakes in order not to harm their affective filter, these corrections were not effectively addressed or monitored and this caused that learning did not remain for a long term with the learners and errors appeared when tested after some time causing feelings of discourage in the learners who realise the feebleness of their learning.

On the other hand, the application of the error correction activity consisting of a self progress check worksheet that comprised self regulated feedback where students could be their own learning agents, mark their own learning and see their own progress, and where their teacher could also write metalinguistic comments on it for them to review and foster learning proved to be effective in helping the students gain a better grammatical knowledge of the language to improve their written compositions not only on a short but also on a long term basis.

Here, as students were not only involved in their own learning but also felt both intellectually and emotionally supported by their teacher, their affective filter lowered and created a sense of accomplishment derived by a true understanding and retention of the information learnt and a feeling of capability to using the language in the tasks they are to perform in their personal and professional life.

Thus we see that use of the proposed research-based grammar error correction activity in EFL classrooms with young upper beginner English

learners from the TEENS programme at the English language institute COPEI in the cycle 71 during the year 2014 to improve the students' grammar production proved to be effective in achieving this goal.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

For the reasons exposed in the conclusion of this study, it is recommended that EFL teachers instructing upper beginner English language teenage learners should use the proposed indirect feedback progress sheet with metalinguistic comments to help the learners not only correct their own mistakes but also gain a better understanding of the language through its syntax and grammatical structure.

Although this study demonstrated the effectiveness of improving grammar skills in young upper beginner teenage learners in the EFL classroom by engaging learners in their own corrective process integrating indirect feedback and metalinguistic comments, some of the limitations of it were the relatively short period of time in which the research took place and the lack of application in other groups to attest the same or similar results.

Further research on it could also include other age groups of learners such as children and adults to study the results and compare them to the ones obtained here. Also, the involvement of parents or legal guardians in the teenagers' learning process could be a great approach to study, redesigning the

proposed worksheet activity if necessary, to make them co participants in the education of their children.

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## **APPENDIX**



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## RESEARCH PROJECT

*Improving grammar skills in EFL classrooms through stress-free error correction activities for young upper beginner Ecuadorean learners from the TEENS programme at the English Learning Institute COPEI.*

## INTERVIEW

This interview has as a goal to find out the types of error correction techniques teachers at the English Learning Institute COPEI use and the effects they have seen these techniques have had on their students.

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_ TIME: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What types of Error Correction activities do you use in the classroom and why?
2. How often do you apply Error Correction Activities and why?
3. To which type of Error Correction activity have you noticed your students respond better? How have you noticed this?
4. Do you try to correct all the mistakes or focus only on those that blur communication?
5. What struggles have you had when applying Error Correction activities?
6. What have you done to face these struggles?
7. What results have you seen from applying Error Correction activities?
8. What are students' attitudes towards Error Correction?
9. Do you consider that Error Correction activities are actually helping students improve their language proficiency?
10. Do you consider Error Correction activities at COPEI could be improved? How?



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**RESEARCH PROJECT**

*Improving grammar skills in EFL classrooms through stress-free error correction activities for young upper beginner Ecuadorean learners from the TEENS programme at the English Learning Institute COPEI.*

**ENCUESTA**

**INTRODUCCION**

Esta encuesta tiene por objeto determinar el grado de aceptación y efectos en los estudiantes de las correcciones académicas. La información provista tiene carácter anónimo y nos ayudará a mejorar programas académicos dentro del programa TEENS de la institución. Por favor sírvase marcar la respuesta que mejor responda cada pregunta.

**DATOS ETNOGRAFICOS**

Sexo: M      F      Edad : \_\_\_\_\_      TEENS: 4 - 5 – 6 – 7 – 8

**PREGUNTAS**

Marque cada respuesta encerrando la opción que mejor responda a la pregunta conforme a su criterio. Si desea cambiar una respuesta táchela y encierre una nueva.

Las correcciones gramaticales son necesarias	No	Si
Las actividades de correcciones de mi profesor me ayudan a mejorar	No	Si
Prefiero concentrarme en un solo tipo de error y corregirlo	No	Si
Prefiero corregir todo los errores que cometo	No	Si
El profesor me da recomendaciones para no cometer errores	No	Si
Cuando escribo, consulto previas correcciones para ya no errar	No	Si
Prefiero que el profesor me indique personalmente mis errores	No	Si
Me siento bien cuando el profesor me indica mis errores y yo los corrijo	No	Si

Muchas gracias por su participación. Su ayuda nos es muy grata



**SRL ERROR CORRECTION WORKSHEET**

*Improving grammar skills in EFL classrooms through stress-free error correction activities for young upper beginner Ecuadorean learners from the TEENS programme at the English Learning Institute COPEI.*

My Progress Table

10 +				
7-9				
4-6				
1-3				
0	Checkpoint 1	Checkpoint 2	Checkpoint 3	Test

Checkpoint 1 - What I need to review

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

Recommendations

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

Checkpoint 2 - What I need to review

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

Recommendations

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

Checkpoint 3 - What I need to review

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

Recommendations

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

Test - What I need to review

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_



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**RESEARCH PROJECT**

*Improving grammar skills in EFL classrooms through stress-free error correction activities for young upper beginner Ecuadorean learners from the TEENS programme at the English Learning Institute COPEI*

**INTERVIEWS TRANSCRIPTIONS**

**INTERVIEW 1**

DATE: April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2014

TIME: 17:00

Interviewer: Hello, today it's April 3rd, 2014; the time is 17:00. We're here at COPEI to have an interview about the effects of error correction activities in students from the TEENS programme at the English Language Learning Institute COPEI. So, thank you for having the time to help me out with this. As I was just explaining you this interview is to find out about error correction activities teachers use and gain insight on the results they have seen; so if you have got a question for me anytime just feel free to ask me.

Teacher: Alright.

Interviewer: So, the first question says what types of Error Correction activities do you use in the classroom and why?

Teacher: Ok, then I'll have to ask you what kind of corrections, I mean, at speaking? writing?

Interviewer: Specifically for writing; when correcting grammar mistakes.

Teacher: Ok, so correcting prepositions and the sort

Interviewer: Yes.

Teacher: Ok. There are basically two things I do. I either use peer correction or I do it by myself. Doing it by myself takes more time, of course, but it's much better for them because they have, you know, a better feedback. Those are the two kinds I use.

Interviewer: And when you correct the mistakes yourself, how do you do it? Do you cross out the incorrect word and write the correct one? Or just indicate the mistake.

Teacher: That depends also because for beginners at initial levels I have to write the corrections; I have to, you know, tell them what the correct way is. If it's higher levels, it depends on how I am in the moment because generally I like to give all the corrections but as they are high levels I'm not supposed to do it; they are supposed to find out the mistake by themselves and correct it but sometimes I've found that they make really basic mistakes so those are the I just circle and that's it but when I see ideas or coherence I am kind of more exact on my corrections.

Interviewer: And in the case of a composition do you correct all the mistakes or do you concentrate specifically on, for example, correcting only articles?

Teacher: Well I correct everything. If I have the time I correct everything; if there is not too much time then I do peer correction or just take one or two compositions in general and I focused on it on the board.

Interviewer: Alright. Do you sometimes write some comments for the students to read about their mistakes?

Teacher: Rarely. Here at COPEI it would take more time and we don't have that time. In schools it is easier, you have more time.

Interviewer: How often do you apply these error corrections techniques?

Teacher: That depends again on the time. Checking Writing Logs (compositions) should be done every week but, and I have also heard this from or Academic department, they say that if we correct and give feedback to 6 or 7 out of 10 Writing Logs it's ok; not all of them because of the time. So that's what I do, I mean one week I check them, I ask for them one by one and I take all of them and I check. In other cases I only sign it so I know they did it and that's it. In other cases I do peer correction, so I try to correct at least 5 or 6 by myself so they see my corrections.

Interviewer: I see. Now, to which type of error correction activities have you noticed your students respond best? Do they like it when you correct their mistakes or when they do peer correction?

Teacher: Well... this is about teen and you know how they are; they don't care or don't mind the corrections. Sometimes you have to insist on them like "hey! Check the corrections!" and then when I correct their work I ask them to exchange the book and read their partner's corrections, their partner's mistakes so they can notice but teens are difficult. Sometimes I give them back a composition, like a full paragraph full of mistakes and they just take it, say thank you and just put it away and I'm like "all my time correcting that thing" so I tell them to check it and read it.

Interviewer: So, would you say they respond better to peer correction than to the teacher's?

Teacher: They don't respond at all I guess. You have to force them to notice their mistakes.

Interviewer: Apart from this, what other troubles have you had when applying error correction activities?

Teacher: The problem when they do peer correction is that they read very quickly or they don't really concentrate on the correction and it's just a waste of time to them so it's not that accurate because then I have to check again.

Interviewer: So would you say the problem lies on the attitude of the students?

Teacher: When they're teens, yes.

Interviewer: And what have you done to face these troubles, apart from telling them to check their corrections?

Teacher: Well... that's why I normally do, just ask them to pay attention to their own mistakes and if I see that a mistake is repetitive I take a couple of examples and put them on the board so everybody can see. Then at least I know that all of them pay attention to a couple of mistakes that I have noticed they still make in their level because sometimes I notice they make mistakes from levels 1 or 2 and from that I am really concern that they don't make those mistakes again.

Interviewer: And what results have you seen from applying these error correction techniques? Have you seen any progress in the students? Have they improved or do they keep making the same weekend?

Teacher: You know, it is only a matter of repetition. You have to repeat and repeat so they can remember. Sometimes when their foundations are not good, they're used to making the same mistake. Some of them I have notice that they say "Oh yeah, you're right" so I guess eventually that correction will help them.

Interviewer: Well, the next question is about students' attitude towards the error correction activities, which has already been discussed.

Teacher: Yes, it's not that they don't like the corrections; it's just that it's not important for them.

Interviewer: Do you think the way in which the correction is addressed is the one that should be changed in order for them to be more interested and pay attention? Like if the correction was done in the way of a game for example

Teacher: Yeah, probably because teens like to do a lot of fun things but no classes so anything that can use their time they may like it.

Interviewer: Ok, so probably they may have a better attitude towards learning and error correction if it was addressed in that way. Now, talking about your students in this cycle while you have been applying these activities, have you notice real progress?

Teacher: I think they have stopped making some repetitive mistakes but it's really difficult for us as teacher to pay attention to every individual mistake from every student we have because I have a course of 15 students in the morning and then 11 other students in the afternoon so I cannot remember exactly what mistake they made the previous week but if I do, then I let them know but if I don't, it's kind of difficult.

Interviewer: Well... finally, do you consider Error Correction activities at COPEI could be improved? How?

Teacher: Maybe as you said, if they were funnier like with games or things like that, I think that could improve error correction at COPEI probably. The problem is that checking homework should be about 10 minutes but in reality we take more time for checking homework and if we start checking mistakes in writing then we might take more time so I don't know; it should be an issue to consider for the academic department. Maybe we should have a workshop to give us ideas on how to better address error correction.

Interviewer: Ok, well... I think that's everything. Thanks a lot for your time. Have you got any questions for me?

Teacher: No, not really, I mean it's interesting.

Interviewer: Ok well then just thanks a lot again.



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**RESEARCH PROJECT**

*Improving grammar skills in EFL classrooms through stress-free error correction activities for young upper beginner Ecuadorean learners from the TEENS programme at the English Learning Institute COPEI*

**INTERVIEW 2**

DATE: April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2014

TIME: 14:15

Interviewer: Good afternoon, today it's April 5th, 2014; it's 14:15. We're here with a COPEI teacher to have an interview about improving grammar skills in the EFL classroom through error correction activities. So, I thank you for this time and I am going to start with the questions but please feel free to interrupt me at any time if you have any further comments.

Teacher: OK

Interviewer: Good. The first question I've got is: What type of error correction activities do you use in the classroom and why?

Teacher: OK. In the classroom I use general feedback; like I check the homework, you know, here at COPEI they have the answer sheet but not all the students check it properly; some of them do it but some of them don't but in my general feedback I write a sentence

on the board and I have the student check where the mistake is on the sentence.

Interviewer: OK

Teacher: Maybe in the classroom two or three notice the mistake and then the others realise and they give feedback among themselves.

Interviewer: And are those sentences that you write on the board are taken from their homework or are they different sentences?

Teacher: Sometimes similar to the ones from their homework but not the same ones. Yes, it's not like repeat the same thing; they have to change so they know how to apply in other context.

Interviewer: OK, that's good. How often do you apply correction activities?

Teacher: Not very often. Not every minute in the class when they make a mistake I stop to correct them because I think it's kind of annoying maybe for them. They feel like "oh no, we're not doing very well" but when I see that this is a very common or general mistake or when I see that they mistake in something very basic; for example, when they say a mistake from TEENS 1 like "I have fifteen years old" so that's something that we have to correct because we are in TEENS 7 and they need to reinforce that.

Interviewer: Good. Next question says which type of error correction activity have you noticed your students respond better? Like, when you apply this technique of general feedback, having everybody

correcting a sentence on the board, have you noticed that this is actually working? Is this actually helping them not to make the same mistake again?

Teacher: Hmm... [sigh while thinking] When I give them for example a challenging exercise and I put them to work in groups so they help each other, I notice that they notice the mistake and they try to help each other and they correct it. Sometimes when they don't understand, they ask me for help and I try to repeat the sentence to make them think and they find out the mistake by themselves in most of the cases; in some cases I have to help them even more until they go and find it.

Interviewer: So would you say that working with a classmate is better for them than just working alone?

Teacher: Well... sometimes; sometimes it helps yes.

Interviewer: And when you correct their mistakes, do you try to correct all of their mistakes or do you only focus on one specific type of error, usually the one that blurs communication?

Teacher: I don't try to correct all the mistakes, as I told you before I think that's kind of annoying. It depends on what do you want to get from your students; if it's something about grammar, then you have to correct all the mistakes so they improve their writing. While they're working I monitor them, see some mistakes but don't correct them

until the end of the activity when I give them feedback and I focus on those mistakes.

Interviewer: And what struggles have you had when you apply this correction activities? Speaking about, for example, how difficult is it for you and for your students to apply these activities?

Teacher: Some students like to be corrected. They come up to me and ask me “Miss, why this? Tell me, explain me” and they like the explanation but not all of them, so for some of them it’s kind of embarrassing; they feel like “oh no, I’m not doing well”. You have to be very... what’s the word? You have to go there and explain them what the mistake is. For example I remember, this is a situation I had. I befriended some of my students on Facebook and one of them once wrote on a post on her wall “*I love all the childrens in my family*” and I was like “oh no, I can’t do this on Facebook” so when she came to class I called her out and asked her “do you remember what the plural of child is?” and she said “childrens” and I asked her “are you sure?” and then she realised and said oh no, it’s children without “s”. But this happened only between she and I; just a personal correction.

Interviewer: And have you had any problems when doing this? For example, have a had a student feeling resentful about the correction or maybe they felt a little bit upset.

Teacher: Not with me but among them. For example when they come to the board and make a mistake on something basic or easy and the other classmates start saying “oh that’s not correct” and they make fun of the student; then they feel embarrassed and I try to stop them and ask them to please help their classmate but not doing that. It depends on the group; not all the groups are like that, or maybe just one or two students annoy the class but not all of them but yes I’ve noticed that some students feel embarrassed when they don’t know and that’s why they’re afraid to come to the board. I remember one student telling me “it’s not about you miss, it’s about them. They make fun of me” So you have to know how to manage those situations, how to control.

Interviewer: And what do you do to control that? Just talk to the group and ask them...

Teacher: Yes I tell them “Please, be quiet; let’s learn. I have some mistakes too; everybody makes mistakes” I address them in a very general way.

Interviewer: And then do you talk to person who...

Teacher: Yes, then when they leave, when they go to break I call the person and tell them to please not do that again and ask him or her if he would like that someone would do that to him. They do it maybe because they have a strong knowledge of English but I make them

imagine if they went to a French class, how would they feel and then they say "OK" and they try to understand the position of his or her classmate.

Interviewer: And what results have you seen from applying these activities? Have they improved?

Teacher: Yes, I think they have. Stronger students help the weaker ones and when they are not sure they ask me. I think these activities really work because they help each other, they reinforce what they learn.

Interviewer: Which one would you say it is more helpful; the one correcting on the board or the one correcting on the desk?

Teacher: Pair to pair. It's more personal.

Interviewer: Now let's talk about students' attitudes towards the corrections

Teacher: Well... some of my students like to be corrected. I have one student who, when I hand them their answer sheets, I think she's the only one really checking the homework and when she doesn't understand something she asks me "Miss, why? What's the difference between this and this? She's not afraid or embarrassed about the corrections.

Interviewer: And what do you think that motivates her to be like that? Is it just her personality?

Teacher: Yes, she's very hard working, she really likes to be the best and thirsts for perfection, and she pressures herself; maybe her family too.

Interviewer: Yes, it could be.

Teacher: But sometimes that's good although sometimes it is know. For example if she gets 23 points on a quiz over 25 points she gets upset easily. I tell her not to worry because she can communicate well in English so she needn't have 25 points on her quizzes; she pressures herself very much.

Interviewer: I've got one question. When your students are working in pair and the strong ones are helping the weak ones, does it happen that only one of the students does all the work and the other do nothing at all?

Teacher: Yes, I notice that. What I tell them is that they both need to write and I check that the two of them are writing to complete the activity because sometimes as you say only one works and the other starts fooling around or bothering so I tell them I want to see both handwritings on the activities.

Interviewer: Well, that's the end of the interview. Have you got any questions for me?

Teacher: Do I have to make a question to you?

Interviewer: If you have any, if you would like to know something

Teacher: What other types of error correction activities are good to apply in the classroom?

Interviewer: Well there are numerous like when the teacher collects the students' books and marks the correct answers or he only makes a sign for the student to notice there is a mistake and give the students the chance to correct it the mistake themselves. Another type of correction would be writing comments, for example here is a mistake and here is the reason why so the student reads the comment and realises of his or her mistake. Research has shown this to be a very effective corrective feedback but it obviously isn't the most popular amongst teachers because it takes a lot of time

Teacher: And you're not sure they're going to read the comment and they're going to apply it. Adult students do check it but teenagers don't actually care.

Interviewer: Yes, as you say it's discouraging for the teacher to spend time writing comments for someone who won't really care. That's the reason why this research is taking place.

Teacher: Interesting

Interviewer: Well thank you very much. I appreciate your time

Teacher: OK. Thank you bye

Interviewer: Cheers