UNIVERSITY OF EL SALVADOR

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FOREIGN LANGUAGE DEPARTMENT

"ERROR CORRECTION- HOW ESSENTIAL IT IS FOR TEACHERS AND WHAT TO DO WHEN STUDENTS COMMIT THEM REPEATEDLY".

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INTRODUCTION

The final work of the Bachelors of Arts in Teaching demands teachers be well prepared not only by practice but also by a deep theory study. English language teachers must be led from theory to practice and vice versa when it comes to improve the art of teaching on a daily basis. It is very necessary for teachers to analyse as well as contrast what happens on the classrooms every day. The importance of not taking for granted issues that seem simple leads to critical thinking teachers who, in turn, can keep on contributing to the discussion of complex matters such as the one presented in this paper work. If teachers go beyond theory and become able to contrast it with accurate supporting after real world practice, they can whether revoke what somebody says, or reinforce and support what somebody establishes. Just by doing this, teachers can contribute to the changes our educational society requires when teaching a foreign language.

OBJECTIVES

General objective:

- To provide the most important theoretical aspects teachers must internalize when facing correction issues.

Specific objectives:

- To establish the main reasons why students commit errors repeatedly.

- To determine the main reasons why students make mistakes repeatedly.

- To contribute to the preparation of the Foreign Language Department teaching aspirants regarding error correction issues.

JUSTIFICATION

The following work is a bibliographical review which will contribute to the Bachelors of Arts in Teaching career. It is aimed to reinforce some given theory about error correction issues regarding foreign language teaching, in this case, English as a second language specifically. The importance of this paper remains the importance of error correction when teaching. Furthermore, this work spots a topic that seems simple and turns it to a complex analysis each single aspect of correcting requires. It is quite important in our current society to encourage teachers to be able and ready to change as well as adapt things they usually put into practice. Also, this paper is aimed to find the possibilities that English teachers can have by the time of correcting students' errors and mistakes.

ERROR CORRECTION- HOW ESSENTIAL IT IS FOR TEACHERS AND WHAT TO DO WHEN STUDENTS COMMIT THEM REPEATEDLY

In order to state points clearly since the very beginning, it is important to separate and be clear on what both mistake and error mean. According to the *Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (1992),* a mistake happens because of lack of attention. Whereas error, according to the afore mentioned source, is the inappropriate use of a linguistic item due to an incomplete and poor learning or lack of competence on the learner's part. In other words, if a student produces an incorrect form only sometimes, that is a mistake. If a student always produces the same wrong form, it is an error. As L. Freeman Dorothy recalls that, in most cases, teachers do not put these two words as something different with regard to English learners' performance.

Error correction takes place as a scientific method on the basis of *S. Pit Corder's* studies on the matter. Corder states that errors are classified according to the learners' utterances such as: *Omission, Addition, Selection, and Ordering.* These ones are divided under the sub-areas of Morphology, Syntax, and Lexicon. Errors can vary; they can be committed from a morpheme, single word or even entire paragraphs. *H.D. Brown,* contributor of the issue correction on his book *principles of Language Learning and Teaching,* establishes that errors are *global* and *local.* The global ones prevent the message from being comprehended, while in the local ones, there is a minor violation of a given sentence and it does not interfere with the message intended.

Corder and *Brown* state that there are also *overt* and *covert* errors. The first ones are unquestionably ungrammatical and the second ones are grammatically well-formed but out of the discussion context. They also establish that error causes are: the native language interference as the core one for causing difficulties to the learner which are faced by the researches' current situation. However, learners' habits as well as teaching methods and even techniques play a crucial role within this process. The complexity of error causes and correction is noticeable when it comes for teachers to put correction techniques into practice because the students' learning characteristics vary in many ways.

As mentioned above, the fact of making errors and mistakes does not depend merely on the learners. It is not enough to believe that errors and mistakes are natural in every second language learning process. It is also necessary to establish the role of the pedagogy help in these learning phases. Language teachers and syllabus designers must be closely involved for the prevention and treatment of these learning obstacles. As *Dwight Bolinger* and *Donald A. sears (1981)* state, *"whenever for any reason a person learns or half-learns a second language, he will mix some of it with the language he already knows".* Hence, institutions must be aware of such simple but meaningful situations that learners must face.

In everyday parlance, students feel ashamed or frustrated when participating in class because of many factors. One of them occurs in the researchers' current context, it is called *losing face.* According to *D. Bolinger and Donald A. Sears*, it occurs when a student is afraid of making mistakes in front of the class. Another one is *generalization,* which is when a student tends to use the same given rule for all the aspects of a given language point. The *lack of democracy* is also something serious in ESL classrooms, tough. One

example is the fact that there are dictators and unique classroom authorities with regard to correction and no participation from students when corrections take place. Errors display the way to be solved just when their root is correctly identified by teachers as well as students.

As *Jeremy Harmer (An Introduction to the Practice of English Language Teaching)* states, *"constant interruption from the teacher will destroy the purpose of the speaking activity."* This means that the teacher must be aware about the real aim of every single activity she or he is to develop. Predictions for possible mistakes and errors must be meditated beforehand. The point here is that, *"correction helps students to clarify their understanding of the meaning and construction of language" (Jeremy Harmer, 2001).* When teachers give up just because a student could not give the correct answer or form by her or his own, the art of teaching fails. If a teacher looks for ways in which the correction will not depend only on her or him, but mostly on learners' participation, by doing this the art of teaching takes place.

When handling speaking activities, it has been noticed that not only students but also teachers face fluency and accuracy problems. If a teacher has not decided the purpose and kind of activities, she or he is totally out of question. It is not possible to just let things flow for the teacher can correct a pronunciation or grammatical error given that the student may forget what she or he said during a given speech. Nonetheless, interruption stops the normal speech flow and the student gets nervous, anxious, among other feelings. On the other hand, when the activities are taken seriously by the teacher and the she or he does know

when to stop a student and decide whether if a correction can be done by peers or by her or himself, the results are quite better.

The *How* to correct errors and mistakes demands that the teacher need be indirect and sensible with her or his students. *Feeman* and *Jensen* assure that the learners play a more risk-taking get more encouraged with self-correction or peer-correction rather than teacher correction. In association with the researchers' current context the afore mentioned is due to the fact that nowadays the teacher plays a fully role of a facilitator and a moderator in the classroom. As mentioned above, the type and magnitude of the error or mistake gives the teacher the key to provide the most appropriate feedback whenever necessary. *Freeman* and *Jensen* state the following: *"The pressure in a native speaking environment is frequently serious--survival tasks must be negotiated. Survival comes first, sophistication later."* Students must reach such confidence and be corrected from time to time and learn to correct themselves whenever necessary.

Other definitions that teachers must keep in mind regarding types of errors are *error ossification* and *error fossilization*. According to the *Wykipedia* definition, error ossification is when the speaking performance of somebody gets into a sub-standard manner. A clear example of error ossification is the Street Language in which many people are totally fluent. This has been misinterpreted by the teachers as something totally good for the classroom. Nevertheless, fluency does not lead to success in something formal or academic. Error fossilization is, according to the same source, when somebody preserves and keeps on using given wrong ways according to given target language rules. Therefore,

somebody can speak fluently and academically correct but she or he can display certain fossilized patterns. These issues must not be disregarded by the teachers anymore.

The case previously mentioned is closely related to teachers that face a situation in which students make the same error or mistake. On the one hand, when a mistake occurs, the teacher can note down and even count the times the same kind of mistake is committed. The teacher can also provide some feedback on a given rule or grammatical point letting students know the "why" of certain mistakes. On the other hand, when an error is faced repeatedly, the teacher must inform the student about such error and have the student practice the correct form over and over using questions on a daily basis for instance. Furthermore, to enrich error correction, teachers can encourage the student to look for information on the issue she or he is facing and create examples in which the fossilized error is practiced and overcome by the student herself or himself.

There are some other good strategies and techniques besides the afore ones mentioned not just when a student makes the same error or mistake repeatedly of course. One of them is the *Echo technique*. As *Feeman* and *Jensen* state *"the purpose of the echoing technique is not too much that of correction of the error, but to stimulate student confidence."* The question here is that the intervention of the teacher must enhance speech instead of correcting every single error or mistake of a student. When a teacher *echoes*, the error or mistake is repeated in a noticeable way so that the student, from that time on, can have the chance to correct herself or himself.

When it comes to grade and correct written work, teachers face a similar issue as with speaking activities. Jeremy Harmer (The Practice of English Language) establishes that "the teacher will need symbols for spelling, wrong tense usage, concord-agreements between subject and verb wrong word order…" among other errors or mistakes cases. The teacher must get into negotiation with her or his students beforehand. This activity suits the real aims of a writing activity and the students feel on the same page as the teacher as already proved and experienced by the researchers. In some cases accuracy will be the target, and in some others the content of what is written on the paper will be the aim and students must be aware of it.

CONCLUSIONS

By no means all the above mentioned assures that there are no books and manuals with tips on how to correct students' errors or mistakes. However, as every single classroom is different, the aim here is to let teachers know that there is some meaningful theory behind the tips one can find in a book on error and mistake correction. The final application of the correction techniques will merely depend on the teacher's current context. The teacher must be critical not only with her or his students but also towards herself or himself. Correcting is not just to say that something is wrong and it is not solved at all by giving the right thing; it takes more effort from teachers and authorities in charge of curriculum design and curriculum changes. Foreign language teachers must be aware that there are appropriate steps to follow when correcting the students.

The situations as well as the reasons regarding error and mistake correction are essential to foreign language teaching success. Frankly, nowadays teachers should critique instead of criticize students' development in classrooms. On the one hand, when the teacher criticizes, she or he only points out the downsides of her or his students without focusing on the students' internalization of the corrections. On the other hand, when the teacher critiques, she or he looks for the best and less possible damaging ways of providing the students the corrections and feedbacks getting as a result a better internalization of the target language and its natural errors and mistakes. That is, teachers can correct students' errors and mistakes to an extent of sharing opinions and furthermore to enlarge ways of explaining any academic foreign language issue. There have been selected from some guides, lists and manuals containing situations (*see Appendix A)* that teachers face by the time of correcting

and before correcting students' mistakes and errors. The organization of the following tips does not lead to importance value of each tip or advice due to the fact that every classroom has and develops its own characteristics.

The application of the tips that a list provides is not a definite solution for the correction issues. It takes a deeper knowledge and meditation from teachers who really are to practice the art of teaching. Theory is still essential when it comes to face real context situations as teachers are being more and more demanded not only by their students but also by the institutions they work for. The roots and related study matters on error and mistakes are a must to know once someone decides to teach a foreign language as praxis. The fact of applying error and mistake correction is a policy teachers must obey.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The new graduation process lead by the Foreign Language Department is quite meaningful with regard to students' internalization of various contents. Nevertheless, some things still can be improved such as:

- The attendance from students need be taken more seriously and be graded if possible.

- There should be given more time and opportunities of participation from those students who rarely do it so that, form time to time, everyone must say something.

- The students should have the available schedule of every single advisor.

- The advisors should take at least two-hour advisory time once a week during their free time.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX (A)

USEFUL TIPS BY THE TIME STUDENTS' CORRECTION TAKES PLACE ACCORDING TO THE RESEARCHERS IN CHARGE OF THIS PAPER.

When a teacher is excessively correcting students' errors and mistakes:

→ He gives students more corrections in one class than they can possibly learn before the next class.

→ He does not believe in the possibility that errors disappear naturally.

→ Students keep stopping and correcting themselves.

→ Students are so scared of making mistakes that they are losing their fluency and confidence every time they speak.

→ The teacher's own idea of having students improve their accuracy is only by correcting their errors.

→ Written work is a mess of red ink when it comes back to students.

→ The accuracy of their speaking is improving much more quickly than their fluency, use of complex forms, speaking strategies etc.

→ Many of the errors you correct are things that won't come up in their classes for a long time or even until the next level

→ You give them more corrections in one class than they can possibly learn before the next class.

→ You correct the same language over and over, even though students' accuracy hasn't improved at all since the first time you corrected them.

→ Students show with their facial expressions or body language that they are not open to correction.

→ Students don't note down most of the errors you correct.

→ Students never have a chance to speak or write without correction.

→ Most of the errors you correct are ones that we know persist naturally in all kinds of people learning English, such as third person *s*.

When a teacher is not correcting enough students' errors and mistakes:

→ Students keep on making the same mistakes and the teacher has never tried correcting those ones.

→ He always assumes an error will disappear naturally.

→ He never corrects a piece of grammar that he has not studied in class yet, even when students try to use it all the time.

→ Accuracy is what is holding students back from reaching the next level or getting a higher score in an EFL exam.

→ He stands around doing nothing instead of noting down students errors during pair work and group work.

→ He corrects under an average of 5% of all student errors.

→ The students don't see the value of speaking activities or just see them as games

→ The students' accuracy is not improving.

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Year: 1991

Key Idea: correction of written work and teachers' concern regarding accuracy from learners.

Title: The Practice of English Language Teaching

Page Number: 146-147

Notes: citation

Author: Dwight Bolinger and Donald A. Sears

Year: 1981

Key Idea: error correction matters such as overgeneralization and aspects of language.

Title: Aspects of Language

Page Number: 246, 257

Notes: citation and examples of second language learners.

Author: Jeremy Harmer

Year: 2001

Key Idea: consequences of wrong error correction from teachers.

Title: How to teach English- An introduction to the practice of language teaching.

Page Number: 62-63, 94

Notes: citation

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Author: Feeman, Lynn Dhority and Eric Jensen

Year: 2001

Key Idea: competence effectiveness after risk-taking when correcting

Title: Joyful Fluency, Brain-Compatible Second Language Acquisition

Page Number: 137-138

Notes: citation

Author: Torrance, E. Paul and R.E. Myers

Year: 1965

Key Idea: creativity not just from students, also from tutors

Title: La Enseñanza Creativa

Page Number: 140

Notes: citation