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# Students' Preferences Regarding the Techniques of Oral Corrective Feedback in a Tertiary Institution

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**Abstract.** Oral corrective feedback (OCF) is an important topic for English as a second/foreign language (ESL/EFL) teachers involved in foreign language acquisition. Several studies have been conducted on OCF in learning and teaching English. Although there are extensive published studies on OCF in Thailand, to the best of my knowledge, little research has been conducted on the sources of OCF in tertiary institutions in southern Thailand. The current study bridges this research gap by investigating students' preferences regarding the sources of error of OCF at a Thai university in the southern province of Thailand. A questionnaire was designed using six five-point Likert scale questions, and data were also collected through observation. Participants were 60 undergraduate students from a tertiary institution in southern Thailand. Analysis of student responses was carried out using mean and standard deviation statistics. The findings from this study reveal that the participants preferred that the teacher point out their errors rather than themselves or their peers. In addition, participants chose error correction by their teachers above peer or self-correction. Although the students who participated in this study preferred the teacher's feedback to their peers, some were open to being trained in self-correction. The value of this study is that the findings may assist both teachers and students in error identification and correction and serve as the first step in ensuring that students in tertiary institutions in Thailand are more confident in expressing themselves using the English language. Future studies can be carried out to explore the preferences of students from other Thai regions.

**Keywords:** error correction; oral corrective feedback; peer correction; self-correction; Thai university

## 1. Introduction

Oral corrective feedback (OCF) is an essential topic for English as a second/foreign language (ESL/EFL) teachers involved in foreign language acquisition. The importance of OCF in language acquisition has been recognized over the past two decades. OCF is defined as "*the response provided by teachers or*

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*other conversational partners to language learners when their output is erroneous, nontarget-like, and not appropriate or ambiguous”* (Oliver & Adams, 2021, p. 188). OCF, as its name applies, focuses on the approaches employed by peers and teachers to assist learners in identifying their mistakes in the target language. Teachers often use different instructional strategies in their classrooms, depending on the ability level, context, and error type, to assist learners in gaining relevant language competency (Wiboolyasarín et al., 2022). Several studies have reported that feedback is essential for language learners because it can improve their understanding and communication skills (Mackey & Goo, 2007; Nassaji, 2016; Russell & Spada, 2006). OCF is also considered productive when it reassures learners on whether they are on the right track. The past decades have seen a rise in the investigation of the nature of corrective feedback. Regarding OCF, learners can either achieve a modified output (Şakiroğlu, 2020) or face humiliation or embarrassment (Ölmezer-Öztürk & Öztürk, 2016). This has resulted in a large body of research investigating the effectiveness of OCF, which has yielded the consensus that OCF is beneficial to learners’ target language development, as indicated in the different studies contained in the references of this body of research (García Mayo & Milla, 2021;; Li & Vuono, 2019; Li, 2010; Lyster & Saito, 2010; Lyster et al., 2013; Mackey & Goo, 2007; Nassaji & Kartchava, 2020 Nassaji, 2016; Pawlak, 2014; Sheen, 2004).

In Thailand, English is a compulsory subject for all students in high school. However, a big challenge faced by the students is the ability to master the language. Similarly, teachers need help to prepare an effective learning environment to enhance students’ language acquisition. This has led to low achievement among the students, as reported on the website of the National Institute of Educational Testing Service (NIETS, n.d.) for the academic year 2019. Students in other provinces received an average score of 34.42% in English exams, while those from schools in Bangkok received an average of 45.95%, which implies that school location in Thailand strongly correlates with the scores (NIETS, n.d.). Several non-native speakers wish to acquire fluency and automaticity in English. This often requires them to be proficient in all skills in the English language. The most important of these skills is the ability to speak fluently. This has remained a challenge for EFL/ESL learners, including those in Thailand. These learners know the importance of speaking English without errors because it enables them to communicate effectively and efficiently with native English speakers in Thailand, using social media, and during their studies abroad. Fan (2019) reported on the importance of addressing error prevention when speaking and listening in class and during examinations, especially for students studying abroad. In Thailand, students learning English language at different universities and institutions experience different vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation challenges. Most of the students are unable to avoid errors during speaking activities, which negatively impacts their studies and final scores. Since students wish to gain high scores to have a chance to specialize in their preferred subject, a negative score leads to stress. However, this has not reduced error occurrence among students, prompting researchers and educators to pay closer attention to the issue of language learning to encourage learners to recognize their errors and improve their speaking proficiency. Thus, research into OCF has recommended that

instructors facilitate learning by addressing speaking errors immediately (cf., Coskun, 2010; Martin & Valdivia, 2017; Papangkorn, 2015).

The conflict in the deep south of Thailand significantly affects education as insurgent groups target schools, resulting in the injury and death of students, teachers, and civilians. There are more than 70 spoken languages in Thailand, most of which are spoken by hundreds of thousands of people residing in border regions of the north and deep south of Thailand (UNESCO, 2019). The never-ending conflict in the deep southern part of Thailand is focused on three southern provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, near the Malaysia border, and several districts in Songkhla province. About 75% to 80% of the inhabitants here are Muslim. The educational system of Thailand's southern provinces comprises the Thai Government educational system and Islamic education, with most Thai-Muslim students starting in Pondok or Islamic boarding schools. These schools teach about basic religious principles, ethics, and morality and have become the preferred educational institution for many Muslims living in the rural areas of southern Thailand (Liow, 2009; Madmarn, 2003). Languages spoken in the deep south are Pattani Malay (Jawi), Southern Thai, Standard Thai, Standard Malay, and Arabic (Nookua, 2012; Premsrirat & Uniansasmita, 2012; Rappa & Wee, 2006). The mother tongue of individuals living in this region is Pattani Malay, which is different from the mother tongue in other Thai provinces (Uniansasmita, 2010). Therefore, English is considered a third language in the southernmost provinces, with children only learning English in school (Madeeyoh & Charumanee, 2013; Srisueb & Wasanasomsithi, 2010).

Though there are arguments against error correction, there are “*numerous and convincing reasons why OCF should be an integral part of teaching practices*” (Pawlak, 2014, p. 49). As Li (2018) stated, “*research has unequivocally demonstrated the benefits of corrective feedback in facilitating L2 development*” (p. 4); it is thus not a question of the effectiveness or types of feedback (Nassaji & Kartchava, 2020). Li (2017) reviewed seven studies on teachers' beliefs about OCF (Agudo, 2014; Bell, 2005; Dong, 2012; Junqueira & Kim, 2013; Kamiya, 2014; Kartchava, 2006; Rahimi & Zhang, 2015), revealing that only 39% of teachers agreed that OCF was important. Although there are extensive published studies on oral or written corrective feedback in Thailand, to the best of my knowledge, little or no research has been carried out on the sources of OCF in a tertiary institution in southern Thailand. Thus, to address this research gap, this study aimed to extend this line of inquiry by examining students' beliefs regarding the sources of OCF in a tertiary institution in southern Thailand.

## 2. Literature Review

There has been an increase in empirical research investigating the nature of OCF and the connection between students' beliefs and target sources. The search from relevant literature revealed that most studies examining the relationship between students' beliefs and teachers' practices are often carried out in ESL settings (e.g., Junqueira & Kim, 2013; Kamiya, 2014). However, studies such as those of Dong (2012), Roothoof (2014), and Ölmezer-Öztürk (2019) were conducted in non-ESL settings. Agudo (2014) provided more findings on language-teacher-cognition

research using a pre-service course for Spanish EFL teachers and found that about 42% of Spanish undergraduate EFL students preferred peer correction. Their study concluded that pre-existing beliefs of EFL teachers regarding general language teaching and dealing with errors will likely affect their initial teaching practices while they are doing their internship. Nonetheless, it contrasts the study by Katayama (2007), who examined students' preferences and attitudes regarding error correction in Japanese classrooms and found that 63% of undergraduate students in Japan preferred peer corrections in groupwork.

Ha and Nguyen (2021) examined the relationship between teacher and learner beliefs regarding the optimal sources and targets of OCF in an EFL class in four public high schools in Vietnam. Data were obtained from 250 students using questionnaires, and 6% (15) of these students were interviewed. All interviewed students preferred error corrections by the teacher because the teacher regularly corrected them in class. Additionally, around 5% of the students preferred self-correction with the teacher's assistance and guidance. With several studies examining the impacts of OCF, researchers have focused on learners or students' beliefs. Empirical investigations of students' beliefs have shown that it varies across EFL/ESL contexts. More than half of the students believed peer correction benefits them. Wiboolyasarin et al. (2020) investigated the existence of preferences and perceptions among East Asian undergraduate students of Thai. They found that public and private correction benefits second language learners in Thailand. However, students were more open to personal revision than to public correction.

Different theories have been implemented in learning a foreign language or second language acquisition. Among these theories, the most predominant ones are contrastive analysis and error analysis. Among these two, error analysis has been widely used to deal with learners' errors and has been considered the most appropriate tool for dealing with learners' language errors and finding error sources (Abied et al., 2022). There have also been mixed research results regarding whether errors should be corrected, with studies such as Davis (2003) and Zhang and Rahimi (2014) reporting that immediate correction is the best form. Regarding the choice of error correction, Zhu and Wang (2019) reported that three taxonomies of errors can be corrected. This includes linguistic taxonomy, focused versus unfocused, and gravity of errors. In this study, students' OCF beliefs are explored based on linguistic taxonomy, comprising grammatical, lexical, and phonological errors.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Procedure and Data Collection**

In this study, the instruments employed included a questionnaire, observation, and feedback from students' learning and the designed speaking tasks. Altogether, 60 students participated in the study, being 37 male and 23 female students between the ages of 19 and 23. Their English proficiency ranged from elementary to intermediate level. The questionnaire was designed using existing literature. The questionnaire aimed to explore students' preferences for OCF during learning and the planned speaking tasks. The questionnaire was designed

using six five-point Likert scale questions ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*, with the frequency of responses provided in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Frequencies of participant responses to questionnaire**

Item examined	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Error identification</b>					
I prefer my classmates to identify my errors	3	18	30	6	3
I prefer the teacher to identify my errors	0	0	0	12	48
I prefer to identify errors myself	48	6	6	0	0
<b>Error correction</b>					
I prefer only error correction from the teacher	0	0	0	12	48
I prefer my classmates to correct my errors	45	3	12	0	0
I prefer to correct my errors myself	30	15	15	0	0

The questionnaire was translated into Thai, and the Thai and English versions of the questionnaires were examined by a Thai lecturer and an EFL lecturer, respectively, who worked at the university. At the end of the questionnaire, participants had to append their signatures to indicate their willingness to volunteer and participate in the speaking activities. All interviews were analyzed autonomously for ethical reasons. The purpose of the speaking activities was to obtain data concerning the participants' preferences for sources of OCF correction during speaking activities. To assess and score the speaking activity, a rubric was created with different criteria to represent the possible skill levels of students. The standard included: *meets high expectations*, *meets low expectations*, *slightly underperforms*, and *does not meet expectations*. Other specific criteria considered in the rubric consisted of fluency, pronunciation and accent, vocabulary, and grammar. The researcher and the EFL lecturer mentioned earlier were present during the speaking activities. The researcher asked participants about their preferred sources for corrective feedback when they made an error during the speaking activity. The participants were also allowed to expand on the reasons for their preferences. The percentages of participant responses are provided in Table 2.

**Table 2: Percentages of participant responses to questionnaire**

Item examined	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Error identification</b>					
I prefer my classmates to identify my errors	5%	30%	50%	10%	5%
I prefer the teacher to identify my errors	0%	0%	0%	20%	80%
I prefer to identify errors myself	80%	10%	10%	0%	0%

<b>Error correction</b>					
I prefer only error correction from the teacher	0%	0%	0%	20%	80%
I prefer my classmates to correct my errors	75%	5%	20%	0%	0%
I prefer to correct my errors myself	50%	25%	25%	0%	0%

### 3.2 Contexts

The study was conducted at a tertiary institution in the southern province of Thailand. As previously stated, the educational system in southern Thailand, especially in the deep south, is different from other parts of Thailand. English is not a language spoken very widely in this region, and most people who can speak it do so at a basic level. Though English is also taught in most schools in the deep south of Thailand, many students need to interact in English more often to become fluent or proficient in it. The ESL/EFL class is the main venue where the students often use English for communication. The English class takes place once a week on Thursdays and usually lasts three hours. During observations, it was noticed that, for the topic of conversation, the teacher provided an image in the form of a picture, and each student described and explained the activities on the picture. Additionally, the favorite hobby of each student was also discussed. The students enjoyed this part of the class since they knew a lot about it. Whenever the students had difficulties clearly expressing themselves due to their limitation in communicating in English, they were allowed to speak in Thai. The conversations in Thai were transcribed and translated into English, and phrases or sentences with the same meanings were classified into different categories.

### 3.3 Data Analysis

The method used in this study was based on a classroom research design. The research instrument used in this research included observation and feedback from students' learning and the designed speaking tasks. Questionnaires were administered to 65 students to complete in their free time. After two weeks, 60 completed questionnaires were returned, with five students deciding not to participate. Thus, only 60 questionnaires were used for the data analysis. There was interaction with the students on an individual level, which lasted for the entire time of the class. To provide a clearer picture of the responses and how widely spread out the responses are, the mean rating and associated standard deviation for all the responses are provided in Table 3.

**Table 3: Analysis of participants' responses using mean and standard deviation**

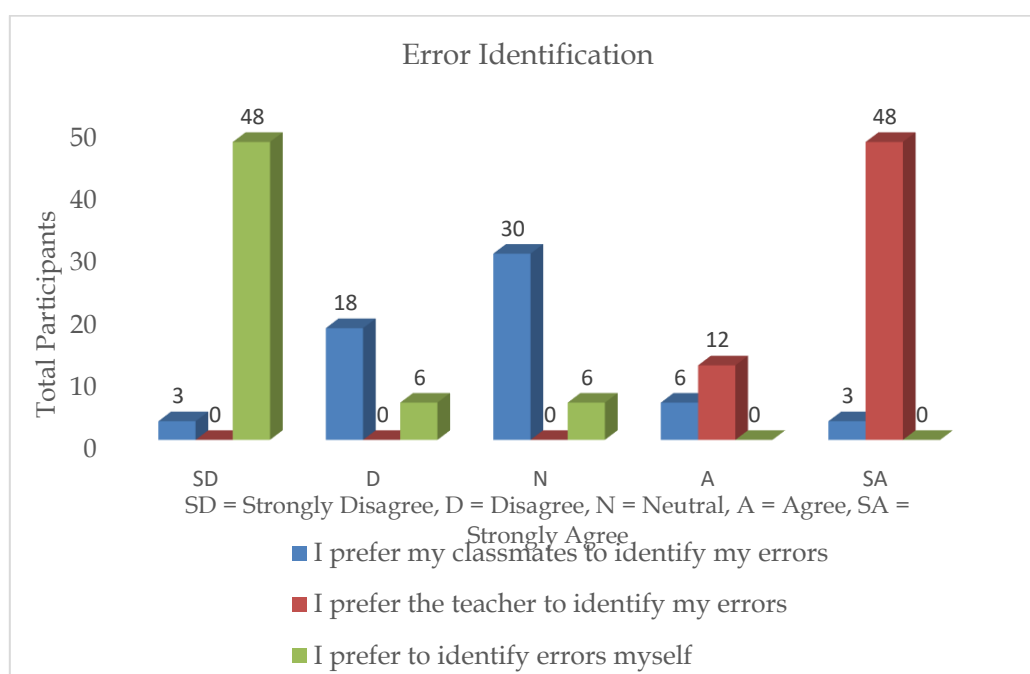
<b>Item examined</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard deviation</b>
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>		
<b>Error identification</b>							
I prefer my classmates to identify my errors	5%	30%	50%	10%	5%	2.80	2.40
I prefer the teacher to identify my errors	0%	0%	0%	20%	80%	6.30	4.62
I prefer to identify errors myself	80%	10%	10%	0%	0%	2.50	1.79

Error correction							
I prefer only error correction from the teacher	0%	0%	0%	20%	80%	6.30	4.63
I prefer my classmates to correct my errors	75%	5%	20%	0%	0%	2.35	1.76
I prefer to correct my errors myself	50%	25%	25%	0%	0%	2.50	1.87

The other findings obtained are reported in the next section.

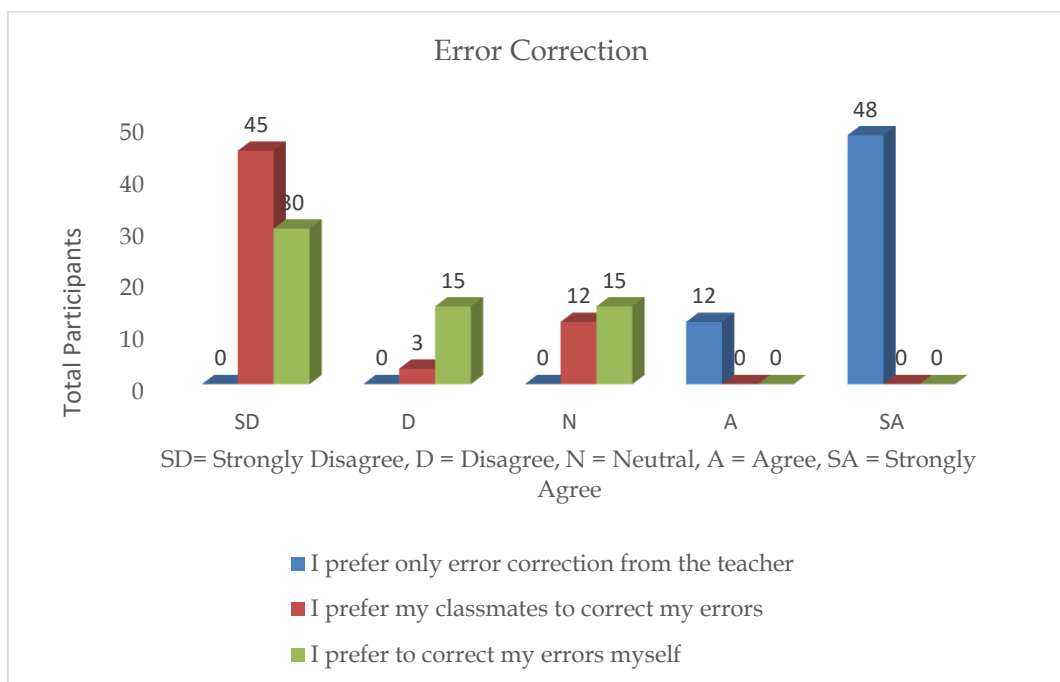
#### 4. Findings

Students' preferences regarding OCF sources were examined through six items, that is, three items for error identification and three for error correction. The results obtained from the examination are presented in Figures 1 and 2, respectively.



**Figure 1: Participants' preference regarding the source of oral corrective feedback for error identification**

For error identification (Figure 1), 5% of the participants strongly agreed and disagreed with error identification by their classmates, 30% disagreed, and 50% were neutral. On the other hand, 80% strongly agreed with error identification by their teachers, and 80% strongly disagreed with error identification by themselves. The three statements examined for error identification had **standard deviation** values of 2.40, 4.62, and 1.79, respectively (Table 3). These findings suggest that participants valued the teacher's role in pointing out errors. The results show that participants were not confident in themselves when it came to self-identification of errors.



**Figure 2: Participants' preference regarding the source of oral corrective feedback for error correction**

Regarding error correction (Figure 2), 80% of the participants strongly agreed that error correction should be done by the teacher, 75% strongly disagreed with peer correction, and 50% strongly disagreed with self-correction. These findings indicate participants' preference for correcting their errors with the help of their teacher. However, they were not confident in self-correction. In addition, the three statements examined for error correction had **standard deviation** values of 4.63, 1.76, and 1.87, respectively (Table 3).

Overall, the obtained results show that most participants preferred error correction by their teachers, with most of them agreeing that this technique can improve their English language skills. This is in accordance with Azad and Kalam (2016), who revealed that Bangladeshi EFL students had a positive attitude towards OCF, perceiving it to be beneficial for learning English.

## 5. Discussion

The main research aim of this study was to understand students' preferences regarding OCF by taking southern Thailand as a case study. The responses obtained from the study participants indicate that corrective feedback is an essential part of second language pedagogy. This is consistent with Kırkgöz and Ağçam's (2015) report that participating teachers believed that OCF should not be abandoned and that rapid response to spoken error should be promoted. Regarding participant preferences, Figure 2 shows that participants preferred corrections by the teacher above self-correction or correction by their peers. This finding is consistent with that by Agudo (2015), who believed that teachers are more equipped in error correction and always eager to listen to comments and information relevant to the error.



During interviews, participants highlighted different reasons for their choices. They felt more secure and agreed with correction by the teacher. This preference stems from the fact that teachers are well respected and considered virtuous in Thailand. Participants also pointed out that peer correction may result in face-threat concerns affecting their confidence, especially for high-performing students or learners. According to Paulhus et al. (2002), Asian students have a high rate of self-reported shyness. This might be the reason why some of the study participants felt shy to admit their mistakes in a classroom-based situation. Below are some excerpts from the participants regarding their choices in the different criteria:

*"The teacher used simple vocabulary in communicating and correcting my errors. This is different from how my friends or I will fix myself."*

*"Though I made errors at the beginning of our conversations, the teacher did not interrupt and only pointed out my corrections after completing our conversation. This way of correction by the teacher kept me from losing any part of the conversation; I like it this way."*

*"I made many errors during the conversation with the teacher. However, the teacher was patient to correct all my errors and provided many alternative vocabularies that can also be used during conversation."*

*"The teacher was very attentive in our discussion and identified several errors."*

*"When I try to speak English with my peers, they always laugh at me and make me shy when I make errors, and they identify the errors. The teacher does not do like this."*

In this study, three sources of OCF exist in the classroom setting. These include the learners themselves through self-correction, learners' peers through peer feedback, and the teacher through the teacher's feedback. Interestingly, although the students who participated in this study preferred the teacher's feedback to that of their peers, some preferred self-correction and were open to being trained in self-correction and its application in groupwork.

The following are some of the excerpts obtained from the interviews with the participants:

*"I would be happy if the teacher could train the other students and me to identify and correct errors."*

*"I wish the teacher could teach me how to find my errors. This will be easy for me to correct myself when the teacher is not around."*

*"I hope the English class is twice a week. This way, my friends and I will learn how to identify and correct any errors we make ourselves."*

As indicated in the above excerpts, participants associated a sense of pride with the ability to correct their own oral errors.

Regarding learning preferences in OCF, it has been reported that OCF plays an essential role for tertiary-level learners. This is evident in the study of Faqeih (2015), where it was found that the attitude of students or learners towards OCF can affect their learning outcomes and influence their behaviors. This is consistent with the findings of this study, because some participants were quite satisfied with how the teacher corrected their errors, which motivated them to learn more.

## 6. Conclusion, Limitations, and Future Studies

The current study bridges a research gap in understanding the sources of oral error identification and correction within a tertiary setting in a university in the southern province of Thailand. The findings show that the participants seemed willing and open to receive corrections by their teacher. Most participants expressed a positive attitude regarding the teacher correcting them, indicating the importance of correction by the teacher. While this is a good approach for students, it is practically impossible for teachers to correct all student errors. This study shows that students are not entirely okay with peer correction. However, teachers should train them to trust themselves to identify their errors and believe in themselves to correct the mistakes of their peers too.

As stated earlier, the current study contributes to OCF research, and in particular, the preferences of EFL students in Thailand regarding error correction. This is a first of its kind, as no study has been conducted on students' preference regarding OCF in southern Thailand. Despite the contributions discussed above, the study had certain limitations. First, the convenience sampling method was employed for selecting study participants. Thus, future research can use a different method to select a more significant study sample. Second, this study was conducted at a university in southern Thailand. Thus, the obtained results cannot be used as a general metric for other regions or parts of Thailand since English is not the first language in the southern part of Thailand. Therefore, future studies can consider students from different areas of Thailand. Next, the participants of this study were students with a pre-intermediate level of proficiency in English. Future studies should consider the inclusion of students with different English proficiency levels to yield a variety of OCF preferences to produce a better result. Finally, only 60 students participated in this study. It would be interesting to see whether different results would be yielded with a larger sample.

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