Navigating the Maze of Emotions: A Deep Dive into Teenage EFL Learners' Sentiments Toward Oral Corrective Feedback

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This study investigates differences in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' preferences for oral corrective feedback (OCF) between adolescent boys and girls in mixed-gender (MGC) and same-gender classes (SGC), with particular attention to the emotional dimensions of classroom interaction. While prior research has examined various factors influencing OCF preferences, this is the first to explore how gender and class composition intersect with learners' emotional experiences, such as anxiety. A 32-item questionnaire was administered to 211 participants (152 females and 59 males). Data analysis using descriptive statistics and the Wilcoxon signed rank test indicated that students in SGC requested OCF more frequently and reported greater emotional comfort than those in MGC. In contrast, MGC settings were associated with heightened anxiety, which appeared to influence feedback preferences. These results highlight the importance for EFL teachers to consider both cognitive and affective factors, particularly emotional responses shaped by gender dynamics and classroom context, when delivering OCF to support more effective and emotionally responsive language learning environments.

Keywords: corrective feedback, oral corrective feedback, gender, same-gendered classes, mixed-gendered classes

INTRODUCTION

The role of corrective feedback (CF) in language learning has been a topic of extensive debate in recent years. Initially, some researchers doubted the positive effects of CF, claiming that it could lead to anxiety and embarrassment among learners (Hosseini et al., 2025; Krashen, 1982; Mlundi, 2024; VanPatten, 1992). However, a substantial body of empirical research and meta-analyses has demonstrated that CF—particularly oral corrective feedback (OCF)—can significantly support language acquisition, provided it

is delivered appropriately (Hosseini et al , 2025; Li, 2010; Lyster & Saito, 2010; Rahimi & Zhang, 2014; Tareen et al , 2023; Zhu & Wang, 2019). Lyster, Saito, and Sato (2013) define OCF as "teachers' immediate response to learners' erroneous utterances" (p. 9).

Various factors can influence the effectiveness of OCF, including learners' preferences, proficiency level, gender, age, and context (Bao & Wang, 2023; Katayama, 2007; Hashemian & Mostaghasi, 2015; Kaivanpanah et al., 2015; Robillos, 2023; Tareenn et al , 2023; Zhao, 2013). Studies consistently show that mismatches between teachers' and students' OCF preferences can hinder learning outcomes (Gamlo, 2019). Moreover, learners' preferences vary by proficiency level (Hashemian & Mostaghasi, 2015; Kaivanpanah et al., 2015; Lengálová & Semotamová, 2025; Özmen & Aydin, 2015; Torabi, 2024) and by age, as developmental stages shape beliefs and expectations (Oliver, 2000; Rubio, 2024; Wiboolyasarin et al., 2023). Context also plays a critical role: non-supportive environments can increase anxiety, which in turn reduces the effectiveness of OCF (Tareenn et al., 2023; Zhao, 2013). Collectively, these findings suggest that OCF cannot be understood in isolation but must be examined within the interplay of learner characteristics and learning context (Bao & Wang, 2023).

In Iran, same-gender classes (SGC) are mandatory at schools, while some language institutes offer mixed-gender classes (MGC). Iranian students thus encounter coeducational learning mostly at the tertiary level. The transition to MGC can create emotional challenges—especially for adolescents—when receiving OCF in the presence of the opposite gender. Research by Kao, Chen, and Craigie (2017) found gender differences in psychological differentiation and cognitive styles, reinforcing the importance of tailoring OCF to gender-related preferences. If teachers overlook these differences, OCF may become intrusive or embarrassing, particularly for teenage learners whose developmental trajectories differ from adults' (Gholami, 2015). In such cases, learners may resist feedback, reducing both affective receptivity and cognitive engagement. Therefore, effective OCF in these contexts must address both cognitive accuracy and emotional comfort (Brown & Lee, 2015; Agudo, 2013).

While prior research has examined aspects of gender, class composition, and emotions in OCF, findings remain mixed. Khadhijah and Vijaykumar (2018) found that males and females in Bangalore reported higher social anxiety in SGC than in MGC. This contrasts with Ebrahimi and Yarahmadzehi (2015), who observed that Iranian males' speaking performance declined in MGC while females' performance was unaffected by class type. Fadilah et al. (2017) reported that university EFL students maintained positive attitudes toward CF despite feelings of shame, whereas Ünsal Şakiroğlu (2020) found that Turkish EFL learners generally did not feel embarrassed when corrected, regardless of context. These differences suggest that cultural, educational, and age-related factors may shape emotional responses to OCF in diverse ways.

Importantly, most prior studies have key limitations: some explored OCF preferences without comparing SGC and MGC (Fadilah et al., 2017; Ünsal Şakiroğlu, 2020), while others differentiated between SGC and MGC without examining feelings toward OCF (Khadhijah & Vijaykumar, 2018). Ebrahimi and Yarahmadzehi (2015) studied social anxiety in both settings but did not consider OCF preferences. Furthermore, most participants were undergraduates (Vuono & Li, 2021), leaving adolescent learners

largely unexamined. Addressing these gaps, the present study investigates both the preferences and emotional responses of Iranian teenage EFL learners toward OCF in SGC and MGC. By integrating affective and cognitive dimensions, it aims to provide insights that can help teachers create supportive learning environments and deliver OCF that is both effective and emotionally sensitive. To fulfill the aims of the study, the following research questions were propounded:

1. Do Iranian teenage male and female EFL learners differ in their preferences for receiving OCF in SGC and MGC?

2. Do Iranian teenage male and female EFL learners differ in their feelings toward receiving OCF in SGC and MGC?

METHOD

Participants

A convenience sample of 211 Iranian EFL teenage learners, including 59 boys and 152 girls, took part in the study. The participants ranged in age from 12 to 18 (M = 14.2, SD = 1.44) and were either false beginners (i.e., while hardly able to express themselves in English, they already knew quite a few words and phrases [Harmer, 2007]) or elementary learners of English. They were students from the seventh to the twelfth grades at high school in West Azerbaijan Province, Iran. The gender distribution was notably imbalanced (152 females vs. 59 males), and this limitation is acknowledged as a potential factor influencing the generalizability of the findings.

Instrument

A 32-item questionnaire, adapted from Wu (2020), Rahimi and Zhang (2014), Katayama (2007), and Ananda et al. (2017), was used to collect data on learners' perspectives toward oral corrective feedback (OCF). The instrument consisted of five thematic dimensions: (1) emotional responses to receiving OCF, (2) preferred timing of OCF, (3) preferred source of OCF, (4) preferred strategies for delivering OCF, and (5) perceived appropriate amount of OCF. Participants rated each item on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree").

In line with the research objective of the present study, only the seven items focusing on the emotional dimension of OCF were analyzed. These items included statements such as "I feel anxious when corrected in front of the opposite gender" and "I feel confused when my teacher gives corrective feedback to my oral errors in front of the opposite gender." The questionnaire was administered in Persian to accommodate learners' lower English proficiency.

To ensure translation accuracy, three TEFL experts (one Ph.D. and two M.A.) translated the survey into Persian. After comparing versions, necessary changes were made for clarity. The scale was then reviewed by two additional TEFL experts, revised according to their feedback, and piloted with six EFL learners (one from each high school grade) who matched the main sample profile. These learners highlighted unclear words or phrases, which were simplified. Back-translation into English was performed by two TEFL specialists (a Ph.D. and an M.A.) to verify equivalence with the original instrument. For reliability testing, 40 EFL students outside the main sample completed

the questionnaire. A Cronbach's alpha value of .80 indicated satisfactory internal consistency.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, version 26). The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, and Wilcoxon signed rank tests. Descriptive statistics were first employed "to provide a simple summary or overview of the data, thus allowing researchers to gain a better overall understanding of the data set" (Mackey & Gass, 2015, p. 292). As a second step, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was conducted to determine whether the distribution was normal. A p value < .05 indicated that the data were not normally distributed. Therefore, the researchers applied non-parametric statistical analysis to the data. To do so, the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test was used to compare the males in the SGC and MGC as well as the females in the SGC and MGC.

FINDINGS

The Teenage Males' and Females' Preferences Regarding Receiving OCF From Their lecturers in the SGC and MGC

In accordance with the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test results, the data were not normally distributed (p = .00). There was a significant difference between the males in the SGC and MGC (z = -2.22, p = .02) as well as the females in the SGC and MGC (z = -2.55, p = .01). Both females and males were more likely to prefer receiving instructors' OCF in the SGC (The females → M = 3.77, SD = 1.14; the males → M = 3.94, SD = 1.06) than in the MGC (The females → M = 3.43, SD = 1.23; the males → M = 3.28, SD = 1.23) (see Tables 1 & 2).

Table 1

The wilcoxon signed rank test regarding receiving OCF from the teachers in the SGC and MGC (Ranks)

		Females			Males		
		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
MGC 1 - SGC 1	Negative Ranks	59[a]	54.14	3194.00	20[a]	13.05	261.00
	Positive Ranks	40[b]	43.90	1756.00	6[b]	15.00	90.00
	Ties	53[c]			33[c]		
	Total	152			59		

Table 2

Descriptive statistics and the wilcoxon signed rank test regarding receiving OCF from the teachers in the SGC and MGC (Test Statistics)

Items	Gender	Groups	M	SD	Minimum	Maximum	z-score	Sig. (2-tailed)
1. I prefer when my lecturer gives CF to my oral errors.	Females	SGC	3.77	1.14	1	5	-2.55	.01
		MGC	3.43	1.23	1	5		
	Males	SGC	3.94	1.06	1	5	-2.22	.02
		MGC	3.28	1.23	1	5		

The Results of the Learners' Feelings Including Feeling Embarrassed, Annoyed, Confused, Reassured, Fine, and Worried Toward Receiving OCF

In the second research question, we investigated whether there were significant differences between the SGC and MGC regarding the feelings of males and females

following OCF. These feelings included feeling embarrassed, annoyed, reassured, fine, and worried. The females' embarrassment was significantly different in the SGC and MGC ($z = -2.94$, $p = .00$). In the MGC, the females were more embarrassed (M = 2.87, SD = 1.35) than in the SGC (M = 2.56, SD = 1.18). When it comes to how annoyed the males felt in the SGC and MGC, they reported being more annoyed in the MGC (M = 2.62, SD = 1.20) than in the SGC (M = 2.24, SD = 1.06) ($z = -1.99$, $p = .04$). With respect to confusion, the confusion level of females in the SGC and MGC was significantly different ($z = -2.20$, $p = .02$). The females were more confused in the MGC (M = 2.61, SD = 1.26) than in the SGC (M = 2.30, SD = 1.17). In comparing how reassured females ($z = -2.92$, $p = .00$) and males ($z = -2.92$, $p = .00$) felt in the SGC and MGC, a significant difference was observed. The females were more reassured in the SGC (M = 3.76, SD = 1.10) than in the MGC (M = 3.37, SD = 1.17). The males, on the other hand, felt more reassured in the MGC (M = 3.98, SD = 1.00) than in the SGC (M = 3.47, SD = 1.10). When comparing how fine the females ($z = -2.60$, $p = .00$) and males ($z = -2.74$, $p = .00$) felt in the SGC and MGC, significant differences were discovered. In the SGC (The females → M = 3.48, SD = 1.15; The males → M = 3.62, SD = 1.06) as opposed to the MGC (The females → M = 3.18, SD = 1.26; The males → M = 3.18, SD = 1.22), both the males and females felt finer. With respect to feeling worried, a significant difference was found between the females in the SGC and MGC ($z = -2.55$, $p = .01$). They felt more worried in the MGC (M = 2.66, SD = 1.26) than the SGC (M = 2.30, SD= 1.08). Among the rest, there was no significant difference (See Tables 3& 4).

Table 3
Wilcoxon signed rank test regarding feeling embarrassed, annoyed, confused, reassured, fine, and worried in the MGC and SGC for the boys and girls (Ranks)

		Females			Males		
		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	*N*	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
MGC 2 - SGC 2	Negative Ranks	46[a]	49.93	2297.00	5[a]	11.20	56.00
	Positive Ranks	69[b]	63.38	4373.00	19[b]	12.84	244.00
	Ties	37[c]			35[c]		
	Total	152			59		
MGC 3 – SGC 3	Negative Ranks	49[d]	54.52	2671.50	7[d]	14.07	98.50
	Positive Ranks	66[e]	60.58	3998.50	19[e]	13.29	252.50
	Ties	37[f]			33[f]		
	Total	152			59		
MGC 4 – SGC 4	Negative Ranks	47[g]	57.64	2709.00	1[g]	1.00	1.00
	Positive Ranks	71[h]	60.73	4312.00	0[h]	.00	.00
	Ties	34[i]			58[i]		
	Total	152			59		
MGC 5 – SGC 5	Negative Ranks	64[j]	52.50	3360.00	26[j]	15.21	395.50
	Positive Ranks	36[k]	46.94	1690.00	5[k]	20.10	100.50
	Ties	52[l]			28[l]		
	Total	152			59		
MGC 6 – SGC 6	Negative Ranks	65[m]	56.89	3698.00	22[m]	14.57	320.50
	Positive Ranks	42[n]	49.52	2080.00	6[n]	14.25	85.50
	Ties	45[o]			31[o]		
	Total	152			59		
MGC7 – SGC7	Negative Ranks	43[p]	50.53	2173.00	11[p]	16.95	186.50
	Positive Ranks	66[q]	57.91	3822.00	15[q]	10.97	164.50
	Ties	43[r]			33[r]		
	Total	152			59		

Table 4

Descriptive statistics and wilcoxon signed rank test regarding feeling embarrassed, annoyed, confused, reassured, fine, and worried in the MGC and SGC for the boys and girls (Test Statistics)

Items	Gender	Groups	M	SD	Minimum	Maximum	z-score	Sig. (2-tailed)
2. I feel embarrassed when my lecturer gives CF to my oral errors.	Females	SGC	2.46	1.18	1	5	-2.94	.00
		MGC	2.87	1.35	1	5		
	Males	SGC	2.44	.98	1	5	-2.72	.06
		MGC	2.94	1.22	1	5		
3. I feel annoyed when my lecturer gives CF to my oral errors	Females	SGC	2.19	1.15	1	5	-1.89	.05
		MGC	2.40	1.21	1	5		
	Males	SGC	2.24	1.06	1	5	-1.99	.04
		MGC	2.62	1.20	1	5		
4. I feel confused when my lecturer gives CF to my oral errors.	Females	SGC	2.30	1.17	1	5	-2.20	.02
		MGC	2.61	1.26	1	5		
	Males	SGC	1.03	1.00	1	5	-1.00	.31
		MGC	1.00	.00	1	5		
5. I feel reassured when my lecturer gives CF to my oral errors.	Females	SGC	3.76	1.10	1	5	-2.92	.00
		MGC	3.37	1.17	1	5		
	Males	SGC	3.47	1.10	1	5	-2.96	.00
		MGC	3.98	1.00	1	5		
6. I feel fine when my lecturer gives CF to my oral errors.	Females	SGC	3.48	1.15	1	5	-2.60	.00
		MGC	3.18	1.26	1	5		
	Males	SGC	3.62	1.06	1	5	-2.74	.00
		MGC	3.18	1.22	1	5		
7.I feel worry when my lecturer gives CF to my oral errors	Females	SGC	2.30	1.08	1	5	-2.55	.01
		MGC	2.66	1.26	1	5		
	Males 7	SGC	2.55	1.19	1	5	-.28	.77
		MGC	2.55	1.20	1	5		

DISCUSSION

Learners' Preferences Regarding Receiving Lecturer's OCF

This study found that both male and female adolescent EFL learners in Iran preferred receiving oral corrective feedback (OCF) in same-gender classes (SGC) over mixed-gender classes (MGC). This preference can be interpreted through the lens of Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, which posits that heightened anxiety and self-consciousness can block language input from being processed effectively (Krashen, 1982; Papi & Khajavy, 2023; Boudadii et al., 2024; Avcı & Arı, 2025). In MGC, the presence of the opposite gender may raise learners' affective filters, making them less receptive to feedback. In contrast, SGC may create a psychologically safer environment, allowing learners to focus on linguistic input without the distraction of social evaluation.

The preference for OCF in SGC also resonates with Sociocultural Theory, particularly the idea that learning occurs most effectively in supportive, low-threat social contexts where learners are willing to engage in interactional repair (Dingemanse & Enfield, 2024; Majadly et al. 2024; Tai, 2023). The finding parallels Ebrahimi and Yarahmadzehi's (2015) observation that gendered classroom composition can shape

participation patterns and confidence levels, as well as Farisiyah et al.'s (2021) results showing higher motivation and comfort in SGC.

Another contributing factor may be the learners' low proficiency level (A1–A2), which has been linked to higher reliance on corrective input for linguistic development (Pavić, 2020). Lower-level learners often view OCF as a vital scaffold for building accuracy, in line with Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis, OCF helps them consciously register gaps between their interlanguage and the target language (Ahadi, 2023).

Learners' Emotional Responses Toward OCF

The second research question revealed complex gender-based emotional patterns. Females reported more embarrassment, confusion, and worry in MGC, and greater reassurance and comfort in SGC. Males were more annoyed in MGC but also more reassured there, suggesting that, for some male learners, mixed settings might serve as a performance motivator. This divergence underscores the role of social identity and self-presentation concerns in shaping feedback reception, especially in adolescence—a developmental stage characterized by heightened sensitivity to peer evaluation.

These patterns are consistent with the cultural context of Iran's gender-segregated education system, where most learners have limited experience interacting academically with the opposite gender before university. In such settings, OCF in front of the opposite gender may be perceived as face-threatening (Brown & Levinson, 1987), leading to increased negative affect. This aligns with Wiboolyasarin et al.'s (2020) observation that Asian learners often experience greater embarrassment in corrective situations compared to Western peers, due to stronger norms around saving face.

The contradictory finding that males felt more reassured in MGC than SGC challenges the assumption that mixed classes universally heighten anxiety for both genders. This suggests that gendered responses to class composition are not uniform and may be mediated by individual confidence, peer group dynamics, and societal expectations of gender performance. Such contradictions highlight the need for context-specific interpretations, as supported by Sociocultural Theory's emphasis on the situated nature of learning experiences.

CONCLUSION

The overarching aim of the present study was to investigate the preferences and emotional responses of Iranian EFL teenage learners in SGC and MGC when receiving OCF. The findings disclosed that the males and females feel anxious and embarrassed in the MGC more than in the SGC. Therefore, this study bears significant implications for teachers. Teachers should be aware of these differences and strive to create a supportive and non-threatening learning environment for all learners. In addition, they should be aware of the potential discomfort or anxiety that students may experience in MGC and modify their feedback strategies accordingly (Taşdemir & Arslan, 2018). By creating a supportive and comfortable learning environment, teachers can enhance the effectiveness of OCF and promote students' language learning.

Also, there are some limitations, including the context of this study; the findings may not be transferable to other cities or countries and may not apply to all situations. The study lacks interviews and observations as qualitative analyses. This study also suffers from some delimitations. First, the current study only considered the context of a few cities in Iran. Second, only teenagers were studied, and young learners and adults were not considered. Third, selection bias was another (potential) problem because the researcher did not use a random sample, although a random sample may be more generalizable. Finally, the number of males and females were not equal in the present study, and the girls outnumbered the boys.

Since this study was the first to be conducted on the current topic, further research should be carried out to compare the results. Learners' preferences may vary depending on their cultural background (Nateghian & Mohammadnia, 2022). Further studies in other cultures, cities, or countries would provide new insights into this topic. Future research should also strongly consider mixed-methods approaches, combining quantitative measures with qualitative techniques such as interviews, focus groups, and classroom observations, to provide richer and more triangulated data. Additionally, cross-cultural replication studies in diverse educational settings are recommended to enhance the generalizability of the findings and to explore whether the observed gender and context effects hold true across different sociocultural environments.

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