

English Teachers' Perceptions of the Impact of Clarification Requests on Students' Anxiety in Learning English

Arparaesa

arparaesa81@gmail.com

Maemuna Muhayyang

maemarasyid@unm.ac.id

Muhalim

muhalim@unm.ac.id

Universitas Negeri Makassar

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study investigates the English teachers' perception of the impact of clarification requests on students' anxiety in learning English. Four certified English teachers (20-26 years of teaching experience) from MTsN 2 Makassar were purposefully selected and interviewed using a semi-structured guide. The data were analysed with Miles and Huberman's (1994) interactive model. The results showed two contrasting perceptions. Three teachers believed that clarification requests lessen anxiety because they enable students to self-repair, maintain participation, build confidence, and avoid face-threatening correction. In contrast, one teacher perceived clarification requests as anxiety-increasing because they result in reduced participation, communication pressure, and student withdrawal. Such differences in perception suggest that the emotional impact of clarification requests is not a function of the type of feedback per se but rather how teachers interpret, frame and deliver it. The study points to the significance of teacher professional development for enhancing affective awareness in addition to technical feedback knowledge.

Key words: Teachers' Perceptions, Clarification Requests, Language Anxiety, Corrective Feedback, EFL Classroom.

INTRODUCTION

Corrective feedback is one of the most critical instructional decisions teachers make in EFL classrooms, as it is directly linked to learners' linguistic development and their emotional experience of language learning. Among the range of feedback strategies available, clarification requests occupy a distinctive place because of their indirect, communicatively embedded nature. Lyster and Ranta (1997) describe clarification requests as feedback moves in which the teacher signals that a student's utterance was unclear, inaccurate, or incomplete, inviting the learner to reformulate or repeat through phrases such as "Pardon?", "What do you mean?", or "Can you say that again?" Unlike explicit correction or recasts that explicitly provide the

correct form, clarification requests put the burden of repair back on the student, thus making the latter active agents of their own correction.

This affective dimension is closely related to the well-established link between corrective feedback and language anxiety. Cooper et al. (2018) point out that feedback delivered suddenly or without emotional support can increase students' speaking anxiety, based on the fear of negative evaluation. Horwitz et al. (1986) define language anxiety as situation-specific anxiety experienced in second language contexts, including communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety all of which render correction, which publicly exposes communicative failure, a potential threat to learners' face and self-concept. Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis further supports this concern, arguing that heightened anxiety raises the affective filter and obstructs the intake of comprehensible input.

This pattern is usually observable by teachers, who often recognize students' anxiety through students' hesitance to speak, reluctance to respond, and decreased engagement during oral interaction (Agustina et al., 2023). During classroom observations at the Ajarmi teaching program at MTsN 2 Makassar (February–May 2025), this pattern was also observed in line with the above phenomenon; students tended to become silent, hesitated to respond, or reluctant to continue speaking after receiving corrective feedback. This phenomenon prompted the question whether teachers themselves were aware of such emotional responses, and how they perceived the role of clarification requests in producing or alleviating them, a question that led to the present study.

Previous research on corrective feedback and anxiety has mainly focused on the learner's perspective or experimental studies. For example, Martín and Valdivia (2017) examined students' beliefs about feedback and anxiety in online oral tasks and claimed that corrective feedback could either decrease or increase anxiety, depending on how it was delivered and interpreted. Ghariblaki and Poorahmadi (2017) found that clarification requests were more effective than recasts in improving Iranian EFL learners' structural knowledge, while Ebrahimi et al. (2022) found that both clarification requests and metalinguistic feedback reduced speaking anxiety in IELTS candidates. These studies shed light on the possible effects of clarification requests, but they do not consider how teachers who give clarification requests understand and interpret such effects in their own classrooms, which is what this study seeks to fill.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate English teachers' perceptions of the impact of clarification requests on students' anxiety in learning English at MTsN 2 Makassar. By foregrounding teacher cognition, the study aims to complement the predominantly experimental and learner-oriented literature with a more contextual perspective. This study specifically addresses the following research question: How do English teachers perceive the impact of clarification requests on students' anxiety in learning English?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Clarification Requests within Corrective Feedback

Clarification requests belong to Lyster and Ranta's (1997) wider taxonomy of corrective feedback which also includes recasts, explicit correction, repetition, elicitation, and metalinguistic feedback. What distinguishes clarification requests is that they withhold the correct form entirely rather than modeling or signaling the specific error, the teacher indicates that the utterance was not understood, leaving the learner to identify and repair the problem independently. This places the greatest degree of communicative responsibility, and potentially the greatest degree of exposure, on the learner, making the emotional stakes of this feedback type especially dependent on how it is delivered.

Teachers' Perceptions: Definition and Types

The perceptions of teachers may be considered as the interpretive lenses through which educators assess their pedagogical practices, student behavior, and classroom interactions, influenced by their experiences, beliefs, and professional circumstance (Zhang et al., 2022). These perceptions are not an objective fact, but they do influence teachers' decision and conduct in the classroom; that is why it is important to look into them when it comes to understanding the use and interpretation of clarification requests.

Irwanto (2002) distinguishes two broad types of perception. Positive perception is an evaluative response in which an object or experience is accepted and viewed as helpful and consistent with prior knowledge. In this study, positive perception is represented when teachers view clarification requests as feedback that decreases anxiety. Negative perception is an evaluative response in which an object is viewed as troublesome or inconsistent with expectations. In this study, negative perception is represented when teachers view clarification requests as feedback that increases anxiety. This distinction forms the organizing framework for the findings of this study.

Factors Affecting Perception and Teacher Cognition

Robbins (2003) explains that perception is determined by factors associated with the perceiver, the target and the situation, commonly referred to as internal and external influences. Internal factors are about the perceiver's attitudes, motives, prior experience and expectations; in an educational context, this refers to teachers' beliefs about feedback and errors, their teaching experience and their individual teaching style. External factors are those that come from the target and the situation in this case, students' language proficiency, emotional responses and classroom atmosphere. Combined, these factors explain why the same feedback strategy is employed by the teachers in the same institution, yet they can hold starkly different beliefs about the emotional consequences of this strategy a connection to the larger

construct of teacher cognition (Borg, 2003), the beliefs and interpretive frameworks that shape teachers' instructional decisions and, in this study, informed the design of the interview instrument itself.

The Emotional Impact of Clarification Requests

Within this framework, four mechanisms are proposed to associate clarification requests with decreased anxiety. First, the direct feeling of being corrected might mitigate the emotional burden of the fear of negative evaluation (Horwitz et al., 1986). Second, because a willingness to communicate is closely linked to anxiety, indirect feedback that leaves room for further interaction could encourage continued participation (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). Third, opportunities to self-correct promote greater processing of language and help develop confidence (Swain, 2005). And finally, as requests for clarification are implicit, they tend to be less threatening to learners' self-esteem than direct correction (Lyster & Ranta, 1997). On the other hand, there are three mechanisms that connect clarification requests to increased anxiety. Anxious learners tend to avoid speaking opportunities in the first place (Dewaele, 2010). Repeated requests can create time and performance pressure and that increases anxiety when learners feel they have to respond immediately while being evaluated (MacIntyre, 1999). And when anxiety becomes persistent, learners may use avoidance strategies such as withdrawing from interaction (Horwitz, 2001).

METHOD

Design and Samples

This study adopted a descriptive qualitative design to explore and articulate the perceptions of English teachers regarding the emotional impact of clarification requests on students' anxiety. Four certified English teachers at MTsN 2 Makassar were selected as participants through purposive sampling, based on their active use of clarification requests in classroom instruction and their professional certification status. All four participants were experienced practitioners with teaching experience ranging from 20 to 26 years.

Instrument and Procedure

Two instruments were employed for data collecting. The main tool was a semi-structured interview guide with 10 open-ended questions that explored teachers' definitions and conceptual understanding of clarification requests, their beliefs about the emotional impact of this feedback strategy on students, their personal classroom experiences with student anxiety and their general views on the relationship between clarification requests and students' willingness to engage in learning. The interviews were carried out with individual participants and lasted for about 20 to 30 minutes. As a secondary instrument, a non-participant classroom observation checklist covering seven indicators (e.g., presence and context of

clarification requests, teacher tone, wait time, and follow-up) was used across two separate sessions per teacher, in different classes, with each session lasting approximately one hour. The purpose of observation was to verify whether and how teachers actually used clarification requests in real classroom interaction, providing supporting evidence for the interview findings.

Data Analysis

The interview and observation data were analyzed separately using Miles and Huberman's (1994) interactive model of data analysis that consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Interview data were coded by transcribing them into categories such as teacher beliefs and perceived emotional outcomes and then were organized into the two overarching themes of positive and negative perception. Observation data were coded by using the checklist results and field notes to identify the presence, frequency, and manner of clarification request use. Interview data were used as the primary source of insight into teachers' perceptions, and observation data were used to corroborate and contextualize the interview data, a form of triangulation between the two data sources.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This part presents the main findings from one research questions: (1) How do English teachers perceive the impact of clarification requests on students' anxiety in English language learning.

Positive Perceptions: Clarification Requests as Anxiety-Reducing

Three of the four teachers (T1, T2, T3) expressed positive perceptions of the impact of clarification requests on students' anxiety, describing them as a feedback strategy that reduced emotional pressure and supported students' engagement with English learning. Four interconnected mechanisms characterized these positive perceptions. The first mechanism was encouraging self-repair rather than direct criticism. These teachers consistently emphasized that clarification requests, by prompting students to revisit and reformulate their utterances, avoided the emotional threat associated with explicit or direct correction. T1 explained that "because we do not directly say that the student is wrong, their willingness to express something becomes greater compared to when there is direct correction such as 'you are wrong'." T2 similarly described how "through clarification requests, students correct themselves. I ask them to repeat, then they think 'maybe it is wrong', and they fix it again." These accounts reflect a shared belief that indirect prompting preserves students' communicative willingness by allowing them to identify and repair their own errors without the social exposure of public correction.

The second mechanism was the support for willingness to participate. Teachers reported that students who were prompted by clarification requests to repeat or

clarify their answers were likely to remain engaged in the interaction rather than withdraw from communication. T1 described students as feeling 'less pressured and appreciated' and T3 observed that the classroom atmosphere 'immediately became lively and the students became enthusiastic about learning English' after the use of clarification requests. These accounts suggest that teachers perceived clarification requests as participation-sustaining rather than participation-inhibiting, an interpretation in line with Long's (1996) Interaction Hypothesis which positions negotiation of meaning as a naturally communicative and anxiety-neutral process.

The third mechanism was increasing confidence and language awareness. Teachers linked the self-repair opportunity created by clarification requests to gradual development of students' confidence in using English. T2 described creating "an atmosphere where they are allowed to answer without being afraid of making mistakes, and if they are wrong, they can correct themselves," while T3 used clarification requests specifically "so that they feel confident that they are able to learn English." This perception aligns with Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy framework, which holds that successful performance experiences, including self-initiated repair, build learners' belief in their capability, which in turn reduces anxiety in subsequent interactions.

The fourth mechanism was providing less face-threatening correction. All three teachers believed that clarification requests helped create a non-critical and emotionally safe classroom atmosphere by framing correction as a communicative event rather than an evaluative judgment. T1 said that students "do not feel burdened, do not feel too down when they make mistakes, and do not feel judged or pressured." T2 said that students "feel happier because they are not judged and feel appreciated." T3 said that "we must accept their mistakes and consider them as something normal, not something that deserves punishment." These perceptions are in line with Sadaf et al.'s (2025) finding that the indirectness of clarification requests maintains learners' face and autonomy, mitigating the evaluative threat that leads to anxiety.

Negative Perceptions: Clarification Requests as Anxiety-Increasing

One teacher (T4) had a very negative perspective and described three ways that clarification requests could increase rather than decrease students' anxiety. Firstly, T4 felt that the repetitive nature of clarification requests decreased students' willingness to participate, with students becoming increasingly hesitant to respond when they expected to be asked to repeat or clarify. This account suggests that for T4's students, clarification requests were a source of communicative pressure rather than communicative support. Secondly, T4 reported that clarification requests created tension when students felt that the teacher's correction conflicted with content they had learned in private tutoring settings, leading to resistance and interpersonal strain rather than constructive repair. Third, and most strikingly, T4 described a case in which a student's response to repeated clarification requests

escalated to sustained avoidance, such that “he did not want to meet me anymore; every time I entered the class, he left.” This account illustrates an extreme case of the withdrawal behavior identified by Dewaele (2010) as a response to anxiety-provoking interaction in language learning contexts.

DISCUSSION

Findings suggest that the emotional impact of clarification requests is not seen as an inherent feature of the feedback type but is context dependent. The dominant positive view coincides with the view that indirect feedback is generally less threatening and more supportive to language learners (Lyster & Ranta, 1997) whilst the contrary view of T4 suggests that this assumption may not be true in all cases. Several factors contribute to this divergence. First, teachers’ previous experience with students’ emotional responses seems formative: T4’s report of a student who avoided him after a clarification episode suggests that this teacher’s negative perception was shaped, at least partially, by a difficult prior experience – in line with Tsui’s (2005) claim that teaching experience is not neutral knowledge but is actively and emotionally construed by teachers. On the other hand, teachers who have mostly observed positive results, such as students self-correcting successfully, are bound to reinforce a positive perceptual framework. Second, differences in teaching style may accentuate this divergence: teachers who privilege the maintenance of participation and communicative flow tend to have a positive view of clarification requests, whereas those more sensitive to face-threatening dynamics may be more alert to their risks.

T4’s report of external tension where clarification requests conflicted with content students had learned in private tutoring also indicates that the anxiety-inducing potential of this feedback move is shaped not only by the feedback itself but by the wider relational and institutional context in which it occurs. This corroborates Alnajrani and Al Fadda’s (2021) finding that learners’ beliefs about feedback significantly influence their language anxiety, and aligns with Yu et al.’s (2021) observation that feedback perceived as confusing or overly demanding can negatively affect learners’ emotions and motivation. The findings extend Ebrahimi et al.’s (2022) experimental finding that clarification requests reduce speaking anxiety by showing that in naturalistic classroom settings this effect is mediated by teacher perception rather than guaranteed by the type of feedback per se. They also contrast with Martín and Valdivia’s (2017) finding that high-anxiety learners in online settings preferred more explicit feedback, suggesting that the perceived effectiveness of implicit strategies such as clarification requests may be heavily dependent on the face-to-face classroom context and on whose perspective teacher or learner is being examined.

The practical implication is that professional development on corrective feedback should extend beyond the technical classification of feedback types to address teachers’ beliefs, prior experiences, and awareness of the affective consequences of their delivery choices. Because teachers within the same school can hold

fundamentally different perceptions of the same strategy, students in different classrooms may receive markedly different emotional experiences of correction pointing to the value of structured, school-level dialogue among teachers about their feedback beliefs and experiences.

CONCLUSION

This research investigates the perceptions of English teachers at MTsN 2 Makassar on the influence of clarification requests on the students' anxiety. The majority of teachers considered clarification requests as a positive feedback strategy that relieves anxiety by encouraging self-repair, promoting the willingness to participate, boosting confidence, and offering a less face-threatening form of correction. Yet, the report from a single teacher suggested that clarification requests may also augment anxiety via the reduction of participation, the generation of pressure in communication, and outright avoidance in one case. The results imply that the emotional impact of clarification requests is not homogeneous but contingent upon the way feedback is delivered and how learners are interpreted in classroom interaction. This study has several limitations. The sample was limited to four teachers at a single school, which restricts the generalizability of the findings, and it relied primarily on teachers' self-reported perceptions rather than students' own experiences of anxiety. Teachers are encouraged to use clarification requests as a supportive type of feedback that keeps the conversation going (delivered with a steady tone, sufficient wait time, and positive reassurance) and to adapt this to the individual student's proficiency and comfort level. Future research should examine how specific delivery features (tone, timing, frequency) mediate the anxiety-related effects of clarification requests and include students' own perspectives in a wider variety of educational settings.

REFERENCES

- Agustina, B. N., Hanafi, N., Nurtaat, L., & Sujana, I. M. (2023). Students' anxiety in learning English (A study at the 8th grade of SMPN 6 Mataram). *Jurnal Ilmiah Mandala Education*, 8, 1583–1588.
- Alnajrani, F., & Al Fadda, H. (2021). The perceptions of beginner EFL students on corrective feedback in speaking classes in relation to their levels of foreign language anxiety. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 11(5), 27–37.
- Bartoshuk, L. M. (2019). Sensation and perception. In *The Cambridge handbook of the intellectual history of psychology* (pp. 88–110). Cambridge University Press.
- Borg, S. (2003). Teacher cognition in language teaching: A review of research on what language teachers think, know, believe, and do. *Language Teaching*, 36(2), 81–109.
- Cooper, K. M., Downing, V. R., & Brownell, S. E. (2018). The influence of active learning practices on student anxiety in large-enrollment college science classrooms. *International Journal of STEM Education*, 5(1), Article 23.

- Dewaele, J.-M. (2010). *Emotions in multiple languages*. Springer.
- Ebrahimi, S. S., Rahimi, F., & Sepehri, M. (2022). Impact of metalinguistic vs. clarification request feedback on the speaking anxiety of Iranian students in IELTS preparatory classes. *Journal of Language and Translation*, 12(2), 1–14.
- Ghariblaki, Z., & Poorahmadi, M. (2017). The effect of recast vs. clarification request as two types of corrective feedback on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' structural knowledge. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 8(1), 87–96.
- Horwitz, E. (2001). Language anxiety and achievement. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 21, 112–126.
- Horwitz, E., Horwitz, M., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal*, 70(2), 125–132.
- Irwanto. (2002). *Psikologi umum*. PT Prenhallindo.
- Krashen, S. D. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. Pergamon Press.
- Lyster, R., & Ranta, L. (1997). Corrective feedback and learner uptake: Negotiation of form in communicative classrooms. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 19(1), 37–66.
- MacIntyre, P. D. (1999). Language anxiety: A review of the research for language teachers. In D. J. Young (Ed.), *Affect in foreign language and second language learning* (pp. 24–45).
- MacIntyre, P. D., & Gardner, R. C. (1994). The subtle effects of language anxiety on cognitive processing in the second language. *Language Learning*, 44(2), 283–305.
- Martín, S., & Alvarez Valdivia, I. M. (2017). Students' feedback beliefs and anxiety in online foreign language oral tasks. *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*, 14, Article 18.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (2nd ed.). Sage.
- Robbins, S. P. (2003). *Organizational behavior* (10th ed.). Prentice Hall.
- Sadaf, Qureshi, N., & Sharif, I. (2025). Investigating the psychological impact of corrective feedback on ESL students' language anxiety. *Inverge Journal of Social Sciences*, 4, 53–61.
- Swain, M. (2005). The output hypothesis: Theory and research. In *Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning* (pp. 471–483). Routledge.
- Tsui, A. B. M. (2005). Expertise in teaching: Perspectives and issues. In *Expertise in second language learning and teaching* (pp. 167–189).
- Wisniewski, B., Röhl, S., & Fauth, B. (2022). The perception problem: A comparison of teachers' self-perceptions and students' perceptions of instructional quality. *Learning Environments Research*, 25(3), 775–802.
- Yu, S., Geng, F., Liu, C., & Zheng, Y. (2021). What works may hurt: The negative side of feedback in second language writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 54, Article 100850.

Zhang, Q., Saharuddin, N., & Aziz, N. A. A. (2022). The analysis of teachers' perceptions of moral education curriculum. *Frontiers in Psychology, 13*, Article 967927.