Impact of Prompts as Corrective Feedback Strategy on Teaching /θ/ and /ð/ among Iranian Intermediate EFL Learners

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Abstract
This study investigated the effects of prompts as corrective feedback strategy on teaching /θ/ and /ð/ sounds to Iranian EFL learners. To achieve this objective, after 30 students studying English at a language institute took a placement test, the intermediate-level students were selected based on their scores on this test. They were randomly assigned to one experimental group and one control group. The experimental group was instructed these two sounds giving prompts as corrective feedback, while the control group received no feedback. In this experimental study, two teacher-made tests on sounds /θ/ and /ð/ were administered to the participants before and after the treatment. After collecting the data and confirming normality of them; through employing two independent-samples *t* tests and two paired-samples *t* tests, the collected data were analyzed. The results indicated that language learners in the experimental group did not significantly outperform in the posttest; thus, it can be concluded that prompts were not an effective feedback in teaching these two sounds to Iranian intermediate EFL learners. Findings of the present study can help language teachers and teacher trainers in teaching these complex sounds to Iranian EFL learners.

Keywords: corrective feedback; error correction; form-focused instruction; prompt; sounds /θ/ and /ð/

Introduction

Students learning English as a second or foreign language most often need to work on their pronunciation (Levelle & Levis, 2014; McCrocklin & Link, 2016; Yamaguchi, 2002). Unfortunately for such students, pronunciation is usually paid less attention to as other skills are assumed to be more prominent (Isaacs, 2009; Kelly, 1969; Lang, Weng, Shen, & Wang, 2012). In effect, development of pronunciation is not that much easy and thus pronunciation learning is regarded as a complex task since it needs knowledge of appropriate sounds in particular contexts as well as the use of vocal organs to articulate those sounds, which requires extensive practice and feedback. Skills and strategies are required to enrich the students in their pronunciation so that they can approach native-like pronunciation. As a result, the more similar one's pronunciation is to that of a native speaker, the more likely his speech will be recognized as intelligible and understandable (Riaz, 2015).

Several studies have attempted to find effective methods and techniques to teach pronunciation, as for many language learners, phonological development is essential (Thomson & Derwing, 2015). This affects their effective use of language and is linked to orthographical development (Wang, Park, & Lee, 2006), feelings of belonging (Gluszek, 2010), confidence,

willingness to communicate (Derwing, Munro, Foote, Waugh, & Fleming, 2014), and overall language development (French, 2006).

Among the teaching techniques, many researchers have recently been interested in exploring the contribution of corrective feedback (CF) in second/foreign language learning. Feedback which is given on students' utterances plays a crucial role in classrooms. Brandet (2008) explained feedback as the information provided which is relevant to learners' performance on a task. Lyster and Ranta (1997) identified six different corrective feedback types based on the descriptive study of teacher–student interaction in French immersion classrooms. They include: recasts, explicit correction, elicitation, metalinguistic clues, clarification requests, and repetition.

Prompts as corrective feedback have two other terms that are used interchangeably to refer to this kind of feedback, i.e. negotiation of form (Lyster, 1998b; Lyster, 2002; and Lyster & Ranta, 1997) and form-focused negotiation (Lyster, 2002). Lyster and Mori (2006) introduce prompts as a range of feedback types, consisting of four prompting moves: elicitation, metalinguistic clue, clarification request, and repetition. All these moves offer learners a chance to self-repair by withholding the correct form.

A growing number of research have investigated the effectiveness of different types of corrective feedback in EFL context (Fungula, 2013; Haryanto, 2015; Iraji et al., 2014; Karimi & Asadnia, 2015; Mohammadi Darabad, 2014; Roothooft & Breeze, 2016; Zarei & Rahnama, 2013; Zohrabi & Behboudnia, 2017; to name a few). Pedagogically, corrective feedback is an important component of focus-on-form (FFI) instruction, referring to a teacher's response to learner errors (Zhao, 2009). FFI focuses on catching learners' attention on some specific issues in teaching. Indeed, FFI intends to teach some particular structures and highlights them during teaching process. Relevant to FFI, corrective feedback tries to draw learners' attention on mistakes or errors that they make during language production. The present study is an attempt to probe the effectiveness of FFI and CF in teaching pronunciation /θ/ and /ð/ to Iranian EFL learners. To the knowledge of the researchers, little research has been conducted investigating the effective techniques to teach these two sounds which are absent in Persian. As such, applying prompt as a corrective feedback strategy can be considered as a novel technique in teaching these sounds in the Iranian context.

The current study is motivated by the question whether prompts can affect teaching pronunciation of sounds /θ/ and /ð/ to Iranian EFL learners. The following research questions (RQ) guide the study:

RQ1: Do prompts affect pronunciation of /θ/ among Iranian EFL learners?
RQ2: Do prompt affect pronunciation of /ð/ among Iranian EFL learners?

Literature Review

Teaching Pronunciation

In the 1970s, pronunciation teaching was considered a priority in L2 classrooms by proponents of the audio-lingual approach, who emphasized mastery of nativelike pronunciation (especially phonemic contrasts) through the use of minimal-pair drills and imitation of appropriate models (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, 1996). The nativeness assumptions in the audio-lingual approach were, however, not well supported by L2 speech research evidence, which has convincingly shown that (a) L2 speech is typically foreign-accented, mainly due to the interaction between the learners' age and the first language (L1) (Flege, Munro, & MacKay, 1995; Piske, MacKay, & Flege, 2001), and (b) very few adult learners achieve nativelike pronunciation in their L2 (Ioup, Boustagi, El Tigi, & Moselle, 1994; Moyer, 1999).

The inevitability of foreign accent led many researchers as well as practitioners to consider pronunciation as an unteachable subject and, consequently, as Celce-Murcia et al. (1996) and Levis (2005) pointed out, to completely ignore pronunciation teaching in their L2 instructional syllabi. Yet, there now exists a revived interest in pronunciation teaching, based on the premise that the ultimate goal of L2 speech learning is to achieve not only accurate but also fluent usage of "intelligible" pronunciation for the purpose of successful L2 communication. Instead of aiming to eliminate pronunciation errors to foster accent-free speech, researchers who support this view stress that instruction should focus only on aspects of pronunciation that influence intelligibility and comprehensibility in ways that make L2 communication more successful (Derwing & Munro, 2005; Field, 2005).

Form-focused Instruction and Corrective Feedback

Lightbown and Spada (2013) defined form-focused instruction (FFI) as a type of "instruction that draws attention to the forms and structures of the language within the context of communicative interaction. This may be done by giving metalinguistic information, simply highlighting the form, or by providing corrective feedback" (p. 218). Although a large body of FFI research is informed by grammar instruction, it is by no means confined to this category alone by definition. In fact, form has been predominantly used in SLA research to represent grammar or grammatical form; however, some scholars have rejected this reductionism (Ellis, 2001). The term form he adds, is intended to include phonological, lexical, grammatical, and pragmalinguistic aspects of language (Doughty & Williams, 1998; Ellis et al., 2001).

Several studies reveled that FFI can positively impact learners' developing system of second language (L2) morphosyntax not only at a controlled level but also at a spontaneous level (Norris & Ortega, 2000; Spada & Tomita, 2010). Although it is often assumed that the empirical findings of L2 grammar studies may be applicable to all types of language features, such as L2 lexis (e.g., Schmitt, 2008) and L2 pragmatics (e.g., Rose & Kasper, 2002), it is surprising that little attention has been given to FFI research in the domain of L2 phonetic development.

Corrective feedback is a prominent aspect in FFI as it focuses on drawing learners' attention to the mistakes and errors that they make during their production. Corrective feedback has been practiced in many English as a Second Language (ESL) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes. A large number of studies on CF have been conducted in morphosyntactic aspect (e.g., Lyster, 1998a; Mackey et al., 2000; Kim & Han, 2007), grammatical aspect (e.g., DeKeyser, 1998; Ammar, 2003; Lyster, 2004; Ellis, 2007; Yang & Lyster, 2010; Sheen, 2011), lexical aspect (e.g., Mackey & Goo, 2007; Dilans, 2010; Elgort, 2011), and pragmatic aspect (e.g., Joan & Kaya, 2006; Takimoto, 2008; Nipaspong & Chinokul, 2010; Nguyen et al., 2012). Research has also been found in the area of phonology (Zhao, 1997; Jensen & Vinther, 2003; Sheen, 2004, 2010; Sato & Lyster, 2012; Saito & Lyster, 2012; Li, 2012; Lyster et al., 2013), however, few studies, if any, have been found to investigate application of prompts as corrective feedback in teaching pronunciation of /θ/ and /ð/.

Prompts include a variety of signals other than alternative reformulations that push learners to self-repair (Lyster, 1998a; Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Lyster, 2002). An example of prompts is shown in (1). In the following example, L and T stand for learner and teacher, respectively.

(1) L: I have finished my homework when my father arrived.
   T: I think you should change your sentence.
   L: I has finished my homework when my father arrived.
   T: think about past perfect *had!*

L: I had finished my homework when my father arrived

Another example for prompt reads as follows (Ito, 2015):

(2)L: I will go back to home tomorrow.

T: You will go back…?

L: Oh, I will go back home tomorrow.

In the above example, the learner reproduces the correct form after receiving prompt feedback. What this feedback does to the learner is to give a clue to elicit modified output. The most easily identifiable hint to identify prompts as corrective feedback is that prompts do not provide positive evidence (i.e., the participants would not hear the instructor's model pronunciation of the word) and a wide variety of prompt types are possible (Gooch et al., 2016).

Ammar and Spada (2006) compared prompts with recasts in form-focused instruction in three sixth-grade intensive ESL classrooms over a 4-week period. Results showed that all three groups benefited from the form-focused instruction, and that the two feedback groups benefited the most, outperforming the control group on posttests. The group receiving prompts significantly outperformed the recasts group. What is more interesting in the study is that the effectiveness of recasts depended on the learners' proficiency. High-proficiency learners benefited equally from both prompts and recasts, while low-proficiency learners benefited significantly more from prompts than recasts. They concluded that the effectiveness of any corrective feedback technique needed to be evaluated in relation to learners' proficiency levels.

Ammar (2008) examined the impact of recasts in comparison to prompts and no corrective feedback on francophone learners' acquisition of English third person possessive determiners. Sixty-four students from three intact intensive English as a second language classes carried out 11 communicative activities during which they received corrective feedback according to the condition they were assigned to. An oral picture-description task and a computerized fill-in-the-blank task that kept record of participants' latency to retrieve the correct forms were administered prior to the treatment and immediately after it ended. Four weeks later the oral picture description task was re-administered. Analyses of individual participants' oral data revealed that prompts were effective in helping learners move up to more advanced stages of a developmental possessive determiner scale. This was especially apparent for low-proficiency learners. Data from the computerized task showed that prompts allowed learners to retrieve possessive determiner knowledge faster than recasts.

Naini (2008) explored the effects of form-focused instruction and feedback type on learning. The learners in treatment group received corrective feedback in the form of prompts, while the learners in the control group received the same instruction as the experimental group without any kind of feedback. The participants were assigned different tasks in order to use the aimed structures during the 15 treatment sessions (30 hours). She found the outperformance of the participants in experimental group over the performance of the participants in control group.

Lyster and Izquierdo (2009) researched the differential effects of prompts and recasts on the acquisition of grammatical gender. The results showed both groups significantly improved accuracy, irrespective of feedback type. They concluded that learners receiving recasts had benefited from the repeated exposure to positive exemplars as well as from opportunities to infer negative evidence, while learners receiving prompts had benefited from the repeated exposure to negative evidence as well as from opportunities to produce modified output.

Ellis, et al. (2009) conducted a classroom-based study which investigated the impact of explicit and implicit CF on the acquisition of the regular past tense "-ed" ending by lower-intermediate adult ESL learners in New Zealand. Also here the feedback groups did better than the controls, and prompts involving the use of metalinguistic information proved to be more

effective than recasts in the long run, particularly with respect to the development of implicit knowledge as well as the occurrence of system-learning.

Cho's (2012) study concerned whether prompts and recasts that occur during interaction could play a role in L2 development. Adopting an untimed grammatical judgment test and an elicited oral imitation test to measure explicit and implicit knowledge, this study examined the relative effects of prompts and recasts on L2 development of past tense forms. The participants were pre-intermediate learners enrolled in English as a foreign language (EFL) classes at a university in Korea. The learners were assigned to two prompt groups, a recast group, and a control group. The analysis of the untimed grammaticality judgment test revealed that the participants promoted their explicit knowledge of the past tense forms of regular and irregular verbs when prompts were provided. The analysis also showed that the learners who received recasts improved their test scores but only in irregular past tense forms.

Hosseini Fatemi and Harati (2014) conducted a quasi-experimental study in EFL classrooms, investigating whether corrective feedback could enhance grammatical accuracy in the learners' speech; and if it could, which type of CF is more effective than the other one. The 96 participants of the study, who were selected out of 169 freshmen students on the basis of a written pretest, took a picture description test the results of which were the criterion for their random divisions into three homogeneous groups. Whenever language learners in two experimental groups made any grammatical errors during the study, consistent CF, recast for one group and prompts for the other one, was provided for them and students in the third group, who functioned as the control group, received no CF for their morphosyntactic errors. The results of the study indicated that negative feedback in general and prompts in particular may have a facilitative role in foreign language acquisition.

Huang and Jia (2016) aimed at finding out similarities and differences between teacher and student perceptions of corrective feedback (CF) on pronunciation for students' presentations in advanced English class through a group interview and a questionnaire survey. Both teachers and students agreed that CF is not only important but necessary since junior and senior students still have pronunciation problems and the best time to provide CF is soon after presentation. However, they differed in concern about students' self-respect, the types of errors that should receive CF and preference for the types of CF. In particular, students' eagerness to learn exceeded their concern about self-respect. Teachers turned to offer CF to repeated errors, while students would like to receive more than teachers could offer. Moreover, teachers regarded prompt as being more effective, whereas students preferred recast to prompt considering the latter to be more demanding though they held similar views about explicit correction.

Khojastehjejad and Zareipur (2017) explored if providing recast and prompt by teacher would have different effects on the grammatical development of Iranian learners of English as a foreign language with high and low anxiety level. In fact, the study investigated the effectiveness of corrective feedback on learners' grammatical achievement. After administering a proficiency test, sixty participants out of eighty-five were selected from the intact classes at two language institutes in Kerman. These selected participants were randomly assigned to three groups namely, prompt, recast and control group each comprising of twenty participants. During a four-session treatment, participants were given corrective feedback (recasts and prompts) while control group did not receive any kind of feedback. The obtained results indicated that participants, who received planned focus on form using recasts feedback, outperformed those students who received planned focus on form in terms of prompts feedback and control group in the posttest.

Becoming proficient at pronunciation in English as a foreign language context, where there is no native speaker available to model and follow makes it an extremely perplexing activity

for students to acquire such languages and correct pronunciations of the words of such languages. As Geylanioğlu and Dikilitaş, (2012) put it "The difficulty posed by pronunciation is closely related to little exposure to interaction with native speakers, distinctive phonological system of L1 as in Turkish, a shallow orthographic language" (p. 38). Therefore, it is a crystal clear fact that students of a second language assume achieving the pronunciation of that language problematic to learn and understand unless they either have highly educated teachers with correct pronunciation and sufficient practice or use effective techniques to learn correct pronunciation. Likewise, another problem with pronunciation is that some sounds are absent in some languages while are present in other languages. It means there is no exact corresponding among sound systems of all languages. Two phonetic sounds /θ/ and /ð/ (th) are absent in Persian; as such, it is problematic for Iranian EFL learners to learn such sounds. Thus, it is worth employing an appropriate method of teaching these sounds to English foreign language learners and this study was an attempt to teach these two problematic sounds to Iranian EFL learners effectively.

Method

This study followed an experimental pretest-treatment-posttest design in which random sampling procedure was used and it was conducted in a language institute in Dezful, Iran. In this study, attempt was made to probe the effectiveness of prompts in teaching pronunciation of /θ/ and /ð/ to Iranian EFL learners. The participants were randomly assigned to one experimental group (EG) and one control group (CG). In the experimental group, prompts were applied as the corrective feedback, while in the control group, the participants received no feedback. The same pretest and posttest were administered in both groups.

Participants

The first participant group of the present study consisted of 30 female intermediate Iranian EFL learners whose age ranged between 18 and 26 years old and they were Iranian and their mother tongue was Persian.[1] They were selected randomly from the EFL learners studying English at Tak English Language Institute in Dezful, Iran. They took the Quick Placement Test developed by UCLES in 2001. The placement test was administered among 60 students; those whose scores on the test fell one standard deviation above or below the mean score were selected as the sample population of the study. They were intermediate EFL learners. The placement test was administered to ascertain that the sample was homogeneous in terms of language proficiency. Then, the participants were randomly assigned to two groups, each of which included 15 participants.

The second group of participants were three nonnative English raters who were Iranian and their age ranged between 30 and 45. They were English language teachers who had IELTS certificates and their overall band scores were 8.0 or above. They were both BA and MA TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) holders and their English teaching experience varied from 5 to 15 years. They were female and their mother tongue was Persian. They were recruited to rate the speech tokens recorded during the pretest and posttest.

The third group included the instructor who was the first author of the study. She was Iranian and her native language was Persian. She was an MA student of TEFL and had taught

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[1] Dezful is a city in Khouzestan Province located in the South-West of Iran. As this province has border-lines with Iraq, Arabs live in certain cities. Although the researchers already knew that no Arabs live in Dezful and all the inhabitants are native speakers of Persian, the participants were checked in terms of being born to Persian mothers and fathers.

English in language institutes in Iran for 4 years. In order to ensure the quality of instruction, the classes were held on an odd-even schedule. The experimental group had classes on even days and the control group on odd days. The whole treatment period lasted for around three weeks.

Materials and Instruments

In the current study, a series of materials were used during the data collection procedure. A set of words which included the sounds /θ/ and /ð/ were prepared by the researchers and were presented in isolation or in context. Since there was no material for teaching these sounds, the researchers selected individual and contextualized words considering the learners' proficiency level. In addition, certain instructive video and voice clips were downloaded from Youtube and Engvid websites (www.youtube.com and www.engvid.com). The clips were specifically developed by English native teachers for nonnative students. In the video clips, these two sounds (/θ/ and /ð/) are taught by showing the place of articulation and repeating words with target sounds in isolation and in context.

A Quick Placement Test (UCLES, 2001) was administered to guarantee the participants' homogeneity in terms of their proficiency level. This placement test contained 60 multiple-choice questions on grammar and vocabulary and the participants' responses were scored on a scale of 60 points. Moreover, a pronunciation placement test was employed to ensure that the participants were at the same level in terms of pronunciation. It was downloaded from teacherspayteachers website (www.teacherspayteachers.com) developed by Gunther Breaux. This test uses the fact that ESL/EFL learners have problems differentiating these sounds: right, white, light, night. Thus, it can quickly and accurately predict English speaking ability and overall English ability.

A pronunciation test was administered to the participants as the pretest and posttest before and after the treatment to measure their phonetic ability before the treatment and to measure their improvement after the treatment. The pretest and the posttest which were parallel consisted of some individual and contextualized words that included these sounds /θ/ and /ð/. The tests were researcher-made and were composed of four parts. The parts were single words with target sounds, some sentences, texts and two questions for interview. The interview questions aimed at examining the pronunciation of these two sounds in a context which is natural. Indeed, it was intended to see how the participants pronounced these sounds in a naturally occurring speech. The tests enjoyed a Likert scale in which each word/sentence/text with the target sound should be scored in the following way: 1= very heavy non-native pronunciation 2= poor pronunciation 3= reasonable pronunciation 4= close to native pronunciation 5=native like pronunciation. The pronunciation test was piloted on a group of 20 learners who shared some commonalities with the sample population of the study. The reliability coefficient was calculated and it was reported as 0.78. The validity of the tests was confirmed by three experts in the field so that where required, the words were modified based on the experts' comments to improve.

Treatment

To begin the data collection procedure, a placement test was administered to 60 Iranian EFL learners. Thirty learners were selected and formed the sample of the study based on their scores on the placement test. The selected participants were randomly assigned to two groups of 15, one experimental group and one control group. Then, the pretest was given to all participants of the study. The test consisted of four parts which the participants read aloud and they were recorded. After the pretest was administered, the three raters scored the test individually. Then, inter-rater reliability of the test was computed and its Cohen's Kappa coefficient was reported

0.75. Therefore, the test had acceptable reliability and the participants' mean score of the three scorings was determined as their performance in the pretest.

In the prompt group, the participants were taught through using prompts as corrective feedback. The sounds in question were first taught applying different techniques such as video as well as voice clips, the teacher's direct elaborations on these sounds, and employing different examples in isolation, in words, or in sentences. Then, the participants read some texts which contained these sounds. If there were any errors in pronunciation of these two sounds, the teacher did not correct them directly. She stopped them and asked them to repeat it. She sometimes asked other students to correct the errors or used expressions such as *pardon*? to make them aware of their errors. In addition, she used body language such as smiling, raising eyebrows or shrugging the shoulders to let the students know that an error was made. This way the participants recognized that there was an error and tried to correct it themselves.

The control group was taught the same materials and the same teaching procedure was followed except for the corrective feedback. They received no feedback when an error was made by the participants.

Treatment period took 8 sessions and each session lasted for 45 minutes. At the end of the eighth session, the posttest was administered to both groups. The data collection procedure from its inception to its termination took 4 weeks during which the placement test, pretest and posttest were administered. After the administration of the posttest, the same raters scored them. To ensure the rater reliability, inter-rater reliability test was computed and the Cohen's Kappa coefficient was 0.73.

Data Analysis Procedure

Normality of the data was checked through Kolmogrov-Smirnov test. To demonstrate whether there was a statistically significant difference between the two groups' performance on the posttest, two independent-samples *t* tests were conducted. Moreover, to see whether or not there was a statistically significant discrepancy between the participants' performance in pretest and posttest, two paired-samples t-tests—one for /θ/ and one for /ð/— were run on the data.

Results

Normality of Data

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to examine the normality of the data collected from the pretests and posttests.

Table 1. *Normality of Data*

	Groups	Kolmogorov-Smirnov		
		Statistic	*df*	*Sig.*
Scores	G1	.207	15	.130[*]
	G2	.197	15	.120
	G3	.209	15	.130
	G4	.129	10	.200[*]
	G5	.141	15	.200[*]
	G6	.171	15	.200[*]
	G7	.149	20	.200[*]
	G8	.214	15	.200

The results of this test showed that in both groups, distribution of collected data was normal. The collected data included two pretests of sound /θ/, two pretests of sound /ð/, two posttests for sound /θ/ and two posttests of sound /ð/. For both groups, significance level was higher than the probability level (0.05). Therefore, *t* tests could be conducted.

Research Question One

The first research question was: *Do prompts affect pronunciation of /θ/ among Iranian EFL learners?* The purpose of this question was to probe whether this corrective feedback was effective in teaching sound /θ/. An independent-samples *t* test as well as a paired-samples *t* test was run on the data and the results are displayed in the following tables.

Table 2. *Descriptive statistics for the EG and the CG on sound /θ/*

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Prompt	Control	15	13.2230	4.20271	.93975
	Experimental	15	15.3145	5.46866	1.22283

The CG's mean score equaled 13.22, while the EG's mean score turned out to be 15.31, which is not quite a large difference. Hence, to determine, in solid terms, whether or not the difference between these two mean scores (and thus the two groups) was statistically significant, the *p* value under the *Sig.* (2-tailed) column in the *t* test table below (Table 3) had to be checked.

Table 3. *Independent-samples t test for the EG and the CG on sound /θ/*

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances				
		F	*Sig.*	t	*df*	*Sig.* (2-tailed)
	Equal variances assumed	2.994	.092	-1.356	28	.183
Prompt	Equal variances not assumed			-1.356	25.639	.184

Based on the information presented in the above table (Table 3), it was found that there was no statistically significant difference between the posttests of the EG and the CG as the *p* value was greater than 0.05 (*p* = 0.883). To check whether the EG had any improvement after the treatment, the paired-samples t test was computed and the results are displayed in Table 4.

Table 4. *Paired-samples t test for prompt group on sound /θ/*

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	*Sig.* (2-tailed)
Pretest	12.73	2.01	.52	.15	14	.883
Posttest	15.31	2.06	.53			

According to the results of data analysis (Table 4), it was revealed that there was no statistically significant difference between the pretest and posttest of prompt group in teaching sound /θ/ as the *p* value was greater than 0.05 (*p* = 0.883).

Research Question Two

The second question was: *Do prompts affect pronunciation of /ð/ among Iranian EFL learners?* This question explored the effect of prompt on pronunciation of /ð/. To this end, through one independent-samples *t* test and one paired-samples *t* test, the participants' performance was compared.

Table 5. *Descriptive statistics for the EG and the CG on sound /ð/*

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Prompt	Control	15	12.3569	3.96214	.96325
	Experimental	15	14.9514	4.24985	1.32354

Table 5 shows that the CG's mean score was 12.35 and the EG's mean score was found to be 14.95. To understand whether the difference between these two mean scores (and thus the two groups) was statistically significant or not, the researchers consulted the *p* value in Table 6.

Table 6. *Independent-samples t test for the EG and the CG on sound /θ/*

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Equal variances assumed	.169	.683	.589	28	.560
Prompt	Equal variances not assumed			.589	27.296	.560

As it could be understood from Table 6, there was not a statistically significant difference in the posttest results of the CG and those of the EG, $t(28) = .589$, $p = .560$ (two-tailed). In other words, the two groups did not differ significantly in terms of the posttest. To check whether the EG had any improvement after the treatment, the paired-samples t test was computed and the results are displayed in Table 7.

Table 7. *Paired-Samples t test for prompt group on sound /ð/*

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pretest	13.86	1.72	.44	.30	14	.762
Posttest	14.95	1.38	.35			

The result demonstrated in Table 7 revealed that there was a difference between the pretest and posttest mean scores; however, this difference was not statistically significant. The *p* value was greater than 0.05 ($p = 0.762$); therefore, prompt was not effective in teaching sound /ð/.

Discussion and Conclusion

The results of data analysis showed that there was not a statistically significant difference between the prompt group's performance and control group's performance in the posttest. Further, no significant discrepancy was observed between the EG's pretests and posttests of both sounds.

As such, it is denoted that prompts as corrective feedback strategy was not effective in teaching sounds /θ/ and /ð/ to Iranian EFL learners.

One explanation for this finding may be attributed to the fact that application of prompts cannot probably attract the learners' attention toward learning pronunciation and stimulate their curiosity. This finding is consistent with the findings of some other studies. For example, Huang and Jia (2016) examined the similarities and differences between teachers' and students' perception about recasts and prompts. They found that teachers regarded prompt as being more effective, whereas students preferred recast to prompt considering the latter to be more demanding though they held similar views about explicit correction. Similarly, Khojastehnejad and Zareipur (2017) examined the effect of recasts and prompts on the grammatical development of Iranian EFL learners. The obtained results indicated that participants, who received planned focus on form using recasts feedback, outperformed those students who received planned focus on form in terms of prompts feedback and control group in the posttest.

Loewen and Philp (2006) maintained that as for prompts, they draw learners' attention from the ongoing communicative task to the well-formedness of the linguistic form, providing learners with opportunities to correct their errors through self-correction. Therefore, the pedagogical function of such feedback moves is to develop linguistic accuracy. However, that sort of strategy was not appropriate and practical in teaching sounds /θ/ and /ð/which are totally absent in Persian and which intermediate learners have not managed to produce them correctly. According to Lantolf (2000), 'indirect CF' should be favored, at least initially, over 'direct CF' because excessive feedback can thwart learner autonomy, yet such a claim cannot likely lead to success while we are dealing with teaching these two sounds which happen to be very problematic for Iranian EFL learners.

Sato and Lyster (2012) pointed out that prompts are considered to be effective both for developing accurate knowledge (procedural) by restructuring their already existing knowledge (declarative) and for enhancing the practice effect by pushing the learners to self–repair. Furthermore, prompts are techniques that "allow opportunities for learners to automatize the retrieval of target language knowledge that already exists in some form" as declarative knowledge, according to Lyster and Ranta (1997, p. 57). That is, prompts provide the learners a chance to recall and use existing declarative knowledge to make a necessary correction. Following these claims, as for Iranian EFL learners at intermediate level, since they still may not have the existing knowledge of the two sounds /θ/ and /ð/, prompts might not work well.

Prompts seem not to be ideal for pronunciation improvement of *high proficiency* EFL learners. Riaz (2015) claimed that in effect, development of pronunciation is not that much easy and thus pronunciation learning is regarded as a complex task since it needs knowledge of appropriate sounds in particular contexts as well as the use of vocal organs to articulate those sounds, which requires extensive practice and feedback. Several studies (Ammar, 2008; Ammar & Spada, 2006; Cho, 2012; Ellis et al., 2001; Hosseini Fatemi & Harati, 2014; Lyester & Izquierdo, 2009; Naini, 2008; to name a few) indicated that prompts have beneficial effects on the development of grammatical accuracy among low-proficiency EFL learners. The findings of the current study showed that the intermediate EFL learners probably prefer explicitness over implicitness in learning pronunciation. Van Patten (2003) advocated that explicit corrective feedback in the form of negotiating for meaning can help learners notice their errors and create form-meaning connections, and this facilitates acquisition.

A number of studies demonstrated that FFI can positively impact learners' developing system of second language (L2) morphosyntax (Norris & Ortega, 2000; Spada & Tomita, 2010), L2 lexis (e.g., Schmitt, 2008) and L2 pragmatics (e.g., Rose & Kasper, 2002); however, the FFI

and its integral part, corrective feedback, could not contribute successfully in learning and teaching pronunciation particularly the sounds which are absent in the mother tongue of the EFL learners.

Concerning the effectiveness of prompts in teaching these two sounds, the conclusion that is drawn is that providing the learners with signals that push them to have self-repair cannot help the learners identify their errors and thus they cannot presumably get the hint how to correct the error that has been made. In addition, form-focused instruction is concerned with corrective feedback which catches learners' attention on some specific issues in teaching. The findings of the study suggested that prompts may not catch the learners' attention strongly and it is concluded that prompts are not efficient in removing learners' mistakes and errors and thus they will not be helpful in promoting second language (L2) pronunciation development.

The present study focused on the efficacy of employing prompts as corrective feedback in teaching two absent sounds in Persian. It was of high significance from two perspectives, the way of providing feedback and teaching absent components of a foreign language to EFL learners. Therefore, different groups can benefit from the results of this study. Teachers should know how to teach and what technique to apply according to the context in which they teach, such as EFL context or ESL contest, and the proximity of phonetic systems of the two languages. Thus, the ineffectuality of prompts in an EFL context in which these two sounds were absent can be a great help in teaching these sounds in other EFL and ESL contexts. As this technique cannot help teachers enrich the students in their pronunciation, they need to find the other techniques which prove to be effective in teaching pronunciation and can results in native-like pronunciation; a kind of pronunciation that will be recognized as intelligible and understandable (Riaz, 2015). Also, this can influence feelings of belonging to the community of the native language as well as confidence and having interest in communication in this language. Teacher trainers can benefit from the findings of the study, as well. They can teach pre- and in-service teachers to get familiar with different types of feedback and the way of teaching absent components. Material developers can also use the findings of this project in designing materials for language learners in a way that they can put emphasis on the corrective feedback types rather than prompts in the teacher's book which accompanies the student's book and workbook.

Since the data in this study have been taken merely from the Iranian context, it is important not to overgeneralize the results of the study and admit that replicational studies can contribute to building a rich body of knowledge.

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