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Effects of Scaffolded and Explicit Feedback on Iranian EFL Learners' Use of Articles in Oral Productions

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Abstract
This study aims to explore and compare the impacts of scaffolded and explicit feedback on Iranian EFL learners' correct use of articles in oral productions. To this end, 45 intermediate female EFL learners in three intact classes in a language institute in Behbahan, Iran were selected through convenience sampling and randomly assigned to two experimental groups of scaffolded and explicit and one control group. The research used a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental design in the form of a pretest, treatment, posttest, and delayed posttest. While the two experimental groups received either scaffolded or explicit feedback treatment, the control group received no feedback on their errors in the use of articles. The findings revealed that the EFL learners in the scaffolded CF and explicit groups outperformed those of the control group concerning the accurate use of both definite and indefinite articles in their oral productions. The implications of the results are also explicated.

Keywords: Corrective feedback; EFL learners; Explicit feedback; Oral production; Scaffolded feedback

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been a growing tendency on the part of researchers to explore oral corrective feedback (henceforth, CF) from the cognitive/interactionist and social interactionist perspectives (Althobaiti, 2014; Ellis, 2009; Wass, Timmermans, Harland, & McLean, 2018). This tendency is not toward the necessity of error correction but toward the efficacy of the type of CF delivered (Li, 2010). Nevertheless, there are inconclusive and mixed results as to which type of CF is more efficacious to learners (Bitchener, 2012).

From a theoretical perspective, the discussion for the role of feedback in L2 development is closely associated with whether or not negative evidence is required in the process of language learning. Negative evidence, otherwise known as corrective feedback (Ellis, 2009), is the information that signals to the learner that he or she has produced an incorrect utterance (Nassaji, 2020).

Explicit and scaffolded feedback are two forms of CF addressed in the present study. While in the former, the teacher's provision of direct assistance indicates that the learner has produced an incorrect utterance (Ellis, 2017; Li, 2010), in the latter, the teacher's assistance is provided incrementally to meet learners' different corrective needs (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994).

Despite the clear preponderance of research studies delving into the impacts of various CF types, i.e. implicit and explicit (e.g., Lyster &

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Izquierdo, 2009; Rassaei, 2013, 2015, 2019; Sheen, 2007) within a cognitive/interactionist approach, scarce specific studies have addressed the effects of CF operationalized within a sociocultural theory. Particularly, the possible effects of the feedback in question on language learners' accurate use of definite as well as indefinite articles have not yet been explored. More specifically, to the best of our knowledge, no studies have examined the extent to which these feedback types affect language development in terms of the indefinite and definite articles.

Thus, to gain a thorough understanding of CF, a multiple-perspective approach taking both cognitive/ interactionist and sociocultural approaches into consideration seems essential (Ellis, 2010). To fill these gaps in the literature, we attempted to address the impacts of scaffolded and explicit CF on the use of articles in language learners' oral productions from the cognitive as well as socio-cultural perspectives. More precisely, the following research question guided our study:

1. Do scaffolded and explicit CF have significant effects on enhancing Iranian EFL learners' accurate use of the English definite article in oral tests? If yes, which type of CF is more effective?
2. Do scaffolded and explicit CF have significant effects on enhancing Iranian EFL learners' accurate use of the English indefinite article in oral tests? If yes, which type of CF is more effective?

The results of this research may redound to the theory and pedagogy of language education. It may also spur language teachers on to expend collaborative effort as a form-based error correction culture that goes beyond a mere communication strategy within both sociocultural and cognitive/interactionist perspectives.

Corrective feedback

The role of CF in second language instruction has received much attention in recent years (Chen & Nassaji, 2018). Li (2010) viewed CF as the teacher's responses to a learner's ill-formed language utterances. That is, CF refers to any indication that the learner produced incorrect target language utterance and to the provision of the targeted form and some explanations concerning the error (Ellis, Loewen, & Erlam, 2006). Due to the complicated nature of CF, scholars hold differing views about CF and even some researchers question the necessity of feedback (e.g., Truscott, 1996, 1999) while others advocate it (e.g., Sheen, 2004).

Different scholars have endeavored to categorize CF in different ways. For example, Lyster and Ranta (1997) classified CF into six types including recasts, repetition, elicitation, clarification request, explicit correction, and metalinguistic feedback. Likewise, Carroll and Swain (1993) classified explicit correction and metalinguistic feedback as explicit CF. Ellis (2009) also classified oral CF into input-providing in which the learner is provided with the correct structure and output-prompting in which the learner is motivated to self-correct.

Explicit CF and cognitive interactionist perspective

Although researchers have offered different definitions of explicit CF, they are unanimous in defining explicit CF as an overtly immediate correction of learners' ungrammatical structures (Carroll & Swain, 1993; Housen & Pierrard, 2005).

From a cognitive/interactionist perspective, CF plays a leading role in interactions and contributes to L2 learning either implicitly or explicitly (Gass, 2003; Long, 1996). CF within this perspective provokes learners' cognitive processes including attention and noticing, regardless of continual dialogues engaged in interaction (Rassaei, 2014). Despite the wide recognition of the superiority of explicit CF over implicit CF in L2 development within cognitive/interactionist's view (Lantolf & Poehner, 2011), CF suffers from the disadvantage of treating learners' demands and capabilities as identical (Rassaei, 2019).

Scaffolded CF and sociocultural theory

Within this perspective, CF hinges on social relationship involved in the teacher-student interaction, and more emphasis is laid on how assistance through collaboration with a tutor or a more knowledgeable partner can assist language learners to carry out the tasks that they are not able to do independently (Nassaji & Swain, 2000). Accordingly, CF is visualized as feedback by which teachers help learners solve their language problems by providing scaffolds in a collaborative fashion (Rassaei, 2014). This assistance happens in what is recognized as the zone of proximal development or ZPD.

In Aljaafreh and Lantolf's (1994) regulatory scale, graduated, contingent, and dialogic assistance are three specific mechanisms of effective CF tailored to learners' ZPD. Similarly, Ellis (2003) shares the view that CF is a dialogic activity in which a more capable individual scaffolds a less capable one by providing appropriate help to solve problems.

Empirical studies

Despite a relatively huge amount of oral CF literature from the cognitive/ interactionist perspective, little research has been done on explicit and scaffolded oral CF operationalized within both cognitive/ interactionist and the sociocultural perspectives simultaneously. Nonetheless, several studies (e.g., Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994; Amirghassemi, Azabdaftari, & Saeidi, 2013; Banaruee, Khatin-Zadeh, & Ruegg, 2018; Erlam, Ellis, & Batstone, 2013; Nassaji & Swain, 2000; Sheen, 2007) were performed on CF types from the two perspectives.

Among these researchers, Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994) examined the effects of negotiated feedback on written errors of adult L2 learners by using a twelve-level 'Regulatory Scale in the English language institute of Delaware University. In this study, out of nine pre-intermediate adult learners, only three who were in the group of ZPD were selected. The help in this scale was tailored to the individual student's needs from the most implicit in each interactive move to the most explicit. They concluded that the level of the teacher's scaffolding was gradually diminished as learners became more independent.

In the same vein, the same regulatory scale was utilized by Nasaji and Swain (2000) in a university in Canada to appraise the effects of scaffolded CF on the incorrect use of English articles in writing. The participants were two Korean adult female intermediate language learners. Their findings suggested the positive effects of feedback provided in the area of ZPD.

According to an investigation conducted by Erlam, Ellis, and Batstone (2013), 15 adult L2 writers in New Zealand were assigned into two experimental groups, i.e. scaffolded CF group (n = 7) and explicit CF group (n = 8). In this study, some learners received scaffolded feedback based on sociocultural theory and some others were provided with direct feedback based on the cognitive approach with the two structures of past tense verb forms and English articles as target forms. The results revealed the effectiveness of scaffolded CF in promoting self-correction. Nevertheless, they concluded that there was no evidence of a reduction in the amount of assistance provided over time. Contrariwise, the explicit CF resulted in lower self-correction.

In a quasi-experimental survey, Amirghassemi, Azabdaftari, and Saeidi (2013) assessed the effectiveness of direct, indirect, and scaffolded CF in improving Iranian EFL learners' written accuracy using English articles as the target structure. Participants of the study were 115 low intermediate to intermediate language learners including males and females majoring in the English language. Their findings indicated that there was not much difference between the learners' performance in the experimental and control groups.

Evidently, the majority of the studies relied on the cognitive/ interactionist framework. What makes a clear distinction between the current study and the ones reviewed in this study is that little research has been performed into the impacts of explicit CF as a feedback type operationalized within the cognitive/interactionist framework compared to CF which is a type of feedback

associated with the socio-cultural paradigm.

METHODS

Design

The study adopted a quasi-experimental design in the form of a pretest, treatment, posttest, and delayed posttest entailing three intact classes randomly assigned to explicit, scaffolded, and control groups.

Participants

Forty-five intermediate Iranian female EFL learners selected through convenience sampling from three intact classes at a language institute in Behbahan, Iran took part in this study. They were assigned to three groups including two experimental (scaffolded and explicit) groups and one control group. The participants were all junior and senior high school students enjoying the same sociocultural background with Persian as their L1 and the age ranges of 15 to 20. They voluntarily opted in to the study.

Noteworthy to mention is that the consent of all the participants was obtained. Moreover, for the subjects under the age of 18, their assent and the permission of their parents were obtained for participation in the study.

Target structure

The target forms consisted of the English articles, i.e. 'the' and 'a' selected for the current study. The selection of articles was made for several reasons. Firstly, it is easy to extract these forms in meaning-centered tasks as well as communicative activities. Next, studies show that many language learners even advanced learners of English experience considerable difficulties using these forms in oral production tasks (Sheen, 2007). Moreover, due to the lack of the article system in the Persian language, Iranian EFL learners encounter some problems learning them. Besides, recent research has revealed mixed results concerning the effects of CF on diverse target forms.

Treatment materials

In the current study, eight short story tasks with a maximum of 750 words taken from language materials designed for EFL learners were utilized to tap learners' oral accuracy for treatment as well as testing sessions. The short stories were reviewed and confirmed by a panel of three experts in the field of language teaching. Three out of eight story tasks were employed for the pretest, posttest, and delayed posttest. It is worth mentioning that enormous care was taken to provide the learners with tasks of the same level of difficulty for the three testing occasions. During treatment sessions, five storytelling tasks were applied to elicit learners' desired responses to provide them with CF on their erroneous production of target structures. Noteworthy to mention is that the tasks in the instructional treatments were the same for the three groups and each session lasted about 90 minutes. The study took about two months starting from April 2019 and ending in June 2019.

Testing instrument

An oral production test (OPT) was adopted in the current study. It was administered as pre, post, and delayed post-tests to measure learning gains of the participants as a result of treatment sessions. The OPT is comprised of three distinctive short stories. The teacher asked the participants to retell stories in the pre, post, and delayed post-tests. The short stories provided the participants with appropriate settings to apply articles because of instructional treatments in their oral activities. The participants gave their written consent to audio record their oral utterances in pre, post, and delayed posttests for further consideration.

In terms of validity, an effort was made to select three language tasks of identical complexity level. The level of complexity was controlled by keeping the length of the stories at a maximum of 750 words. Furthermore, to ensure that the tasks were clear and intelligible to the participants and to lower task complexity, they were provided with a Farsi narration of the stories before performing the task. The lead researcher endeavored to cover a range of topics that were familiar to the learners. Moreover, test-retest reliability was

measured only for the control group. The correlation coefficients between pre and posttest and also between post and delayed posttest scores turned out to be 0.82 and 0.88, respectively.

Treatment procedures

Initially, the three classes were assigned to three conditions including two experimental (scaffolded and explicit) groups and one control group. For each of the five treatment sessions, the participants in each group were assigned into three groups of five. Then, each one of the participants of the three groups was provided with the short story to be equally involved in story retelling. Before retelling the story to the whole class, they were asked to read the story and discuss it within 15 minutes as a class. The participants were allowed to ask the instructor about the meanings of any words whose meanings were not clear to them. Having checked the participants' comprehension of the story, the instructor collected the stories and then read them aloud. As he read them, the learners jotted down keywords to retell the story. Having finished doing the storytelling in groups, the learners of each group retold the story for the whole class. The instructor asked each of the participants to make a short presentation by retelling two sentences of the story successively until the whole story was covered thoroughly. Upon making an error by the learners while using target structures, the instructor corrected it by providing feedback based on the participants' CF.

Data collection procedure

At the outset of the study and prior to the treatment, all the participants were provided with a pretest to investigate the differences between the three groups regarding their prior knowledge of the target items. In the pretest, the instructor distributed a short story to every single participant of the three groups to equally involve them in retelling the story. The participants practiced the task for 15 minutes. Then, the instructor collected the stories. Preparing to retell the story, all the participants narrated them to the instructor. The participants' utterances were audio-recorded and transcribed for further analysis.

Following the last treatment session, an immediate post-test similar to the pretest was administered with a different short story to assess the immediate effects of treatment sessions on learners' language development. After a fortnight, a delayed posttest similar to the pre and posttest with a distinctive short story was also administered to assess the time lapse effects of CF on their target form knowledge.

The procedure for scoring the OPT tests follows two steps. Firstly, all the contexts in which the participants were needed to produce articles, as well as their correct use of articles in the mandatory contexts, were first discerned. Second, the ratio of participants' correct use of articles to the sum of the contexts required for the use of articles plus the inaccurate cases of the articles were used as participants' scores.

Operationalization

Scaffolded CF group

Aljaafreh and Lantolf's (1994) graduated regulatory scale for effective mediation within ZPD was employed to operationalize scaffolded feedback. In this condition, the researcher engaged in the ongoing conversation with the language learners and corrected their errors using scaffolded CF through several negotiation moves. These moves embark on the least assistance with most implicit or inductive prompts to stimulate self-regulation and end with correct forms provided by teachers with increasingly more explicit and informative clues. The following short excerpt from our data formulates the operationalization of scaffolded feedback.

(1) L (learner): He planted a peach tree in backyard.

(2) T (teacher): Sorry – could you repeat that? → clarification requests

(3) L: He planted a um… a peach tree in backyard.

(4) T: No, the definite article. Think about the definite article. → metalinguistic information

He planted a peach tree in …? → elicitation

(5) L: Um, yeah, in the backyard, yes, he planted a peach tree in the backyard.

As the example illustrates, the instructor embarked on minimal assistance via implicit feedback following the learner's error. In case the learner was not able to cope with her errors, scaffolding levels were gradually increased. These small incremental moves assisted the learner in finding ways to cope with her linguistic errors. Receiving just two hints, she reconstructed her inaccurate items and made the correct response. This implies that after the learner received mediation tailored to her ZPD, she became an independent self-reliant learner and no longer needed explicit feedback.

Explicit CF group

Following a learner's error, the teacher provided the learner with overt error correction. The following is a typical example of explicit CF:

Learner: I saw him left a few minutes ago.

Teacher: No, we say, "I saw him leave", not saw him left. The rule is "see somebody do something".

Control CF group

The participants in this group performed the same tasks without receiving any feedback.

DATA ANALYSIS

The one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to assess if the data were normally distributed. Moreover, to ensure whether the three groups were homogeneous in terms of their knowledge of the target items before the treatment sessions, one-way ANOVA was run on the OPT pretest scores. The data obtained from the three testing occasions, i.e. pre-, post, and delayed posttest were descriptively analyzed in terms of mean scores and standard deviation. A mixed between-within-group ANOVA was run to examine the effects of scaffolded and explicit CF conditions over time in which time, CF, and mean scores were regarded as a within-group independent variable, a between-group independent variable, and dependent variable, respectively. Post hoc analysis was also undertaken to pinpoint the precise location of the significant difference. The data were analyzed using SPSS 26 and an alpha level of 0.05 was set.

RESULTS

Test of normality

To assess the normality of the distributed data, the one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used. Table 1 shows the results of the normality of the distributed data for two variables.

Table 1.

Normality Test for Distribution of the Definite and Indefinite Articles

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov		
	Statistic	Df	Sig.
Definite article	0.103	135	0.200
Indefinite article	0.117	135	0.181

Based on Table 1, one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test on the mean scores of the definite article revealed that the data distribution was normal, D (135) =0.103, P=0.2 > 0.05. As for the indefinite article, the one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test also showed that the data were normally distributed, D (135) = 0.117, P = 0.181 > 0.05.

Test of homogeneity

To ensure homogeneity of the three groups regarding accurate use of the definite and indefinite articles in the pretest, we performed two one-way ANOVAs whose results are displayed in Tables 2 and 3, respectively.

Table 2.
One-way ANOVA for the Three Groups' Performances in the Pretest Concerning the Definite Article

	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig
Between Groups	45.316	2	22.658	1.896	0.163
Within Groups	502.000	42	11.952		
Total	547.316	44			

Based on Table 2, oral pretest scores revealed no significant differences among the three groups, F (2, 42) = 1.896, P=0.163 > 0.05 indicating that the participants were homogeneous concerning accurate use of the definite article.

Table 3 also shows the results of one-way ANOVA for the performances of the three groups in terms of the indefinite article.

Table 3.
One-way ANOVA for the Three Groups' Performances in the Pretest in Terms of the Indefinite Article

	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig
Between Groups	38.259	2	19.129	1.138	0.330
Within Groups	705.960	42	16.809		
Total	744.219	44			

According to Table 3, the oral pretest scores also revealed no significant differences among the groups, F (2, 42) =1.138, P=0.330>0.05 demonstrating that the homogeneity of the groups regarding accurate use of the indefinite article was met.

Results of the first research question

The first research question read "Do scaffolded and explicit CF have significant effects on enhancing Iranian EFL learners' accurate use of the English definite article in oral tests? If yes, which type of CF is more effective?"

Table 4 shows the descriptive statistics including mean, SD, minimum, and maximum for learners' performance in the OPT for the pre, post, and delayed posttests in terms of the definite article.

Table 4.
Descriptive Statistics on OPT in Pre, Post and Delayed Posttest of the Three Groups in Terms of Definite Article

Groups		N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Scaffolded	Pretest	15	64.80	75.50	69.30	3.665
	Posttest	15	76.80	80.40	78.80	1.309
	Delayed Posttest	15	74.80	80.90	77.90	1.690
Explicit	Pretest	15	64.25	75.68	70.04	3.359
	Posttest	15	70.80	80.48	75.83	3.273
	Delayed Posttest	15	71.24	77.78	74.95	2.535
Control	Pretest	15	65.60	76.55	71.70	3.338
	Posttest	15	69.75	75.50	72.50	2.035
	Delayed Posttest	15	67.95	73.90	70.95	1.964

As shown in Table 4, there were some improvements for the two experimental groups in the transition from the pretest to the posttest.

Figure 1 graphically displays the comparison of groups' performances in the pre, post, and delayed posttests on the OPT regarding the definite article.

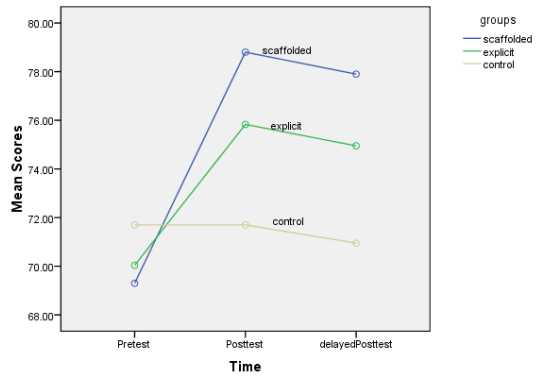

Figure1. Comparison of Groups' Performances in Pre, Post and Delayed Posttest on the OPT in Terms of Definite Article.

The effects of treatment sessions on learners' performance over time was examined by applying a mixed between–within-group ANOVA. As displayed in Table 5, the within-group and the between-group independent variables were time and CF, respectively. The mean scores were considered as the dependent variable.

According to Table 5, the values for time, F (2, 84) = 52.762, p < 0.001, (η^2 = 0.557), corrective feedback, F (2, 42) = 14.864, p < 0.001, (η^2 = 0.414) , and their interaction, F (4, 84) = 17.717, p < 0.001, (η^2 = 0.458) turned out to be statistically significant. This points to a significant change as time passed. Further, CF was effective and the groups differentially performed over time in terms of the definite article. The effect size values using eta squared (η^2) were large for all the variables i.e. time, CF, and their interaction (Cohen, 1988).

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) on learners' posttest scores illustrated significant differences among the groups in terms of using the definite article, P-value=Sig<0.001, and F (2, 42) = 24.273. Tukey's post hoc comparisons on the posttest scores showed the outperformance of the scaffolded group over the other two groups (p-value=sig < 0.05). The ANOVA showed significant differences among the groups on delayed posttests as well, F (2, 42) = 41.660, P < 0.001. Moreover, Tukey's post hoc comparisons on the delayed posttest scores also revealed the outperformance of the scaffolded group over the explicit and control groups.

Moreover, the effects of treatment on each group were determined using a one-way within-group ANOVA with Tukey post hoc tests. The OPT mean scores were considered as the dependent variable and time as a within-group independent variable. The within-group ANOVA was significant for scaffolded group, F (2, 42) = 68.758, p <0.001; and the explicit group, F (2, 42) = 15.409, p <0.001 in terms of the definite article. Post hoc comparisons for the two experimental groups indicated significant differences between the mean scores of pretest and posttest as well as between the pretest and delayed posttest mean scores. However, post hoc comparisons did not show any significant difference between the posttest and delayed posttest mean scores for the two experimental conditions. Regarding the control group, no significant difference existed in all three occasions, F (2, 42) = 1.752, p = 0.186 > 0.05.

Table 5.
Mixed between-within Group ANOVA for the OPT Scores in Terms of the Definite Article

Source	DF	Error	F	Sig	Effect size (η^2)
Time (within subjects)	2	84	52.762	0.000	0.557
Corrective Feedback (between subjects)	2	42	14.864	0.000	0.414
Time * Corrective Feedback	4	84	17.717	0.000	0.458

Results of the second research question

To identify whether scaffolded and explicit CF have significant effects on enhancing Iranian EFL learners' accurate use of the English indefinite articles, we used the descriptive statistics analysis comprising mean, SD, minimum, and maximum

for the learners' performance in the OPT for the pre, post, and delayed posttests. Table 6 depicts the pertaining results.

As evident in Table 6, some improvements were observed for the two experimental groups from the pretest to the posttest.

Figure 2 graphically depicts the comparison of groups' performances in pre, post, and delayed posttests on the OPT regarding the indefinite article. A mixed between–within-group ANOVA was performed to examine the effects of treatment sessions on learners' performance from the pre to the delayed posttest.

As depicted in Table 7, the within-group and the between-group independent variables were time and CF, respectively and the mean scores were viewed as the dependent variable.

Based on Table 7, the values for time, F (2, 84) = 42.189, p < 0.001, (η^2 = 0.501), corrective feedback, F (2, 42) = 19.208, p < 0.001, (η^2 = 0.478), and their interaction, F (4, 84) = 12.150, p < 0.001, (η^2 = 0.367) were all statistically significant. This indicates a significant change as time passed. Further, CF turned out to be effective and the groups differentially performed over time in terms of the indefinite article.

The effect size values using eta squared (η^2) were large for all the variables including time, CF, and their interaction (Cohen, 1988).

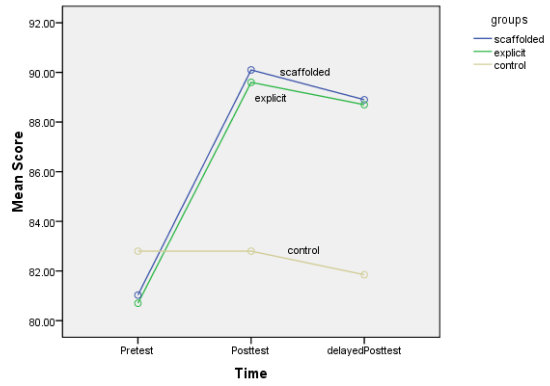

Figure2. Comparison of Groups' Performances in Pre-, Post- and Delayed Posttest on OPT in Terms of Indefinite Article.

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) on learners' posttest scores illustrated significant differences among the groups in terms of using the indefinite article, P-value=Sig<0.001, and F (2, 42) = 23.920. Tukey's post hoc comparisons on the posttest scores showed the outperformance of the scaffolded and explicit groups over the control group. However, there was not any significant difference between the scaffolded and explicit group (p=0.906>0.05). The ANOVA showed significant differences among the groups on delayed posttests as well, F (2, 42) = 32.741, P < 0.001. Moreover, Tukey's post hoc comparisons on the delayed posttest scores showed that there existed no significant difference between the scaffolded and explicit group (p=0.978). However, these groups outperformed the control group (p<0.001).

Furthermore, the effects of treatment on each group were ascertained using a one-way within-group ANOVA with Tukey post hoc tests in which the OPT mean scores were considered as dependent variable and time as a within-group independent variable. The within-group ANOVA was significant for scaffolded group, F (2, 42) = 45.786, p <0.001; and the explicit group, F (2, 42) = 28.643, p <0.001 in terms of the indefinite article. Post hoc comparisons for the two experimental groups indicated a significant difference between the mean scores of the pretest and posttest as well as between the pretest and delayed posttest mean scores. Nonetheless, post hoc comparisons did not show any significant difference between the posttest and delayed posttest mean scores for the two experimental conditions. Regarding control group, no significant difference was observed in all three occasions, F (2, 42) = 0.861, p =0.430 > 0.05.

Table 6.
Descriptive Statistics for OPT in Pre, Post and Delayed Posttest of the Three Groups in Terms of Indefinite Article

Groups		N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Scaffolded	Pretest	15	77.20	85.40	81.03	3.381
	Posttest	15	86.35	94.20	90.10	2.928
	Delayed Posttest	15	85.85	91.90	88.90	1.964
Explicit	Pretest	15	75.00	86.40	80.70	4.855
	Posttest	15	85.60	93.55	89.60	2.699
	Delayed Posttest	15	84.70	92.10	88.70	2.619
Control	Pretest	15	76.80	88.40	82.80	3.928
	Posttest	15	78.80	88.60	83.70	4.226
	Delayed Posttest	15	77.55	85.85	81.85	3.381

Table 7.
Mixed between-within Group ANOVA for the OPT in Terms of the Indefinite Article

Source	DF	Error	F	Sig	Effect size (η^2)
Time (within subjects)	2	84	42.189	0.000	0.501
Corrective Feedback (between subjects)	2	42	19.208	0.000	0.478
Time * Corrective Feedback	4	84	12.150	0.000	0.367

DISCUSSION

This study examined the effects of two forms of CF i.e. explicit and scaffolded in enhancing Iranian EFL learners' accurate use of the definite and indefinite articles in their oral Productions. The findings demonstrated that the EFL learners in the scaffolded CF and explicit groups were significantly different from those of the control group concerning the accurate use of both definite and indefinite articles in their oral productions. This result is in accord with the findings of Ellis et al. (2006) and Rassaei (2012) who reported that the explicit feedback results in L2 development. According to Rassaei (2014), scaffolded CF stands at an implicit-explicit continuum that explicitly engages language learners in correcting their

language errors. In this regard, scaffolded CF can be viewed as reflecting some degrees of explicitness that can account for the outperformance of the scaffolded CF group over the control group.

Furthermore, the study examined which forms of CF i.e. explicit or scaffolded was more effective in enhancing Iranian EFL learners' accurate use of the definite and indefinite articles in their oral Productions. The results revealed that the EFL learners in the scaffolded group significantly outperformed those of the explicit and control groups in the post and delayed posttests in terms of using the definite article. This superiority can be ascribed to the role of awareness in SLA and Schmidt (1994) Noticing Hypothesis based on which learners will not be able to learn grammatical features of a language unless they are noticed. In essence, the two levels of awareness, namely noticing and understanding or metalinguistic awareness visualized in Schmidt (1994) Noticing Hypothesis can account for the significant difference between the scaffolded CF group and the explicit group. While noticing focuses on the surface structure of the sentence level, understanding draws learners' attention to the deep structure. Building on this, it could be argued that explicit CF raises learners' awareness just at the noticing level, while scaffolded CF

enhances learners' awareness at both noticing and metalinguistic levels thereby affording a higher level of awareness that enhances the learning of grammatical forms. The results can also be justified on grounds of the consciousness-raising view of language learning that suggests language learning effectively takes place when language learners' attention is directed to linguistic forms (Rutherford, 1987). The primacy of scaffolded CF over explicit feedback can be substantiated by the fact that it makes language learners produce modified output by self-correcting their ill-formed utterances (DeKeyser, 2007). This is advocated by Swain's (1985) Output Hypothesis based on which comprehensible output is integral to L2 development. The metalinguistic function of output makes language learners reflect upon their target language forms which helps internalize them (Swain, 1985). This finding is in line with the results reported by Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994) who also found the positive impacts of scaffolded CF presented within learners' ZPD. Consistent with our findings, Erlam et al. (2013) confirmed the effectiveness of scaffolded CF in promoting self-correction. In a similar vein, Nasaji and Swain (2000) demonstrated the positive effects of the ZPD corrective feedback. This finding, on the other hand, stands in contrast to the results of Amirghassemi, Azabdaftari, and Saeidi's (2013) study which revealed that the performance of learners in the scaffolded group was not different from those of the direct and indirect groups. The discrepancy of their results with those of ours can be explained in terms of the type of linguistic structures investigated in their study (articles and past tenses). Another line of explanation might be that the target structures in their study were examined through written CF rather than oral CF as investigated in our study.

Furthermore, the other results of the present study revealed that the two experimental groups were not significantly different in the post and delayed posttests in terms of using the indefinite article. One line of explanation might be that the indefinite article in the EFL learners' first language (Persian) resembles the target language form which assists them to use it more conveniently. This resemblance is seen as the candidate for the positive transfer of the linguistic form in question.

CONCLUSION

The current study investigated the effectiveness of two forms of CF i.e. explicit and scaffolded in enhancing Iranian EFL learners' accurate use of the definite and indefinite articles in their oral Productions. The findings provided clear evidence of the effectiveness of scaffolded and explicit CF in promoting learners' accurate use of the definite and indefinite articles in the OPT. Nonetheless, scaffolded CF was found to be more effective than explicit feedback in enhancing EFL learners' use of the definite article but not the indefinite article. Consistent with Schmidt (1994) Noticing Hypothesis, we can argue that scaffolded and explicit CF make language learners better attend to linguistic forms. Scaffolded CF, however, seems equally as effective as explicit feedback in cases where positive language transfer takes place.

In light of Swain's Output Hypothesis and the results of this study, EFL teachers need to be more appreciative of CF types in their instruction. In particular, scaffolded CF should be integrated into teachers' ongoing learning-oriented assessment in the classroom setting. Further, it can be concluded that teachers should deliver CF aligned with language learners' ZPD to favor the development of language learning. This ZPD-based scaffolded feedback assists language learners to be motivated, autonomous, and self-regulated.

Scaffolded CF highlights the negotiation of meaning and assisted performance within the cognitive/interactionist and sociocultural perspectives, respectively (Rassaei, 2014). Consequently, it seems plausible to integrate form-focused instruction and focus on meaning as an effective means of promoting L2 development in classroom settings. Given the saliency of CF in language teaching settings, it is suggested that EFL teachers encourage language learners to capitalize

on various CF types in the form of self-assessment, peer-evaluation, and error logs to help them reflect on and attend to their own errors.

CONTRIBUTION TO NEW KNOWLEDGE

The present study carries significant contributions and insights for EFL teachers and syllabus designers. An understanding of the value of scaffolded CF might help language teachers to effectively employ CF practices based on EFL learners' learning needs in the classroom. Syllabus and curriculum designers can also explore avenues towards designing and incorporating grammar-based tasks into language learning materials. Such tasks can heighten learners' awareness of L2 grammatical structures and enable them to become actively involved in communicative interaction where EFL teachers can deliver interactional scaffolded feedback. The results may also play a crucial part in the existing CF literature by endorsing the effectiveness of scaffolded CF and open new directions for future research. The full potential realization of different types of CF might assist language teachers and curriculum designers to tailor their corrective steps to language learners' needs within their ZPD.

There are several limitations to this research that should be redressed in future studies. First, the study involved a relatively small number of participants; partly due to their reluctance to participate in the study. Furthermore, all the participants of the study were female intermediate language learners. One reason for this was the inadequacy of the intermediate male EFL learners in the institute where the experiment was conducted. The second reason concerned the impossibility of holding mixed-gender language classrooms due to the cultural restrictions. Thus, the research findings may not be generalizable to a wider population, language learners of other proficiency levels, and male language learners. Thus, future research should consider a greater number of male and female language learners at different proficiency levels. Similarly, since the study was made up of 5 two-hour sessions, a small number of CF delivered to the language learners. By increasing the number of treatment sessions, different results might have been obtained. Likewise, given administrative constraints, a random sampling of participants was not plausible and the research was conducted with three intact groups which may lead to set limits on the generalizability of the results.

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