

Effects of Immediate and Delayed Written Corrective Feedback in the Form of Recasts on the Accuracy of the English Past Tense

Soory Salajegheh

Ph.D Student

Islamic Azad University, Kerman Branch
Kerman, Iran

Email: salajegheh123@gmail.com

Ali Akbar Khomeijani Farahani*

Associate Professor

University of Tehran
Tehran, Iran

Email: farahani@ut.ac.ir

Hassan Shahabi

Professor

Islamic Azad University, Kerman Branch
Kerman, Iran

Email: Shahabi1964@yahoo.co.uk

Abstract. The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of immediate and delayed implicit corrective feedback in language learners' structure accuracy in writing. For this purpose, 90 Iranian English as a foreign language (EFL) learners were assigned into three groups: immediate implicit feedback, delayed implicit feedback, and a control condition with no feedback. Whereas in the immediate feedback condition, the teacher provided learners with recasts on their errors immediately after their writing task completion, in the delayed condition, learners received the corrective feedback two days after their task completion. Results indicated that the immediate feedback was significantly better

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*Corresponding author

than the delayed feedback and control condition in the immediate post-test. However, in the delayed post-test, the immediate feedback was not different from the delayed condition, yet it was still superior to the control group. Implications of these findings are discussed and suggestion to extend this area of inquiry are presented.

Keywords: Corrective feedback, implicit, recast, immediate feedback, delayed feedback

1. Introduction

Cook (2013) declared that writing skill is considered to be one of the important production skills of any language. It has always been assumed that anybody either literate or illiterate has the ability to listen and later speak and read. However, writing skill has always been considered as the skill of the ones who have sufficient knowledge of their field of study as well as their speaking language (Khezlrou, 2012a, 2012b). Wolfe-Quinter, Inagaki and Kim (1998) mentioned that college learners need to be evaluated on their writing skills including both sentence level features such as clearness of grammar and discourse-level features such as cohesion and coherence. For several years, corrective feedback (CF) to correct learners' errors in writing has been a matter of hot argument among researchers. Alamis (2010) underscored that there were different attitudes towards CF in writing ranging from considering errors as sins in the 1960s to strong displeasure of CF as being unjustified in the late 1970s and a more serious view of the need and value of it in the 1970s and 1980s. Truscott (1998) is against grammar correction in the L2 writing classroom. His reasoning is that grammar correction is ineffective; hence, it has to be displaced from the writing classrooms. However, as it is evident, feedback appears to be essential to the process of teaching as modification to the process of writing. Alamis (2010) asserts, "student writers should be taught that editing and revision are integral part to writing and correcting is an ongoing and multi-level process, not merely a quick check for correct grammar." Nevertheless, different aspects of CF in different contexts are still unclear given the different needs, educational backgrounds and instructional practice types in different contexts (Sadeghi & Khezlrou, 2014, 2016). The present study was an attempt to

examine the role of implicit CF timing (i.e., immediate and delayed) in Iranian EFL learners' linguistic accuracy in their writing productions.

2. Review of the Literature

2.1 Corrective feedback through writing skill

That writing is one of the second language skills that is really tricky is of no uncertainty (Ghasemi, 2013). Richards and Renandya (2002) contend that the challenging nature of writing is due to the generation and organization of the ideas and their translation into readable text. According to Halliday (1989), writing is an explanatory act which requires great judgment. It is a major achievement to be able to express one's ideas through writing coherently and accurately in a second or foreign language. It is a skill that even many native speakers of English may not completely master it (Celce- Murcia, 2001). Therefore, it is quite natural for L2 learners to commit errors in the writing process. However, what is significant is the reaction and corrections of the errors in the classroom which have led to an extensive body of research in the second language acquisition literature.

It is worth mentioning that the CF can be targeted to any feature of the writing assignments and it is not restricted to grammar. Descriptive and experimental studies on CF have found that grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation all receive considerable attention in the classroom. For instance William's (1999) reported about 80% as high percentage of lexical correction. Poole (2005) found that the majority of forms that learners attended to them were lexical. Ellis (2002) stated that CF is more likely to succeed if it is directed at morphological features than syntactic structures.

A lot of other past as well as recent studies highlight the effectiveness of CF on the whole. Chen, Nassaji and Liu (2016) expressed that learners had a favorable perception towards CF, it was valuable for English as a second language (ESL) learners and indicated significance of the individual and contextual factors. Brumfit (1998) asserted that CF needs to be concerned with both the content and the quality of writing and that effective feedback should be able to bring about learner's development. Abedi and Tayyebi (2014) examined the impact of different CF

options on accurate writing of elementary students. They made use of direct, indirect, indirect followed by direct feedback and no feedback as four strategies. The results showed that the participants in all treatment groups produced more accurate essays compared to their pre-treatment performances. All the three experimental groups improved considerably in their grammar performance compared to the no feedback as a control group.

In sum, it becomes clear that CF is a particularly effective practice, which is both needed and essentially practiced in classroom teaching and should be introduced to the classroom syllabi. Although there has been extensive research on providing feedback, there has been limited research on the role of CF timing (immediate vs. delayed) on learners' grammatical features and uptake which was the focus of this study.

2.2 Timing of corrective feedback

The issue of corrective feedback timing is concerned with the question of whether the reaction to the learners' errors needs to be provided immediately after error commitment or after some time in a delayed manner. This distinction brings about examination of whether corrective feedback functions better when it is provided in an interactional context or an isolated format. A number of researchers (Doughty, 2001; Doughty & Williams, 1998; Tomasello & Herron, 1989) are of the opinion that the most appropriate time to provide feedback to learners is when they are engaged in analyzing the input and when a need arises to focus on form in order to bridge the gap between their interlanguage and the target language.

Nevertheless, Doughty (2001) believes in four plausible conditions for corrective feedback provision. One condition refers to simultaneous (at exactly the time when the learner needs correction) implicit focus on form, meaning, and function (Doughty & Williams, 1998). The second condition refers to the time when implicit or explicit attention occurs shortly in advance of the need of the learner in any communicative act (Dekeyser, 1998; Li & Vuono, 2019; Lightbown, 1998). The third condition refers to a short, implicit or explicit change of attention from meaning and function to forms when the learner seems to be in need

of correct form supply (Long & Robinson, 1998). The last condition alludes to the time when implicit attention is provided to forms shortly after learner need emerges (Doughty & Varela, 1998; Long, Inagaki, & Ortega, 1998).

The essence of exploring the role of immediate and delayed corrective feedback stems from the presumption that the target language teacher needs to perceive the proper time for the learner to be provided with correction. As stated previously, the teacher can make a decision to attract the learner's attention to form either proactively by informing them of the linguistic regularity in addition to its exception beforehand or reactively by raising their consciousness about their errors at the time when the generalization is made. Tomasello and Herron (1988), implementing a Garden Path technique, carried out a comparison these two strategies for correcting the learners in the language classroom and concluded that learners had a better performance when their transfer errors obtained immediate reactive correction through the use of form-based cognitive comparisons. This finding is in line with White's (1987) proposal that particular grammar instruction and corrective patterns can in fact be fruitful for acquisition. Chaudron (1988) has referred to a great deal of studies represented in a table to figure out that classroom teachers are more likely to correct learner's errors either when they are related to the instructional focus of the lesson or when they considerably hamper the flow of speech and learners' communicative endeavors.

Shintani and Aubrey (2016) investigated the timing effects of corrective feedback which was presented to the learners throughout or following the web-based writing tasks. EFL learners were asked to carry out two writing tasks by means of the text-editing tool of Google Docs. The target structure that was selected in this study was the conditional type three structure in English. The results revealed that both experimental groups outperformed the control group in the immediate post-test, yet only the immediate feedback group was found to be superior to the control group in the delayed post-test. Arroyo and Yilmaz (2018) studied the influence of immediate and delayed reformulations (equivalent of recasts in writing) on the errors that learners committed while performing a communicative task via text-based synchronous computer-mediated

communication. Arroyo and Yilmaz reported that the delayed feedback could not be as productive as immediate feedback with respect to the oral production task demanding learners to be correct while their primary focus was directed towards meaning. More recently, Fu and Li (2020) investigated the role of immediate and delayed recasts on the acquisition of the English past tense. Results confirmed the significant superiority of the immediate CF over the delayed CF, task only and control groups. To recap, in spite of the significance of the issue of corrective feedback timing, there is a lack of adequate evidence to advocate the researchers' claims, such as Doughty's (2001) claims outlined above, and there has been no systematic research attempt to examine the appropriate of immediate implicit focus on form, delayed implicit focus on form, immediate explicit focus on form, and delayed explicit focus on form. In the following section, the explicit and implicit types of corrective feedback categories are outlined and clarified.

2.3 Explicit versus implicit corrective feedback

Corrective feedback might be in the form of explicit or implicit. Implicit feedback usually refers to the recast type of CF (Loewen, 2006). For the purposes of this study, implicit feedback is operationalized as recast which based on Loewen's definition, adapted from Long, defines a recast as a reformulation of all or part of a learner's immediately preceding utterance in which one or more non-target like items are replaced by the corresponding target language form(s). The following example exhibits this CF type.

S: to her is good thing

T: yeah for her it's a good thing

S: because she got a lot of money there. (Loewen & Philp, 2006)

In the explicit type of CF, after a learner has produced an incorrect language, the teacher provides metalinguistic feedback by giving comments or questions in terms of the accuracy of the learner's utterance (Ellis, Loewen, & Erlam, 2006). The example below represents this CF type:

S: She goed to the store

T: No, not goed-went. (Ellis, Loewen, & Erlam, 2006)

In fact, the role of learning in explicit and implicit instructional types has long been a debated issue in the realm of psychology. The majority of experimental studies in this field (Reber & Allen 1978; Zizak & Reber, 2004) have represented that learning encompasses complicated stimuli with the lack of any conscious awareness. Almost all of these studies implemented artificial languages in their treatment activities as stimuli. Nonetheless, in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) which is marked by the natural use of the languages, it is not obvious without controversies how straightforwardly these findings can be generalized.

A large number of studies in second language learning have been in response to Krashen's (1989) assertion that learners only learn when they are involved in unconscious acquisition. Learning, according to Krashen, is conscious and does not lead to acquisition, which is unconscious, and functions only as a monitor. In spite of this, the substantial focus of language learning is not the difference between conscious and unconscious learning. A more significant issue is the extent of explicitness and implicitness of learning. Robinson (1996) asserts that such studies are likely to present an obvious individual foundation for the speculations of second language theorists with respect to the degree to which unconscious learning of forms may or may not be plausible. In addition, the degree to which explicit and implicit corrective feedback can be successful in restructuring the learners' interlanguage important from both the theoretical and instruction angles: It might lead to an evident comprehension of the ways that the human cognitive system functions when learning a second language. Besides, it may equip teachers with more practical strategies to opt for when correcting the learners explicitly or in implicit ways.

Previous research has investigated the effectiveness of implicit and explicit types of corrective feedback (Bryfonski & Ma, 2020; Khezrlou, 2019b, 2020b; Carroll & Swain, 1993; Rosa & Leow, 2004; Ellis, Loewen, & Erlam, 2006). Khezrlou (2020b) investigated the comparative effects of reformulation and explicit error correction on Iranian EFL learners' written complexity, accuracy and fluency. Results revealed that

the provision of error correction significantly improved on all measures of accuracy whereas the reformulation feedback enhanced written complexity. Additionally, both feedback types were effective in terms of delayed fluency developments. In another study, Khezrlou (2019b) looked into the effectiveness of recast and clarification requests on EFL learners' development of the regular and irregular past tense forms. Results indicated the superiority of clarification requests over recasts regardless of linguistic structure. The study by Bryfonski and Ma (2020) attempted to explore the effects of more explicit versus more implicit oral corrective feedback on L2 Mandarin tone perception and production after 10 weeks of interactions with an instructor. The results from the pretests and posttests indicated no statistically significant difference between the more implicit (recast) feedback group and the more explicit (metalinguistic) feedback group from pretesting to post-testing. Nevertheless, the mean gain was greater for the implicit feedback than the explicit feedback. These results highlight the potential of implicit CF in contrast to suggestions that recasts are better appropriate for more advanced learners whose developmental readiness lets them become more sensitive to the input (Ammar & Spada, 2006). Although these results are promising with respect to the significant role of recasts in L2 phonological development, there is still a clear need to examine the effects of recasts on L2 syntax development particularly in the Iranian context where the majority of learners are used to more explicit CF types (see Khezrlou, 2020a, 2020b; Khezrlou, Ellis & Sadeghi, 2017; Sadeghi, Khezrlou & Modirghameneh, 2017). The present study was an attempt to provide further insights into the effectiveness of immediate and delayed implicit CF in the Iranian EFL context. The following research question was addressed:

To what extent do the immediate and delayed implicit corrective feedback affect Iranian EFL learners' grammatical accuracy in writing?

3. Method

3.1 Participants

One-hundred and five English as a foreign language (EFL) learners from ACECR language institute in Kerman, Iran took part in this

study. Participants comprised both male ($N = 41$) and female ($N = 64$) learners whose mean age was 19.46. Their level of proficiency was low-intermediate as identified by the placement test of the language institute and they had similar knowledge of the regular past tense structure according to the pre-test grammar results. Participants were randomly assigned to three experimental groups and one control group: 1) immediate implicit CF ($N = 38$), 2) delayed implicit CF ($N = 38$), and 3) control group ($N = 29$). To have a larger number of participants, two classes for each condition were used. All participants listened to oral consents and indicated their agreement to take part in this study.

3.2 The target feature

The regular past tense-ed was chosen as the target structure in this study resting on a number of assumptions. Initially, even though EFL learners receive instruction about this structure in early levels of language teaching, they still have challenges in its accurate production even at higher levels of proficiency (Ellis et al., 2006). Furthermore, regular English past tense is a rule-based structure given the existence of a clear general rule: Add-ed to the end of the regular verb form. Concerning the degree of saliency, this structure has low saliency due to the addition of a voiceless -ed, and the communicative value is lower in comparison to the irregular past tense -ed, and it has high regularity (DeKeyser, 1998; Ellis, 2005).

3.3 Instruments

3.3.1 Pre-test

To evaluate the participants' knowledge of the target structure in this study, a pre-test which included 20 multiple-choice and fill-in-the-blanks type items was developed for this study. All the items measured learners' knowledge of the regular past tense structure. This test was piloted showing an acceptable index of reliability as measured by Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = .82$).

3.3.2 Writing tasks

The writing tasks that were used in this study were descriptive writing tasks which were homogenized concerning the number of words required

(about 70-100), planning time (about 10-15 minutes), prior knowledge (only requiring general knowledge), individual work only, paper-based and were carried out inside the classroom. The topics were based on the learners' textbook and included the following:

1. Describe a day or an evening out that you enjoyed. Give details about the place, time, the things you did, people, the food and drinks there.
2. Describe the last vacation and the place that you stayed in.
3. Describe the best present that you received.

The first topic was implemented in the first session as the pre-test task, the second was employed when the learners were exposed to CF as the immediate post-test and the last task was used as the delayed post-test after two weeks. Therefore, the three writing tasks were used to gauge learners' accuracy of the target structure production in writing prior to, immediately following and after the treatment. These topics were also translated to Farsi to prevent from any comprehension problems arising from the learners' low level of English proficiency. Besides, the inter-rater reliability of the writing tasks was measured through Pearson Correlation Test (pre-test ($r = 1.00$), immediate post-test ($r = 1.00$) and delayed post-test ($r = .89$)).

3.4 Procedure

A classroom-based study, this research was based on data collected from the Jahad Daneshgahi institute in Kerman, Iran. In this institute, 5-6 terms are held in each year with each semester lasting for 6-8 weeks. The treatment in this study was conducted through three sessions with each session lasting for 10-15 minutes. The syllabus in this institute is based on American English File's books (starter, 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5). And, Starter's book was used as the course book in the classes in which this study was conducted.

Participants were first asked to orally consent their agreement to take part in this study. Later on, six intact classes (i.e., two for each group) which had low-intermediate level of proficiency based on the placement test of the language institute were assigned into three groups: 1) immediate implicit correction, 2) delayed implicit correction, and 3) a control

group without any CF. In the immediate implicit correction, the teacher provided the correct reformulation of the learners' erroneous grammatical feature, namely recast, immediately after they completed their writing in the classroom. However, in the delayed implicit correction, feedback was exactly the same with the immediate implicit feedback with the only difference being its provision two days after essay completion. Time, as Ellis et al. (1999) argue, alludes to the point where the teacher and the learner attend to the error after its production. In the present study, the CF was provided either immediately after the completion of the writing tasks in the classroom or was delayed after two days. Put simply, in the delayed feedback, the teacher presented the corrected papers in the next session (i.e., after two days) and participants were asked to go over their errors and then write their second new piece of writing (i.e., the immediate post-test). It needs to be highlighted that accuracy in the use of past tense-ed was measured based on the number of correct uses of the verb form.

4. Results

The data was analyzed using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) (21) with the significance level set at .05. The required normality tests were run before conducting the main statistical analysis (Kolmogorov Smirnov test ($p > .05$)). Furthermore, the homogeneity of variance as measured by Levene's test ($p > .05$), the assumptions of Sphericity using Mauchly's test, $x^2(3) = 12.59$, $p = .28$, were all met. Following Cohen (1988), ηp^2 values of .01, .06, and .14 and d values of .20, .50, and .80 were considered small, medium, and large.

For the first research question, a repeated measures ANCOVA was conducted. The results of descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1 and Figure 1.

Based on Table 1, the immediate recast group attained the highest mean score both in the immediate post-test ($M = 1.15$, $SD = 1.21$) and the delayed post-test ($M = 1.00$, $SD = .92$), followed by the delayed recast group in the immediate ($M = .60$, $SD = .78$) and delayed ($M = .63$, $SD = .81$) post-tests. The results of ANCOVA are presented in Table 2.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Groups' Structure Accuracy over Time

	Groups	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Pretest	immediate recast	.76	.94	38
	delayed recast	.73	1.10	38
	control	.34	.55	29
Immediate post-test	immediate recast	1.15	1.21	38
	delayed recast	.60	.78	38
	control	.24	.43	29
Delayed post-test	immediate recast	1.00	.92	38
	delayed recast	.63	.81	38
	control	.24	.43	29

Table 2: Results of Repeated Measures ANCOVA

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Intercept	52.57	1	52.57	57.78	.000	.36
pretest	.69	1	.69	.76	.38	.007
groups	21.61	2	10.80	11.87	.000	.19
time	.08	1	.08	.16	.68	.002
time*groups	.30	2	.15	.30	.74	.006
Error	52.01	101	.51			

The results of repeated measures ANCOVA revealed non-significant effects for pre-test, $F(1, 101) = .76$, $p = .38$, $\eta p^2 = .007$, time, $F(1, 101) = .16$, $p = .68$, $\eta p^2 = .002$, and time group interaction, $F(2, 101) = .30$, $p = .74$, $\eta p^2 = .80$. There were, however, significant effects for group, $F(2, 101) = 11.87$, $p = .000$, $\eta p^2 = .19$. Results of the post-hoc Tukey analysis led to the identification of the exact points of differences. Results of the Tukey test (see Table 3) represents the clear superiority of the immediate recast group over the delayed recast ($p = .02$, $d = .54$) and control ($p = .000$, $d = 1.00$) groups in the immediate post-test. However, there was a non-significant difference between the delayed recast and control group ($p = .23$, $d = .57$). In the delayed post-test, the immediate recast condition outperformed the control group ($p = .000$, $d = .42$), yet it was not different from the delayed recast condition ($p = .10$, $d = 1.05$). And, there was non-significant difference between the control and delayed recast conditions ($p = .11$, $d = .60$).

Table 3: Results of Post-hoc Tukey Test

Dependent Variable	(I) groups	(J) groups	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
immediate	immediate implicit	delayed implicit	.55*	.20	.02	.05	1.04
		control	.91*	.22	.000	.38	1.44
	delayed implicit	immediate	-.55*	.20	.02	-1.04	-.05
		control	.36	.22	.23	-.16	.89
	control	immediate implicit	-.91*	.22	.000	-1.44	-.38
		delayed implicit	-.36	.22	.23	-.89	.16
delayed	immediate implicit	delayed implicit	.36	.17	.10	-.05	.79
		control	.75*	.19	.000	.30	1.21
	delayed implicit	immediate	-.36	.17	.10	-.79	.05
		control	.39	.19	.11	-.06	.84
	control	immediate implicit	-.75*	.19	.000	-1.21	-.30
		delayed implicit	-.39	.19	.11	-.84	.06

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

To further explore the within-group test differences, paired-samples t-tests were performed. The results demonstrated that neither the immediate recast group nor the delayed recast condition showed any significant differences over time ($p > .05$).

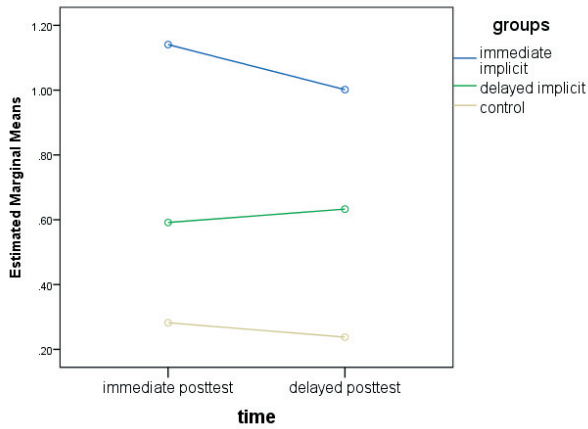


Figure 1. Groups' accuracy over time

5. Discussion

The results of this study clearly pointed to the effectiveness of immediate recast over the delayed recast and control condition without any feedback in the immediate post-test. In the delayed post-test, however, both the immediate and delayed CF performed similarly. From an interactionist viewpoint, these results support those of previous studies showing the effectiveness of implicit feedback (Mackey et al., 2000; Saito & Lyster, 2012). Implicit feedback such as recasts has also been found to be influential for linguistic structures that pose difficulties for learners such as the past tense structure in the current study (Goo & Mackey, 2013). These findings also run contrary to those of studies that have proved the effectiveness of explicit CF such as metalinguistic feedback over recasts (Ellis, 2007; Ellis, Loewen, & Erlam, 2006; Sheen, 2007). In the present study, the low proficiency learners who had not yet mastered the target structure benefited from implicit feedback. This might be because the immediacy of the provision of positive evidence (the recast) to negative (the learner's error) was fruitful, an aspect of recasts that has been revealed in a numerous previous work (Goo & Mackey, 2013; Leeman, 2003; Long, 2007). Nevertheless, the educational context and learners' and teachers' views to target language learning should also be taken into account in evaluating the effectiveness of a particular instructional approach (Sadeghi & Khezrlou, 2014, 2016).

Regarding the timing of CF, immediate feedback in comparison with delayed feedback was more effective particularly in the immediate post-test. It appears that the immediate feedback condition have strengthened the impacts of the learners' noticing of their errors because it was provided immediately after the writing task. Because of the proximity of the feedback to error, the learners could associate the obtained feedback and their gap in the use of the structure while the knowledge was in an active state (Fu & Li, 2020). In contrast, in the delayed feedback, correction may have functioned independently from the writing. When the delayed feedback was presented, learners were less likely or less able to match the feedback with the errors that they made, and the function of the feedback became solely corrective instead of reinforcing (Fu & Li,

2020). An unexpected finding in this study was that in the delayed post-test, the timing of CF was not different and that both the immediate and delayed CF was more effective than no CF in structure accuracy. This finding may imply that the second and third writing tasks followed by the delayed CF might have reinforced the effects of delayed CF.

6. Conclusion

This study sought to examine whether the timing of recasts mediated the role of CF in learners' accurate use of the regular past tense structure. Results indicated that the immediate recast was more effective in the short-term, while the delayed recast following further writing performance could also be effective in the long-term. Based on these findings, it is suggested that feedback be provided immediately after learners' initial production of the linguistic feature and that errors need be addressed before they are integrated into the L2 system. Finally, we suggest providing practice opportunities following the provision of CF to help learners implement the knowledge they learned through CF into practice. In sum, the main finding from this study on the timing of feedback is that recasts are effective, whether it is provided immediately after task completion or after a period of delay. It should also be considered that the educational context and learners' and teachers' views to target language learning should also be taken into account in evaluating the effectiveness of a particular instructional approach (Sadeghi & Khezrlou, 2014, 2016). Nonetheless, this conclusion is based on restricted research, and thus there is a need for more research on the timing of CF.

This study has a number of limitations which encourage the conduction of further research in this area. First, future researchers may want to compare the timing variable against different types of corrective feedback (direct vs. indirect, input-providing vs. output-prompting, and implicit vs. explicit) to gain better insights into the effective type of CF for Iranian EFL learners. Secondly, this study lasted for three sessions which limit the generalizability of findings. Longitudinal studies are therefore recommended to examine the role of feedback over an extended period of time. In addition, this study used the regular past tense-ed structure as the target feature. Future studies may want to examine the regular past

tense too to investigate the role of structure saliency. Lastly, learners with different levels of proficiency, learning background, aptitude and working memory need to be studied to obtain deeper insights.

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