The Impact of Explicit vs. Implicit Instruction on Pronunciation Intelligibility among Iranian EFL Learners

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Abstract. In an attempt to examine the controversy over the explicit vs. implicit teaching of pronunciation, this quasi-experimental study was carried out on two homogeneous groups of Iranian high school female students. The experimental group (N=30) underwent the treatment; i.e., explicit pronunciation instruction using a variety of auditory, visual and physical techniques. The control group members (N=31) received oral activities as conventionally instructed in common Iranian high schools. After fifteen sessions of the treatment, there sults of the post-test were rated by an English native speaker based on the criteria set for accuracy and fluency. Data analysis revealed the explicit group's outperforming the implicit group concerning accurate and fluent pronunciation; thus, supporting explicit instruction as an essential technique for boosting pronunciation intelligibility in Iranian EFL context. English instructors and materials developers might find the suggested pedagogical implications beneficial for determining an efficient mode to overcome the problem of teaching pronunciation.

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1. Introduction

In today's realm of language pedagogy, the ultimate goal is communication, and clear pronunciation is seen as a key to such achievement. Shedding light on the importance of clear pronunciation, Darcy (2015, p. 2) goes even further to the extent that he claims "language is sound." To him, communication takes place only if the interlocutors are exposed to clear pronunciation, no matter if the speakers are limited by poor vocabulary knowledge or deficiency in grammar since a change in pronunciation may change the meaning. Fraser (2000, p. 7), too, supports such notion by asserting that "with good pronunciation, a speaker is intelligible despite other errors; with poor pronunciation, understanding a speaker will be very difficult, despite accuracy in other areas."

Additionally, as stated by Cook (1998, p. 20), "Working Memory is the gateway to language processing, and pronunciation is the key to Working Memory." Thus, clear pronunciation accounts for the preliminary mental process involved in comprehension. Therefore, mispronunciation can be responsible for most misunderstandings and communication breakdowns.

So, it is the intelligibility aspect of pronunciation which deserves more attention. According to Darcy (2015), a comparison between traditional approaches and current approaches to the issue of pronunciation shows that in the past, learning a native-like pronunciation and accent was of great value, but current views give more weight to clear pronunciation rather than accent. In the past, all segmental elements would be equally considered important, but recently the focus has shifted towards selected segmental, as well as suprasegmentals, based on the needs. Then, as pointed out by Field (2005), those dimensions which affect comprehensibility and intelligibility, such as incorrect word stress (suprasegmentals) warrant more focus. There are also other factors involved in comprehensibility such as, "lack of clearly articulated consonants" (i.e. accuracy) (Zielinski, 2006, as cited in Darcy, 2015), as well

as "speaking too slowly or too fast, too many or too long pauses" (i. e. fluency) (Kang, 2010, as cited in Darcy, 2015).

Pronunciation plays a significant role in language teaching contexts. However, it is high time this crucial element of language received due attention in the context of language teaching. Derwing and Munro (2005) believe that teachers neglect pronunciation teaching and they are reluctant to teach pronunciation. They state that "teachers are often left to rely on their intuitions with little direction" (p. 379).

As argued by Munro and Derwing (2011), the problem can be attributed to the scarcity of empirical research on L2 pronunciation. As stated by Koike (2014), teachers are not willing enough to teach pronunciation because of the lack of relevant empirical research in this area aiming at clarifying the most efficient ways for them to overcome this problem. According to Thomson and Derwing (2014) who reviewed 75 L2 pronunciation studies, many studies in this domain connote some degrees of limitations. These limitations include focusing on native-like pronunciation instead of clear pronunciation, emphasizing on segmental aspects rather than considering both segmental and suprasegmental elements, and concentrating on accuracy at the expense of fluency (pause and speed).

In this respect, the EFL context in Iran is no exception. As pointed out by Shooshtari and Mehrabi (2013), instructors are usually reluctant to resort to different methods and techniques of teaching pronunciation; instead, they stick to the limited coursebook exercises. According to Hashemian and Fadaei (2011), pronunciation is rarely taught explicitly, and if it is ever taught, teachers do not pay attention to problematic or essential features in pronunciation which can impact on comprehensibility and intelligibility. Altogether, notwithstanding the importance of pronunciation intelligibility, the issue has not received due attention in Iranian context as far as practicality is concerned.

From another perspective, whether to take an "implicit" or "explicit" approach to deal with the issue has also been a great concern for the educators and scholars. According to Archer and Hughes (2011), explicit instruction is "structured, systematic, and effective methodology for teaching academic skills" (p. 1); thus, conforming to a clear and

direct way of teaching. Explicit instruction is an available tool that increases students' academic knowledge. On the other hand, according to Ellis (1993), implicit instruction involves creating a learning environment in which the learners are exposed to rules and formulas of target features without any conscious effort. Krashen (1981), too, believes that second language learners can acquire a foreign language with the exposure to a lot of comprehensible input subconsciously. Such available input, as an external factor, more specifically plays a crucial role in pronunciation acquisition. Accordingly, the controversy has been attended to by some scholars with different views toward the issue. For instance, some like Krashen (1981) believe that pronunciation can be improved through implicit exposure, whereas others like Schmidt (1995) and Couper (2003) argue that consciousness rising is necessary for learning a language; thus, the pronunciation should be taught explicitly.

2. Literature Review

The issue of whether to teach pronunciation implicitly or explicitly has long been a matter of controversy. According to Ellis (2008), implicit instruction provides for language learning pretty much like the process of first language acquisition; i.e., unconscious and automatic. Explicit instruction, on the other hand, refers to the descriptions and explanations of the rules of a foreign language structure. Dividing language instruction into "indirect" and "direct" intervention, Ellis (2009, p. 16) believes that "indirect intervention aims to create conditions where learners can learn experientially through learning how to communicate in the L2". In contrast, "instruction, as direct intervention, involves the pre-emptive specification of what it is that the learners are supposed to learn and, typically, draw on a structural syllabus." To put it differently, implicit instruction allows learners to infer the rule by themselves unconsciously; then, "indirect intervention is implicit in nature" while in explicit instruction, learners are aware of the rules; therefore, "explicit instruction constitutes direct intervention" (Ellis, 2009, p. 17).

The related studies carried out in a variety of EFL/ESL contexts, in general, have confirmed to the existing controversy in that some (e.g., Minhong & Ailun, 2006; Papachristou, 2011) favored implicit instruction

of pronunciation, taking it for granted that such a mode of instruction could help learners enhance their English pronunciation while getting involved in autonomous learning. However, there are other studies (e.g. Abdi, 2010; Couper, 2003; Doan, 2013; Koike, 2014; Mohseni, 2011; Saito, 2013) who have taken side for explicit instruction by concluding that explicit instruction of pronunciation is beneficial for L2 learners to improve their perception and production of L2 phonological features and results in a comprehensible speech. To this end, Goodwin (2001) has put one step forward by shifting the focus towards teaching suprasegmental elements, like stress patterns. Pointing out to the complex factors involved in English stress patterns, Goodwin (2001) has proposed a framework of instruction for teaching such features like the part of speech and affixation. The procedures include description and analysis, listening discrimination, controlled practice, and communicative practice.

Nevertheless, there are studies, like Kissling (2013) who found that both instructions, explicit and implicit, had equally significant effects on pronunciation learning. It was concluded that "it might be the input, practice, and feedback included in pronunciation instruction, rather than the explicit phonetics lessons, that are most facilitative of improvement in pronunciation" (p. 720).

As for the techniques of teaching pronunciation in EFL context, many ways have been introduced in the literature. According to Underhill (2005), phonemic charts and diagrams of the vocal tract are useful in teaching pronunciation. He recommends that teachers raise their students' awareness by explaining the process of sounds production and letting them touch their vocal musculature to find out the place and the manner of articulation of sounds.

In sum, a review of contrastive studies on pronunciation has informed us about the critical role of differences in phonological elements between two languages; thus, giving weight to the explicit teaching of pronunciation as it is favored and supported by many professional educators. It can be hypothesized, then, that explicit teaching of phonological differences between English and Persian in different aspects of pronunciation, such as accuracy (segmentals and suprasegmentals) as well as fluency (pause

and speed), may help EFL learners to improve their pronunciation and communicate more intelligibly.

Then, having reviewed the related literature, one may pose the question whether Iranian EFL learners' deficiency in clear pronunciation may be attributed to ignoring its instruction altogether. If so, which mode of instruction can serve better to boost pronunciation intelligibility? So, in an attempt to deal with the existing problems Iranian EFL learners have in English pronunciation acquisition, this study aims at comparing the effects of two modes of instruction; i.e., explicit vs. implicit, on Iranian high school EFL learners' clear pronunciation. The study focuses on a selection of segmental and suprasegmental elements of EFL pronunciation which are problematic in Iranian context and interfere with intelligibility and comprehensibility. Based on the objectives mentioned above, the present study addresses four main questions:

RQ1. To what extent is there a significant difference between explicit and implicit instruction of pronunciation?

RQ2. To what extent does explicit instruction of pronunciation have a significant effect on Iranian EFL high school learners' problematic consonants?

RQ3. To what extent does explicit instruction of pronunciation have a significant effect on Iranian EFL high school learners' syllable stress patterns functioning as noun and verb?

RQ4. To what extent does explicit instruction of pronunciation have a significant effect on Iranian EFL high school learners' fluency?

3. Methodology

The focus of the study is on the most problematic areas of pronunciation in our Iranian EFL context. Such areas are believed to affect comprehensibility in communication dominantly. The problematic areas which are dealt with in this study consist of consonants: $/\theta/$, $/\partial/$, $/\hbar/$, $/W/$, $/\Re/$, $/\ell/$, $/t/$, an initial consonant cluster (segmental); stress patterns of words functioning as nouns and verbs (supra-segmental); and

fluency (speed and pauses). The researchers are of the opinion that explicit teaching of these problematic areas in pronunciation may help EFL high school learners to produce English pronunciation more accurately and fluently.

3.1 Participants and setting

The participants for this pseudo-experimental research study were purposefully selected among 10th graders from a state high school in Iran. Sixty-one female participants, 15 to 16 years old, were selected from a population of 80 students based on their scores on a sound recording test. They were sampled out based on the criteria of scoring within the range of two scores above or below the mean (i.e., + 2 SD). All the participants came from the same L1 background, Persian, and their homogeneity regarding English pronunciation was assured via the sound recording test before the study. The selected students were almost at the same level of proficiency in respect to their mistakes as far as their accurate pronunciation of English consonants, clusters, and lexical stress patterns, as well as fluency rate (pause and speed), were concerned.

3.2 Instruments and materials

The instruments employed in the study consisted of audio machines for voice recording as a means of collecting audio data, as well as providing input. In order to teach the target English sounds chosen from the "English book 2", lesson 7, pages 84 to 98, the teacher-researcher developed the instructional materials with the aim of including and emphasizing the most problematic English consonants for Persian speakers, such as $/\theta/$, $/\partial/$, $/\hbar/$, $/W/$, retroflex $/r/$ ($/\Re/$), dark $/l/$ ($/\ell/$), flap $/t/$ ($/t/$), as well as initial consonant clusters (a total of 8 phonetic elements). To this end, a list of 16 words was created for each one of those problematic segmental features. Besides, focusing on lexical stress, twelve sentences were included in the materials to be practiced by the participants so that they would distinguish nouns from verbs in a pair. Such pairs include: increase, decrease, export, import, discount, refund, permit, invite, record, rewrite, reject, and present. As for meeting the other objective of the study; i.e., investigating their fluency, the participants were assigned to read a paragraph from their course book to measure the rate of pause

and speed.

Additionally, the researchers made a test of pronunciation and administered it at the stages of pre- and post-treatment. This test was composed of pronunciation elements, such as problematic English segmentals, syllabus stress, as well as pause and speed, purposefully designed to meet the objectives of the study. It included the same fore-mentioned typical elements of pronunciation which were planned in the instruction materials, only in a smaller portion. Finally, the researcher created a rating sheet which included three major sections: accuracy, fluency, and intelligibility. Materials are available upon request.

3.3. Procedures

Before the treatment started, at the pre-test stage, the researchers recorded individual students' voice for about five minutes. The researchers assured the students that such a test did not have any effect on their term evaluation. During the voice recording procedure, the participants were asked to read aloud a list of eight pairs of words (16), corresponding to the eight potential problematic English consonants. Also, the students were asked to read 16 sentences with a particular focus on syllabus stress, either functioning as a noun or as a verb. After that, the participants were required to read a short paragraph which was purposefully taken from their textbook. The idea was to evaluate their fluency concerning pause and speed. Later on, at the stage of post-test, the whole procedure of evaluation, under the same condition and using the same instruments, was repeated after the intervention.

The students were randomly divided into two groups; i.e., one group as experimental and the other one as a control group. So, the study groups are considered "intact" as the researchers had no role in selecting or grouping the participants, but the whole procedure was by the school's regulation. Thus, any differences between groups can be more confidently attributed to the treatment.

The experimental group was taught through the explicit instruction. As inspired by Goodwin's (2001) proposed framework of instruction, this study designed the experimental lessons based on the processes of description and analysis, listening discrimination, controlled practice,

and communicative practice while the control group was treated through typical implicit teaching; i.e., listening and repeating.

The whole treatment procedure took 15 sessions, each about 15 minutes, starting in April 2016. In each session, one consonant or one stress pattern functioning as either a noun or a verb was chosen for the experimental class to be practiced explicitly. There was not any teaching or conscious practicing of pronunciation in the control class, however. Besides, as the treatment group was reading the short paragraph, the researcher evaluated the effect of explicit teaching of pronunciation on students' fluency (pause and speed). After finishing the treatment, the students' voice was recorded and analyzed under the same condition set for the pre-test stage.

Having collected the data at two phases of the study, i.e., pre- and post-tests, the students' voice recordings were sent to a rater, a native English speaker, to be rated. The rater was completely informed about the purpose of the study. The rater transcribed the students' voice and completed the rating sheets for each student.

As for rating the accuracy, the rater was requested to evaluate the participants' uttered segmentals (8 consonants included in 16 words) and suprasegmentals (syllable stress functioning as a noun or a verb in 8 sentences). The rater had been instructed to give one point to the correct pronunciation and zero to the incorrect pronunciation. Fluency was evaluated regarding pause (22 pauses) and speed (too fast, too slow, and regular). About the fluency, one point was to be given to the appropriate pause, zero to the inappropriate pause, one point to a reasonable speed, and zero to either a too fast or too slow speed. As for intelligibility, the rater would give one point to clear pronunciation and zero to unintelligible pronunciation.

Finally, the researchers used SPSS software to analyze the returned data. A comparison between the results of two sets of recordings (pre-test and post-test) for each student revealed the extent to which the students improved in their pronunciation; thus, providing for determining the efficient mode of instruction.

Experimental Procedure (Explicit Instruction). Under the explicit condition of this study, the students were completely aware that the

primary objective of the activities was pronunciation learning. All the activities during the last 15 minutes of the class time were geared to pronunciation learning. Every session, the teacher wrote one of the selected segmentals or suprasegmentals on the board to draw students' attention. Then, she wrote the list of words including the selected sounds and read them aloud. The teacher taught the sound explicitly and raised students' awareness about the phonological features, such as the place of articulation, the manner of articulation and correct pronunciation, pointing out the dissimilarities between the two languages. Then, she used different techniques, strategies, and games such as minimal pair drills, drills with similar words, discrimination drills, etc. For example, for teaching $/\theta/$, $/\partial/$, and $/W/$, the teacher used different charts of speech organs and also asked students to look at the mirror and try to pronounce the sound correctly. For teaching $/\Re/$ and $/l/$ sounds, the teacher asked the students to imagine an English native speaker speaking in Persian with their particular accent. Then, the participants were asked to imitate and speak Persian in the same way that English native speakers would do. Thus, the students would find out the place, and the manner of articulation of English sounds such as $/\Re/$ and $/l/$. For teaching $/t/$, the teacher used different games like tongue-twisting fun. In the same way, different techniques were used to teach syllable stress functioning as a noun or a verb, such as using capitalization for the stressed syllables, underlining stressed syllables, and controlled practice. The teacher also told them that the stressed syllables would be pronounced louder than the unstressed ones. This stage continued by practicing and repeating the sound after the teacher, followed by the students' reading the passage, as well as identifying different words or sentences including the sounds practiced during the lesson. As for assessing their fluency concerning pause and speed, the teacher had the students read a paragraph. They were supposed to pause after the commas and full stops or read the interrogative sentences with an appropriate rhythm based on the principles of syllable stress they were taught. They were also taught to maintain average speed, not to read too fast nor too slowly, in order to have a fluent and intelligible pronunciation.

3.4 Control procedure (Implicit instruction)

The students received the lessons through typical implicit teaching. So, they were not aware of the intended objective of the activities; i.e., pronunciation learning. They were mainly engaged in activities and skills, like listening, repeating, and drilling. In this condition, the teacher did not explain the phonetic features or the functions of speech organs. It was taken for granted that the students would acquire pronunciation once they were exposed to it. At the end of the class session, the teacher assigned the students to listen to the CD of the book at home, too. The purpose of this additional task was to give the students another chance to listen to the correct pronunciation later after the class. After finishing the sessions, students' rate of achievement on pronunciation was assessed using the same criteria as established for the experimental group.

3.5 Study design and data analysis

The design of the study (pretest-posttest) is appropriate for comparing two different modes of instruction (implicit and explicit), using the same content and measuring the outcome with the same tools. In this quasi-experimental study, the voice recordings (as pre-test and post-test) were used to quantitatively gather the data on students' pronunciation in two groups, experimental and control (explicit and implicit). The method of pronunciation instruction, explicit/implicit, was the independent variable of this study and pronunciation acquisition, the dependent variable.

In order to analyze the collected data, the participants' performance was rated by an English-L1 rater. Then, the researcher fed the data into the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) for gaining the results of the descriptive analysis, as well as those of the appropriate referential analysis. Thus, the mean scores obtained from both study groups could be compared to find any potential differences between them in two phases of the study, i.e., the pre-and post-tests. Tests of normality were run before deciding for the right technique of referential analysis, best fitting the study data.

4. Data Analysis and Results

This section examines each one of the study null hypotheses by pre-

senting the results of the appropriate referential statistics. It is note-worthy to mention that since the pre-assumptions were not met, the re-searchers used the gain-score comparison to compare the study groups' English pronunciation. It should be mentioned that the gain score is the difference between the posttest and the pretest (Dornyei, 2007, p. 118). Therefore, the appropriate test for mean comparison would be the non-parametric equivalent of the independent t-test which is the Mann-Whitney U test. So, to test the first null hypothesis set for the present study, Table 1 presents the result of the Mann-Whitney U Test.

Table 1: The result of the Mann-Whitney U Test for the Pronunciation Gain Scores of the Groups

	Implicit-Explicit
Mann-Whitney U	106.50
Wilcoxon W	602.50
Z	-5.17
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.00

There was a statistically significant difference between the pronunciation scores of the two groups, confirming the better performance of the specific group, U = 106.50, $P < .05$. Hence, the first null hypothesis was rejected. The results of the analysis indicate that the participants were more apt to accept an explicit instruction for improving their pronunciation. So, despite the presumable mindset that teaching pronunciation works best through providing natural input, practice, and feedback, these results suggest that explicit teaching serves as a facilitative means of instruction.

As for testing the second null hypothesis, before working on the inferential statistics, the test of normality was run to choose the appropriate test. The result of the Shapiro-Wilk test of normality showed that the data are typically distributed for the two sets of scores ($P > .05$). Therefore, the independent samples t-test should be used for the comparison of consonant scores. The result of the independent samples t-test compares the groups' performance after the treatment (Table 2).

Table 2: The result of the Independent Samples T-Test for the Comparison of Consonant Scores

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances t-test for Equality of Means						
		f	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Consonant Scores	Equal variances assumed	5.361	.064	12.13	59	.00	-10.62	.875
	Equal variances not assumed			12.07	52.43	.00	-10.62	.879

As Table 2 shows, there was a statistically significant difference between the consonant scores of the two groups, t (59) = 12.13, $P < .05$. The experimental group scored higher after receiving the treatment; therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Table 3: Result of the Independent Samples t-test for the Comparison of the Groups on Their Stress Scores

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Stress Scores	Equal variances assumed	11.66	.00	3.20	59	.002	-3.18	.99
	Equal variances not assumed			3.17	44.79	.003	-3.18	1.00

The results of the above analyses show that explicit instruction was a more effective method in teaching pronunciation regarding problematic consonants and clusters. In an attempt to test the third hypothesis, first the distribution normality of the data was checked, the results of which showed that the data were normally distributed for the two sets of scores ($P > .05$). Therefore, the independent samples t-test could be used for the comparison. Table 3 presents the results.

As shown in Table 3, there was a statistically significant difference between the stress scores of the two groups, t (59) = 3.20, $P < .05$. The experimental group scored higher after receiving the treatment; therefore, the third null hypothesis was rejected, suggesting that explicit instruction is more useful for teaching stress patterns.

Before working on the inferential statistics for finding the answer to the fourth question, the test of normality was run to choose the appropriate test. Since the result of the Shapiro-Wilk test of normality showed that the data were not normally distributed for the two sets ($P < .05$) for the experimental group, the appropriate test for comparing the mean scores would be Mann-Whitney U test. Table 4 displays the results.

Table 4: The result of the Mann-Whitney U Test for the Fluency Gain Scores of the Groups

	Fluency Scores
Mann-Whitney U	310.00
Wilcoxon W	806.00
Z	-2.23
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.02

According to Table 4, there was a statistically significant difference between the pronunciation scores of the two groups, confirming the better performance of the experimental group, U = 310.00; $P < .05$. So, the null hypothesis was rejected. Such results are suggestive of the fact that

Iranian EFL learners in our study responded better to explicit instruction of pronunciation regarding fluency improvement, as well.

5. Discussion

The first null hypothesis set for the present study predicts no statistically significant difference between the explicit and implicit instruction of pronunciation. Based on the results of data analysis, this hypothesis was rejected, indicating that explicit instruction gains support over implicit instruction of pronunciation. A possible account for this result may be the case that much focus was put on a variety of techniques of presenting English pronunciation; i.e., through visual, auditory and physical stimuli. It thoroughly explains the fact that the facilitative effect of explicit instruction would depend on a variety of learning styles on the part of the learners. Further, the teacher was cautious to clarify the differences of segmental elements (consonants) and suprasegmentals (stress patterns) between L1 and L2 in order for the students to have a better understanding of such abstract knowledge which would facilitate accuracy.

Another explanation may have to do with the learning styles of language learners and their preference for direct instruction rather than the implicit instruction. As compared to the related studies carried out in Iran, our findings are in line with Mohseni (2011) who found explicit instruction not only as the best method in improving the participants' pronunciation but also in retrieving the information. However, although it seems that EFL learners favor explicit instruction in Iran, the results do not conform to those carried out in other countries. For instance, Kissling (2013) found that both explicit and implicit instructions had equally significant effects on pronunciation learning and in another study by Minhong and Ailun (2006), implicit instruction showed the better effect on Chinese college students' pronunciation.

The second null hypothesis was rejected, too. As the statistical analysis revealed, explicit instruction is more effective as far as teaching English consonants and clusters is concerned. This could be explained by the fact that the participants in the explicit group received exposure to the correct pronunciation of such English sounds with extra exercises

and explanations whereas participants in the implicit group just received adequate exposure to the correct pronunciation.

Similar results were found in earlier studies including Mohseni (2011) and Khanbeiki and Abdolmanafi-Rokni (2015) who examined the effect of the explicit vs. implicit teaching of English consonants clusters. Such a comparison indicates that Iranian EFL students prefer the explicit instruction for learning and mastering of problematic consonants which are absent in their mother tongue. So, such results gain support from the strong version of CAH which predicts difficulties based on differences between L1 and L2, calling for remedial instruction and focusing on form.

As for answering the third research question of the study, the researchers sought to find out the effect of explicit instruction of pronunciation on Iranian EFL high school learners' word stress patterns functioning as a noun or a verb. The results indicate that the experimental group scored higher after receiving the treatment. The findings of a related study by Doan (2013) are in line with the findings of our study. Doan (2013) examined the effect of noticing on improving the pronunciation of Persian learners of English. He found that noticing the errors of supra-segmental features (stress on negative markers, stress on compound nouns, and stress on question words) had a significant effect on improving the pronunciation of the participants, especially on the stress pattern of the compound nouns. Also, Abdi (2010) conducted a study on the explicit vs. implicit teaching of English vowels and stress patterns and found similar results, suggesting the fact that English stress patterns appear to be problematic for EFL learners and one way to tackle the problem would be providing them with explicit input followed by adequate practice.

Regarding the fourth research question, data analyses revealed that the explicit instruction of pronunciation had a statistically significant effect on Iranian EFL high school learners' fluency. So, regarding fluency, too, explicit instruction proved more effective for teaching pause and speed. Here, too, the teacher's efforts bear fruits by raising students' awareness of the role of fluency through focusing on meaning. As a part of the treatment, the students were explicitly instructed wherein the reading passage to make pauses and how to adjust their speed with

the normal and natural pace; learning to produce the language chunk by chunk. So, all in all, the experimental group outperformed the control group concerning pronunciation intelligibility, both accuracy, and fluency. One general explanation is that they find it difficult to reflectively and autonomously improve their fluency through implicit instruction as they have not merely been trained to do so during their academic life.

6. Conclusion

In sum, drawing on CAH, as a way to predict the extent to which language learners could achieve pronunciation accuracy (Echman, 1987), this study sought to compare the effects of two modes of instruction, implicit and explicit, on Iranian EFL learners' pronunciation intelligibility in terms of the production of the most difficult English consonants and word stress patterns for Persian speakers. A part of the study focused on the participants' fluency of speech by measuring their performance regarding pause and speed.

All in all, the findings showed that explicit teaching of pronunciation through an explanation of the rules and the use of a variety of activities (auditory, visual, and physical) (Underhill, 2005) is more effective. Rule explanation would lead to the improvement of abstract knowledge which is, in turn, reinforced by adequate rehearsal and tasks. The main benefit of explicit instruction is that it may facilitate noticing, raise learners' awareness of English knowledge, and thus help in converting the input to intake (Schmidt, 1995). The results of this study support the role of explicit instruction aiming at preventing any likely adverse effect of Persian phonological system transfer on the English phonological system.

So, based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that ELT practitioners should be cautious that simply providing learners with input, or input with minimal explicit instruction, may not be sufficient for acquisition to take place. This study suggests that a more direct pedagogic intervention is needed, at least where relatively complex pronunciation features are the focus of attention.

Teachers should maximize the learners' explicit knowledge of L2 features, emphasizing the degrees of the similarities and differences of phonological systems of the interacting languages. In this respect, they

should be encouraged to attend workshops in order to get familiar with the procedures of explicit pronunciation instruction and its benefits for language learners.

Notwithstanding the results, one should bear in mind certain limitations this study posed. First, the duration of time allotted for teaching pronunciation may not suffice to generalize the results. Additional investigations are needed to further examine the comparison between the implicit and explicit modes over a more extended period, with extended teaching time. Also, acknowledging the fact that a mixed methods research would validate the results, it could be of more benefit if future studies integrate a comparison of participants' perceptions about these modes of instruction to see whether their views would change in the treatment. Further, the present study was carried out on a rather small number of Iranian female high school tenth graders. It seems that this project would have been more informative, and the results would have been more generalizable if it had been carried out on a larger sample. Further studies are needed to replicate the present study on participants of different age and gender groups, with different proficiency levels and in different learning settings.

Last but not least, one reason for the lack of feasibility to draw robust conclusions may have to do with the fact that the implicit group was not provided with sufficient authentic input including intensive and extensive rehearsals. Otherwise, the results might have varied. So, future studies should carry out the experiments in a way that the implicit conditions will be fully attended. Besides, adding a third mode of instruction that would combine the implicit and explicit modalities can be even more informative.

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