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## **EFFECTIVENESS OF DIRECT ERROR CORRECTION IN THE CORRECT USE OF ENGLISH ARTICLES AMONG IRANIAN EFL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN KERMAN**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The goal of the study was to investigate the correcting strategies of English articles that could best help both teachers and learners to learn the use of articles by doing a research in a language institute. To this purpose the researcher had to meet certain qualities: sampling and randomization, instrumentation, pre and post testing, data analysis procedures and analysis of the achieved data. The population of the study was composed of two intact intermediate groups of EFL learners in a language institute in Kerman. Furthermore, two pre and posttests of article were used to determine the initial level of the subjects of the study in this area. The selected subjects were already familiar with Basic English grammar, and they were motivated enough to learn the article system of English and discuss the ideas about this topic. Nelson standard tests of articles were used. The tests focus on the test of definite and indefinite articles. To ensure the test reliability, the researcher tried to control all of the variables that might affect the result. The final results were analyzed using SPSS software. The results of the study supported the idea that language learners would enjoy high achievement if they are exposed to immediate error corrections strategy. In other words, the subjects of the study preferred their errors to be corrected at the time of production without having been delayed. The subjects of the study achieved a transparent view from the grammar they learn, and they naturally come to the level to use the article system more practically.

**Keywords:** *Grammar Teaching, Article System, Error, Error Correction, Feedback, Immediate Feedback*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Teaching grammar in most educational systems has been a major goal and it is the topic of discussion in the studies on language teaching. It has been observed that grammar teaching and acquisition can enhance learner proficiency and accuracy and facilitate the internalization of its syntactic system, thus supplementing the development of fluency (Ellis, 1996).

There are many factors that may determine the teaching of grammar and grammar internalization. These factors may include both the instructional and non-instructional factors such as the level of the learners, the goals the learners follow, the teaching hours available, the perceptions of the learners about grammar and the approaches that formerly learners had developed about grammar in terms of error correction and providing the appropriate feedback for more accurate use of the language.

One important factor is the way teachers treat errors and try to eradicate them. One of the aspects to consider is the immediate error correction strategy in contrast with delayed correction or peer feedback. The question to rise is to what extent using immediate error correction strategy can facilitate the acquisition of errors in the area of articles.

However, the study tries to exercise an approach that facilitates learning of English article system at the light of exercising a specific error correction strategy.

#### ***Statement of the Problem***

Learning grammar has always been an essential need of the Iranian EFL learners in various levels of proficiency.

To them, learning a language normally equals learning and knowing grammar. Besides, language classes have been managed by giving a lot of focus to the teaching and practicing of grammar. On the other hand, using the grammar components such the use of articles is subject to a lot of problems and the learners have to struggle with some definite obstacles to master the English article system.

### **Research Article**

Mc Eldowney (1977) in her study discussed that the same type of errors of article persists in the English of school children, college students, university students, English teachers, scientists, and other graduates. She recognizes three types of errors among them:

- .1 Omission of a/the/-s
- .2 Wrong insertion of a/the/-s
- .3 Confusion of a/the/-s

This is believed that this area of universal errors probably exists because in article usage, we are dealing with a system of interrelated units. Thus, in this case, on the one hand, we can anticipate L1 interference, and on the other hand the source of errors is traced back to the L2. Faghih (1997) discussed that because of the deep difference between the article system of English and Persian, Farsi learners of English have great difficulty to master the English article system. He in his study concludes that due to the fact that Modern Standard Written Persian does not have a definite article, it is plausible that the acquisition of the English definite article will constitute a problem. Nunan (1998) believing that in textbooks, grammar is very often presented out of context and learners are given isolated sentences, which they are expected to internalize through exercises involving repetition, manipulation, and grammatical transformation concludes these exercises are designed to provide learners with formal, declarative mastery, but unless they provide opportunities for learners to explore grammatical structures in context, they make the task of developing procedural skill—being able to use the language for communication—more difficult than it needs to be, because learners are denied the opportunity of seeing the systematic relationships that exist between form, meaning, and use. An evidence of the EFL learners' disability to grasp the L2 grammar is in fact the big gap that is felt and observed between the rules of the two languages. Todd *et al.*, (1986) discussed the more differences we feel between the rules; the more difficult it is to learn them. In other words, differences normally lead to difficulty and the main problem here arises when the number of errors cumulates as a result of these differences .

### **Significance of the Study**

The study primarily aims at working an approach that may facilitate the acquisition of English article system for the subjects of the study. The study means to help the EFL learners of the study to master the English article system by implementing an appropriate error correction strategy that may give the required focus to the use of the article system. Selecting the corrective feedback primarily depends on the age, level, goal and the materials being used. However, the study aims at exercising the error correction strategy that is relevant to the objectives being purposefully selected. It is assumed if the subjects find a transparent view from the grammar they learn, they naturally come to the level to use it more practically. This can happen if they know when and how to use any particular structure. Therefore, the study means to achieve these goals by following two procedures: first using a definite error correction strategy and second focusing on the teaching and practice of the article system. This study is carried out to find suitable answers for these questions: what is the best method of correcting errors of article? How direct and immediate error correction can affect the performance of the EFL learners? Can error correction strategy develop the accuracy of using articles? It moreover tries to review the current error correction strategies and their impact on the learning and linguistic performance of the EFL learners. On the other hand, it tries to unfold the question if immediate error correction will lead to the removal of the errors and decrease them in number and type .

### **Theoretical Framework**

The scope of the study is limited to what Kulik & Kulik (1988) presented in a meta-analysis of their studies by looking at error correction strategies. They proposed although delayed feedback was often found to produce better results in laboratory studies, immediate feedback resulted in better performance in applied studies in actual classrooms. This is why; they implied that it might be the classroom setting itself that is the key factor. The meta-analysis of Kulik & Kulik (1988) revealed that delayed feedback sometimes resulted in superior performance, and several other lines of research underline this possibility. The processing of delayed feedback may be more difficult than the processing of immediate feedback. They pointed to differences in the spacing of the to-be-learned materials that obtain between immediate

### **Research Article**

and delayed feedback conditions. The repetitions of the information with immediate feedback tend to be massed, whereas those with delayed feedback tend to be more dispersed or spaced. Insofar as spaced practice can benefit memory, as has often been shown delayed feedback should benefit memory.

### **Research Questions**

To undertake the study, first we start by asking the following two questions that consider the method and the approach having been incorporated in this study:

- 1 How error correction strategy can facilitate the acquisition of the article system ?
- 2 What is the impact of implementing immediate error correction strategy on the acquisition of article system ?

### **Research Hypothesis**

Regarding the questions raised above, two directional hypotheses are proposed :

H1: Using direct error correction strategy can facilitate the acquisition of the articles system .

H2: Correcting errors immediately has positive effect on the use of the English articles .

### **Limitations of the Study**

The first limitation of the study is that it limits its scope to the teaching of the article system, and naturally ignores other aspects of grammar. On the other hand, to focus only on the articles and to ignore other quantifiers can be a mismatch in the teaching processes since most of the quantifiers and possessives can function the same as definite articles and thus teaching and presenting articles have to be associated with the discussion of all other determiners. On the other hand, focusing on immediate error correction system and ignoring other alternatives is another important limitation of the study. It is possible for some of the learners to be sensitive about the error correction strategy and do not feel comfortable with this special strategy. Therefore to impose it to all of the learners does not seem to be practical and interesting .

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The goal of the study was to investigate the correcting strategies of English articles that could best help both teachers and learners to learn the use of articles by doing a research in a language institute. The researcher had to meet certain qualities: sampling and randomization, instrumentation, pre and post testing, data analysis procedures and analysis of the achieved data. The population of the study was composed of two intact intermediate groups of EFL learners in a language institute in Kerman. The language learners, male and female of about 42, made up the study population. To ensure the homogeneity of the subjects, an Oxford Placement Test was used for this purpose. After taking the test and drawing the result, 12 subjects whose scores fell one standard deviation above and below the mean were excluded from the study. The other remaining 30 ones made up the subjects of the study and were classified into two groups. The first 15 ones were randomly selected and made up the experimental group (EG) and the other 15 ones made up the control group (CG), aged from 18 to 24. Furthermore, two pre and post tests of article were used to determine the initial level of the subjects of the study in this area. The pretest was taken before the experiment started and the posttest after the study had come to an end. The content and the form of the tests were the same for both groups. For the tests, Nelson standard tests of articles were used. The tests focus on the test of definite and indefinite articles and thus were valid enough to estimate the same trait. To ensure the test reliability, the researcher tried to control all of the variables that might affect the result. To this goal, the tests were taken in a controlled condition and with enough attention to the allotted time, noise, administration and other relevant factors. The final results were analyzed using SPSS software.

Several type of material was used for the two groups. The main source was using Inside Out English series that are used in Kish Air Language Institute in Kerman. The teacher provided different types of exercises for the learners. They were some contextual and meaningful exercise that wanted the learners to give the response to each item one by one. These procedures were followed similarly for both groups of EG and CG. The only difference was observed in the production level where there were some differences. For the EG the teacher immediately corrected the errors that the learners produced. In case of any error, the teacher immediately responded by giving the right answers to the learners. On the other hand, in case

### **Research Article**

of the CG, the teacher ignored most of the errors of article and either corrected them in later stages. The focus was not as tense as the procedure for the EG. All in all, the main difference between the two groups falls within the error correction strategies which are implemented differently for the two groups.

#### **Examining Research Hypothesis**

The goal of the study was to support the following two research hypothesis:

H1: Using direct error correction strategy can facilitate the acquisition of the articles system.

H2: Correcting errors immediately has positive effect on the use of the English articles.

In order to examine the research hypotheses, the researcher used both descriptive and inferential statistics. She used an independent T-student test to analyze the difference between the means of the two groups regarding their score on the pre and posttests. The data of the study was a combination of the pre and posttest scores. The other parameter was using Spearman Correlation in order to discover any meaningful relationship between the two pre and posttest of each group. The other parameter is using coefficient of correlation in order to estimate inter-rater reliability.

By referring to the results, we can recognize that the first hypothesis is verified and proved to be correct. In other words, the study proved direct error correction could facilitate and develop the acquisition of the article system of the subjects of the study.

The study also showed that implementing the error feedback was an effective tool in order to assist the subjects to use the corrective feedback and use the strategy for their grammar knowledge .

On the other hand, the second hypothesis is also proved to be true. By referring to the statistics and data presented in the previous chapter, we can learn that the EG performed better from pre to posttest and achieved higher scores than the CG. In other words, the experiment showed to be effective in terms of providing the learners with the knowledge on the article system.

The results of the study supported the idea that language learners would enjoy high achievement if they are exposed to immediate error corrections strategy. In other words, the subjects of the study preferred their errors to be corrected at the time of production without having been delayed. The data show that the EG developed more satisfactorily and were more satisfied in this regard. The subjects of the study achieved a transparent view from the grammar they learn, and they naturally come to the level to use the article system more practically. This can specifically happen if they know when and how to use any particular structure.

Besides, the subjects of the study proved to benefit more from the immediate error correction strategy and at the same time they proved to prefer the immediate to the delayed corrective feedback. In other words, the adult language learners prefer to be corrected by their teachers at once and without being forced to be kept waiting for later time. This strategy has been followed in different places and with different language skills and language learners.

However, it has to be noticed that error correction strategy of any type does not necessarily show that the errors will completely and orderly remove from the linguistic competence of the language learners. Witbeck (1976) believing the fact that correcting an error in a particular context does not often lead to the elimination of the same kind of error in subsequent contexts, points to the importance of error correction strategies in various situations and introduces “peer correction as one reliable strategy. The advantages of the activity are as involving the students in both correcting and rewriting and those students get immediate feedback. Moreover, the results are improved when it is made clear that questionable points, either in correction or rewriting, should be handled through consultations with the teacher.

#### **Data Presentation**

Below the results of t sample tests are reflected. As it can be observed, table 1 presents the information about the pre and post tests of the CG. The 15 subjects for the pretest achieved a mean score of 12.06 which compared with the posttest, it rose to 14. In other words, before any instruction, the subjects show a lower score and it subsequently rises to 14 after a period of instruction. We can conclude that the learners have improved positively being instructed using the traditional and teacher-centered approach

**Research Article**

**Table 1: Pre and posttest of CG**

|        |            | Mean    | N  | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|--------|------------|---------|----|----------------|-----------------|
| Pair 1 | pretestcg  | 12.0667 | 15 | 1.66762        | .43058          |
|        | posttestcg | 14.0000 | 15 | 1.55839        | .40237          |

On the other hand, table 2 demonstrates the result of the correlation between the pre and posttest of CG. As it reveals, the relevant coefficient correlation between the two tests is estimated to be .825 which is clearly an acceptable level of correlation for the two tests. In the same manner, the relevant significance for the two tests is Sig=.000 which by itself shows perfect meaningful relationship between them: Sig=.000< .05.

**Table 2: Paired Samples Correlations**

|        |                              | N  | Correlation | Sig. |
|--------|------------------------------|----|-------------|------|
| Pair 1 | pretest of cg&posttest of cg | 15 | .825        | .000 |

In the same way, table 3 demonstrates the detailed information about the t sample test and the degree of meaningfulness between them. In other words, based on the information and with the standard deviation of .24817, and at 95% of confidence we can believe that the two tests are related meaningfully.

**Table 3: Paired Samples Test**

|        |                                   | Paired Differences |                | Std. Mean | Error95% Interval Difference Lower | Confidence of the |
|--------|-----------------------------------|--------------------|----------------|-----------|------------------------------------|-------------------|
|        |                                   | Mean               | Std. Deviation |           |                                    |                   |
| Pair 1 | pretest for cg<br>posttest for cg | -1.93333           | 96115          | .24817    | -2.46560                           |                   |

The next table shows the mean, table t, and the df or degree of freedom. In other words, by referring to the information proposed here, we can conclude that perfect relationship can be observed between the pre and post tests for the CG with -7.79 of the t of the table and df of 14. The sig= .000 that shows that the two tests are meaningfully and completely related

**Table 4: Paired Samples Test**

|            |            | Paired Differences                              |       | t      | df |      |
|------------|------------|---|-------|--------|----|------|
|            |            | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Upper | Lower |        |    |      |
| Pretestcg- | Posttestcg | -1.40107  |       | -7.790 | 14 | .000 |

On the other hand, by looking at the information in table 5, we can learn that it shows the relationship between the pre and posttests for the EG. First of all, the total mean score for the pretest of the group was estimated to be 12.64 while it rose to 16 for the posttest of the same group. However, the standard deviation of the two groups change from 1.549 for the pretest to 1.109 for the posttest, this is the criterion that signal more homogeneity of the group from pretest to posttest. The standard error of measurement has also decreased to .296 from .414.

**Research Article**

**Table 5: Paired Samples Statistics for EG**

|        |            | Mean    | N  | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|--------|------------|---------|----|----------------|-----------------|
| Pair 1 | pretesteg  | 12.6429 | 15 | 1.54955        | .41413          |
|        | posttesteg | 16.0000 | 15 | 1.10940        | .29650          |

On the other hand, the relevant correlation between the two pre and posttest for the EG is reflected in table 6. The estimated coefficient correlation of the two tests is .626, with a significance of .017. The relevant correlation is not very high but somehow acceptable and the sig= .017< .05. The equation shows the meaningful relationship between the two pre and posttests for the EG.

**Table 6: Paired Samples Correlations**

|        |                        | N  | Correlation | Sig. |
|--------|------------------------|----|-------------|------|
| Pair 1 | Pretesteg & posttesteg | 15 | .626        | .017 |

Based on the data presented in table 7 that demonstrates the detailed information about the t sample test and the degree of meaningfulness between them, we can know the degree of freedom between the two variables. In other words, based on the information and with the standard deviation of 1. 215 and at 95% of confidence we can believe that the two tests are related meaningfully.

**Table 7: Paired Samples Test**

|        |                        | Paired Differences |                | Std. Error Mean | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower |
|--------|------------------------|--------------------|----------------|-----------------|---|
|        |                        | Mean               | Std. Deviation |                 |   |
| Pair 1 | pretesteg - posttesteg | -3.35714           | 1.21574        | .32492          | -4.05909  |

Table 8 shows the mean, the t of the table, and the df or degree of freedom. In other words, by referring to the information proposed here, we can conclude that perfect relationship can be observed between the pre and post tests for the EG with -10.332 of the t of the table and df of 13. The sig= .000 that shows that the two tests are meaningfully and completely related.

**Table 8: Paired Samples Test**

|        |                        | Paired Differences                              |   | T       | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|--------|------------------------|---|---|---------|----|-----------------|
|        |                        | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Upper | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower |         |    |                 |
| Pair 1 | pretesteg - posttesteg | -2.65520  |   | -10.332 | 13 | .000            |

On the other hand, table 9 reveals the information about the relationship between the pretests of both CG and EG. In other words, the table shows if any kind of relationship can be observed between the two tests. According to the information, the mean score for the CG pretest is calculated to be 12.00 while it is 12.64 for EG. In fact the mean scores belong to the time before the instruction begins. The relevant standard deviation for CG and EG are 1.709 and 1.549, respectively.

**Table 9: Paired Samples Statistics**

|        |             | Mean    | N  | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|--------|-------------|---------|----|----------------|-----------------|
| Pair 1 | pretesteg – | 12.0000 | 15 | 1.70970        | .45694          |
|        | Posttesteg  | 12.6429 | 15 | 1.54955        | .41413          |

**Research Article**

But the estimated correlation for the pretest of both CG and EG is reflected in table 10 As it can be seen, the low correlation of only .290 proves that there is no correlation between the two tests. The significance is also too high for this purpose: Sig= .314>.05.which indicates that there is no relationship between the two tests.

**Table 10: Paired Samples Correlations**

|        |                     | N  | Correlation | Sig. |
|--------|---------------------|----|-------------|------|
| Pair 1 | pretestcg&pretesteg | 15 | .290        | .314 |

The same relationship is observed between the pretest of both EG and CG. In other words, although the standard deviation for the two tests that is shown in table 11 is just 1.945, it can't show the relationship between them.

**Table 11: Paired Samples Test**

|        |                        | Paired Differences |                | Std. Error Mean | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference |
|--------|------------------------|--------------------|----------------|-----------------|---|
|        |                        | Mean               | Std. Deviation |                 |   |
| Pair 1 | pretestcg<br>pretesteg | -.64286            | 1.94569        | .52001          | -1.76627                                  |

Table 12 shows the t value test of the pretests of both CG and EG. In fact it shows that the two tests are correlated at 13 degree of freedom when sig is estimated to be .238. However, the relationship is not so tight. Sig=.238>.5. The equation does not show any significant relationship between the two tests.

**Table 12: Paired Samples Test**

|        |                        | Paired Differences                        | t      | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|--------|------------------------|---|--------|----|-----------------|
|        |                        | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference |        |    |                 |
|        |                        | Upper                                     |        |    |                 |
| Pair 1 | pretestcg<br>pretesteg | -.48055                                   | -1.236 | 13 | .238            |

According to the information in table 13 the two posttests belonging to the EG and CG have been correlated and the results are presented. As it can be seen, the total mean score for the CG posttest is estimated to be 14.07 while this is 16.00 for the EG. On the other hand, the calculated standard deviation for the CG is 1.591 and it turns to be 1.109 for the EG.

**Table 13: Paired Samples Statistics**

|        |            | Mean    | N  | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|--------|------------|---------|----|----------------|-----------------|
| Pair 1 | posttestcg | 14.0714 | 15 | 1.59153        | .42535          |
|        | posttesteg | 16.0000 | 15 | 1.10940        | .29650          |

On the other hand, table 14 presents the required information about the degree of correlation between the post tests of both CG and EG. As it can be seen, the achieved correlation is .087 which is a very small and in the same way, the relevant sig is calculated to be .767. In other words, no special relationship can be investigated here.

**Table 14: Paired Samples Correlations**

|        |                       | N  | Correlation | Sig. |
|--------|-----------------------|----|-------------|------|
| Pair 1 | posttestcg&posttesteg | 15 | .087        | .767 |

**Research Article**

The same relationship is observed between the posttest of both EG and CG. In other words, although the standard deviation for the two tests that is shown in table 15 is assumed to be 1.859, it can't show the relationship between them.

**Table 15: Paired Samples Test**

|        |                          | Paired Differences |                |                 | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference |
|--------|--------------------------|--------------------|----------------|-----------------|---|
|        |                          | Mean               | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |   |
| Pair 1 | posttestcg<br>posttesteg | --1.92857          | 1.85904        | .49685          | Lower<br>-3.00195                         |

On the other hand, table 16 displays the t value test of the posttests of both CG and EG. In fact it shows that the two tests are correlated at 13 degree of freedom when sig is estimated to be .002. So we can conclude the equation is  $\text{Sig} = .002 > .5$ . The equation reveals significant relationship between the two tests.

**Table 16: Paired Samples Test**

|        |                          | Paired Differences |                | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | Upper | Sig. |
|--------|--------------------------|--------------------|----------------|---|-------|------|
|        |                          | Mean               | Std. Deviation |   |       |      |
| Pair 1 | posttestcg<br>posttesteg | --.85519           |                | -3.882                                    | 13    | .002 |

**Conclusion**

The study presented the data based on the marks of the pre and posttests for the two CG and EG groups. The analysis of the marks revealed how the two groups of learners and the treatment affected their performance. In other words, we could understand what kind of relationship existed between the treatment exercised by the teacher and the achieved results. Besides, we knew how and to what extent the research hypotheses could be verified.

To this purpose, a few statistical parameters were used, all of which will were brought into consideration in the given tables above.

To achieve these goals, the researcher used two types of data: descriptive and inferential. The descriptive data showed the means and the standard deviations, but the inferential data however showed the coefficient of correlation, t sample relationship and the degree of freedom. The results of the study supported the idea that language learners would enjoy high achievement if they are exposed to immediate error corrections strategy.

In other words, the subjects of the study preferred their errors to be corrected at the time of production without having been delayed. The data show that the EG developed more satisfactorily and were more satisfied in this regard. The subjects of the study achieved a transparent view from the grammar they learn, and they naturally come to the level to use the article system more practically. This can specifically happen if they know when and how to use any particular structure.

The findings of the study have a lot of indications for language teachers, practitioners and administrators. The results can support the idea that selecting suitable corrective feedback strategies can positively affect the performance of the learners and thus language teachers have to carefully select suitable corrective feedback that may fall useful and effective for the type of their learners.

The study may also help textbook designers to prepare suitable materials that may address the needs of their learners by providing appropriate practice exercises. The focus can be given to the needs of the learners and their special problems in this area. On the other hand, the study achievements may also assist test designers to construct the tests that can focus on the problems of their learners and their difficulties in this area.

## Research Article

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**Research Article**

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