

## **THE EFFECT OF CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK ON IRANIAN EFL LEARNERS' PRONUNCIATION: THE CASE OF /V/ W/**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study investigated the use of corrective feedback to address beginner Iranian EFL learners' pronunciation. Two groups of 15 language learners were randomly assigned to one experimental and one control group. While the control group just received common traditional method of pronunciation teaching, the experimental group received corrective feedback on their wrong pronunciation. The design of this study was pretest-treatment-posttest. The results of the pretests and posttests showed no significant differences between the control and the experimental group. The findings showed that (a) corrective feedback affected the learners' pronunciation of v sound and (b) corrective feedback did not improve w sound production.

**Keywords:** *Pronunciation, Corrective Feedback, Iranian EFL Learners*

### **INTRODUCTION**

In the realm of language learning pedagogy, a great number of researchers have studied in the field of language teaching based on learners' need such as communicative competence and consequently pronunciation which has been pervasive issue in second language acquisition (SLA). Pronunciation deals with sound production. Therefore sounds play crucial role in the language.

Marks (2006) introduced pronunciation as integral component of communicative competence that affects using language (Grant, 2010) as well as the quantity and quality of produced output and received input (Fraser, 2000). In the field of SLA, in particular, the subject of pronunciation has garnered plenty of changes. Traditional approaches considered pronunciation ineffective factor (Purcell & Suter, 1980) while recent methodologies language teaching have pointed out this essential component of the language (Pennington, 1994). Regarding with the significant role of pronunciation in SLA, Pennington (1996) asserted that ignoring pronunciation means ignoring the basic of the language. The literature on the seminal role of pronunciation, has suggested that this integral component of language-pronunciation- cannot be dissociated from other foreign language skills (Celce-Murcia *et al.*, 1996).

The need for communication the target language in the field of second language learning, is the main reason of many efforts which were made to establish different kinds of techniques and activities to cover pronunciation in the second language teaching curriculum. Among these activities corrective feedback is dominant which the main independent variable in this study was.

Corrective feedback (CF) was expected as an effective factor for pronunciation improvement. Ellis (2006, p. 28) has defined CF as "responses to learner utterances containing an error". Ranta and Lyster (2007) classified CF into two broad categories: reformulations and prompts. Reformulations are those feedback strategies that rephrase a learner's erroneous production, providing the learner with the correct form. Prompts, on the other hand, do not provide learners with the correct form. Instead, they push or prompt the learners directly or indirectly to self-correct. These two types of feedback have also been called input providing and output prompting strategies (Ellis, 2009).

One sophisticated subject in the second language teaching and learning is pronunciation which has undergone many changes. Most Iranian EFL teachers even at elementary level of the language proficiency have difficulty in teaching pronunciation with regard to English sounds that are not found in Persian language such as /w/ v/θ/ð/ ə/. /v/ and /w/ were the main focus of this study. Jahan (2011) stated that the most common difficulty in the target language was that the students were influenced by their mother tongue. Due to absence of mentioned sounds in Persian, EFL learners also have problems to pronounce some English sounds correctly even intelligibly. While dominating audio-lingual approach, pronunciation

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was focused through repetition and recitation in the sixteen century. Arousing communicative approach in the seventeen and eighteen century, teachers dropped out pronunciation as an extraneous component of the language (Brown & Yule, 1983). In many language classrooms pronunciation ceased to be taught (Derwing & Roister, 2006). For many teachers, choosing the best technique to teach this seminal part of language was controversial and sophisticated, and to learners there were large individual perspective about effective method of teaching pronunciation.

## **Literature Review**

Needing learners for communication in the field of second language learning, has pointed up the significance role of pronunciation in L2 pedagogy, pronunciation has been neglected in the second language classroom and has been considered as frightening issue for teachers (Bergess & Spencer, 2000). Seferoglu (2005) claimed that most language curriculums have not covered a secure place for pronunciation instruction. Teaching pronunciation has been considered as personal interest which is up to the teachers to incorporate it in to their syllables (Harmer, 1993).

Dominating audio-lingual approach, pronunciation was focused through repetition and recitation in the sixteen century. Arousing communicative approach in the seventeen and eighteen century, teachers dropped out pronunciation as an extraneous component of the language (Brown & Yule, 1983). In many language classrooms pronunciation ceased to be taught (Derwing & Roister, 2006). For many teachers, choosing the best technique to teach this seminal part of language was controversial and sophisticated, and to learners there were large individual perspective about effective method of teaching pronunciation.

Emerging form-focused instruction in the early 1990s, corrective feedback has been given much attention from both theoretical and pedagogical perspective (Lightbown & Spada, 1990; Spada, 1997, 2011). According to Ur (1996), 'the learner needs feedback on how well he or she is doing'. CF is a complex phenomenon whether to correct, what to correct, how to correct, and when to correct?

The extent to which language learners require feedback in order to acquire language has been a matter of debate in L1 and L2 acquisition. Chaudron (1988) defined corrective feedback as "treatment error" that refers to "any teacher behavior following an error that minimally attempts to inform the learner of the fact of error"

Corrective feedback is closely related to the noticing hypothesis (Schmidt, 1994, 2001), claiming that noticing is essential and that "intake is what learners consciously notice" (Schmidt, 1990). Doughty (2001) and the other linguists have investigated the effective role of awareness in SLA which led to necessity role of feedback in pedagogical environment. Feedback provides opportunities for learners to notice what they know and what they can say (Ellis, 2005).

This study is an attempt to investigate the effectiveness of corrective feedback instruction on the Iranian beginner EFL learners' pronunciation knowledge. / w/v/ sound production were focused which had previously partially taught to the participants. The present study was conducted through eclectic techniques of teaching pronunciation contained phonetic training, reading aloud, repetition and recitation (Celce-Marci, 1996) which were followed by corrective feedback on learners' erroneous utterance.

The target language is better taught through spoken form than the other forms such as reading (Stern, 1992). Since sounds play a crucial role in communication, pronunciation is a prominent element in foreign language learning and teaching. Therefore, teachers must be cautious of utilizing proper instructions and techniques to teach pronunciation in their classrooms. Following Swain's output hypothesis (1985) which rejects Krashen's claim that stated one can basically acquire an L2 "without ever producing it" (1981) learners need to engage in language production in order to increase their L2 proficiency. Therefore, communicative competence is highlighted in this stage of language learning.

Regarding with the important role of feedback, Abdollahifahm (2014), conducted a study in Tabriz on 20 intermediate subjects. The subjects were randomly divided into experimental and control group. The design of the study was pretest-treatment-posttest which was successful to indicate the positive effect of interactional feedback on writing skill and learners' motivation toward foreign language learning.

Not only do Iranian teachers have problems with teaching pronunciation, but also Iranian EFL students consider pronunciation as sophisticated and uninteresting proficiency in SLA. Unfortunately,

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pronunciation is not focused in used curriculum in Iran and language learners are not exposed to sufficient pronunciation instruction. Therefore, in many language classrooms, pronunciation ceased to be taught (Derwing & Rossiter, 2002). To overcome this difficulty, it is essential to implement variant innovative methods to teach pronunciation. However many researchers have supported the impact of feedback on learners' language performance; many teachers do not utilize this effective technique (feedback) to teach pronunciation in Iran. Teachers still use traditional method for teaching pronunciation that leads to be uninteresting for drawing learners' attention in pedagogical setting. In other words, pronunciation as a crucial ingredient part of language is neglected in many English classes. If Iranian teachers use an enjoyable method for teaching pronunciation, it may not take a long time to improve learners' English pronunciation. Integration phonological awareness and feedback helps students pronounce English words correctly in communication with the pedagogical environment. Exposing learners with new methods of teaching pronunciation, provide interesting setting for both teachers and learners for presenting pronunciation.

## Research Question

This study aimed at answering the following question:

Does corrective feedback improve Iranian EFL learners' pronunciation proficiency?

To investigate the research question of the present study, the following null hypothesis is addressed:

There is no relationship between corrective feedback and pronunciation knowledge.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Methodology

The participants of the study were 30 fresh man male students who were studying accounting at the University of Applied Science in Yazd, Iran. They did not know alphabets. They did not go to any English classes before just they passed some English courses at secondary or high school which were not satisfied. It is noticeable that most subjects claimed that they did not know anything about English or they forgot what they learnt. They had problem with sounds production that had different articulators' manner from their mother language like /v/, /v/, /w/, /θ/, and /ə/.

Table 1 presents demographic characteristics of participants involved in the present study. The participants were assigned randomly into two groups of 15, one was experimental groups and the other one was the control group.

**Table 1: Demographic Background of Participants**

Nationality	First Language	Sex	Number	Age Mean	Level of proficiency
Iranian	Persian	Male	30	18-25	Beginner

### Materials and Instruments

The *Basic English Reading for University Students* is the main material university which was taught to the subjects of the present study. This book written by Jallilipoor *et al.*, (1379) from Shahid Rajaee Press points up primary vocabularies texts. Reading comprehension is the main focus of this book. The language of the book is simple concluding 30 short simple texts. The texts ordered from simple to difficult followed by some multiple-choice questions about the context. This book contains 30 units 8 of which were taught in the current study. This book was selected because of its texts. If corrective feedback which was the variable of the present study impacted on learners' pronunciation, subjects were be able to read the texts and vocabularies accurately which was the main purpose of conducting this research.

*Longman Handy Learner's Dictionary of American English* was utilized as another material. This useful dictionary provides learners with pronunciation table, guide to the dictionary, grammar codes, and symbols used with words in the same family. Not only does contain Persian explanation for pronunciation table, but also it concludes simple definition of words English to English.

To answer the research question, three different instruments including *Pretest on Pronunciation*, *Posttest on Pronunciation*, and *Recording Subjects' Voice* were used to collect the data. A text of one unit selected as

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pretest from *Basic Reading for University Students*. All subjects in the control group and the experimental group were asked to read the text without any correction or corrective feedback. While reading, the subjects' pronunciation was being recorded by the teacher to be compare with subjects' performances on the posttest after the treatment. All of the subjects took part on the pretest. The validity of the text was accepted by four experienced English teachers and instructors at Ardakan Applied Scientific University who taught different English books more than ten years.

In order to achieve the aim of the present study, the subjects in both groups were supposed to read another text adopted from the main material as posttests. The subjects' pronunciation was recorded by the teacher. The content and focused sounds were similar to those in the pretest.

## Procedure

Before conducting the research, the process of sound production, different problematic English sounds for Iranian EFL learners, and significance of pronunciation were explained to the experimental group. Different activities and techniques for improving pronunciation in the second language were introduced to the participants. Moreover, the syllable and curriculum of their class which focused on pronunciation were elaborated to them and they were cognizant of their duties to work on sound production.

Since this study aimed at investigating the impact of corrective feedback on Iranian EFL learners' pronunciation, a pronunciation test that focused on special words containing /v/w/ was performed to both the experimental and the control groups before performing the treatment. The participants read the text in a class individually. While reading their subjects' voices were recorded. Other subjects were waiting outside the class in order not to help each other during the test.

To show whether the treatment in this study was effective or not, in the last session of the project a text with the same contents in the pretest was read by both the experimental and the control group. It was expected that after the treatment in the experimental group, the subjects had better performance on the posttest in comparison to the subjects in the control group. After collecting the data of the questionnaire and pre/posttest, they were statistically analyzed using the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science). Each question in the questionnaire was analyzed separately and the results of the pretest were shown in term of descriptive statistic first and inferential statistic then. A comparison was also carried out to show whether there were any differences between performance of each group or not.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The results of this study are indicated through descriptive statistic first. Then, to show statistical significant differences between and within groups' performance on the pretest and posttest, a paired sample *t* test was administered.

To show the homogeneity of two groups, a pretest of grammar was conducted before the treatment. The result confirmed that the control group and the experimental group performances were not significantly different. Table 2 shows that descriptive result of each group's performance on the pretest.

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics on the Pretests**

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Experimental		15	2.1333	.25820	.06667
	Control	15	2.0933	.30111	.07775

According to table 2 groups' performances were nearly close. As it can be seen the reported means of the control group and the experimental group indicated the homogeneity of these group.

## Descriptive Statistics on the Pretest of w Pronunciation

As mentioned earlier, two sounds of English were focused in this study. The result of each sound is reported separately. Descriptive statistics on w is illustrated in table 3

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**Table 3: Descriptive Statistics on the Pretests of the W sound (Pretests)**

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Experimental	15	2.2667	1.22280	.31573
Control	15	2.000	1.13389	.29277

As it is showed in table3, the mean of experimental group and control group on W pronunciation were very close, indicating that there was no significant difference between two groups' performance on the pretest.

### **Descriptive Statistics on the Pretest of v Pronunciation**

Another variable investigated in this study was v sound. Table 4 presents statistic description on v production in the pretests.

**Table 4: Descriptive Statistics on V Pronunciation (Pretests)**

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Experimental	15	3.0667	1.16292	.30026
Control	15	3.5333	1.06010	.27372

Referring to the reported in the table 4.3 the performance of both the experimental and the control group was similar concluding the homogeneity of the experimental and the control group on v sound production. Because of having the V sound in Persian language, 19 participants from 30 did not have problem in v pronunciation.

To show statistically significant difference between two means of experimental and control group on the pretest an independent sample *t* test was administered for each sound before and after treatment. The null hypothesis (*H*<sub>0</sub>) and the non-directional or alternative (*H*<sub>1</sub>) hypothesis were set and a *t* test was used to test these hypotheses. The null hypothesis assumed that the present means score of two groups on pronunciation focused sounds were no different. This hypothesis was tested against the non-directional at assumed the mean score of experimental group was not different from that of control group. The level of significance for testing these hypotheses was set at .05. That is if the null hypothesis was rejected, the non-directional hypothesis would be accepted and the probability that a difference in sample means would have occurred by chance, if the level of significance was less than the set value (*p*.05). The results are illustrated in table 3.

**Table 5: Inferential Statistics on the Pretests and Posttests**

		<i>T</i>	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	Posttest – Pretest	3.000	28	.001

Reported mean of the experimental group and comparing it with the pretests, it could be concluded that there was no changes between the performances of the experimental group on the pretests and posttests which indicated the ineffectiveness of corrective feedback in the present study on this sound. Little improvement which was not statistically significant was reported on the performance of the control group.

### **Inferential Statistics on W Sound**

**Table 6: Inferential Statistics on W Sound**

		<i>F</i>	Sig.	<i>t</i>	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pretest of w pronunciation	Equal variances assumed	.016	.901	.619	28	.541
	Equal variances not assumed			.619	27.842	.541
Posttest of W Pronunciation	Equal variances assumed	.023	.880	-.307	28	.761
	Equal variances not assumed			-.307	27.980	.761

As it can be seen *t* observed is smaller than *t* critical so there was no difference between pronunciation of w in the pretests and the posttests



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### Inferential Statistics on V Sound

**Table 7: Inferential Statistics on V Sound**

		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pretest of v pronunciation	Equal variances assumed	.218	.644	-1.149	28	.260
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.149	27.763	.261
Posttest of V Pronunciation	Equal variances assumed	10.338	.003	-2.138	28	.041
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.138	18.184	.046

As it can be seen  $t$  observed is bigger than  $t$  critical so there was significant difference between pronunciation of v in the pretests and the posttests. Reported result indicated the positive effect of corrective feedback on v sound pronunciation.

### Conclusion

Pronunciation is fundamental to language that leads to using target speech sounds accurately. This integral component of language is a crucial proficiency which deeply requires to be used in real context by the students. Regarding the results of the current study, there are some implications: This finding suggests teachers in EFL classroom pronunciation must be considered as essential factor and also utilize practical techniques to work on pronunciation. Regarding with the result of this study, corrective feedback did not play positive role on pronunciation learning and teaching. Therefore, teachers and researchers should think of innovative methods or integration them with corrective feedback to open new perspectives and methodologies related to pronunciation.

The significance of corrective feedback (CF) has been highlighted in L1 and L2 research literature; however, there has been some disagreement among linguists and language experts about the level of effectiveness of different types of CF. Brnadet (2008) defined feedback as information supplied learners related to some performance on task. Nassaji (2007) has asserted that an effectual teaching methodology entails feedback. As he stated in classes where corrective feedback is missing, no significant pedagogical outcome is obtained. He believed that while exchanging information between learners and teacher, learning occurs.

As Flores (2001) asserted working on pronunciation should be implemented at the early stages of language learning, the result of this study indicated that phonological instruction did not improve the adult learners' pronunciation. So for teaching pronunciation to adult, teacher should be enough innovative to implement effective PA training course. Introducing dictionary as one main and valid source is another implication for teachers. In English classes dictionary should be highlighted by the teachers.

However, investigating the effectiveness of corrective feedback on learners' pronunciation recommends important insight to TEFL teachers, conducting this research was not an easy task and it had some limitations like conducting standard pretests and posttests, the limitation of the number of collaborative task to push learners in the center of education, the number of the participants, and the amount of time devoted to data collection

In spite of the clearness and significant of the present study results, there is need to investigate further research to reply some unanswered questions which they were not covered by the result of this study. Therefore further studies are suggested to answer if corrective feedback leads to learners' independency and autonomy in the field of SLA? Whether corrective feedback enhances students' oral production and other skills? A wide range of research can be conducted to answer these questions. Replicating this study with a large number of participants and also during a longer period of time is also recommended to investigate.

Since there have been a limited number of research studied on the efficacy of corrective feedback on learners' pronunciation in Iran, this study was offered to fill hopefully this void. The present study aimed at

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finding and providing new opportunities and recommendations for language teachers and educators, material designer, and students. It is hoped that this study could open new perspectives for further research and paves the way for educational improvement.

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