

# Effect of Autonomous Noticing Activities on EFL Learners' Grammatical Accuracy<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

This study focused on the effect of transcribing task, as a noticing activity, on EFL learners' grammatical accuracy. For 20 sessions, oral discussion tasks were assigned to 2 intermediate adult EFL classrooms, with 1 class serving as the control group and the other as the experimental group. For this purpose, the learners were divided into groups of 3 or 4 in each class. Learners in both groups were asked to record their group conversations each session. Unlike the control group, the learners in the experimental group were engaged in the posttask activity. Working individually, they first transcribed the recorded classroom speaking task and autonomously tried to correct their own and their peers' grammatical mistakes. Subsequently, collaboratively, the learners engaged in further reformulation of these mistakes. Results obtained from the *t* test indicated that the transcription of oral output with a follow-up self- and peer-correction significantly enhanced the accuracy of the EFL learners' production.

**Keywords:** Autonomy; Grammatical Accuracy; Group Discussion Task; Transcription

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## 1. Introduction

During the last few decades, one of the most significant and influential developments in the area of L2 education has been a shift of perspective, at an ontological level, from a cognitive orientation toward social dimensions of language learning and teaching (Benson, 2011; Block, 2003; Firth & Wagner, 1997). This paradigm shift has paved the way for the emergence and development of new approaches to language learning and teaching (e.g., sociocultural theory) which attempt to promote cooperative classroom activities and intend to maximize social interactions among language learners (Swain, 2005). It is well-documented that classroom tasks where students work together and produce collaborative output are far more effective in terms of meaning negotiation (Kowal & Swain, 1994, 1997; Lapkin & Swain, 2000; Swain, 2001a, 2001b, 2005). In this respect, Swain (2005) argues that such activities not only can motivate learners to produce further output but also may provide them with opportunities to receive further instructional scaffolding and peer correction.

It is highly recommended that, in language classes, teachers should devote part of their classroom instruction to activities that can promote beneficial language learning habits (Vickers & Ene, 2006). In their review of SLA (Second Language Acquisition) research, Lightbown and Spada (1999) have emphasized that helping second language (L2) learners to notice the form of the target language is one of the main aspects of classroom teaching, which can be done through various activities and tasks that directs learners' attention to form while they are communicating in the L2. Moreover, for effective language learning to take place, students should ideally be engaged in communicative interactions which can draw their attention to the form of the language (e.g., Doughty & Williams, 1998; Ellis, 2003, 2005; Lightbown, 1998; Long, 2006; Nassaji & Fotos, 2007; Nassaji & Tian, 2010; Pica, 2007; Williams, 2005). However, learners often complete communicative tasks "without noticing much of anything about the language they use or encounter" (Stillwell, Curabba, Alexander, Kidd, Kim, Stone, & Wyle, 2010, p. 445). As Cooke (2013) argued, "students seldom incline to reflect upon their output and unless guided to do so by the teacher, may miss opportunities to develop their language competence by themselves" (p. 76).

Granted the fact that noticing may not always be undertaken by language learners, Thornbury (1997) suggests that, as part of their pedagogy, teachers in L2 classrooms must attempt to encourage noticing among learners. Similarly, Little (1997) emphasizes on the importance of consciousness raising by highlighting the differences between communicative language teaching and more traditional approaches toward language education. In particular, he discusses that the grammar-translation method did focus on language awareness and knowledge about the target

language, but did not provide learners with any opportunity to practice spontaneous target-language use in the classroom. However, the strong version of the communicative approach exclusively emphasizes on language use, and rarely attempts to develop students' language awareness. On this basis, Little (1997) concludes:

We need a pedagogical approach that effectively combines language learning with learning how to learn; one that insists on the use of the target language as the normal medium of classroom communication, but at the same time encourages reflection on the target language both as medium of communication and as rule-governed system; in short, one that develops both kinds of language awareness in the pursuit of learner autonomy. (p. 103)

To achieve these goals in language education, SLA researchers have identified special tasks that help learners autonomously focus on their L2 output and recognize their inaccurate language use. These tasks that promote focus on form on the part of the learners are assumed to develop students' communicative competence and foster their autonomy as well. To help learners to notice cases of inaccuracies in their own output, transcription exercise has been recognized as a useful posttask activity (Cooke, 2013; Lynch, 2001, 2007; Mennim, 2003, 2012; Stillwell et al., 2010). According to Lynch (2001), asking learners to transcribe their own output helps them to notice incorrect language use and reflect on formal and semantic aspects of their output. A posttask activity of this kind which takes place after the communicative task, provides learners with offline feedback and "relieves the pressure on speakers, allowing them to spare more attention to their L2 output, as they are no longer preoccupied with formulating meaning" (Lynch, 2007, p. 312). To date, a growing number of studies have been conducted on the effects of transcription of students' own output on L2 development (Cooke, 2013; Lynch, 2001, 2007; Mennim, 2003, 2007; Stillwell et al., 2010). Empirical investigations show that transcription exercises provide learners with an opportunity to reflect on their oral output after communicative task. Studies also indicate that when transcription exercises are used, L2 learners not only tend to notice the incorrect language uses in their output, but also their accuracy improves after a while (Mennim, 2003, 2007, 2012).

There have also been theoretical speculations about the beneficial effects of transcription of oral output activity on noticing incorrect language use by L2 learners as well as their language development. However, almost no systematic study has, thus far, compared the effect of using this task on the performance and language development of Iranian EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners.

## 2. Learner Autonomy: Social Dimension

Cross-sectional examination of the literature reveals many criticisms leveled against traditional classrooms. For instance, according to Sfard (1998), traditional classrooms are too transmission-oriented. In such environments, learners are seen as passive recipients of a predefined set of knowledge and this passive role blocks their engagement in meaningful learning, deep-level processing, and application of learning strategies (Furtak & Kunter, 2012). Citing Wolf (1994), on this basis, Burkert (2011) reminded teachers to reconceptualize and rethink about their teaching practice. He explains that once the principles of constructivism are followed, the educational context turns into a learning workshop where learners become active researchers, taking part in the collection, analysis and development of knowledge. Little (1991) took a similar stance, and pointed out that “learning is possible only to the extent that the learner is able to integrate the new information that is being offered with the sum of his experience to date” (p. 123). In this regard, Williams and Burden (1997) made a distinction between the teacher as a mediator and teacher as a typical instructor. From their perspective, a mediator helps learners become autonomous, and take control of their own learning, with the aim of enabling them to become independent thinkers and problem-solvers. Thus, transferring power to the learners implies that it is not just the teacher who should take responsibility for whatever goes on in the classroom (Burkert, 2011), and it is important to make the learners aware of the fact that they are also the agents of knowledge acquisition (Dam & Legenhausen, 2011).

In light of the recent developments in English Language Teaching (ELT) and a shift of perspective from cognitive to social-orientation, proponents of learner autonomy have also started to pay more attention to the social aspect of autonomy. As Benson (2011) maintained, the social turn in language teaching and learning has turned researchers’ attention from viewing autonomy as an individual learning to collaborative learning. In the 1990s, SLA researchers recognized that studying language in isolation from language teachers would not necessarily result in learner autonomy (Benson, 2006; Oxford, 2003, 2015). For instance, Little (1991) considered the concept of autonomy as a feature of learning situation and not as a feature of a learner. In addition, Holliday (1999), by emphasizing the vital role that socialization plays in language learning, proposed the notion of social autonomy and asserted that “autonomy resides in the social worlds of the students, which they bring with them” (p.117). Similarly, Littlewood (1999) contended that language learners, by taking the opportunity of communicating with other learners in English and by accepting the responsibility for their own learning, can develop their autonomy in an interpersonal environment.

Researchers who have emphasized the social dimensions of learner autonomy (e.g., Dam, 1995; Esch, 1997; Feryok, 2013; Little, 1991; 1999; Trinh, 2005) argue that L2 autonomy is a matter of independence as well as interdependence. Trinh (2005) suggested that interdependence is undertaken in the process of negotiating meaning, scaffolding between teacher and learners and among learners themselves. This social interaction which helps L2 learners in the development of learner autonomy is also evident in Vygotsky's formulation of sociocultural learning (Little, 1996). Therefore, concepts such as scaffolding, collaborative learning, and reciprocal teaching that are related to the sociocultural theory of learning have been given momentum in fostering learner autonomy (Sinclair, 2009). Development of learner autonomy, in this view, is considered as a socially mediated process (Benson, 2006).

Alongside collaborative interactions, reflection on the use of language has also been assumed to play an important role in developing learner autonomy. Smith (2003) suggested that the main aim in fostering autonomous learning should be based on awareness-raising and reflective skills. This entails that thinking about language and reflection on its use plays a crucial role in the development of learner autonomy. Similarly, Little (1997) speculated that in order to develop autonomy, language learners should be encouraged to negotiate and evaluate their learning process through making attempts to learn English by using it. This would help them to develop "their language awareness in the psycholinguistic sense" (p. 103). Therefore, in order to help learners to receive considerable linguistic benefit from classroom interactions teachers should ideally encourage learners to reflect on their output (Lynch, 2001).

Despite the theoretical justification for the implementation of autonomous activities in language classrooms and its effect on learners' language development, there is a paucity of direct empirical research studies in its support. Studies done on the effect of transcription task have mainly examined the extent to which language learners notice the incorrect language uses in their output. However, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, no study, so far, has investigated the effect of using this posttask activity on the improvement of EFL learners' grammatical accuracy. To this end, in the present study, EFL learners were initially engaged in collaborative work where they were required to negotiate meaning in their groups. Second, to promote language awareness and reflection on L2 output, a follow-up post-task activity was designed and the learners were asked to transcribe their conversations and then focus on erroneous utterances they and their partners produced while negotiating meaning. This self- and peer-correction provided learners with an opportunity to notice their own and their peers' errors and allowed them autonomous reformulation of these inaccurate utterances (Lynch, 2001, 2007). Then, working

collaboratively, learners were engaged in further discussions and reformulation of these errors. To meet the purpose of the study, the following research questions were addressed:

1. What is the effect of individual and group autonomous activities (self- and peer-correction, collaborative reflection, and reformulation of mistakes) on EFL learners' grammatical accuracy?
2. To what extent and what incorrect language components would EFL learners notice via self- and peer-correction?

### **3. Method**

#### ***3.1 Participants***

The participants were a total of 39 EFL learners in two groups of experimental ( $n = 19$ ) and control ( $n = 20$ ) groups, studying English in a language institute in Zanjan, Iran. The institute presented courses for various levels of proficiency, ranging from elementary to advanced. The main course book taught in the institute was *Top Notch* series (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) written by Joan Saslow and Allen Ascher (2012). For the purpose of this study, two intact classes were randomly chosen. All the participants were female, ranging in age from 17 to 21.

#### ***3.2 Materials***

##### ***3.2.1 Oxford placement test***

Two intact classes were randomly selected, which were introduced as intermediate learners by the English language institute. All the learners had learned English in an instructed setting for about 10-12 months. Nevertheless, to confirm the homogeneity of the participants, an Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was given to them at the beginning of the research. The test contained 100 multiple-choice questions with three main sections: Reading, Grammar, and Vocabulary.

##### ***3.2.2 Oral discussion task***

Along with the regular pedagogical activities of the main course book, each session, an oral discussion task was assigned as part of the classroom activity to the students. They were supposed to do this activity collaboratively in groups of three or four. The topic of the oral discussion activity was the same across the groups of students, and it was chosen by the teacher in order to create spontaneous output on the part of the learners. Each group was responsible for the recording of the conversation (via their smart phones), which lasted about 10-15 min.

### ***3.2.3 Transcription task***

The students were individually asked to transcribe the first 5 min of the spoken interactions of their groups, in order to be able to identify and highlight their own and their peers' errors and then correct them. Regarding the transcription protocol, the participants were required to write the name of the speaker next to that person's utterance and write their speech verbatim. The only other direction given to the learners was for them to mark three dots [ . . . ] to indicate long pauses made during an utterance. It was hoped that these transcription conventions would be simple enough for all learners to follow and remember (Cooke, 2013). To verify this, the students were asked to carry out a pilot recording and transcribing their group utterances in class. The teacher also checked the learners' transcriptions to confirm that all the students had transcribed, as the task required.

### ***3.3 Procedure***

Following a similar teaching methodology, the two groups were instructed by the same teacher (one of the researchers). Throughout the course, along with the regular pedagogical activities, in each session, an oral discussion task was assigned as part of the classroom activity to the students in both experimental and control groups. The students were supposed to do this activity collaboratively in groups of three or four. The topic of the oral discussion activity was the same across the groups of students and it was chosen by the teacher in order to create spontaneous output on the part of the students. Each group was responsible for the recording of the conversation, which lasted about 10-15 min. the students in the control group were supposed to hand the recorded discussion to the teacher without doing any posttask activity. Unlike the control group, the students in the experimental group were provided with an access to their group's recordings outside of the class time. The students were individually asked to transcribe the first 5 min of the spoken interactions of their groups. Then, they were required to identify and highlight their own and their peers' errors, and correct them. Before each subsequent recording, each session, the students were asked to conduct a feedback session in their own group to share their comments regarding the accuracy of their transcription and their identified errors and discuss on the best way of reformulating and editing their committed mistakes. If an unnoticed error remained in the learners' transcripts, the teacher would correct it. The students were also asked to keep a learning diary for themselves during the course where they could write down their groups' committed errors and their reformulated forms. Following Cooke (2013), in this study also, a levy of 30% of the learners' final score was placed on the completion of these posttask activities to assure that all the members of the class were engaged in performing these tasks during the course.

#### 4. Data Analysis

At the end of the 20-week research period, 20 recorded discussion tasks were collected from each group. The first 5 min of the control group's recorded files was transcribed by one of the researchers, and the accuracy of students' output was measured. Because the students in the experimental group had transcribed their own group first 5 min discussion each session, there was no need to transcribe these recorded files. The researchers just checked for the accuracy of the transcriptions made by the students. Then, the transcriptions were examined in terms of grammatical accuracy. Following Mehnert (1998), in this study, grammatical accuracy was measured in terms of the number of errors per 100 words (e.g., if one group of the learners in their 5-min discussion produced 80 words and, in this 80 words, they had 10 grammatical errors, their accuracy scores becomes 12.5). As Mehnert stated (1998), this kind of measurement is more accurate than the other measures of overall accuracy that take account of the number of errors per clause because clauses can be of different lengths and no distinction can be made between clauses with one error and clauses with multiple errors. For this purpose, all the syntactic, morphological, and lexical errors were taken into account. The learners' recorded group feedback sessions in which they discussed their mistakes with their group members were helpful in recognizing some of the errors made by the learners. Based on their mistakes, the accuracy scores were measured for the two groups of participants, and then the mean scores were analyzed by using SPSS (version 21).

#### 5. Results

As mentioned earlier, this study aimed at investigating the effect of transcribing task, as a noticing activity, on EFL learners' grammatical accuracy. To provide an answer to the first research question, the mean scores of the mistakes and the grammatical accuracy for both experimental and control groups were calculated (see Table 1):

Table 1. *Mean Scores of Mistakes and Accuracy for Two Groups of Participants*

Groups	N	Mistakes		Accuracy	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Experimental	19	21.9467	.77660	8.8267	.28941
Control	20	28.4000	.08165	9.9453	.27554

Descriptive statistics, as shown in Table 1, indicate that, compared to the experimental group (mean = 21.94), the learners in the control group (mean = 28.4) committed more errors in their productions. In order to measure the students' accuracy scores, the researchers calculated the number of the errors made by the students per 100 words. The performance of the learners in the experimental group



(mean = 8.82) turned out to be more accurate compared to the performance of the learners in the control group (mean = 9.94). Thus, whereas the lower the scores indicate more accurate the performance, the higher the scores show less accuracy.

Before analyzing the obtained data, the normality of the distribution of the groups' scores was ascertained by using one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test (K S-test). The results of K S-test indicated normal distribution of the scores for the groups because the  $p$  value exceeded .05 (see Table 2):

Table 2. *One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test for Normality of Distribution of Scores*

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z	$p$ Value	Result
Accuracy Scores: Control Group	1.679	.226	Normal
Mistakes: Control Group	.948	.423	Normal
Accuracy Scores: Experimental Group	1.134	.153	Normal
Mistakes: Experimental Group	.654	.225	Normal

After ensuring the normality of the distribution of the data, the experimental and control groups' scores on accuracy were compared. To examine the statistical significance of the difference in the mean scores of the groups, in terms of accuracy scores, a  $t$  test was carried out (see Table 3):

Table 3. *t Test for Comparison of Accuracy Scores of Control and Experimental Groups*

	$N$	Means	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	$Sig.$
Control Group	20	8.8267	.28941	.12943	.022
Experimental Group	19	9.9453	.27554	.12322	

The results in Table 3 show a significant difference between the groups ( $Sig. = 0.022 \leq .05$ ), revealing that transcription task with the follow-up self- and peer-correction activities had a positive effect on the performance of the experimental group.

### **5.1 Learners Noticed and Unnoticed Mistakes**

Unlike the students in the experimental group, the learners in the control group handed their recorded discussion to the teacher without performing any posttask activity. The learners in the experimental group, individually, first transcribed the recorded classroom speaking task and then autonomously tried to find and correct their own and their peers' grammatical mistakes. Subsequently, working collaboratively, the learners were engaged in further discussions and reformulations of these mistakes. In order to answer the second research question,

the students' performances were fully analyzed. The data show that the participants were able to notice and identify their mistakes during the research period. The noticed mistakes as well as the unnoticed ones were counted and the mean scores were calculated. The summary of the results is presented in Table 4:

Table 4. *Mean Scores of Noticed and Unnoticed Mistakes by Intermediate Learners in Experimental Group*

	Noticed Mistakes		Unnoticed Mistakes	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Experimental	11.0400	.65557	10.9067	.31735

As evident from Table 4, the learners' noticed mistakes (mean = 11.04) are more than their unnoticed mistakes (mean = 10.90).

In addition, the learners' transcriptions in the experimental group were examined in detail. From the total number of 1,645 committed mistakes in 5-min transcription of the conversation of all the groups in each session during the 20-week period of research, 827 mistakes were noticed and corrected and 818 were unnoticed by learners. From these noticed and corrected mistakes, 775 mistakes changed for the better and 52 changed for the worse. The identified mistakes were classified by the researchers. The detailed classification of the mistakes turned out to be somehow difficult because, in some cases, it was difficult to say to which category the mistake belonged. Therefore, a general classification (following Lynch, 2001) was conducted. Table 5 presents examples of the learners' noticed and unnoticed mistakes:

Table 5. *Examples of Learners' Mistakes*

A. Grammatical Corrections	Examples
Verbs and Tenses	<i>But I think <u>it is depended</u> on the driver ... .( it depends)</i> <i>My father <u>drive</u> fast ... . (drives)</i> <i>When I was a student I <u>go</u> Mashhad with my friends.</i> <i>(went)</i>
Articles	<i>My father is <u>  </u> good driver. (<u>a</u> was added)</i> <i>... I'm <u>  </u> only child ... . (<u>an</u> was added)</i> <i>Most of <u>  </u> people understand the importance of ... . (the was added)</i>

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Prepositions	<i>sometimes <u>for</u> lose weight I eat ... . (to) I want to travel all <u>of</u> the world ... . (over) ... I will help <u>to</u> them. (<u>to</u> was omitted)</i>
Plural Nouns	<i>... How <u>many</u> money? ... . (much) Naughty <u>childs</u> make their mother angry ... . (children) ... and young boys and <u>mans</u> ... . (men)</i>
Possessives	<i>I think clothes shows our <u>country</u> culture. (country's) Elnaz usually wears black and <u>she's</u> shoes are ... . (her) My <u>daughter name</u> is ... .(daughter's name)</i>
Pronouns	<i>I think in <u>your</u> life without money we cannot do anything ... . (our) I like to finish <u>our</u> study and be an English teacher. (my) ... and we can help <u>their</u> by buying food and clothes ... . (them)</i>
Question Formation	<i><u>What do you make you happy?</u>( How do you make yourself happy?) Ok. <u>Do you like to go what place?</u>(Which city do you like to go?) For lunch eat Borani? (Do you eat Borani for lunch?)</i>
Negatives	<i>I <u>prefer to don't travel</u> by train . (I don't like to travel ...) When I am angry I <u>not control</u> myself ... . (can't control) I <u>haven't</u> any sister. (don't have)</i>
Adverbs and Adjectives	<i>When I'm angry I become <u>silence</u> and don't speak with anyone. (silent) ... and it has fat, sugar, and <u>excess</u> salt ... . (extra) ... and we should pay attention to its <u>important</u> and ... . (importance)</i>
B. Lexical Corrections	
	<i>Examples</i>
Choice of Words	<i>I eat <u>plant food</u> and ... . (vegetables) What's your <u>business?</u> (job) It takes me two <u>o'clock</u> to go ... . (hours)</i>
Collocations	<i>Have you ever <u>exam</u> vegetarian food? (tried or eaten) My <u>biggest</u> wish is to ... . (greatest) Some people have <u>up</u> expectations in their life ... . (high/ a lot of)</i>

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C. Reformulation of Sentences or Phrases	<i>I like to give <u>somebody that I love gifts</u> ... . (I like to give gifts to whom I love)</i> <i>I like to have my family happy ... . (I like to have a happy family)</i> <i>Most of the food I can cook ... . ( I can cook most of the foods)</i>
D. Corrections for the Worse	<i>Everyone have your her or hissself special idea ... . (everyone have own idea)</i> <i>I think big wishes have a big work. (for big wishes you should work hardly)</i> <i>Some people can continue their life with <u>low</u> money. (few)</i>
E. Unnoticed Mistakes	<i>I have <u>eat</u> Italian food ... . (eaten)</i> <i>Was he driving <u>speed</u>? (fast)</i> <i><u>Are you agree</u> to talk about ... ? (Do you agree ...)</i>
F. Edited sentences	<i>Examples</i>
Omissions	<i><u>My wishes</u>, one of my wishes is to ... . (the underlined was omitted)</i> <i>Mashhad is <u>frequently</u> always crowded. (the underlined was omitted)</i> <i><u>I want</u> I wish to be a Badminton coach ... .(the underlined was omitted)</i>
Additions	<i>... and ___ your sister? (what about your sister?)</i> <i>... I study ___ a lot ... (I study my lessons a lot)</i> <i>... I'm a teacher and I teach in ___ Reza Abad. (... I teach in a village named Reza Abad)</i>

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Moreover, the learners edited some of the sentences by removing redundancies and repetitions made in their speech. Several additions were also made to further clarify the meaning. Some examples are provided in Table 5, part F.

Examination of the learners' transcriptions suggested that from 827 noticed mistakes 652 were related to grammatical corrections, 105 to reformulations of sentences and phrases, and 70 to lexical corrections. Table 6 shows the percentages of corrections by the learners and their teacher:

Table 6. *Percentages of Corrected Mistakes by Learners and Teacher*

Corrected Mistakes	Total Mistakes Corrected by Learners		Total Mistakes Corrected by Teacher	
Grammatical Corrections	652	79%	490	60%
Lexical Corrections	70	9%	195	24%
Reformulations	105	12%	133	16%
Total	827	100%	818	100%

As Table 6 shows, the learners mainly focused on errors related to grammar. The lexical mistakes received scant attention by the participants. Lots of omissions and additions were also undertaken in correcting and reformulating the words, phrases and sentences. The unnoticed mistakes were also corrected by the teacher. Although the participants were not able to solve all the problems they had in their speaking, the posttask activities made them aware of their weaknesses and encouraged them to evaluate their own language use critically. The teacher's discussions with the learners regarding some of the committed mistakes revealed the fact that the learners had the underlying knowledge of the grammar rules; however, attention to meaning at the time of speaking hindered them to fully focus on the formal aspects of their speech. Moreover, as the learners indicated, the follow-up activities were useful not only in reminding them some previously learned knowledge of language, but also in learning new knowledge from their peers' and their teacher's comments.

## 6. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed at examining the effect of individual and group autonomous activities on Iranian EFL learners' grammatical accuracy. The individual and collaborative posttask activities used were implemented to counterbalance the risk of developing fluency at the expense of accuracy (Ellis, 2003). The findings provide adequate evidence in favor of considerable benefits of the engagement in these posttask activities. The statistical analyses of the results revealed significant difference between the experimental and control groups. This suggests that transcription of oral output with a follow-up self- and peer-correction enhances the accuracy of EFL learners' oral production. These results are in line with the findings reported in some of previous studies showing that encouraging L2 learners to transcribe their oral output after communicative task not only helps them to notice the incorrect language uses in their output, but also enhances their accuracy in the use of these noticed forms in later productions (e.g., Lynch, 2001, 2007; Mennim, 2003, 2007; Stillwell et al., 2010).

An important point which should be noted here is that, in dealing with the incorrect language use of L2 learners, one should make a distinction between mistakes and errors. According to Corder (1967), an error results from a lack of knowledge of the correct rule. However, a mistake occurs when learners fail to use their underlying knowledge of the language. The former arises as a result of lack of competence, and the latter as a result of performance conditions. As the learners' transcription with a follow-up corrections suggested, they were able to correct those mistakes for which they had previously developed the required competence (noticed mistakes). In case of the errors, the teacher played a key role in identifying and editing the learners' incorrect language uses (unnoticed errors). Although part of a good teacher responsibility is correcting learners' mistakes, it is worth remembering that too much corrective feedback and constant interruption from the teacher, while students are deep in their conversation, may destroy the main purpose of the speaking activity and discourage learners from attempting to speak (Harmer, 2007). On the other hand, if learners' mistakes are ignored and left uncorrected, fossilization may tend to happen (Brown, 2007). The discussion task with the follow-up posttask activities used in this study provided the learners with ample opportunities for both attention to meaning and attention to form. According to Ellis (2003), noticing activities of these kinds can be implemented as a follow-up task to direct learners' attention to language forms that have been used incorrectly in the main task. In this respect, explicit knowledge "serves to prime the intake through noticing and to feed the internal monitoring that arises when learners notice the gap between their output and what they know consciously" (Ellis, 2003, p. 149).

From a sociocultural perspective, the findings of this study can also be explained with reference to Vygotsky's (1978, 1986) theory of zone of proximal development. As explained previously, in the feedback sessions, the participants negotiated their identified mistakes and tried to reformulate them in their own groups. Although the data from recording of these feedback sessions were not reported in this study, the collaborative correction and reformulation of the mistakes resulted in the learners' engagement in metatalk, which was beneficial for all the members of the groups. Because different learners were competent in different areas of the target language, they were able to act as experts on those areas in their groups (Lynch, 2007; Mennim, 2003). This provided the learners with opportunities for interaction and negotiation of form. In the feedback sessions, the language itself turned to be the content of the task. Thus, the learners were prompted to interact in order to discover how some features of language work. From a sociocultural perspective (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986), this kind of interaction and collaboration not only helps less capable learners to expand their language competence, but also provides an opportunity for more capable ones to consolidate their current knowledge when using it to provide educational assistance to other members

(Nassaji & Tian, 2010). Moreover, these social interactions, undertaken in the process of negotiating meaning, contribute to L2 learners' autonomy development (Little, 1996; Trinch, 2005), which is considered as a socially mediated process (Benson, 2006). In addition, the interactions can provide further opportunities for instructional scaffolding.

This study highlights that the term *autonomy*, in contrast to its meaning, is both self-directed and socially mediated learning. Collaborative activities in which the learners tried to negotiate meaning in their groups with a follow-up individual as well as collaborative posttask activities were helpful in promoting reflection and autonomy in EFL learners. These practices not only aid learners to evaluate self and peer performances but also, as Burket (2011) succinctly argued, help them to “step out of their shoes of passive recipients of knowledge and take a different perspective looking at their learning from a meta-level” (p. 145). They can also potentially enable learners to become independent thinkers and problem-solvers. As Little (2007) rightly pointed out, in educational as well as natural contexts, communicative competence can be obtained through engagement in a mutually interactive process. Therefore, if learning autonomy is our educational objective, we need to devise an interactive and dynamic procedure where we can help our learners simultaneously develop their communicative proficiency and their learning autonomy. In other words, “autonomy in language learning and autonomy in language use are two sides of the same coin” (Little, 2007, p. 26). According to Little (1997), thus, in language education, learner autonomy cannot be considered as an optional extra, but it must be placed at the heart of language teaching both in terms of theory and practice.

The findings of the present study have important implications for language pedagogy in EFL contexts. According to Abednia and Izadinia (2013), the educational system in Iran is primarily transmission-oriented and memorization-based. Currently, in most EFL classes in Iran, the learners are regarded as passive recipients of knowledge and the main focus of language teaching in these classrooms is based on learning language through grammar, memorization, and vocabulary (Riazi & Mosalanejad, 2010), although in some classes where communicative tasks are utilized for promoting communication among language learners, the teachers take students' mistakes for granted. Although in the Iranian context there are numerous constrains that can seriously impede implementation of autonomy-supportive strategies, the researchers in this study believe that there is still room for the teachers to make various attempts in order to promote learners' autonomy maneuver (Nasri, Vahid Dastjerdy, Eslami Rasekh, & Amirian, 2015). EFL teachers, by assigning autonomy-supportive activities (like the posttask activities used in this study) can help learners to realize that they themselves should assume responsibility for their own learning and also make them aware of the fact

that it is not just the teacher who should take the responsibility for whatever goes on in the classroom (Burkert, 2011). Drawing a distinction between the teacher as a mediator and the teacher as an instructor, Williams and Burden (1997) encourage teachers to play the role of mediators in order to help their learners to become autonomous, to take control of their own learning, and to enable them to become independent thinkers and problem-solvers.

Teachers must, however, be cognizant that autonomous learning is a learnable skill in the same sense that other academic skills are. Thus, they should encourage the development of this skill by embedding it within their process of language teaching and evaluation. Putting differently, this means that teachers need to teach the skills required to become an effective autonomous learner in the same way that they do other generic and discipline-specific skills (Railton & Watson, 2005; Scott, Furnell, Murphy, & Goulder, 2015). Therefore, a serious challenge for the researchers in future is to move beyond theoretical proposition of autonomy towards an empirically grounded understanding of it in language learning and teaching (Benson, 2006).

Despite the above mentioned points, it should be noted that the present study is not without its limitations. First, the topics of the discussions were already decided by the teacher. This might have affected the learners' willingness and motivation to fully engage in the discussion at hand. Future studies will be undertaken to examine learners' reactions to the various topics proposed by the teacher as group discussion tasks and take topics of learners' interests into consideration. Second, group performances may have been affected by individual performances within each group. In future research, it might be worth investigating, via videotaping, the impact of participation of individual speakers on group dynamics.

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