CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

1.1. Overview and Background

One of the central questions for teachers, researchers and second language learners has long been whether language should be treated as an object in language learning or it is better to acquire it incidentally and implicitly through engaging in communication with others. The decision over what kind of syllabus to use for language teaching courses and how to overcome the shortcomings of that type of syllabus in order to facilitate second language learning has always been a controversial issue in second language acquisition (SLA) research and this has led researchers and syllabus designers to support different approaches to syllabus design and hold different views regarding the most effective way to overcome the possible problems in this regard.

Wilkins (1976) made the classic distinction between synthetic and analytic syllabuses in the language classroom. Synthetic syllabuses are similar to type A syllabuses in White (1988) based on which different parts of language are taught separately and in a step by step manner so that the acquisition of the target language occurs as a process of gradual learning of parts until the whole structure of language is formed (Nunan, 2004; Wilkins, 1976). This type of syllabus which traditionally consists of a graded list of structures is sometimes called linguistic syllabus (R. Ellis, 2003). The underlying belief of this kind of syllabus is to simplify learning for language learners by breaking the content down into its constituents and sequencing them from easy to difficult (Nunan, 2004). Syllabuses such as lexical, structural, notional-functional, and methods such as Grammar Translation, Audiolingual, Silent Way, Total Physical Response, and classroom practices such as repetition of models, transformation of exercises, and display questions are commonly associated with this type of syllabus (Long & Robinson, 1998).

The second main type of syllabus distinguished by Wilkins is analytic syllabuses, which are based on theories of communicative competence (e.g., Hymes, 1971). In analytic syllabuses, the analysis of the target language system into discrete pieces of language, which is a necessary precondition for the adoption of a synthetic
approach to syllabus design is not done in advance (Wilkins, 1976). Instead, in these types of syllabuses, a chunk of language is presented to the learners in the context of a meaning-oriented lesson with the aim of providing language learners with opportunities to learn the language incidentally or implicitly. The main tenet of this approach with regard to syllabus design, methodology and classroom practices is that people, regardless of their age and context, learn a language better through experiencing it as a medium of communication, not by treating it as an object of study. Procedural Syllabus, Natural Approach, Immersion Education and Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) are usually considered to be based on this type of Syllabus (Long & Robinson, 1998).

Synthetic linguistic syllabuses have been criticized during the last decades. Long and Crooks (1992, 1993) enumerate some of the negative effects of a synthetic approach to syllabus design. First, since a learner is provided with the language which is controlled from a completely linguistic perspective, synthetic syllabuses are full of artificial language. Apart from this disadvantage, Long and Crooks go on to argue that synthetic approaches to syllabus design conflict with the findings of SLA research that suggest people do not learn isolated items in a second language in an additive, linear fashion, but rather as parts of complex mappings of form-function relationships. Moreover, the immediate target mastery of the taught form which is one of the goals of this kind of approach is not in line with SLA research which shows that learners rarely achieve the target-like mastery of linguistic codes in one step.

Abundance of evidence into the process of second language acquisition that indicates second language learning is not an additive linear process (Kellerman, 1985; Sato, 1986; Selinker & Lakshaman, 1992) and the findings that suggest learners do not acquire certain morphological and syntactic structures at the same rate (R. Ellis, 1994; Skehan, 1989) as well as the empirical studies that indicate second language learners follow a fixed, universal order of acquisition (R. Ellis, 1994) have called into question the validity of synthetic approaches to syllable design and drawn researchers’ attention to exploring alternative analytic approaches such as task-based instruction in the past decades.
Task-based syllabus is one type of analytic syllabus in which tasks are selected and graded as constituents of the syllabus (R. Ellis, 2003; Long & Crooks, 1992; Skehan, 1998; Skehan & Foster, 2001). For the past 20 years, task-based language teaching (TBLT) has attracted the attention of SLA researchers, curriculum developers, educationists, teacher trainers and language teachers worldwide (Van den Branden, 2006). The empirical accounts of teacher-dominated, form-oriented classrooms led to the emergence of the term and concept of TBLT (Long & Norris, 2000). Long (1985) and Prabhu (1987), among others, argued that students should be provided with educational tasks that require them to have primary focus on meaning and as thus use language for real word purposes. Therefore, tasks are being considered as the main building blocks and units of instruction in communicative language teaching and classroom activities, curriculum and syllabuses are all specified with reference to tasks.

In the literature, various definitions of tasks have been offered. What all those definitions have in common is that they emphasize that tasks are the goal-oriented activities (Van den Branden, 2006) that involve communicative language use in which the user’s attention is focused on meaning rather than grammatical form (Nunan, 2004). What distinguishes a task from a grammatical exercise is that in a task, contrary to an exercise, learners are free to use a range of language structures to achieve an outcome and the forms are not specified in advance (Willis & Willis, 2007). Before doing a task, learners are not told what the linguistic focus is and thus they focus their primary attention on the message content. But it should be mentioned that as R. Ellis (2003) put it, primary focus on meaning does not mean that “learners will not attend to the target form while they perform the task” (p.141). In fact, meaning and form are highly interrelated and grammar enables the language user to express different communicative meanings (Nunan, 2004).

On the surface of it, it seems that adopting a task-based syllabus is a solution to the problems of language acquisition posed by synthetic syllabuses and implementing tasks as units of syllabus design and instruction will contribute to second language acquisition effectively. Nonetheless, closer exploration of tasks reveals that the story is far from over. SLA research has indicated that a purely meaning-focused approach in general and a task-based syllabus in particular without being augmented by some
kind of grammar instruction will not suffice (R. Ellis, 2003; Long, 2000; Long & Crooks, 1992; Long & Robinson, 1998; Skehan & Foster, 2001). Since the meaningful use of language will necessarily imply that the relevant form-meaning mappings should occur, the learner will need to manipulate and pay some attention either consciously or unconsciously to form (Van den Branden, 2006). It should be noted that some SLA theorists hold that communicative interaction in the language is enough and does not need to be enhanced through drawing learners’ attention to form. Krashen (1982) makes a distinction between conscious and unconscious learning mechanisms, and comparing learning a second language to the first language acquisition, rejects the necessity of focus on form in TBLT. However, a considerable number of SLA researchers (e.g., Doughty & Williams, 1998; R. Ellis, 2003; Long & Norris, 2000; Long & Robinson, 1998; Skehan, 1998) argue that tasks need to be manipulated in such a way that learners’ attention is drawn to certain aspects of the language code in the context of meaningful activity in order to promote second language acquisition. So, there is a consensus among many researchers and authors that there should be a place for focus on grammar in TBLT.

The need which is felt for some focus on form in the context of analytic syllabuses in general and TBLT in particular is based on the studies that indicate if learners are just engaged in meaningful activities without being given some assistance with the linguistic code, their accuracy will suffer and are very unlikely to attain a native-like grammatical competence (Long, 1996; Long & Robinson, 1998; Swain, 1991). Research in immersion and other communicatively oriented classrooms has demonstrated that being exposed to rich second language input falls short of developing students’ grammatical accuracy in production (Harley & Swain, 1984; Lightbown & Spada, 1990). In fact, although exposure to comprehensible input is necessary for SLA, it is not sufficient because comprehension does not necessarily mean acquisition and it may occur without acquiring linguistic knowledge (Han, 2004; Long, 1996). Meaning-based comprehension or semantic processing may benefit from top-down strategies that draw on the learners’ existent linguistic knowledge and contextual information (Han, 2004), and learners may understand the meaning without understanding all of the morphosyntactic features of it. This suggests
that there is a need for some external intervention to draw students’ attention to the formal aspects of language.

The essentialness of this kind of intervention can be more tangible in task-based approaches because besides comprehensible input, there are lots of opportunities for output production. Swain (1985, 1995) argues that output may prompt learners to test hypotheses, notice the gaps in the interlanguage as well as serve as a point of departure for metalinguistic reflection. She claims that production may have the effect of pushing learners beyond semantic processing into syntactic processing (Han, 2004). Swain goes on further to acknowledge that if students are not given sufficient feedback concerning the successful conveyance of their message in terms of accuracy, appropriateness and coherence, output may not serve any of these roles (Swain, 1991). Several other researchers including Swain herself have noted that the functions that Swain has mentioned as byproducts of production cannot be performed unless consistent information on form is provided (Han, 2002b, 2004; Swain & Lapkin, 1998).

By and large, research has indicated that instruction including some kind of focus on form is more effective than instruction which is based on just meaning (see Norris & Ortega, 2000). The overall effectiveness of and necessity for focus on form are accepted facts among SLA researchers (for a recent review, see Fotos & Nassaji, 2007). A point which is worth mentioning is that form here refers to the formal properties of the target language and these properties are included in the grammatical and discourse competencies of communicative competence and the term form is preferred to grammar in latest developments in SLA because researchers wish to highlight its communicative quality (Dörnyei, 2009). However, there is still controversy over the superiority of different form-focused techniques. Among the proposals that have been set forth in an attempt to incorporate form into TBLT in order to distinguish it from the traditional grammar teaching and avoid compromising the values of tasks as realistic communicative motivators and opportunities to trigger acquisition has been Long’s Focus on Form (Long & Crooks, 1992). In a seminal work, Long (1991) distinguished Focus on Forms (FonFs), which is the main characteristic of synthetic approaches to language teaching from what he called focus
**on form** (FonF), which consisted of an occasional shift of attention to linguistic code features by the teacher (Doughty & Williams, 1998). This kind of attention to form in the context of doing a task is what R. Ellis (2003) generally refers to as “methodological focus on form”. For Long (2000), FoF is superior to FonFs because it is learner-centered, is adjusted to the internal syllabus of learners and occurs when necessary.

Initially, Long’s definition of FonF just referred to spontaneous classroom events where the teacher reacted implicitly to a linguistic problem that a learner had when he was engaged in negotiation of meaning, but gradually FonF was extended to refer to a variety of planned and unplanned pedagogical techniques. Therefore, FonF can be achieved through a variety of methodological techniques. Implicit techniques of focus on form include recasts, clarification requests, comprehension checks, and repetitions. These types of focus on form are considered to be implicit feedback because they aim at directing learner’s peripheral attention to form without diverting the focal attention from meaning (Doughty, 2001). A focus on form can also be achieved in an explicit way if learners are provided with explicit information regarding a linguistic feature or problem that arises in the process of task accomplishment. This kind of focus can be either preemptive or responsive. In preemptive focus, the teacher draws attention to the target feature by raising a question or making a metalingual comment. A responsive focus takes place when negative feedback involving explicit attention to the linguistic feature is provided in the form of explicit correction or metalinguistic comment (R. Ellis, 2003).

Corrective feedback (CF), as a reactive or responsive type of form-focused instruction has received particular attention in recent years. The term CF is a commonly used in the literature by those scholars and researchers who work within cognitive-interactionist theories of second language acquisition. It refers to the responses to learner’s utterances that contain an error (Lyster & Ranta, 1997). SLA researchers have been interested in the acquisitional value of CF and have investigated what type of CF works best for second language acquisition. A brief review of the language teaching literature immediately reveals that at present there is no consensus among teacher educators’ views concerning the avoidance or use of CF,
the best corrective move, the proper time, and the type of error to be corrected (e.g., Harmer, 2007; Hedge, 2000; Ur, 1996). Therefore, it is understandable if teachers and teacher educators find themselves in a dilemma when they are faced with various recommendations and warnings on error correction, especially in a context where the primary focus is on meaning and fluency. This dilemma is further exacerbated when the recent advocacy of focus on form during communicative tasks is in stark contrast to what teachers are prescribed to follow by methodologists and teacher educators. Two cases in point are H. Brown (2007) and Harmer (2007). They argue that CF has no role to play in fluency work and it should be advised when students engage in speaking. They generally believe that CF should be provided immediately during accuracy-oriented activities, but its provision in fluency work should be delayed.

Controversy is also common in second language acquisition research and different views originate in different theoretical stances. According to cognitive theories, CF assists acquisition when it is provided in the context of primary focus on meaning. Within cognitive theories, realization of the relationship between form and meaning in context assists language acquisition (R. Ellis, 2012). Researchers with this cognitive orientation to CF are divided regarding what type of CF in the context of focus on meaning is most effective. While Lyster (1998a) advocates the learners’ production of correct form after the provision of CF by the teacher in the form of prompts (i.e., clarification requests, metalinguistic feedback, etc) as the main element in the superiority of one type of error correction to others, Long (2007) argues that the positive evidence provided by CF is of primary importance. Proponents of sociocultural theories endorse the value of CF but criticize the dominant view that an effective and facilitative form of correction can be used for all learners. Different theoretical views on CF and pedagogical recommendations as well as the importance of using form in a task-based course all lend support to the need for systematic empirical studies on this aspect of teacher’s intervention.

Researchers have attempted to identify and classify CF into discrete types. For second language classroom, the most influential taxonomy was developed by Lyster and Ranta (1997). Among those CF types identified by Lyster and Ranta, three types of CF techniques have figured strongly in CF studies. They include prompts, explicit
correction and recasts. Although not all researchers have addressed their research questions using these terms, these techniques can be described in a number of ways that makes them different. In fact, each of these types can differ greatly in implementation and degree of explicitness or implicitness based on the teacher’s behavior and context (Ortega, 2011). Recasts can be partial or full. They can also be implicit or explicit. Explicit correction can be accompanied with metalinguistic feedback or is used alone. Prompts also vary on whether they elicit a correct form from the learner after some metalinguistic information is provided or by teacher’s repetition of the incorrect form, requesting the student to produce the correct form using phrases such as “Pardon me?”, or elicitation which entails direct questions such as “How do we say this in English?”. Therefore, it seems logical to pursue studies focusing on different CF techniques with precise definition of each for the sake of clarity in our claims for supporting a theory or a pedagogical practice.

Previous studies on CF have addressed a number of these aspects. Although recasts were proposed by Long (1996, 2006) to work for acquisition because of their reactive and implicit nature, their effectiveness was not as much as the other types of corrective moves in some studies (e.g., R. Ellis, 2006; Lyster, 1998a). Ellis et al. (2006) argued in favor of explicit prompts in the form of metalinguistic information and Sheen (2007) argues in favor of the explicit correction which consists of a combination of provision of correct form and metalinguistic information. These studies suggest that explicit techniques of focus on form are superior to implicit techniques. This had been previously supported by the results of Norris and Ortega’s (2000) meta-analysis which were in favor of explicit instruction. Since different CF operationalizations have been used in these studies, a question that needs to be addressed is what type of explicit correction works best. This is also what Ortega (2011) pointed out:

In the future, then, it would be more desirable to be able to classify and analyze negative feedback episodes by attributes or features that can cut across (and abstract out of) specific types. One of these features ought to be degree of explicitness as proposed by R. Ellis and Sheen (2006) and Sheen (2006). Explicitness can be defined as the perceptual salience (e.g., intonation) and
linguistic marking (e.g., by metalanguage) with which negative information is delivered and thus the corrective intent is made clear to learners. (Italic in the original, pp.74-75)

This kind of orientation towards researching CF can push research on CF forward by building on what we already know about the CF studies. Sheen (2007) refers to the need for studies comparing explicit recast and metalinguistic correction and expresses doubts regarding the superiority of explicit input-providing techniques (i.e., explicit correction with metalinguistic information) over output-pushing techniques. Also, R. Ellis (2012) argues that the studies that have compared recasts and prompts are not without their problems because recasts are considered a single CF strategy, while prompts include a number of different strategies such as clarification requests, repetition of errors, elicitation and metalinguistic clues. Additionally, R. Ellis states that the beneficial effect of prompts in comparison with recasts might be due to the fact that prompts include several strategies that vary with different degrees of implicitness and explicitness and thus the salient nature of certain strategies in the prompt group might be the reason for the effectiveness of prompts rather than their output-pushing nature. These recent arguments make us think twice before we claim that in the context of communicative focus on form, one CF technique is superior to the other ones because of a certain characteristic it has. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap and add another piece to the puzzle of CF strategies.

1.2. Rationale and Significance of the Study
In recent years, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of studies which have been conducted in both laboratory and classroom contexts regarding the effectiveness of different types of feedback (e.g., Ammar & Spada, 2006; R. Ellis et al., 2006; Lyster, 2004; Lyster & Izquierdo, 2009; Sheen, 2010b). The reason underlying this interest in CF is that despite the high level of comprehension ability and oral fluency that second language learners acquire through attending communicative classrooms, their accuracy of production in areas of morphology and syntax suffers (Fotos & Nassaji, 2007; Lightbown, Halter, White & Horst, 2002; Lightbown & Spada, 1990).
Insufficiency of comprehensible input in exclusively meaning-based instruction has been interpreted as the underlying reason for the above-mentioned problem. Schmidt’s noticing hypothesis (1990, 2001) also emphasizes the necessity of making students aware of the formal properties of language in communicative classes. Therefore, two ways of focusing on form - proactive and reactive - have been proposed to make students aware of language forms in the context of meaningful communication. Among these two, CF as a reactive form of focus on form has attracted the attention of researchers and teachers in the last decade and a brief review of this newborn line of research suggests that there is a need for a large number of studies regarding the effectiveness of different types of CF to come up with clear conclusions. The meta-analysis studies which have been conducted on the CF have also revealed there should be more substantial number of studies that examine the differential effects of CF techniques (e.g., Li, 2010; Lyster & Saito, 2010). As Li (2010) noted:

Although there is a relatively large amount of research on recasts, less attention has been paid to explicit correction, metalinguistic feedback and even less to negotiation moves such as clarification and elicitation which, makes the comparison of effect sizes among different feedback types difficult. (p. 348)

Therefore, despite the fact that research findings support the consensus of L2 teachers and researchers that a focus on the formal properties of a second language through CF is beneficial, more research is needed before we can conclude whether some types of CF are more effective than others (Ammar & Spada, 2006). The need for further research on CF is also felt when the task-supported teaching which is compatible with the weak version of communicative language teaching is gradually introduced in EFL contexts like Iran. EFL teachers should be able to integrate some sort of focus on form into their task-supported classes without compromising the values of tasks as realistic communicative motivators and opportunities to trigger learning processes (Skehan, 1996).

On the theoretical side also, there has long been a controversy on whether negative evidence is necessary or beneficial to language learners in the process of
second language acquisition. There are some researchers and scholars who claim positive evidence suffices for second language acquisition (e.g. Krashen, 1982; Schwartz, 1993) and negative evidence can be harmful sometimes (Truscott, 1996). On the other hand, those who argue in favor of CF claim that negative evidence has positive and facilitative role in acquisition (Long, 1996; Schmidt, 1990, 1995). As it was also mentioned above, even within cognitive and computational models of language teaching, the issue is not resolved fully and emphasis on the input-providing nature of CF vs. its output-pushing functions has led researchers and theoreticians in SLA to argue in favor of different types of CF. Therefore, the findings of this study are important from a theoretical point of view.

As far as language pedagogy is concerned, perhaps the most important contribution of this study can be discussed in terms of its relevance to language teaching. R. Ellis (2003) notes that the relationship between research and pedagogy is strengthened when researchers and teachers both work with shared constructs. Tasks and CF are among those commonly used constructs in both SLA and language pedagogy. There have been numerous studies in the literature since 1970’s, focusing on errors and error treatment in language classes. (e.g., Chaudron, 1988; Fanselow, 1977; Hendrickson, 1978). Since these studies reveal that teachers’ treatment of errors is often arbitrary and idiosyncratic, studies such as this shed light on the value of error correction in language classes and stimulate teachers to subject their CF practice to critical scrutiny.

The pedagogical value of this study is also highlighted when, as it was noted before, methodologists and teacher educators’ views on CF (e.g., Harmer, 1983; Hedge, 2000) contradict what researchers (e.g., R. Ellis, 2009b; Sheen, 2011) recommend. A quick review of language teaching methods also reveals that language teaching methods have also adopted different views on error correction (R. Ellis, 2012). Studies such as these inform language teaching methodology too.

1.3. Statement of the Problem
Research in English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts has revealed that the exclusive use of traditional teaching methods such as Grammar Translation Method is
problematic and the learners who are taught through these methods perform successfully on discrete-point grammar tests, but they fail to communicate fluently and accurately in communicative contexts (Hu, 2003). Most of the teachers in Iranian schools and universities and other EFL contexts still adhere to the traditional form-focused instruction that denotes the teaching of linguistic forms in isolation. This type of teaching entails extracting linguistic features from context or communicative activity (Doughty & Williams, 1998), and presenting them based on one of the aforementioned synthetic syllabuses. The problem with this type of approach, as was enumerated briefly before, is that students with some years of studying English behind them fail to communicate fluently in L2. In fact, research suggests that the traditional teaching of isolated grammatical forms is not sufficient to promote their acquisition (Long & Robinson, 1998). Therefore, there is a need for introduction of tasks into the EFL educational system of Iran in order to bring about a dramatic change into the quality of language teaching. Nonetheless, what needs to be taken into consideration is the fact that without attention to form, the new approach will fail to lead to both fluency and accuracy at the same time, and as the research findings suggest, interlanguage is likely to stabilize, and fossilization may set in. Teachers need to be informed and enlightened about the best ways of assisting language learners to acquire linguistic forms in communicative classes and CF studies such as the present study can be considered a step forward in addressing this problem.

Apart from this, teaching of linguistic points has always been a tedious and boring job. Teachers should be informed that certain aspects of grammar can be taught through using tasks and provision of CF, which is a more enjoyable, motivating and helpful approach than the traditional method of grammar presentation (R. Ellis, 2003; Fotos & Ellis, 1991; Garcia Mayo, 2002; Loumpourdi, 2005). The introduction of new approaches such as task-based syllabus to language pedagogy and teaching grammar through focus on form in focused tasks can lead to higher levels of motivation and interest among language learners who view grammar teaching painful and uninteresting.

More importantly, some language schools in Iran have already adopted a strong approach to communicative language teaching with little focus on form, claiming that
the purpose of language learning is communication and grammar has no role to play in this regard. While this group’s use of communicative tasks in their language classes and their outright rejection of grammar incorporation into language teaching reflects their wholly communicative orientation, it should be noted that this approach is likely to lead to students’ fossilization of interlanguage and subsequent failure to use language accurately in informal real life encounters or academic settings. Research suggests that purely communicative approaches fail to assist learners to achieve high levels of target language accuracy (e.g., Harley & Swain, 1984; Swain & Lapkin, 1998). The teachers at this extreme pole need to be given insights concerning the possibility of improving learners’ accuracy and linguistic competence in a context when focus in mostly on communication and meaning. Introduction of a totally communicative approach can lead to sacrificing accuracy for the sake of fluency. Thus, there is a need for some kind of focus on form in the context of task-based instruction which is a version of communicative language teaching (Dörnyei, 2009; R. Ellis, 2003). Nevertheless, a question that remains unanswered is how beneficial this focus is, what type of focus is the most effective and how compatible it is with learners’ and teachers’ preferences and views. Therefore, this study is an attempt to address these issues.

1.4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the present study is twofold. First, through an experimental design, this study seeks to investigate the potential benefits of 3 different types of CF to EFL students engaging in communicative tasks. Through making comparison across different groups that did and did not receive CF, and making comparisons based on the type of the corrective technique used, this study aims to find out which type of focus on form in communicative tasks, namely prompts, recasts and explicit correction with metalinguistic information is more effective in enhancing students’ accuracy. Second, a survey study will be conducted on EFL learners’ and teachers’ preferences for and beliefs about different aspects of CF. The purpose of survey study will be mostly pedagogical and deals directly or indirectly with the controversial issues that will be discussed in CF literature and language pedagogy section. The researcher’s goal is to find out if the teachers’ and learners’ preferences for and beliefs about CF are in line with research findings in general and the present
experimental study in particular as well as the recommendations put forth by educators and experts in the field of language teaching research and pedagogy. The researcher believes that if second language learners are expected to benefit from CF, their preferences for different aspect of CF must be taken into account and its compatibility with teachers’ preferences needs to be examined and in cases where there is a discrepancy between research and preferences, necessary measures should be taken because using the findings of CF studies in language classes without considering students’ expectations about language learning might result in disappointment and can hamper the process of language acquisition (Horwitz, 1988).

1.5. Research Questions and Hypotheses
The researcher in this study will endeavor to examine the effects of different types of CF (i.e., recasts, prompts, and explicit correction with metalinguistic comment) on second language acquisition in an EFL context and the extent these different techniques contribute to the development of knowledge of usage and increased ability to use the L2. The study also aims to probe teachers’ and learners’ preferences for and beliefs about different aspects of CF and the possible discrepancies or compatibilities that exist between learners’ and teachers’ preferences and the extent they are in line with research findings in the last decades. Therefore, the experimental study along with the survey study will be an attempt to answer the following questions in an Iranian EFL context:

1- Does CF on English article errors during the performance of communicative tasks contribute to Iranian EFL learners’ second language acquisition?
2- Do different types of CF, that is, recast, prompt (i.e., clarification requests), and explicit correction with metalinguistic information have differential effects on Iranian EFL learners’ second language acquisition?
3- Is there a difference in the effectiveness of different types of CF, that is, recast, prompt (i.e., clarification requests), and explicit correction for Iranian EFL learners’ knowledge of usage and the ability to use the language?
4- What are EFL learners’ and teachers’ preferences for and beliefs about different aspects of CF?
5- How compatible are EFL learners’ and teachers’ preferences for and beliefs about different aspects of CF?

1.6. Null Hypotheses (Experimental Study)
Based on the above-mentioned research questions, the following hypotheses were formulated:

1. CF on English article errors during the performance of communicative tasks does not contribute to Iranian EFL learners’ second language acquisition.

2. Different types of CF, that is, recast, prompt (i.e., clarification requests), and explicit correction with metalinguistic information do not have differential effects on Iranian EFL learners’ second language acquisition.

3. There is not a difference in the effectiveness of different types of CF, that is, recast, prompt (i.e., clarification requests), and explicit correction with metalinguistic information for Iranian EFL learners’ knowledge of usage and the ability to use the language.

1.7. Scope and Delimitations
The present quasi-experimental study along with the survey focused on investigating the effect of CF on EFL learners’ second language acquisition of articles and exploring EFL teachers’ and learners’ preferences for and beliefs about different aspects of CF. A number of delimitations of these studies were as follows:

As for the quasi-experimental study, first, the study was delimited to investigating the effect of CF on just three functions of articles in an EFL context (i.e., Iran) and did not cover other functions of articles and other linguistic features.

Second, the researcher limited the quasi-experimental study to one type of communicative task, that is, narrative task. The choice of narrative task was motivated by the fact that these tasks enabled the researcher to elicit article errors from learners more easily than other communicative tasks.

Third, the quasi-experimental study was also limited to 4 intact classes of elementary students at a public language institute in Iran (i.e., Iran Language Institute)
during the winter of 2012. The classes were chosen randomly by the researcher out of the 8 elementary classes at the institute and no actual randomization of individual participants into different groups was done.

Fourth, the study addressed only the immediate effect of CF after a one and a half month treatment and no delayed effect was examined.

As for the survey study, it was limited to just 4 different language schools in Yazd, one of the cities in Iran. The survey included both male and female elementary EFL learners and all the teachers in those 4 schools. The adopted methodology of the institutes might have influenced the teachers’ preferences and views. “Social desirability”, “self-deception”, “acquiescence bias” and “fatigue effects” (Dörnyei, 2003) were not within the control of the researcher. Therefore, the pedagogical and theoretical relevance as well as any kind of generalizations to other contexts, linguistic features, and participants should be done with caution.

1.8. Definition of Key Terms and Operationalizations

1.8.1. Focus on Form

Focus on form in this thesis will be operationalized as provision of CF in forms of recasts, prompts and explicit correction with metalinguistic information in reaction to the grammatical errors that learners commit. This kind of reactive focus on form is carried out regard to a predetermined linguistic feature during an L2 focused communicative task.

1.8.2. Corrective Feedback

Corrective feedback can be defined as an interlocutor’s response to a non-native speaker’s error. The purpose of CF is to either correct or signal the incorrectness of an erroneous form. The three types of CF in this study are made explicit in nature through intonation, or showing that there is a grammatical problem in the production.
1.8.3. Recast
Sheen (2011) defines recast as “a reformulation of the learner’s erroneous utterance that corrects all or part of the learner’s utterance and is embedded in the continuing discourse” (p.2). In fact, a recast provides morphosyntactic information that is essential but is either missing or wrongly used in the learner’s production while the primary focus is on meaning. In simple terms, recasting occurs when a teacher reformulates the learner’s utterance and provides him/her with reformulated correct utterance without explicit explanation.
Examples (form Ammar & Spada, 2006):
If a student says *his hat is blue* when describing a woman’s hat, the recaster does one of the following moves:

1. Her hat.
2. Okay. Her hat is blue.
3. What color did you say her hat was?
4. Her hat was blue. What’s the color of her jacket?
5. Ehh, her hat is blue. What else?

In this study, recast is didactic and is operationalized as a partial reformulation of learners’ erroneous utterances.
Example:
S: * He saw big cat.
T: a big cat

1.8.4. Prompt
Prompt is a type of CF that pushes the learners to be more accurate in their input. Lyster (2004) categorizes prompts into four types, including clarification requests, repetitions, metalinguistic clues and elicitation by the teacher. These interactional moves have one feature in common which is in contrast to recast: They don’t provide the correct form. Instead they afford the learner an opportunity to self-repair and produce the correct form.
Examples (from Ammar & Spada, 2006):
If a student says *his hat is blue* when describing a woman’s hat, the prompter does one of the following:
1- No, whose hat is it? So, what should we say?
2- His hat is blue? Is that correct in English?
3- We don’t say his hat in English. What do we say?
4- His hat is blue? Who does the hat belong to?
5- No, It’s the woman’s hat. So, what should we say?
6- His hat is incorrect.

In this study, prompts are operationalized as clarification requests without providing the correct form.

Example:
S: * He saw big cat.
T: “sorry?”, “pardon me?” “what?”

1.8.5. **Explicit Correction with Metalinguistic Information**

Metalinguistic information refers to comments, questions, and information concerning the well-formedness of the students’ utterances.

If a student uses the present tense instead of past tense, the teacher provides the correct form and gives some explanations in the form of metalinguistic information.

Examples from Ellis, Shawn, Loewen (2006):

Learner: He kisses her.
Teacher: kissed - you need past tense.
Learner: He kissed.

In this study, explicit correction with metalinguistic information is operationalized as provision of correct form along with the necessary grammatical information about the error.

Example:
S: * He saw big cat.
T: a big cat; You should use an indefinite article “a” here. It’s the first mention.

1.8.6. **Task**

The concept of task has been defined in different ways in the literature (Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Breen, 1989; Bygate et al., 2001; Crookes, 1986; R. Ellis, 2003; Long, 1985; Nunan, 2004; Skehan, 1996). While definitions of task vary somewhat, they all
emphasize the fact that attention is focused on meaning rather than grammatical form (Nunan, 2004). For present study R. Ellis’s (2003) definition of task is adopted. R. Ellis (2003) states that a task is:

A workplan that requires learners to process language pragmatically in order to achieve an outcome that can be evaluated in terms of whether the correct or appropriate propositional content has been conveyed. To this end, it requires them to give primary attention to meaning and to make use of their own linguistic resources, although the design of the task may predispose them to choose particular forms. A task is intended to result in language use that bears a resemblance, direct or indirect, to the way language is used in the real world. Like other language activities, a task can include productive and receptive, or oral and written skills. (p. 64)

The reason for choosing this definition of task is that, unlike most of the other definitions of a task, the essential commonalities in tasks such a task as a workplan, primary focus on meaning, involving real world process, using all four language skills, engaging cognitive processes and a well-defined communicative outcome are all included in this definition. Treatment communicative tasks in the present dissertation were operationalized as narrative tasks which were accompanied by pictures.

1.8.7. Ability to Use the Language
Use of language will be operationalized as the students’ ability to write a short story based on a timed written picture description task. EFL learners’ accuracy in writing spontaneously under time constrains will be taken as measure of their ability to use English articles correctly. 

1.8.8. Knowledge of Usage
Usage of English in this study is operationalized as the students’ scores on untimed grammaticality judgement task. Students’ scores on tests which will be administered before and after the experiment will be a measure of their explicit knowledge of language.
1.9. Summary and Organization of the Thesis

In the introduction to the thesis, we came to the understanding that although task-based syllabus, as one type of analytic syllabus, is superior to the traditional methods of language teaching and aims to develop learners’ interlanguage in language classes through using communicative tasks, a mere focus on meaning does not suffice and language learners may develop their fluency in using the language but fail to produce the language accurately. Therefore, based on previous studies, the researcher came to conclude that there is a need for some kind of focus on form in the context of primary focus on meaning. The type of focus on form that was introduced was CF. It was noted that in recent years this area of research has attracted the attention of researchers and language teachers and there has been a bulk of studies which have addressed CF in both EFL and ESL contexts. However, there is still a need for more studies which focus on CF from different angles with different operationalizations. It was also stressed that studies such as these will be more revealing if teachers’ and learners’ preferences for and beliefs about CF are also examined. The research questions and hypotheses were formulated and the key terms and their definitions were provided. The remainder of this thesis is organized as follows:

In Chapter 2, the researcher reviews the relevant research on CF which motivated the current study. The arguments concerning the necessity of focus on form in the context of performing communicative tasks as well as the research which focused specifically on different types of CF in different contexts will be extensively described and the rational for the present study is provided. Chapter 3 reviews the design and methodological procedures which are employed in this research. A detailed description of the participants, methods, treatment materials and measurement instruments is given in this chapter. In chapter 4 the results of the quantitative analyses of the data are presented. Chapter 5 reviews and discusses the main findings of the study with regard to the specific research questions and hypotheses in Chapter 1 and implications of the findings, limitations and recommendations for prospective researchers are provided.