

The Effects of Form-Focused Instruction on the Learners' Accuracy of Written Production

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Abstract

A recent approach to second language (L2) instruction is integrating Form-Focused Instruction (FFI) in a L2 classroom. One way to achieve this is through incidental focus on form (FonF) which draws learners' attention to linguistic items as they arise. Focus on form has been theorized as benefitting to the L2 learners, but few empirical investigations have been done in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision in this regard. This study looked into the effects of FFI and tried to compare the two types of FFI (implicit and explicit) and further investigated which type of instruction helped to promote L2 language development. To carry out this research 'The Effects of Form-Focused Instruction on ESOL Learners' Accuracy of Written Production', 45 experienced teachers at various ESOL centers in the UK and 16 ESOL learners in Entry level 2 or B1/B2 level at the 'Skills for Life' Centre in Preston College, UK, who were as the experimental group of this study. The ESOL teachers' perception about the effectiveness of FFI in the L2 classroom was yielded through questionnaires and one to one interviews. The experimental study was conducted by individualized tests for the ESOL learners in which productive tests were designed to induce their progressive written production and time triangulated data. The results revealed that planned focus on forms (FonFs) is preferred and practiced by the ESOL teachers in their L2 classrooms and seen as beneficial. The results of the tests showed that learners were able to recall correctly or partially correctly the intended linguistic items. This suggests that explicit FFI may be of some benefit to the ESOL learners, particularly if they are encouraged to incorporate the targeted linguistic items into their own L2 production.

Key words: FFI, Explicit, implicit, written production, UK

1. Significance of the Study

A common way to talk about language is in terms of its grammar (Hulstijn, 2002). In fact, the most common conception of language is that it consists of a large set of lexical items and a set of rules. Moreover, grammar is often thought of as an “invisible central spine that holds everything else together” (Cook, 2001: 24) and an important component of L2 learning programmes. Ellis asserts that, “there is ample evidence to demonstrate that teaching grammar works” (2006:102). Grammar is perceived as a language system of communication allowing speakers/writers to make meaningful exchange. This meaningful exchange is “text that refers to any instance of language, in any medium, that makes sense to someone who knows the language” (Halliday, 2004:3).

A ‘communicative approach’ is taken to teach grammar in the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) sector under this study which refers to the “provision of English language teaching for adult migrants” termed by Lang (2010:223). Though they are functionally and communicatively oriented; yet they are invariably based on so called pedagogical grammars (either overtly or covertly) and involve a structured approach to the presentation of the rules of grammar. Such Pedagogical techniques or Form-Focused Instruction (FFI) is referred to “Any planned or incidental instructional activity that is intended to induce language learners to pay attention to linguistic form” (Ellis, 2001:1). Focus on form is most frequently teacher-initiated, but it is also initiated by learners through questions and requests for explanation (Poole, 2005b).

1.2 Aims of the Investigation

This study originated from the researcher’s personal experience of teaching grammar with explicit instruction in English as Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. The study aims to investigate the teaching maxims of experienced ESOL teachers in the UK as to how they conduct FFI in their language classrooms and their rationale for doing so. Furthermore, the researcher attempts to examine which technique affects the linguistic accuracy of a group of ESOL learners’ written production following implicit FonF in comparison with another group receiving explicit FonFs at the same level of language proficiency.

Doughty & Williams defined Implicit and explicit instruction as: Implicit FonF: The aim is to attract learner attention and to avoid metalinguistic discussion, always minimising any interruption to the communication of the meaning. Whereas explicit teaching: The aim is to direct learner attention and to exploit pedagogical grammar in this regard. (1998:230). Hadley (2001) defines the term ‘proficiency’ as a learner’s general language ability in speaking, listening, reading and/or writing based on some kind of criteria. In other words, proficiency in L2 requires that the learners acquire a rich repertoire of formulaic expressions, which caters to fluency, and a rule-based competence consisting of knowledge of specific grammatical rules, which caters to complexity and accuracy (Skehan, 1998).

1.3 The Research Questions and Hypotheses

Research Questions formulated for the purpose of this study are:

1.3.1 Research Question One

How do the ESOL teachers perceive the impact of implicit vs explicit instruction for the ESOL learners?

1.3.1.2 Research Question Two

To what extent does FFI improve the written production of ESOL learners at entry level 2/3 or intermediate level?

1.3.2 Hypotheses

1.3.2.1 Hypothesis One

Implicit FFI does not affect the linguistic accuracy of the ESOL learners' written production in comparison with explicit FFI.

1.3.2.2 Hypothesis Two

There are no significant differences between Explicit and Implicit FFI in terms of improving accuracy in written production of the ESOL learners.

1.3.3 Rationale for the Research Questions

This study originated from the researcher's personal beliefs about teaching explicitly in EFL classroom. One of the concerns as an EFL teacher was whether the language learners' written production should be corrected in terms of the non-targeted forms or not. The question then arises as to when to correct, how to correct and what to correct. Even by referring to the existing research there are some contradictory findings. The noteworthy point is that, considering the results of all these studies, one cannot see concluding results concerning FonF in particular. Regarding the comparative studies in terms of the effectiveness of Explicit and Implicit FonF the need could easily be felt to investigate the effects of implicit and explicit FFI and its effects on the written production of ESOL learners at entry level 2/3 or intermediate level.

2. Theoretical background

The aim of this study is to investigate the effect of 'Form-Focused Instruction' on Second Language Learners (SLL); it would be significant to discuss at this point some theories/hypotheses which are in support to the concept of 'input' in the language development. Over the years, a number of the linguistic theories and the hypotheses have been evolved which highlights that how L1 and L2 are acquired/learned by the learners. Noam Chomsky describes language acquisition as the mental representation that is stored in a human's mind. He states that ". . . 'language acquisition device' that takes experience as 'input' and gives the language as an 'output'-an 'output' that is internally represented in the mind/brain" (Chomsky, 2000:4 cited in Mitchell & Myles, 2004:52). His Universal Grammar theory (UG) which he puts forward that all human beings inherit a universal set of principles that are invariant to all natural languages as well as parameters which are variant or help to illustrate differences between languages. He took into account was that, "for language acquisition is **linguistic competence**, or speaker-hearers' underlying knowledge of language. This is distinguished from **linguistic performance**, or speaker-hearers' actual use of language in specific instances" (Troike, 2006:56). UG has been significantly important for the SLA researchers to conduct studies on the basis of this theory and to find the correlation between the FLL and the SLL language development, and how learners use their linguistic knowledge to acquire/learn SLA. "However, as UG is a theory of natural languages claiming it plays no part in second language acquisition would mean claiming that second languages are not natural languages" (Mitchell & Myles, 2004:77).

Other problem related to this linguistic theory is that it was only related to core grammar as well as ignoring the learner's psychological and social factors. This led to further exploration of the

significant elements of SLLs paving its way to the Interlanguage (IL) theory, coined by Selinker (1970's). The IL theory attempts to identify the stages of development that are dynamic (constantly evolving), for example omission and generalization as the learners become more proficient in the comprehension and production of their second language. However, Selinker argues that learners do not acquire their L2 fully and may maintain some features of L1 which is termed as 'IL continuum'. It leads to an overgeneralization of rules in a way that native speaker would not, for example "I goed home" to create past tense, this can lead to fossilization, that is unique to the learner. According to Mitchell & Myles, (2004:102) "Fossilisation refers to the fact that Second Language Learners unlike First Language Learners sometimes seem unable to get rid of non native like structures in the L2 despite abundant linguistic input over several years".

3.1 Input Hypothesis

Krashen's first input proposal led researcher to examine more closely the characters of input being made available to the L2 learners (Mitchell & Myles, 2004:166). In Krashen's hypothesis he claims that it is important for learners to receive comprehensive input for SLL to take place.

The hypothesis states that:

"Humans acquire language in only one way-by understanding messages or by receiving 'comprehensible input' . . . We move from i , our current level, to $i+1$, the next level along the natural order, by understanding input containing $i+1$ " (Krashen, 1985; Cited in Mitchell & Myles, 2004:165).

The defining distinction between implicit acquisition was made by Krashen which states that, (subconscious process that all children use to acquire their L1 by natural interaction) and explicit learning of L2 (is a conscious process that results in knowing a language in a classroom experience) Furthermore, in his view, as the implicit and explicit knowledge are two distinct mental developments they are not interchangeable. This is termed as 'Interface position'. On the other hand, Ellis (2006) argues that the implicit knowledge is procedural and is held unconsciously as it can only be verbalized if made explicit (explicit knowledge is held consciously and consists of facts that speakers of a language have learned). Moreover, Ellis continues that: "there is plentiful evidence that explicit instruction is effective in promoting L2 learning".

Despite various criticisms, linguists Long and Swain extended their investigation based and inspired by Krashen's Input Hypothesis. These hypotheses "propose a more systematic approach to linking features of environmental language and learners' second language development" (Mitchell & Myles, 2004:166), some of the aspects that were ignored in the Krashen's proposal.

3.2 Interaction Hypothesis

Long (1980) comments on the Krashen's hypothesis and said that, an attempt to capture the strengths of an analytical approach by stating that the speakers modify their speech in order to make input comprehensible. In this case the input is paraphrased in terms of the "conversational tactics such as repetitions, confirmation checks, comprehension checks and clarification requests" (Mitchell & Myles, 2004:167), which are available for acquisition. Input which well targets to the particular developmental needs of an individual learner to resolve any communicative difficulties between the native speaker/non native speaker and not any conscious motive to teach grammar. However, the perspective put forward by Long was that such efforts should help the language development which in Krashen's, terms is that the learners receive $i+1$ following interaction. Long, (1997b) suggests that "particularly important is the negotiation of

meaning that occurs more or less predictably in certain interaction between learners and other speakers . . . and certain type of written texts, especially long” (cited in Doughty & William, 1998:22).

3.3 Output Hypothesis

Swain's Output Hypothesis was based on Vygotsky's theory which explains how the interaction contributes to the language learning (Lightbrown, 2000). Swain's conceptual hypothesis is “largely on the ‘reflective’ role of output” (Mitchell & Myles, 2004:175). According to her, there is a need to focus not just on the input and the interaction, on learning production ‘output’ which signifies the relationship between the language use and the language learning in SLA. Ellis (1999) did some studies to find the link of output on the L2 development. He concludes that pushing learners to produce language may give rise to positive effects especially on the vocabulary. Hence, in regards to grammar teaching the benefits of ‘pushed out’ remain inconclusive (cited in Mitchell & Myles, 2004:175).

3.4 Focus on Form

It is evident from all the above mentioned theories/hypotheses that the learners pay attention to the language development in order to intake or absorb the knowledge of language use with the help of input and interaction. A learner is required to be made ‘aware’ of the error at some point and Schmidt (1990, 1994, 2001) labels ‘awareness’ as ‘noticing’ based on his own experience of learning L2 (Portuguese): despite getting input of language instructions for several months, he only started using ‘form’ once he started noticing them. To support the Schmidt's idea of Noticing, the researchers such as Philip investigated its relevance and his findings claimed that “In terms of understanding the process of SLA, these findings support the claim for interface between interaction, noticing and SLA . . .” (Philip, 2003:120; cited in Mitchell & Myles, 2004:185). However, the nature of noticing cannot be limited to the amount of formal instructions to which learners are exposed to (Lightbrown, 2000). The role of language instructions is to help learners move their current level of IL to the next level. L.White makes a discrete distinction between two types of instruction: FonFs, that is step-by-step explicit grammar instructions and FonF which is corrective feedback fully integrated into the ongoing communicative activities and therefore implicit (cited in Lightbrown, 2000). A number of studies have compared the effects of these pedagogical interventions which in result strongly support the inclusion of FonF in the CLT classrooms. In fact research by Norris and Ortega confirms that instructions which include FonF make a significant difference in learners' language development (cited in Lightbrown, 2000).

4. Methodology

4.1 Data Collection Procedures

The Data were collected from a variety of individuals and by using different methods/procedures. The main purpose of selecting these participants was that they had experience of the phenomenon under investigation here (i.e. experience of teaching/learning in the ESOL sector). This study will also provide comparison of two native teachers' Form-focused practices in the context of their own classrooms for the experimental study. The rationale for this selection was purposive: as Patton (1990) puts it, a strategy in which participants are included in

a study on the basis of their ability, as judged by the researcher, to provide information relevant to the central purpose of the research.

4.2 Institutional Setting

To accomplish this comparative study, the ESOL learners were from the language institute located in the 'Skills for Life' Centre, Preston College, UK. In this institute, there are a set of placement tests (prepared in-house) and also interviews that the ESOL learners are required to take before being placed in classes of various levels. ESOL is offered to people whose first language is not English. It is offered at 6 different levels from Pre-entry to Level 2. The classes take place within the college premises and in different locations within Preston city for learners' convenience and tutors is a mixture of native and non-native speakers of English.

4.3 The Participants

'Teachers and learners' refer to 'ESOL' teachers and learners.

The words 'student and 'learner' are interchangeable in this study.

4.4 ESOL Teachers for the Questionnaires

A total of forty-five responses were analysed for the quantitative study; the researcher's initial criteria for selecting the ESOL teachers from various educational centres were based on their years of experience, Education and willingness to participate. The teacher participants were from both genders and included; 10 males and 35 females among them 18 teachers had between 3 and 6 years and 27 teachers had more than 5 years of ESOL teaching experience at different proficiency levels.

4.5 ESOL Teachers for the Experimental Study

Two teachers with different levels of teaching experience agreed to participate in the study; both were native speakers of English and teachers at Preston College ESOL provision. The experimental studies participants were; Teacher 1 had more than 20 years of teaching experience in ESOL provision at Preston College and teacher 2 had more than 3 years of teaching experience. Following the ethical guideline, both teachers were approached and consent forms were signed after they showed willingness to participate.

4.6 ESOL Learners for the Experimental Study

The ESOL learners of two existing classes at Preston College and were existing students of the above mentioned teachers. The sample size was twenty-six; multilingual and mixed ethnic backgrounds such as Polish, Eastern European and others as a mix of Asian backgrounds. The ESOL learners were aged between 19-30 years approximately. There was no preference for male or female, as this is not a study of gender differences. The choice of size was based on a personal preference to what the researcher thought was achievable. The two ESOL classes taken under consideration for this study meet three times a week and every session lasted for 120 minutes. The proficiency level of learners was Entry level 2/3; CEFR independent user B1/B2 level. Borg and Gall (1979) emphasise that "The casual comparative and experimental methodologies require a sample of no fewer than fifteen" (cited in Cohen et al., 2007:93). Hence, the resultant sample was comprised of two classes which were further divided into groups 1 and group 2 of N=13 in each.

4.7 Procedure

Loewen (2005:367) suggests “with planned focus on form, it is possible to use a pre-test and post-test to measure gains in learners’ ability to use the targeted structure”. As shown in Table 1 Taking planned FonF approach the pre-test was the initial test administered to each group of ESOL learners and post-test were taken soon after each group received treatment. In applied linguistics most successful field of investigation has been L2 instructional effectiveness using experimental design (Dörnyei, 2007). Moreover, Ortega and Ibarra-Shea (2005) suggest that, “the researchers don’t take advantage of time series designs that can enhance the effectiveness of such studies” (ibid). To strength the ‘time series design’ and findings delayed post test was administered. In earlier studies there have been anecdotal opinions about the amount of time that should elapse between each test (i.e. from 1 month up to a year). So the researcher allowed a delayed period of 3 months (Long & Robinson, 1998) to gauge the effectiveness of FFI and that one of the research questions could be properly investigated. The tests were marked and scored according to the marking criteria of ESOL learners at entry level 2/3.

5. Summary of the Findings

One of the aims of this research was to elicit teachers’ perspectives and their adherence to the integration of FonF within communicatively oriented language teaching. Initially quantitative data were collected from 55 ESOL teachers in form of questionnaires in order to get the holistic view.

The results from the questionnaire showed that all ESOL teachers intervened and gave corrective feedback in form of clarifications and recast dyad explicitly or implicitly and recognise it valuable weightage for the acquisition L2 learners’ language competence. This means the interactional hypotheses proposed in SLA theories enhances language acquisition and validates that significance of negotiations with comprehensive input. A negotiation in this context means reformulating of the information which took place when the learners had difficulty in comprehending the instructions for their written productions which is vital in the overall L2 acquisition. Learners’ IL behaviour does not suddenly change when corrected; this does not weaken the importance of correction. Hence, evidence suggests that correction of errors should be only aimed at something which learners are actually capable of (Lightbrown, 2000). Various questions were raised in this study’s questionnaires, to find out how teachers believe that formal instructions helps learners’ to produce written work in L2 acquisition. Acquisition in this study sense “increased control over use of linguistic form” (Ellis, 2008:842).

As seen in Table 1, statistically high number of teachers’ favoured FFI. This supports the SLA theories/hypotheses of input and interaction put forward by linguistics Krashen and Long. Observations done on teachers proved evidence that explicit FFI help learners to stop making errors and even sustainable over long period of time (Lightbrown, 2000). 80% of teachers agreed, when teachers where asked if ‘some errors are susceptible to the teacher’s intervention, while others just resolve themselves over time and through exposure and practice’. This clarifies Lightbrown, (2000) argument that learners IL behavior does not suddenly change when corrected, yet still facilitates them to notice the difference between their L1 and L2.

The questionnaire had two sections: section one contains 8 questions and section two has 7 questions. Table 1 illustrate the results of section one of the questionnaire for ESOL teachers answering “Strongly agree”, “Agree”, “Not sure”, “Disagree” and “Strongly disagree”

Table 1. The results as a percentage rounded to the nearest decimal for following statements:

No.	Questions	Strongly agree (1)	Agree (2)	Not sure (3)	Disagree (4)	Strongly disagree (5)
1	Formal instruction helps learners to produce written work in correct grammatical language.	13%	29%	18%	33%	7%
2	In case of implicit or delayed error correction a student keeps making the same error.	31%	36%	9%	16%	9%
3	Students can improve their writing accuracy through frequent practice of grammatical structures.	13%	33%	11%	42%	0%
4	Some errors are susceptible to the teacher's intervention, while others just resolve themselves over time and through exposure and practice	33%	40%	13%	13%	0%
5	A typical measure of accuracy is Percentage of error-free clauses.	7%	44%	27%	22%	0%
6	Students learn grammar more successfully if it is presented within a Complete text in an activity.	44%	20%	22%	13%	0%
7	Form-focused correction helps students to improve their written Proficiency	13%	42%	31%	13%	0%
8	Explicit discussion of grammar rules is helpful for students to improve their written proficiency.	16%	44%	20%	13%	7%

Moreover, to triangulate the findings and further support the hypotheses devised for this study, qualitative data from the 16 questionnaire's comments section were further categorised and analysed which are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Some of the qualitative responses that draws attention to teacher's maxims for FFI:

An ESOL teacher commented on form-functions similarities between L1 and L2
“I think we need to remember that people attend to different things in second languages and also feel different things are useful in their learning, so it's sometimes difficult to generalise There's also the point that where L1 and L2 share grammatical or form-function similarities, then it may be easier to correct errors etc. An ESOL teacher supported the idea of FonFs”.
An ESOL teacher supported the idea of FonFs
“All students are different and therefore some will find FonF more effective than FonFs and vice versa. Personally, I agree that FonFs is more effective (see Ellis), but that doesn't mean I wouldn't use both, and other, approaches in the classroom to teach grammar”.
An ESOL teacher commented on implicit teaching
“Students' perceptions are important. If they think focus on form is the only way to learn a language then they will not realise they can learn just as well from implicit teaching. Most students will say they want 'more grammar' because they don't recognise they are learning grammar implicitly. A good ESOL teacher should do a mixture of both I think”.

Measurement of effects on learning and durability of FFI

Common to all studies paradigm is the concern for accuracy and the important aspect this study looked into and was also highlighted in questionnaires such as 'A typical measure of accuracy is percentage of error-free clauses' for which 40% of teachers strongly agreed whereas 27% disagreed and remaining were not sure. "That is instruction is a said to have had an effect if learners demonstrate a statistically significant gain in accuracy over time" (Ellis, 2008:840).

Varieties of instruments are used such as pre-test and post-test as ". . . samples provide evidence of what the learners know about the language they are trying to learn. (the TL) If samples are collected at different points in time it may also be possible to find out how learners' knowledge gradually develops . . ." (Ellis, 1997:4). The researcher believes there is a large scope for application in this study as "it offers an investigator the opportunity to gather 'live' data form naturally occurring social situation" (Cohen et. al., 2007:396).

As shown in Table 3 below ESOL learners were observed as focus groups on the basis of 'test teach test' (TTT). They were pretested by the means of a receptive test and received treatment as teaching of that session, then will be given a delayed productive test. Scores were matched to find out the learning outcomes on the basis to measure learners' ". . . progress along a sequence of acquisition (i.e. movement from early stage of development in an attested sequence" (Sharwood Smith, 1985 cited in Ellis, 2008:840). The test was a free writing production conduct on 'eight' ESOL learners. Post test was done after delayed 3 months of duration to check the effects of FFI and its durability at times can have short term effects.

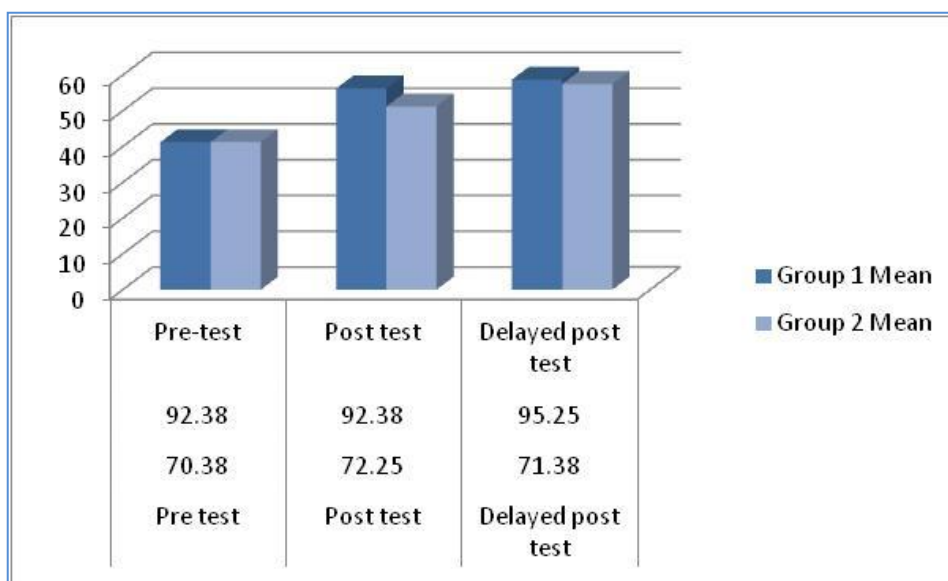
Table 3. Demonstrates the Experimental Study Design:

Groups	Treatment	Tasks types / tools	Time triangulation / 3 Test stages
Experimental group 1	Implicit FFI	T 1: Constrained constructed responses / gap fill task	1.Pre-test 2.Post-test (soon after treatment session) 3. Delayed Post- test (after a period of 3 months)
Experimental group 2	Explicit FFI	T 2: Free constructed response/ free writing	

Two tools were purposely administered by the researcher to compare the ESOL learners' written production between receptive and productive tests. It was seen as important for the consistency of results to measure the effects of FFIs or the familiarised effect of the aimed grammar structure, hence the productive test enabled the detection of other grammar components although the complexity of sentences was not under consideration as the groups under study are at E2/E3 intermediate level. The quantitative data revealed interesting results (see table 4) which demonstrate the descriptive statistical analysis of the findings.

The study aims to measure the effect of FFI on the ESOL learner's written production. The gain scores of each group will be analysed between each test (for example: pre- test by post- test, post test by delayed post- test and so forth with the help of t-test; This "t" value tells how far away from 0, in terms of the number of standard errors, the observed difference between the two sample means and expansively evaluated by Sig. (2-tailed) indicated the level of significance of the t-value.

The Table 4 Illustrates means of Tool 1 and 2; group 1 and 2 at all three stages of test.



This led to conclude in this study that overall the effect of FFI was sustained by the learners. However, there is insufficient evidence in the literature supporting that the effects of FFI can be short lived. In this case Lightbrown (1992a) suggested “. . . when form-focused instruction is introduced in a way which is divorced from the communicative needs and activities of the student, only short-effects are obtained” (cited in Ellis, 2008:867). In other words, learners' subsequent and ongoing access to communicative activities in order to utilise their target language features even after the instruction has been stopped, has seen to be benefited from FFI. This concern has also been shown by one of the participants (ESOL teacher) of this study regarding aspects of FFI and commented by saying, “Students learn best when they, are given plenty of opportunities to learn in an interactive environment which is non-threatening. Nothing succeeds like success”.

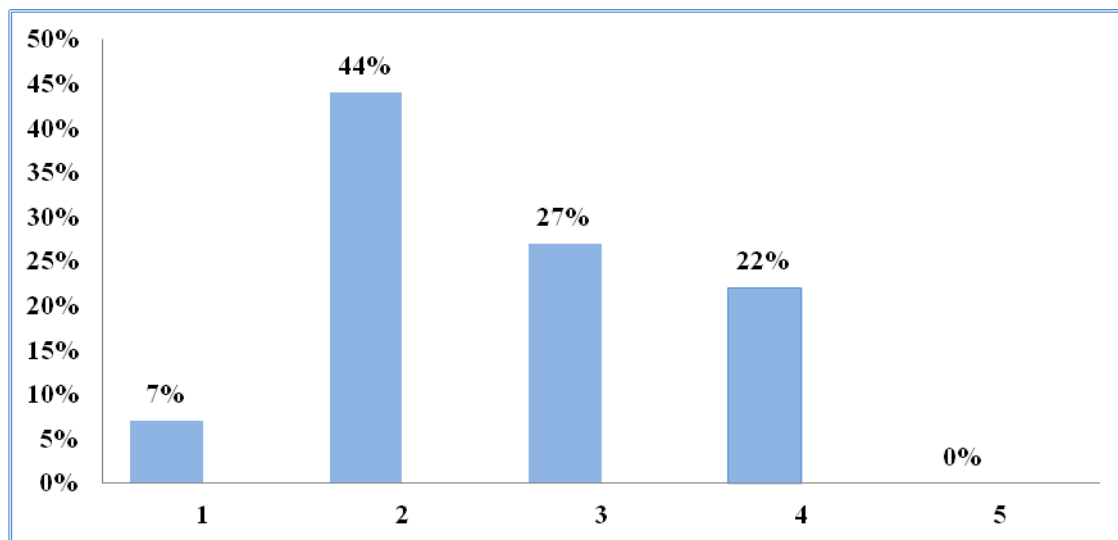
Corrective feedback

White (1991) cited in Lightbrown, (2000) argued that “second language learners draw on features of L1 as well as input on L2” which was seen more problematic in multilingual classrooms. In this case they require negative evidence in the form of instruction or corrective feedback. “Negative feedback obtained in negotiation work or elsewhere may be facilitative of SL development, at least for vocabulary, morphology and language-specific syntax, and essential for learning certain specifiable L1-L2 contrast” (Long, 1996:414 cited in Doughty & Williams, 1998:23). As part of my empirical investigation, I also wanted to consider what learners perception is for corrective feedback.

Moreover, a qualitative data from L2 learner's perception under this study stated that: “I find myself to be quite tolerant to learners' errors as they are part of natural development. Looking at my experience as a learner, I wasn't that keen on being corrected by the teacher in front of everyone, it made me feel anxious and most of the time I just refused to take part in whole-class debates just to avoid the bad feeling of being wrong”. This only shows that it is probably very important to find out learners attitudes towards error correction what enhances and facilitates learning in their opinion. Although, the perception is reality for individual learner, the credibility of the teacher and the instructional approach with regards to corrective feedback would be questioned by a learner whose expectations were not met (either consciously or unconsciously).

Question 5 in the questionnaire was how teachers measure accuracy in order to give corrective feedback to the learners. This question was devised to answer research question two which sought to find out which teaching method of FFI is more effective for students. The results in Table 5 is by ranking the order of agreement to disagreement, it was an expected pattern of answers that demonstrated experienced teachers beliefs for the accuracy in work. Significantly higher number that is 44% of teachers agreed whereas 22% disagreed. However only 27% were not sure.

Table 5. Question 5 in the questionnaire was how teachers measure accuracy in order to give corrective feedback to the learners.



Conclusion and Summary of the Study

There are many factors that complicate FFI research and instruction effectiveness. Some possible influences of FFI are suggested by Spada & Lightbown in the TESOL quarterly as “FFI may be beneficial with features that are relatively simple to explain or illustrate” (2008:195). In this regard, Krashen introduces functionally and formally complex rules, the lack of the latter benefiting the learnability; however, DeKeyser argues that “it is hard to see how a rule could be formally simple if it is functionally complex, except in the very superficial sense that a rule can be regarded as formally simple if it involves nothing but presence versus absence of a single morpheme” (1998:44). DeKeyser further adds that complexity is also hard to define and not many researchers agree on some rules to be simple or complex. This interpretation seems to converge rather well with findings of this study. Not only might a structure difficulty affect the success of instruction, its subjective difficulty may do so as well. Subjective difficulty refers to the notion that L2 learners may differ in how complex they perceive a structure to be (DeKeyser, 2003).

Long (1991) was first to conceptualise the need to incorporate FFI into communicative language teaching with the term ‘focus on form’. Researchers in the input or interaction theories/hypotheses seem to accept in general terms that SLA must be the result of interaction between environmental stimuli, a learner internal language system, and some language specific learning capabilities. This study concluded from the above discussion of the findings that the ESOL teachers favoured and practice FFI and supported the importance of giving explicit instruction. However, the experimental study did benefit from FFI and its effects were not sustained over a period of time. Nicholos et. al. (2001) pointed out that, “those findings to date for negative feedback research are still somewhat inconclusive and difficult to interpret” (cited in Mitchell & Myles 2004:183). Mitchell and Myles state one increasingly recognised problem is that “we still know very little about how much attention learner’s pay to feedback they receive, or how they interpret it” (ibid). Ellis (1999) asserts that in regards to grammar teaching the benefits of ‘pushed out’ language remain inconclusive (cited in Mitchell & Myles, 2004:175).

This study confirmed from the above literature findings: the widely held participants (ESOL teachers) gave input with negotiations/corrective feedback to linguistic errors in their classrooms. Qualitative data from a respondent evaluates (FFI)

“I think we need to remember that people attend to different things in second languages and also feel different things are useful in their learning, so it's sometimes difficult to generalise. There's also the point that where L1 and L2 share grammatical or form-function similarities, then it may be easier to correct errors etc”.

This leads Leeman to conclude from one of his researches that:

“The findings are highly suggestive regarding the role of attention and salience in SLA...A logical interpretation is that enhancing the salience of certain forms led learners to attend to those forms....It seems that some interactional features, recast among them, can lead to greater development by highlighting specific forms in the input” (2003:57). All researchers in the input or interaction theories/hypotheses seem to accept in general terms that SLA must be the result of interaction between environmental stimuli, a learner internal language system, and some language specific learning capabilities. However, as Nicholos et. al. (2001) points out “those findings to date for negative feedback research are still somewhat inconclusive and difficult to interpret”. One increasingly recognised problem is that “we still know very little about how much attention learners pay to feedback they receive, or how they interpret it” (Mitchell & Myles, 2004:183). Another study which I found very interesting was conducted by Truscot (1999, cited in Ferris, 2004) who stated that corrective feedback on written work was completely ineffective and learners did not improve their writing even though they were provided with feedback. Doughty and Williams (1998) suggest no particular benefit of one type of instruction (explicit/implicit) over the other. They do point out that the classroom situation might direct a teacher to his/her choice of FonF, for instance proactive FonF might be useful if a teacher has a clear idea of common language problems in a class with the shared L1; the nature of noticing cannot be limited to the amount of formal instructions to which the learners are exposed to (Lightbown, 2000).

Limitations of the Study

As this study was on a small scale, the sample size was 26 and 16=8 in each group at the time for the experimental study and limited to written production. The results may have been significantly higher between the gained score if the number of the acquired sample were larger. As Borg and Gall (1979) emphasise that “The casual comparative and experimental methodologies require a sample of no fewer than fifteen” (cited in Cohen et al., 2007:93). The participants were ESOL learners at Entry level two or B1/B2. So the results cannot be generalized to other levels of language proficiency.

The participants of the experimental groups were members of both the genders; monolinguals belonging to different origins and adult learners over the age of 18. The results may vary with multilingual groups and learners below this age. This study was done on experienced NS teacher in UK due to purposive sample. Due to this fact NS and NNS teachers were not taken into account within or outside UK. Hence, their perception about FFI in communicative context cannot reflect to larger population of teachers.

Further Recommendations

Since this study was narrowed down in terms of its participants, structures in focus, techniques of focus on form, etc., it seems necessary to point out some further research to be done in this regard. Considering the fact that this study was limited to only two techniques of focus on form, (explicit and implicit FFI) it is suggested that similar studies be conducted with other techniques of FonF such as clarification request, comprehension check, etc. Moreover, more comprehensive

studies could be done to investigate the effect of more than two techniques at a time on language acquisition. Since the present study focused on only two structures in English, similar studies could examine the accuracy gains in terms of other structures in English or any other languages. Similar research could be done regarding oral production of other English structures. The need is felt to carry out similar experiments to investigate the long-term effects of focus on form through different techniques and strategies. Finally, this study could be replicated with learners at higher and lower levels of language proficiency.

Final Remark

There is high scope of replication of this study as there are a scarce number of studies done in the context of ESOL provision in UK, specifically looking into the effects of FFI. One of the participant ESOL teacher having 20 years of teaching experience felt that more studies should be conducted in ESOL to improve the teaching and learning experience. It is hoped that some contribution is made to the development of language teaching. Besides, it is believed that this study covered a narrow scope of focus on form issue, and other researchers/students are recommended to carry out related studies to push the frontiers of knowledge in this regard.

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