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The Efficacy of Incidental Focus on Form in the EFL Classroom: An Investigation of Occurrence, Uptake, and Learning

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ABSTRACT

While focus on form (FonF) has been a prominent area of research in second language acquisition, the specific efficacy of incidental FonF, particularly its impact on learning different linguistic forms in an EFL context, remains underexplored. This study investigated incidental FonF with two primary aims: 1) to determine the frequency, type, linguistic coverage, and uptake rate of incidental focus on form episodes (FFE), and 2) to measure its short- and long-term effects on the learning of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. An upper-intermediate EFL discussion class with 12 learners was observed for eight hours. Data were collected via video recordings, learner uptake sheets, and individualized immediate and delayed post-tests derived from the uptake sheets. Findings revealed a high frequency of incidental FFEs (one every 1.5 minutes), with preemptive FFEs occurring more often than reactive ones. Lexical FFEs were the most common, while vocabulary and pronunciation had the highest rates of learner uptake. Crucially, test results indicated that incidental FonF was highly effective in promoting both short- and long-term retention of grammatical, lexical, and phonological forms. These findings suggest that incidental FonF is a valuable and effective pedagogical tool in meaning-oriented EFL instruction.

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1. Introduction

The history of language teaching pedagogy is characterized by a persistent tension between approaches prioritizing linguistic form and those that champion communicative meaning. Early methodologies, such as the Grammar-Translation Method and the Audio-Lingual Method, were built on structural linguistics and behaviorist psychology, centering on the systematic teaching of discrete

grammatical structures. This Focus on Forms (FonFs), as it came to be known, often produced learners who demonstrated high accuracy in controlled, decontextualized exercises but lacked the fluency and communicative spontaneity required for genuine communication (Zare & Aqajani Delavar, 2023). According to Long and Robinson (1998), such synthetic syllabi are problematic because they fail to account for the non-linear nature of language acquisition and ignore the learner's internal, developmental syllabus (Shabani & Vahedi, 2025).

In reaction, the latter half of the 20th century saw the rise of meaning-based instruction (Yuan & Tang, 2025), heavily influenced by Krashen's (1982) distinction between conscious 'learning' and subconscious 'acquisition'. Methodologies like the Natural Approach (Sun & Zhang, 2021; Krashen & Terrell, 1983) and various implementations of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) shifted the focus entirely to meaning, arguing that language is best acquired implicitly through exposure to comprehensible input (El Garras et al., 2025). However, evaluations of purely meaning-focused programs, most notably Swain's (1985) landmark study of French immersion students in Canada, revealed a significant weakness. While learners in these programs achieved high levels of fluency and communicative confidence, their grammatical accuracy often fossilized at non-target-like levels, demonstrating that comprehensible input alone was insufficient for achieving high linguistic proficiency.

This pedagogical dialectic—the accuracy-but-not-fluent product of FonFs versus the fluent-but-not-accurate product of FonM—created a clear need for an integrated approach that could foster both dimensions of communicative competence (Sato, 2025; Chung & Révész, 2025). The solution emerged as Focus on Form (FonF), a concept crystallized by Long (1991), who defined it as an approach that “overtly draws students’ attention to linguistic elements as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning or communication” (pp. 45-46). FonF instruction, therefore, represents a crucial methodological compromise (Murtisari, 2025): it maintains a primary emphasis on meaning, using language for authentic communicative purposes (Esmaeeli & Sadeghi, 2025), while allowing for brief, unobtrusive shifts in attention to linguistic form when a communicative need arises.

2. Literature Review

The theoretical justification for FonF is robust, resting on a convergence of three influential, interaction-driven hypotheses in second language acquisition (SLA). First, Long's (1983, 1996) Interaction Hypothesis, an extension of Krashen's Input Hypothesis, posits that comprehensible input is necessary but not sufficient. Long argued that acquisition is facilitated specifically through the interactional modifications that occur when learners and their interlocutors negotiate for meaning in the face of communicative breakdown.⁷ These negotiations (e.g., clarification requests, confirmation checks, recasts) provide learners with more finely tuned input and, crucially, negative evidence about the non-target-likeness of their utterances, drawing their attention to problematic forms and connecting input to cognitive processes like selective attention.

Second, Swain's (1985, 1995) Output Hypothesis complements the input-focused perspective by highlighting the role of language production. Swain argued that producing language pushes learners from semantic to syntactic processing, forcing them to engage with the grammatical systems of the language. Output serves three key functions: (1) the noticing function, whereby learners become aware of gaps in their own interlanguage when they are unable to express a desired meaning; (2) the hypothesis-testing function, as learners try out new forms and receive feedback; and (3) the

metalinguistic function, where learners reflect on language use, thereby consolidating their knowledge.

Finally, Schmidt's (1990, 1993) Noticing Hypothesis provides the cognitive link, asserting that for input to become intake (i.e., the linguistic data used for interlanguage development), learners must consciously notice the relevant linguistic forms. Schmidt argued that attention is the necessary starting point for acquisition, the condition that converts raw input into processable intake. FonF provides an ideal pedagogical context for this to occur, as the brief, meaning-driven shifts in attention are designed precisely to make linguistic features salient and thus more likely to be noticed by the learner. Together, these hypotheses provide a powerful theoretical rationale for an instructional approach that embeds attention to form within communicative interaction.

To operationalize FonF for research and practice, scholars have proposed several key distinctions (Afshar, 2021; Xodabande & Boroughani, 2023). The most foundational is Ellis's (2001) classification of FonF into two main types: planned and incidental. Planned FonF is proactive and intensive (Alcón, 2007); a teacher pre-selects one or a few linguistic items and designs a communicative task to naturally elicit them. This can be achieved through "input" options, such as providing enriched input or input enhancement (e.g., bolding target words in a text), or through "output" options, such as using focused communicative tasks that necessitate the use of a specific structure to complete the goal (Ellis, 2001). In contrast, incidental FonF, the focus of the present study, is extensive and unplanned. It arises spontaneously from the learners' communicative efforts during unfocused tasks. This type is further divided into two crucial sub-types (Ellis et al., 2002). Reactive FonF, also known as corrective feedback, occurs after a learner has produced an erroneous utterance. The teacher or a peer provides feedback to correct the error. Preemptive FonF occurs before an error is made. This can be initiated by the teacher, who might anticipate a problem and provide a linguistic reminder (e.g., "Remember to use the past tense for this story"), or by a student who realizes a gap in their own knowledge and asks a question (e.g., "How do you say...?").

FonF episodes can also be classified along a continuum of explicitness. Implicit FonF is subtle and does not interrupt the flow of communication, with the most common form being the recast, where the teacher reformulates a learner's erroneous utterance correctly without explicitly signaling an error. While frequent, recasts run the risk of being ambiguous and may not be noticed by learners as corrective (Nabei & Swain, 2002). Explicit FonF, on the other hand, involves overtly indicating that an error has been made, through techniques like metalinguistic explanation, elicitation, or direct correction. While more likely to be noticed, overly explicit FonF can disrupt the communicative flow (Ellis et al., 2002). Finally, FonF can be either conversational, arising from a genuine breakdown in communication that requires negotiation of meaning to resolve, or didactic, where attention is drawn to a form even though no misunderstanding has occurred (Liu & Ren, 2024).

A growing body of empirical research has sought to measure the learning outcomes of incidental FonF, primarily through the use of individualized post-tests. These studies have consistently pointed to its effectiveness, though the contexts and findings vary. This section delves into various empirical studies investigating the efficacy of focus on form in the EFL contexts. As Shabani and Vahedi (2025) investigated the role of Form-focused Instruction (FFI) in various interaction between EFL teachers and learners. Further, it explored the effects of FFI in learners' acquisition of the past tense (regular and irregular types) during classroom tasks. To obtain this aim, 32 pre-intermediate learners were selected and divided into three groups. All interactions between

EFL instructors and learners were observed. Finally, a posttest was run one week after each observation. The results confirmed that majority of Focus on Form happened in individual contact which were not primarily teacher-initiated.

In a more similar study, Al-Buraiki (2025) investigated Focus on Form during collaborative interactions and dialogues in EFL settings. Additionally, this research studied the ways EFL learners focused on form during their pair and group activities. Audio recordings of learners' dialogues were utilized for data collection. Moreover, 22 EFL learners were selected in a Foreign Language Center in Oman. The learners' collaborative interactions for language related episode (LREs) were analyzed by the researcher. The findings indicated that the participants produced 152 LREs within 140 minutes. The findings indicated that Phonological LREs were more frequent than Lexical LREs.

In another investigation, Helal (2024) probed the effectiveness of Focus on Form integration and Gamified Learning among Egyptian EFL learners. For the objective of the study, 64 EFL students were selected into two intact classes. The experimental group was taught English verbs through proposed focus on form integration. Pretest and Posttest were conducted to compare the performance of the participants. The findings revealed that the experimental group surpassed the control group in both understanding and producing English verbs in their EFL classes.

Along the same line, Ahmad and Mahmud (2024) investigated the role of focus on form and forms in teaching English language grammar. Furthermore, 210 EFL teachers were chosen from several Pakistani universities and institutes. The findings proved that the participants consider Focus on Form as the most convenient choice for teaching English as a foreign language. However, the results highlighted that EFL teachers utilize materials that tend to favor Focus on Form in most of their English classes. Furthermore, Kim and Nassaji (2018) investigated incidental FonF and its relationship with learner extraversion. Their study found a lower retention rate (27-33%) than previous research. The authors attributed this to the nature of the feedback in their study, which was predominantly reactive and implicit (recasts), suggesting that the saliency of the feedback is a critical variable in whether an FFE leads to learning.

Despite these valuable contributions, several significant gaps persist in the literature. First, as Nassaji (2011, 2013) notes, the vast majority of research on incidental FonF effectiveness has been conducted in ESL contexts. The nature and impact of FonF may differ in EFL contexts (Zare et al., 2025), where the classroom is the primary, if not sole, arena for language interaction and where learners may be more oriented towards formal accuracy. Second, a persistent methodological challenge has been to ensure that post-tests are measuring new learning rather than pre-existing knowledge. Studies often design test items based on all observed FFEs, but a learner's error could be a random performance slip rather than a true competence gap (Datu, 2025; Nassaji, 2009, 2010). There is a need for methods that can more reliably ascertain the novelty of a linguistic form to a learner before measuring its retention.

Finally, and most critically, there remains a dearth of research on the differential effects of incidental FonF across various linguistic domains (Teng & Cui, 2024). While studies like Williams (2001) and Loewen (2005) included different linguistic categories, they did not make a systematic comparison of learning outcomes the central focus. Not much is currently known about whether incidental FonF is more or less effective for acquiring vocabulary, grammar, or pronunciation (Zare et

al., 2024). This is a crucial omission, as these features vary in their perceptual salience and communicative value (Seyyedi et al., 2024).

This study aims to address these gaps by conducting a fine-grained investigation into the occurrence and effectiveness of incidental FonF in a meaning-oriented, upper-intermediate EFL classroom. It employs a novel methodological approach using "uptake sheets" to confirm learner noticing and ascertain the novelty of targeted forms. It moves beyond simply measuring uptake to assess short- and long-term retention via individualized post-tests, and it systematically compares the learning outcomes for vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. To this end, the study is guided by two primary research questions:

RQ1. What are the frequency, type (reactive vs. preemptive), and linguistic focus (vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation) of incidental Focus on Form Episodes (FFE), and what is the corresponding rate of learner uptake?

RQ2. What are the short- and long-term effects of incidental FonF on learners' retention of the specific lexical, grammatical, and phonological forms that were the focus of instruction?

3. Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods design to comprehensively investigate the phenomenon of incidental FonF. To address the first research question concerning the frequency, type, linguistic focus, and uptake of FFEs, a descriptive, observational research design was used. This involved the systematic observation, recording, and coding of naturalistic classroom interactions to paint a detailed picture of how incidental FonF manifests in an EFL setting. To address the second research question on the learning effects of incidental FonF, a quasi-experimental design was implemented. This design involved measuring learners' knowledge of targeted linguistic forms through individualized immediate and delayed post-tests, allowing for an examination of both short-term acquisition and long-term retention.

3.1 Participants and Setting

The study was conducted with 12 EFL learners (8 female, 4 male) in an intact, upper-intermediate free discussion class at a private language institute in Iran. The participants' ages ranged from 20 to 31 years ($M = 23$). All were university students majoring in fields other than English, and all shared Azeri as their L1 and were also proficient speakers of Persian. The homogeneity of their English proficiency was a critical factor and was established prior to the study using a retired version of the General Purpose IELTS test. The scoring of the speaking and writing sections was conducted by the researcher and a team of five ELT specialists to ensure reliability. The mean score for the initial pool of 19 examinees was 6.5 with a standard deviation of 0.62. Only the 12 learners who scored within one standard deviation of the mean were selected to participate, ensuring a relatively uniform proficiency level. The class was taught by a 25-year-old male instructor with an MA in ELT and approximately 10 years of teaching experience. All participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and signed consent forms before the study began.

3.2 Instrumentation

Data were collected using several specifically chosen instruments:

Video Recordings: Four two-hour class sessions (eight hours total) were video-recorded using a mini-sized, unobtrusive camera. To maintain a naturalistic classroom environment and avoid prompting the teacher to behave in a certain way, he was only informed that the study was exploring general "classroom interactions," without specific mention of FonF.

Uptake Sheets: To capture a more reliable measure of learner noticing than oral uptake alone, "uptake sheets" adapted from Gholami and Basirian (2011) were used. These were not presented as a test but as simple notepaper for the class. At the start of each session, learners were given these sheets, which were divided into three sections: "Vocabulary," "Grammar," and "Pronunciation." They were instructed to use these sheets to take notes on any linguistic points they noticed during the class discussions. A crucial component of the sheet was a checkbox for learners to indicate whether the noted linguistic point was "New" or "Not New" to them. This methodological feature was vital for two reasons: (1) it helped confirm that a learner had consciously noticed a form, moving beyond ambiguous oral responses like nods or simple repetitions, and (2) it allowed the researcher to isolate FFEs that targeted novel linguistic information for each student, thereby ensuring that the subsequent post-tests were measuring new learning rather than pre-existing knowledge or performance slips.

Individualized Post-tests: To measure learning and retention, tailor-made post-tests were created for each student. The test items were derived exclusively from the FFEs that each individual student had noted as "New" on their uptake sheets. This student-specific approach ensured that learners were only tested on linguistic forms to which they had been exposed and which represented a gap in their prior knowledge. The tests were administered at two intervals: an immediate post-test (1 to 4 days after the FFE) and a delayed post-test (15 to 18 days after the FFE). The test formats varied by linguistic focus:

Grammar: An Untimed Correction Test (UCT) was used to measure explicit knowledge. It presented sentences containing grammatical errors from the FFEs, which learners had to identify and correct. An Oral Elicited Imitation Test (OEIT), based on Erlam (2006), was used to measure implicit knowledge. Learners listened to a statement (some grammatically incorrect), indicated their agreement/disagreement to ensure a focus on meaning, and then had to repeat the statement in correct English.

Vocabulary: The Vocabulary Knowledge Scale (VKS), a five-point self-report scale developed by Paribakht and Wesche (1993), was used to assess both receptive and productive knowledge of the target lexical items. The scale ranges from "I have never seen this word" to "I can use it in a sentence," with a modification requiring learners to also provide a definition at the highest level.

Pronunciation: A Pronunciation Test (PT) required learners to read the target words aloud, first within a sentence to provide context, and then in isolation to focus on the specific phonological form.

3.3 Research Procedure

The study proceeded in several stages. First, the IELTS proficiency test was administered. Next, the four two-hour discussion classes were video-recorded, with the researcher attending as an unobtrusive observer, taking field notes. Learners used the uptake sheets throughout each class.

Following data collection, the video recordings were transcribed verbatim. The researcher and a trained ELT expert independently coded the transcriptions to identify all incidental FFEs. An FFE was defined as the segment of discourse from the trigger (e.g., an error, a question) to its resolution or a topic shift (Ellis et al., 2001a). The FFEs were then categorized by type (reactive vs. preemptive) and linguistic focus (vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation). Inter-rater reliability for FFE identification and categorization was high (97-98%). The collected uptake sheets were then analyzed to identify all learner-reported noticing events. Individualized post-tests were created based on these sheets. Each learner was then invited to a quiet room to complete the immediate and delayed post-tests.

To answer Research Question 1, descriptive statistics (raw frequencies and percentages) were calculated for the occurrence of FFE types, their linguistic foci, and the corresponding rates of uptake. To answer Research Question 2, learners' responses on the post-tests were scored as either correct or incorrect. For the VKS, responses in categories 4 (correct definition) and 5 (correct definition and use) were considered demonstrations of knowledge. The raw frequency counts of correct and incorrect answers were analyzed using Pearson's chi-square test to determine if there were statistically significant differences in retention rates between the immediate and delayed post-tests. The alpha level for significance was set at $p < .05$. All statistical analyses were performed using SPSS version 18.

4. Data Analysis

4.1 Frequency, Type, and Uptake of Focus on Form Episodes (FFE)

The analysis of eight hours of meaning-focused classroom interaction revealed that incidental FonF was a highly frequent event. A total of 320 FFEs were identified, which translates to an average of one FFE every 1.5 minutes, or 40 FFEs per hour.

As shown in Table 1, the linguistic focus of these episodes was not evenly distributed. Lexical FFEs (vocabulary) were the most common, constituting nearly 60% of all instances. Grammatical FFEs followed at 25%, while phonological FFEs (pronunciation) were the least frequent, at just under 16%.

Table 1

Frequency of FFEs by Linguistic Focus

Item	Frequency	Percentage
Vocabulary	189	59%
Grammar	80	25%
Pronunciation	51	16%
Total	320	100%

When categorized by type, preemptive FFEs (N=198) occurred more frequently than reactive FFEs (N=122), accounting for 61.9% and 38.1% of the total, respectively. There was a notable interaction between FFE type and linguistic focus. As detailed in Table 2, the majority of reactive FFEs targeted grammar (57.4%), reflecting a focus on correcting errors in sentence structure. In contrast,

preemptive FFEs overwhelmingly focused on vocabulary (85.9%), indicating that proactive attention to form was typically aimed at providing necessary lexical items for communication.

Table 2

Linguistic Focus of Reactive and Preemptive FFEs

Linguistic Focus	Reactive FFEs (N=122)	Preemptive FFEs(N=198)
Vocabulary	19 (15.6%)	170 (85.9%)
Grammar	70 (57.4%)	10 (5.1%)
Pronunciation	33 (27%)	18 (9%)

Analysis of the uptake sheets demonstrated a high rate of learner noticing. Overall, 75% of all FFEs (238 out of 320) resulted in uptake by at least one student. The rate of uptake, however, varied significantly by linguistic category (Table 3). Vocabulary and pronunciation FFEs were noticed at a much higher rate (81.5% and 80.4%, respectively) than grammatical FFEs (53.8%).

Table 3

Uptake Rate by Linguistic Focus of FFEs

Linguistic Focus	Total FFEs	Frequency of Uptake	Uptake Rate
Vocabulary	189	154	81.5%
Grammar	80	43	53.8%
Pronunciation	51	41	80.4%

4.2 Effectiveness of Incidental FonF on Learning

The effectiveness of incidental FonF was determined by learners' performance on individualized post-tests, which included a total of 322 tested items across all students and linguistic categories. The overall retention rate was high and stable over time. On the immediate post-test, learners correctly answered 52% of the items. On the delayed post-test, the retention rate was 50%. A chi-square test confirmed that this small decline was not statistically significant ($\chi^2 (1, n = 644) = .22, p = .63$), indicating strong long-term retention of the learned material. The detailed results for each linguistic category are presented below.

As shown in Table 4, learners demonstrated knowledge of approximately half of the novel lexical items. Notably, a high proportion of this knowledge was productive (i.e., they could use the word correctly in a sentence), especially on the delayed test. There was no significant difference between short- and long-term retention ($\chi^2 (1, n = 490) = .21, p = .65$).

Table 4

Retention Rate of Lexical FFEs (N=245 items)

Test Timing	Receptive Knowledge	Productive Knowledge
Immediate Post-test	122 (49.8%)	92 (75.4%)
Delayed Post-test	116 (47.3%)	91 (78.4%)

Learners' retention of 26 novel grammatical points was tested for both explicit and implicit knowledge. As seen in Table 5, learners retained explicit knowledge of exactly half of the items over time. Retention of implicit knowledge was lower but also stable, showing no significant change between tests.

Table 5

Retention Rate of Grammatical FFEs (N=26 items)

Knowledge Type	Immediate Post-test	Delayed Post-test
Explicit (UCT)	13 (50%)	13 (50%)
Implicit (OEIT)	8 (30.8%)	9 (34.6%)

The retention of 51 phonological items was robust. As indicated in Table 6, learners correctly pronounced over 60% of the target words in isolation and over 55% within a sentence, with no significant decline in performance on the delayed test.

Table 6

Retention Rate of Phonological FFEs (N=51 items)

Test Format	Immediate Post-test	Delayed Post-test
Word-level	32 (62.7%)	31 (60.8%)
Sentence-level	29 (56.9%)	28 (54.9%)

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study offer significant, multi-faceted evidence for the important role of incidental focus on form in the meaning-oriented EFL classroom. The high frequency of FFEs observed—one every 1.5 minutes—is consistent with, and even slightly higher than, rates observed in ESL contexts (e.g., Ellis et al., 2001a), suggesting that attention to form is a pervasive and integral component of communicative instruction, not an exception to it. An interview conducted with the instructor and learners post-study revealed a shared pedagogical belief that accuracy is as important as fluency, which likely fostered an environment where these frequent, brief shifts to form were considered beneficial rather than disruptive.

A key finding was the greater prevalence of preemptive FFEs over reactive ones. This indicates a proactive instructional environment where both teacher and students anticipated linguistic needs rather than simply waiting for errors to occur. This finding is particularly salient given the classroom

context. In many cultures, direct error correction can be face-threatening. Preemptive FonF, especially when student-initiated, provides a less confrontational means of addressing linguistic accuracy. This result challenges the argument that teacher-initiated preemptive FFEs may not target actual gaps in learner knowledge (Ellis et al., 2002). The use of uptake sheets in this study provided clear evidence that these proactive moves by the teacher frequently addressed forms that learners themselves identified as novel and necessary. It also suggests that in a communicative classroom, the need for new linguistic resources (primarily vocabulary) to express intended meaning is a more frequent driver of FonF than the need to correct flawed output.

The most important contribution of this study is the strong evidence for the effectiveness of incidental FonF in promoting durable learning. Across all linguistic categories, learners retained approximately half of all novel linguistic forms they were exposed to, with no significant decay over several weeks. This provides robust empirical support for the claim that incidental FonF facilitates durable L2 learning. It confirms that the brief, contextualized attention to form characteristic of these episodes is sufficient to trigger the cognitive processes of noticing and hypothesis testing, leading to long-term changes in a learner's linguistic knowledge. This validates the theoretical underpinnings of FonF and demonstrates its practical utility in the classroom.

Perhaps the most surprising finding was the roughly equal effectiveness of incidental FonF across all three linguistic categories: vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. This runs contrary to theoretical claims and some empirical findings that suggest lexical items should be more readily learned due to their higher perceptual salience and immediate communicative value compared to more abstract morphosyntactic features (Ahmad & Mahmood, 2024). One explanation for this finding may lie in the manner in which the FFEs were conducted. Although reactive FFEs (which targeted grammar and pronunciation more often) are sometimes considered less salient than preemptive FFEs, the classroom observation revealed that the teacher almost always made these corrections highly explicit, often by writing the correct form on the board, providing metalinguistic explanation, and prompting learner repetition. This added layer of explicitness may have enhanced the saliency of the grammatical and phonological forms, effectively leveling the playing field and allowing them to be learned as effectively as the more inherently salient lexical items. This suggests that the quality and explicitness of the attention drawn to form may be a more powerful determinant of learning than the linguistic category being targeted.

Furthermore, the findings of the research were backed by Shabani and Vahedi (2025) which investigated the role of various Form-Focused Instruction (FFI) between teachers and learners. According to the findings, Focus on Form frequently happened in the individual contact and the role of preemptive Focus on Form was highlighted in students' interaction.

This study provides a detailed and compelling account of incidental focus on form in action. It demonstrates that incidental attention to form is not only a frequent and natural part of communicative language teaching but also a highly effective mechanism for fostering durable L2 learning across vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. By systematically measuring learning beyond uptake and differentiating among linguistic categories, this research offers a more nuanced understanding of how FonF operates in an EFL context. The findings suggest that an effective communicative classroom is not one that shuns form in favor of meaning, but one that skillfully and

spontaneously integrates the two. By confirming the long-term learning benefits of incidental FonF, this research reinforces its status as a cornerstone of modern, balanced language pedagogy, encouraging educators to value and leverage the powerful learning opportunities embedded in authentic communication.

The findings carry several important implications for language teachers, curriculum designers, and teacher educators. First, teachers should feel empowered and encouraged to utilize the spontaneous teachable moments that arise during communicative activities. This study demonstrates that these are not mere interruptions but are integral to language acquisition. Second, the effectiveness of preemptive FonF suggests that teachers should not only react to errors but also proactively offer linguistic resources that learners might need, fostering a supportive environment. Third, the fact that explicit attention within reactive episodes yielded strong results for grammar and pronunciation suggests that a clear, direct, yet brief, focus on form can be highly beneficial and does not necessarily derail a communicative activity. Finally, curriculum designers and language schools should endorse syllabi that are flexible enough to allow for this kind of incidental, needs-based instruction, rather than rigidly adhering to a pre-ordained structural sequence.

While this study provides valuable insights, its limitations must be acknowledged. First, the small sample size (N=12) within a single classroom context means the findings cannot be generalized broadly. Replications with larger and more diverse learner populations are necessary. Second, the quasi-experimental design did not include a control group, which makes it impossible to attribute the learning gains exclusively to incidental FonF. However, the methodology of testing only items identified by learners as "new" provides a strong and direct link between the instructional episodes and the learning outcomes.

The use of uptake sheets proved to be a highly effective methodological tool for confirming learner noticing and the novelty of linguistic items. Future research on FonF effectiveness would benefit greatly from adopting similar methods to move beyond assumptions about what learners know or notice. Future studies could also investigate the role of individual learner differences, such as working memory or language analytic ability, in mediating the effectiveness of incidental FonF.

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