

The Effect of the Timing of Form-Focused Instruction on the Development of Iranian Tourism and Hotel Management Students' Explicit Knowledge of Grammar

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study was to examine the effect of teaching grammar explicitly on Iranian tourism and hotel management students' grammar knowledge. The 65 Iranian tourism and hotel management students who participated in this study were homogenized based on the Nelson proficiency test, so 51 tourism and hotel management students were selected as the main participants. They were divided into three experimental groups, which were called the "integrated FFI group," "pre-task FFI group," and "post-task FFI group." The learners' scores were compared using ANCOVA to analyze the data. The learners were pretested using the error correction test to assess their explicit grammar knowledge. After the treatment sessions, learners were post-tested using the error correction test to check the efficacy of the timing of form-focused instruction on the development of explicit knowledge of grammar. Based on the obtained results, it was found that there is a significant difference between the effects of integrated FFI, pre-task FFI, and post-task FFI on the explicit knowledge of the grammar of tourism and hotel management students.

Keywords: Explicit Knowledge of Grammar; Hospitality; Hotel Management; Timing of Form-Focused Instruction; Tourism.

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1. Introduction

Grammar learning is one of the problems that foreign language students encounter within the area of language learning. The difficulties of learning grammar in second and foreign languages, along with the importance of grammar, have made scholars focus on different aspects of this part of the language. One of the areas of language learning that has been emphasized recently is the use of form-focused instructions on the development of grammar. Owing to EFL learners' difficulties in learning grammatical rules and structures inside the classroom, many researchers and EFL teachers worldwide have become primarily interested in investigating and offering appropriate techniques for teaching grammar in their classes. Among the studies that have investigated the effect of different variables on learning grammar, those that have studied the notions of form-focused instructions seem to be of paramount significance. Collins (2012) identifies FFI as "any pedagogical practice undertaken by second language (L2) teachers to draw their students' attention to language form" (p. 2187). Language forms, in this case, may refer to spelling conventions, punctuation, grammatical structures, or a range of other possibilities. Spada and Lightbown (2008) distinguish between integrated and isolated forms of FFI. In integrated FFI, students' attention is drawn to language forms during communicative activities, whereas in isolated FFI, form-focused lessons are conducted independently and place meaning in a secondary role.

The timing of FFI has been conceptualized as isolated or integrated FFI. In isolated FFI, attention to form is drawn separately from the communicative use of language (Spada & Lightbown, 2008), whereas in integrated FFI, attention is drawn to form during meaningful interaction (Spada & Lightbown, 2008; Spada et al., 2014). Spada and Lightbown (2008, p. 162) asserted that, "researchers and teachers are most concerned about the issue of how and when to implement FFI to make it more effective. The majority of studies investigating form-focused instructions have a positive effect on language learning. Zhang (2021) examined the effect of highly focused versus mid-focused written corrective feedback on EFL learners' explicit and implicit knowledge development. Results revealed that the highly focused and mid-focused groups significantly outperformed the control group on all outcome measures, with no significant differences between the two treatment groups. This study shows the positive effect of form-focused instructions on explicit and implicit knowledge development. In another study, Xu and Li (2021) mentioned the positive effect of form-focused instructions on learning. They explored the effect of the timing of form-focused instruction on EFL learners' learning of complex and easy grammatical features. The results showed the positive effect of form-focused

instruction on complex structure and the easy structure. As the previous studies indicate, (e.g., Xu and Li, 2021; & Zhang, 2021), focused instruction has been the subject of many studies.

Due to the increasing need to learn English as a second language and the low performance of students during the past decades in Iran, it seems pretty essential to apply efficient techniques and teaching conditions to promote English language learning. The findings of the present study may provide some help on how grammar might be taught effectively. It is beneficial for the students, in general, to gain insight into possible contributing factors to their language learning, and therefore make better decisions on how to enhance their performance, by employing appropriate cognitive strategies with their teachers' assistance. EFL teachers also benefited from the results of this study in order to decide how to teach grammar more effectively and also understand which kind of timing form-focused instruction is suitable for their teaching.

2. Literature review

Long (1991) has defined focus on form as follows: "Focus on form... overtly draws students' attention to linguistic elements as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning or communication" (pp. 45-6). The notion of the timing of FFI is first observed in cognitive psychology, and it draws the learners' attention to form in instructional sequence (Danks & Gans, 1975; Reber et al., 1980). The results of cognitive psychology have shown that timing is one of the critical variables affecting the effectiveness of FFI, which may vary depending on the time when FFI is given in the cement focus guide. FFI timing is also an important research issue within the SLA. Ellis (2006) emphasizes that it is important to explore different ways of timing for FFI from a psychological and pedagogical point of view. However, limited practical activities will be conducted on a research basis to determine if this is an excellent opportunity to engage the student in a learning environment. In this regard, Xu and Li (2021) asserted that "in Spada and Lightbown's opinion (2008), there are two types of FFI concerning the timing issue: isolated FFI and integrated FFI. Both types occur in classes where the primary focus is on meaning and where attention to form is included, but they differ in terms of when attention to form is drawn.

Explicit Grammar Teaching Activities

An explicit approach to teaching grammar insists upon the value of the deliberate study of a grammar rules, either by deductive analysis or inductive analogy.

In order to organize linguistic elements efficiently and accurately, Denny Sargent (2009) suggested this method for explicit grammar teaching:

First, teachers should teach skills, strategies, vocabulary terms, concepts, and rules. Skills sequences are important, so that first, teachers teach more accessible skills, then more challenging skills which are more complicated skills, teach high-frequency skills before skills which are less frequent in usage. The teacher should change complex skills and strategies into small instructional units. Teachers should be able to design, organized, and focus lessons on the topics. Teachers should tell students clearly about what is to be learned. Providing a review of relevant information should not be ignored by teachers. They monitor students' performance closely. It is an excellent opportunity to provide feedback to students about how well they are doing (immediate affirmative and correct feedback). Since many students have difficulty seeing how some skills and concepts fit together, it is essential to use teaching techniques that make these connections more apparent or explicit. Well-organized and related information makes it easier for students to retrieve information and facilitate its integration with new material. Finally, providing distributed and cumulative practice is so important. Distributed (vs. massed) practice refers to multiple opportunities to practice a skill over time. Cumulative practice is a method for providing distributed practice by including practice opportunities that address both previously and newly acquired skills. In this method, a solid knowledge of grammar and syntax will be provided by explicit grammar instruction. Also, it is helpful in pointing out the particularities of a language, and the exceptions.

Zhang (2021) investigated the effects of highly focused versus mid-focused written corrective feedback on EFL learners' explicit and implicit knowledge development. They stated that research displays that written corrective feedback (CF) can facilitate improved grammatical accuracy in second language learners' new pieces of writing. This study examines the comparative effect of highly focused and mid-focused metalinguistic CF on explicit and implicit knowledge of regular and irregular past tense forms. Fifty-eight low-intermediate English as foreign language (EFL) learners in a first-year English program at a Thai university are randomly assigned to a highly focused group, a mid-focused group, and a control group. Treatment effects are assessed at a pretest and two posttests using an error correction task, a timed grammaticality judgment test, and a timed picture description task. Results exposed that the highly focused and mid-focused groups

significantly outperformed the control group on all outcome measures for regular but not for irregular past tense forms, with no significant differences between the two treatment groups.

Xu and Li (2021) investigated the effect of the timing of form-focused instruction on EFL learners' learning of complex and easy grammatical features: A comparative study. This study compared the effect of three types of FFI on EFL learners' learning of complex and easy grammatical features. All groups received instructional treatments combining meaning and form, but attention to form was given at different times. In the integrated group, FFI is provided within communicative activities. In the pre-task and post-task groups, FFI is provided either before or after communicative activities. Treatment effects are measured through an error correction test (ECT) and a timed grammatical judgmental test (TGJT).

3. Method

3.1 Participants

To accomplish the objectives of this study, a total population of 65 Iranian tourism and hotel management students was selected. The age of the participants ranged from 20-6 years old. They were both male and female learners. Then, to ensure the homogeneity and proficiency level of tourism and hotel management students, a 50-item piloted Nelson proficiency test is administered to all the participants. The selected participants, who scored ± 1 standard deviation are selected as the main participants of the study. So, 51 tourism and hotel management students were selected. Then they were divided into three experimental groups, which are called (integrated FFI group, pre-task FFI group, and post-task FFI group).

3.2 Instruments

Explicit Knowledge of Grammar Test: The error correction test is a measure of controlled, analyzed knowledge of grammar (explicit knowledge). The error correction test is usually regarded as a measure of controlled, analyzed knowledge of grammar, that is, explicit knowledge (Spada et al., 2014). It has 24 target items and six distractors. Following Lee (2007), items are developed with three types of errors:

- Use of the present participle, -ing, instead of the past participle (e.g., 'Laws are making by the government);
- Absence of the auxiliary verb be (e.g., 'several trees planted last summer); and
- Use of the basic form of the verb instead of a past participle (e.g., 'some files are deleted from the computer).

Proficiency Test (Nelson): Subjects took a Standardized English Proficiency Test (i.e., Nelson test). The learners whose scores fell one SD above and

below the mean on the Nelson proficiency test are selected to participate in the study. This ensured that all the participants were homogeneous regarding their English proficiency and at the intermediate level. The Nelson 350 A test (Flower & Coe, 1976) is used for homogenizing the subjects considering their proficiency level. This test consists of 50 multiple-choice items. Before starting the treatment, Nelson test is administered to the experimental group to ensure their homogeneity regarding their proficiency level. The validity and reliability of the Nelson test have been estimated several times before by other researchers. In this study also Nelson test enjoyed a KR-21 reliability of .71.

3.3 Materials

In this study, some passive voice structures were taught because the participants' course book was about passive and active voice structures. So, rewriting tasks were used as the material of the study. The selected tasks and activities are used as grammatical exercises, and they are used in all three groups.

Rewriting Activities: Editing, or revising, means changes in structure, format, and content. Rewriting does not mean using your spell check. Rewriting means writing a passage until it consists of the best group of words for the most apparent sentence or paragraph. In this kind of activity, the active sentences are presented, and the learners rewrote them to the passive ones.

3.4 Procedure

First, the Iranian tourism and hotel management students of Tehran were selected. Then they were homogenized based on the Nelson proficiency test. The selected participants were randomly assigned to three groups receiving different types of Form-Focused Instruction, (group 1: integrated FFI, group 2: pre-task FFI, and group 3: post-task FFI). Then, the learners were pretested using the error correction test to measure their explicit knowledge of grammar. Following the instructional procedures of Spada et al. (2014), in all the groups, the teacher began with a discussion. In pre-task FFI, the teacher first introduced the passive voice structures. Then the learners did the rewriting task, the teacher focused on the forms by presenting the corrective feedback and the usage and functions of the passive sentences while the learners were doing the activity. In post-task FFI, rewriting activities of passive voice is carried out first, and attention to the passive sentences and the form focus is drawn later by presenting feedback (Xu & Li, 2021, p. 5). In the integrated FFI group, during the activity the teacher briefly intervened to focus the student's attention on the usage and function of passive sentences using quick explanations and examples. The teacher focused on the correct form by presenting feedback on the errors and

mistakes during the performing of the task. After the treatment sessions, learners are post-tested using the error correction test to check the efficacy of timing of form-focused instruction on the development of explicit knowledge of grammar. Since, there are three experimental groups; the obtained data of this study are analyzed using the ANCOVA procedure to check the difference between groups.

4. Results

Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics for the Nelson test on the subject selection phase of the study. The KR-21 reliability index for the Nelson test is .71. It should be noted that the distribution of scores on the Nelson test enjoyed normal distribution.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of the NELSON Test (Subject Selection Phase of Study)

	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD	V	Skewness		Kurtosis	
							Statistic	SE	Statistic	SE
NELSON	65	13	41	27.50	6.394	40.877	-.275	.304	-.417	.599
KR-21	.71									

The hypothesis of this study predicted that ‘There is not any significant difference between the effect of integrated FFI, pre-task FFI and post-task FFI on the development of explicit knowledge of grammar about the learners’ cognitive style.’ As it is shown in Table 2, the highest mean score belongs to the pre-task FFI group (M=17.62), followed by the post-task (M=14.81) and the integrated FFI groups (M=13.12).

Table 2. Groups Mean Score

filter	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Integrated FFI	13.1250	.99103	18
Pre-task FFI	17.6250	.51755	18
Post-task FFI	14.8182	.87386	15
Total	15.1481	1.95534	51

As Table 3 shows, there is a significant difference between the effect of integrated FFI, pre-task FFI, and post-task FFI on learners’ explicit knowledge of grammar. As the *p*-value is above the .05 ($f_{(1, 49)} = 181, p > .05 = .675$) so the effect of the different timing did not differ in the pretest in all the three groups (integrated FFI, pre-task FFI, and post-task FFI). On the other hand, ($f_{(1,49)} = 58.17, p < .05 = .000$) in the posttest shows that, there is a significant difference between the groups in posttest. Meanwhile, the index of the strength of association indicates that about 83% of the observed differences between the groups are attributable to the independent variable

(integrated FFI, pre-task FFI, and post-task FFI). Based on Cohens' (1988) guidelines, this is a large effect size. This means that the remaining 17% of the variance is unaccounted for.

Table 3. Dependent Variable: posttest of explicit knowledge of grammar

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	83.149b	3	27.716	39.209	.000	.836
Intercept	122.886	1	122.886	173.840	.000	.883
pretest. explicit filter	.128	1	.128	.181	.675	.008
Error	82.239	2	41.120	58.170	.000	.835
Total	16.258	49	.707			
Corrected Total	6295.000	51				
	99.407	50				

Based on the above results, the hypothesis of this, which is stated, 'there is not any significant difference between the effect of integrated FFI, pre-task FFI and post-task FFI on the development of explicit knowledge of grammar, can be safely rejected.

Table 4. Pairwise Comparisons posttest of explicit knowledge of grammar

grammar knowledge	(I) filter	(J) filter	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig. ^a	95% Confidence Interval for Difference	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
integrated FFI	Pre-task FFI	Post-task FFI	-4.488*	.421	.000	-5.359	-3.616
		Post-task FFI	-1.685*	.391	.000	-2.494	-.876
	Pre-task FFI	Post-task FFI	2.803*	.391	.000	1.995	3.611

To locate the difference, pairwise comparisons were made. The results of the pair wise comparisons indicated that, there is a statistically significant difference between the integrated FFI, pre-task FFI and post-task FFI groups.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study attempted to investigate the effect of timing form-focused instruction on Iranian hotel management EFL learners' explicit knowledge of grammar. Based on the obtained results, it is found that there is a significant difference between the effect of integrated FFI, pre-task FFI, and post-task FFI on explicit knowledge of grammar. The results of the research question indicated a significant difference between the effect of integrated FFI, pre-task FFI, and post-task FFI on explicit knowledge of grammar. The findings of this study also proved Xu and Li (2021), who investigated the effects of the timing of form-focused instruction on EFL learners' learning of complex and easy grammatical features. The study's findings revealed that different timing of form-focused instruction developed the grammatical features. The findings of this study are also in line with Zhang (2021), who investigated the effect of highly focused versus mid-focused written corrective feedback on EFL learners' explicit and implicit knowledge development. It was found that the types of form-focused written corrective feedback developed the learners' explicit and implicit knowledge development. The findings suggest that timing is a significant variable that affects the effectiveness of FFI, which can vary depending on when the FFI is provided in the meaning-focused instruction. In previous studies, only pre-task FFI attracted attention from researchers. Post-task grammar instruction, in which language forms are focused on after communicative activities, have received limited attention in SLA. The findings might help them to know that timing FFI can be powerful device for learners to improve their learning. Therefore, the researcher thinks that more studies should be directed at researching the effect of timing FFI on language learning. Furthermore, the findings strengthen the theory of form-focused instruction and put a stamp of approval. The findings may have practical implications as well. Teachers can use the three kinds of timing FFI investigated in the current research to help their learners develop their explicit knowledge of grammar more efficiently. They should know that different timing of form-focused instruction can even assist learner to improve their learning. The focus of this study was on integrated, pre-task and post-task FFI, a similar study can be conducted on other types of FFI, such as isolated FFI. Additionally, further studies are recommended with groups of different proficiency levels as well as with a bigger sample size.

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