

## The Effect of Enriched Input on the Iranian EFL Learners' Grammar Learning

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**Abstract** – Grammar teaching has been a matter of discussion for a long time especially for foreign or second language teaching. On one side of the continuum, there are people who claim that grammar teaching is not necessary because its teaching does not help in the acquisition of the language. On the other side of the continuum there are others who claim that grammar teaching is essential. The present study was an attempt to highlight the importance of teaching grammar in second language learning. It focused on investigating the effect of input enrichment technique as a kind of focus on form instruction on grammar learning. To achieve this purpose, two intact groups each consisting of 15 learners were randomly selected as the control and experimental groups of the study. These two groups were chosen for teaching the target structure. The experimental group was taught through input enrichment approach while the control group was thought using the conventional method of teaching grammar. The results of the posttest proved the outperformance of the experimental group over the control one. The findings support the arguments regarding the importance of focused task-based instruction in grammar learning.

**Keywords:** explicit grammar instruction, implicit grammar instruction, focused task, focus on form, grammar, enriched input

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### I. INTRODUCTION

The role of grammar is perhaps one of the most controversial issues in language teaching (Richards, Willy & Renandya (2002, P. 146). In the early parts of the twentieth century, grammar teaching formed an essential part of language instruction, so much so that other aspects of language learning were either ignored or downplayed. The argument was that if you knew the grammatical rules of the language, you would be able to use it for communication. This concept was strongly challenged in the early 1970s. Knowledge of the grammatical system of the language, it was argued, was but one of the many components which underlie the notion of communicative competence. To be considered a competent user of a language, one needs to know not only the rules of grammar, but also how the rules are used in real communication. During this period, grammar teaching become less prominent, and in some cases, was abandoned. But in recent years, grammar teaching has regained its rightful place in the language curricula. People now agree that grammar is too important to be

ignored, and that without a good knowledge of grammar, learner's language development will be severely constrained.

There are different approaches to teaching grammar Neupane (2009). Inductive (starts with the presentation of some examples from which a rule is inferred) and deductive (starts with the presentation of the rule and is followed by examples in which the rule is applied) approaches are the commonly used approaches for teaching grammar. Carter, Hughes and McCarthy (2000, p. viii) say, " an inductive approach to learning grammar often involves providing lots of examples so that the patterns of usage can be seen; Similarly Cowan (2009, p.32) mentions that an inductive instruction "involves having students formulate rules from natural language and it is perhaps more useful in teaching intermediate and advanced students" In a deductive approach, according to Cowan (ibid), "different structures are presented and then practiced in different kinds of exercises and activities including memorizing dialogue, reading simplified texts, doing transformation exercises."

The present study was an attempt to highlight the importance of teaching grammar in second language acquisition (SLA). It outlines the arguments forwarded for and against teaching grammar and approaches to teaching grammar: Swan (1998) states that there are two good reasons for teaching grammar: comprehensibility and acceptability (as cited in Richards & Renandya, 2002).

In recent years, the degree of implicitness and explicitness of grammar instruction has received so much attention. According to Eliss et al. (2009) implicit instruction aims to provide learners with conditions under which they can infer the rules without awareness.

According to Willis and Willis (2007) focus on meaning gives no attention to the forms and the focus of classroom activity is on communication of meaning only. Focus on language, in contrast, includes drawing the student's attention to grammatical forms in a communicative context how best to express themselves in a given communication situation. Focus on forms is one which one or more lexical or grammatical forms are isolated and specified for study.

Doughty (2003) claims that "focus on form" refers to bringing grammar to the attention of language learners as a part of communication language practice. Focus on form is one of several methodological principles in task-based by teaching. Task-based language teaching is a relatively new approach to second language acquisition (Richards, 1999). It involves the use of tasks that engage learners in meaningful interaction and negotiation focusing on completion of a task. Learner's grammar need are determined on the basis of task performance rather than through predetermined grammar syllabus. The present study was an attempt to investigate the effect of input enrichment technique as a kind of focus on form instruction on grammar acquisition. According to Trahey, (1996); Trahev and White (1993) input enrichment or input flood refers to the process of seeding input with extra tokens of the target structure. In other words, in enriched input the target feature appears with high frequency but with no textual manipulation. It is believed that the increased tokens of input target forms attract learner's attention (Reinder & Eliss. 2009).

## **II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

In this section, a review of related literature to the topic of thesis will be mentioned. The related studies as well as the ideas and theories which are somehow concerned with the variables in the present study will be fully explained in the following sections. The explanations may be directly or indirectly related to input, enriched input, as well as grammar knowledge which are the main subjects of the present study.

### **A. Importance of Grammar Teaching**

Swan (1998) claims that there are two good reasons for teaching grammar: comprehensibility and acceptability (as cited in Richards & Renandya, 2002).

**Comprehensibility:** Knowing how to build and use certain structures makes it possible to communicate common types of meaning successfully. Without these structures, it is difficult to make comprehensible sentences. Therefore, we are supposed to identify these structures and teach them well.

**Acceptability:** In some social context, serious differences from native-speaker norms can prevent integration and provoke prejudice – a person who speaks 'badly' may not be taken seriously, or may be considered uneducated or stupid. Students may thus want or need higher level of grammatical correctness than is required for mere comprehensibility.

### **B. Implicit vs. Explicit Grammar**

In recent years, the degree of implicitness and explicitness of grammar instruction has received so much attention. According to Ellis (2009), implicit instruction aims to provide learners with conditions under which they can infer the rules without awareness. The result will be internalizing the pattern without having their attention focused on it. The summarizing task that the researcher applied basically caters for implicit grammar teaching because learners are not consciously focused on using the form correctly but rather they pay attention to the meaning of the texts in order to understand them.

Dekeyser (1995) suggests that explicit instruction involves teaching a certain rule during the learning process and encouraging the learners to develop metalinguistic awareness of that rule (as cited in Ellis, 2009).

### **C. Focused Tasks and SLA**

Focused tasks are tasks aimed to predispose learners to process, receptively or productively, some particular linguistic feature, for example a grammatical structure (Ellis, 2003, p. 16). Of course, this processing must occur as a result of performing activities that satisfy the criteria of a task, i.e. language is used pragmatically to achieve some non-linguistic outcome. Therefore, focused tasks have two aims: one is to focus on communicative language use; the other is to target the use of a particular, predetermined target feature.

Ellis (2003) claims that there are two ways in which a task can achieve a focus. One is

to design the task in such a way that it can only be performed if learners use particular linguistic features. The second way of constructing a focused task is by making language itself the content of a task like consciousness raising tasks.

#### **D. Designing Focused Tasks**

Ellis (2003) assumes that there are three principal ways in which researchers have set about designing focused tasks: (1) structured-based production tasks, (2) comprehension tasks, and (3) consciousness-raising tasks.

Structured-based production tasks: Loschky and Bley-Vroman (1993) distinguish three ways in which a task can be designed to incorporate a specific target language feature. The first is 'task-naturalness'. In this case the target structure may not be necessary to complete a task but naturally it is assumed to be used by the learners. The example Loschky and Bley-Vroman give is of a task that involves the exchange of information about a travel itinerary. The second way of incorporating a language feature is in terms of 'task utility'. By this they mean that the target structure is not essential in performing a task but it is 'useful' like spot the difference task by using different prepositions. The third way of incorporating a language feature is in terms of 'task-essentialness'. This requires that learners must utilize specific feature in order to do the task because the feature becomes the 'essence' of the task.

Comprehension tasks: Comprehension tasks may be more successful in eliciting attention to a targeted feature than production-based tasks because learners cannot avoid processing them (Ellis 2003, p. 157). There are two ways this has been attempted-input enrichment and input processing.

'Input enrichment' involves designing tasks in such a way that the targeted feature is (1) frequent and/or (2) salient in the input provided (Ellis 2003, p. 158). The present study, thus, focused on this technique by highlighting or underlining the targeted feature and also by using the targeted structure frequently in the written texts.

'Input-processing instruction' is a term coined by VanPatten (1996). Its goal is to alter the processing strategies that learners take to the task of comprehension and to encourage them to make better form-meaning connections. There are three key components: (1) an explanation of form-meaning relationship, for example, the use of the passive to topicalize the patient of a sentence by placing it in the subject position, (2) information about processing strategies, for example, the need to attend to the form of the verb to determine whether the subject is the agent of the verb or the patient as in the case with passive verbs, (3) structured-input activities where learners have the chance to process the targeted feature in a controlled manner.

Consciousness-raising tasks: The main purpose of consciousness-raising (C-R) is to develop explicit knowledge of grammar or it is intended to develop awareness at the level of 'understanding' rather than awareness at the level of 'noticing' like input enrichment task (Ellis, 2003, p. 163). Another feature of this task is that whereas the previous types of task were built around content of a general nature, for example, stories, pictures of objects, C-R tasks make language itself the content.

### **E. The Psycholinguistic Rationale for Focused Tasks**

Ellis (2003) suggests that there are two psycholinguistic bases for focused communicative tasks: (1) skill building theories and the notion of automatic processing, and (2) implicit learning.

Automatic processing involves the activation of certain nodes in memory each time the appropriate inputs are present (McLaughlin and Heredia, 1996, p.214). Shrifin & Schneider (1977) argue that automatic processing contrasts with controlled processing. A key difference between automatic and controlled processing is that whereas the former occurs automatically and in parallel form, the latter occurs more slowly and functions serially. Skill development involves converting the controlled processing into automatic processing, in other words, it is the proceduralization of declarative knowledge (Anderson, 1993, 2000). Declarative knowledge is factual, i.e. it includes explicit knowledge of grammatical rules. Procedural knowledge is declarative knowledge that has become fully automatized.

N. Ellis (1994) argued that implicit learning is the acquisition of knowledge about the underlying structure of a complex stimulus environment by a process which takes place naturally, simply and without conscious operations. The main difference between skill building theories and theories of implicit learning lies in the particular role that explicit knowledge plays in language learning. Skill building theories see learning as a process by which explicit knowledge is converted to implicit knowledge through communication practice. In contrast, theories of implicit learning view the process by which learners acquire implicit and explicit knowledge as inherently different and separate (Ellis, 2003, p. 148).

### **F. Research Question**

A number of studies have conducted in scope of traditional grammar teaching. A current interest in methodology is task-based approaches to teaching (Jackc, Richards, 1999). These involve the use of tasks that engage learners in meaningful interaction and negotiation focusing on completion of a task. In relation to these notions, the present study has intended to pay attention to task-based teaching, that is the specific way of implicit teaching of grammar, it is called input enrichment. Input enrichment refers to another awareness raising technique by using extra tokens of target structure. So the present study aimed to answer the following question:

1. Does input enrichment as an approach to focused-task have any significant effects on students' grammar learning?

## **III. METHODOLOGY**

### **A. Participants**

The participants in this study were 30 intermediate female teenagers. They were chosen randomly into experimental and control group. They were intermediate students in Tofigh institute, in Nahavand, Iran. The researchers selected the participants who had a mean age of

15 and had been studying English for 8 semesters in Tofigh institute. Since it was a quasi experimental design both groups were selected randomly from 7 intact classes consisting of 105 students. The whole population was 105 students.

## **B. Instrument**

For the purpose of achieving the goals of this study, four instruments were utilized by the teacher: an oxford placement test for homogenizing the student's general English, reading comprehension text in order to teach grammar through input enrichment, pre-test which was extracted from Nelson book, and a post-test measuring and comparing the grammar achievement of the groups which was extracted from Nelson Book. All the above are described in detail below.

**Oxford Placement Test:** The oxford placement test measures a test taker's ability to communicate in English. In the present study the students were randomly divided into two groups of experimental and Control after the process of making them almost homogeneous (through the administration of the oxford placement test) at the first session of the semester. It provides information about a person's language level. This test was comprised of 60 items. The test is reliable (consistency grading test takers at the right level) and valid (having a strong theoretical basis).

**Materials of Teaching:** In this study the materials of teaching during sessions were reading comprehension texts in both groups (experimental and control group) in order to teach grammar through input enrichment. They were extracted from anecdotes in American English book, so they were standardized and reliable.

**Pre-Test:** A pre-test that was extracted from Nelson book, was given to both groups (extracted from Nelson book, was given both groups (experimental and control) in order to measure the grammar level of the students. The test is standardized and reliable. It was comprised of 50 items.

**Post-Test:** The post-test was as same as the pre-test which included 50 grammar items which were selected form Nelson book to the control and experimental group. The time given was 40 minutes and the correct answer to each item received complete point. There was no penalty for false responses. On the basis of the post test, the efficiency of the method of grammar teaching could be judged.

## **C. Procedure**

Following the process of the selecting the control and experimental groups, the researchers commenced the actual treatment program. It is worthy to mention that researchers seek to control all other variables that might influence the dependent variable. She tried to make sure that both groups had the same instructor that both sections met at the same time of day. Also reading texts were the same and so forth. The researchers might also cheek on the ability level and background of the students in the two sections to make sure one section was not superior or better prepared than the other. Here the researchers suspected that age was a

variable that might affect the dependent variable, so she selected only teenagers of a particular age (15).

The present study was a quantitative and a quasi-experimental design. It was quantitative because the researchers studied variables, which are characteristics that take on different values across people or things. Experiment research involves a study of the systematic manipulation of one variable(s) on another variable. Also it was quasi-experimental design because the researchers selected intact classes randomly but she didn't give random assignment to each individual.

In the present study, the researchers needed two groups of subject: the experimental and the control group. After selecting the whole population (N-105) an oxford placement test to make them homogenous was administrated. Based on the result of this test, participants (two classes) whose scores were one standard deviation above or below the population mean were selected as target subjects for the study. Then, the two groups were randomly assigned to a control group and experimental group of the study. A pre-test to assess their initial knowledge in grammar was administered. It was a test of grammar consisting of 50 multiple-choice items taken from Nelson test book. Both groups were given reading comprehension texts in order to summarize the text or to write down the topic sentence and major support sentences. However, the texts delivered to the experimental contained a lot of specific grammatical features. For example in one text present perfect tense is salient. In other text, used to was utilized frequently. In the third text, because of and because were highlighted and so on. The treatment lasted for about eight weeks or so. Afterward, all participants were given a post-test of grammar. The text was extracted from Nelson grammar test. Finally, the results of both pre-test and post-test were compared for data analysis.

#### IV. RESULTS

This study was an attempt to investigate the effect of focused task instruction on Iranian EFL learners' grammar acquisition. To fulfill the purpose of the study, both descriptive and inferential statistics were used.

As mentioned above, 105 learners participated in this study. The participants were female studying English at Tofigh Institute in Nahavand, Iran.

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for two groups in Oxford placement test**

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Placement	105	35.00	19.00	54.00	33.6952	8.17492
Valid N (list wise)	105					

All the data including mean, maximum score, minimum score, range, and so on are shown in Table 1.

### A. Independent Sample T-Test as the Pre-Test

First of all, it is worth noting that Independent Pair t-test is used to determine whether there is any significant difference between the means of two independent groups. Since there were two groups in the present study, the researchers used Independent Pair t-test to compare the means of different groups.

**Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for two groups in Pre-test**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
control	15	7.00	14.00	11.2667	1.70992
experiment	15	7.00	14.00	11.1333	2.29492
Valid N (list wise)	15				

Table 2 provides useful descriptive statistics for two groups. The data include the mean, the standard deviation, minimum and maximum scores.

**Table 3. Independent Samples Test in pre-test**

	Learners Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
input Equal variances assumed	2.304	.140	.180	28	.858	.13333	.73894	-1.38032	1.64698
Equal variances not assumed			.180	25.882	.858	.13333	.73894	-1.38592	1.64698

Table 3 indicates the output of the Independent Pair t-test analysis and whether there is any significant difference between the means of two independent groups. As can be seen in this table, the significance level is 0.85 ( $p=.85$ ) which is above 0.05; therefore, there is statistically no significant differences between the groups at the beginning of the study.

**Table 4. Descriptive Statistics for two groups in Post-test (grammar)**

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
control	15	4.00	10.00	14.00	12.1333	1.12546
experiment	15	5.00	13.00	18.00	15.2667	1.79151
Valid N (list wise)	15					

All data regarding, mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum scores are provided in table 4.

**Table 5: Independent Samples Test in post-test**

	Learner's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Input Equal variances assumed	5.535	.026	-5.73	28	.000	-3.13333	.54627	-4.25232	-2.01435
Equal variances not assumed			-5.73	23.56	.000	-3.13333	.54627	-4.26189	-2.00477

Table 5 indicates the output of the Independent Pair t-test analysis and whether there is any significant difference between the means of two independent groups. As can be seen in this table, the significance level is 0.00 ( $p=.00$ ) which is below 0.05, therefore, there is statistically significant differences between two groups. It means that input enrichment task instruction was effective.

## V. COCLUSION

Regarding the idea that grammar items which were learnt through input enrichment can facilitate learning, the results of the current study indicated that it is clear the learners in the control group performed less significantly than the subjects in the experimental groups in the final grammar achievement test. This research was motivated by the substantial increase in the number of English language learners in Iranian EFL contexts. The role of grammar is one the most controversial issues in language teaching (Richards & Renandiyx; 1999, p.146). In the early parts of the twentieth century, grammar teaching formed an essential part of language instruction, This concept was strongly challenged in the early 1970. During this period, grammar teaching become less prominent. But, in recent years people agree that grammar is too important to be ignored, there is a general consensus that the issue is not whether or not we should teach grammar. The issue now centers on question such as, which grammar items do learners need most? How do we go about teaching grammar items in the most effective way. Therefore, a consensus on what is the best technique or strategy have become a challenging topic among different scholars in SLA. Among these techniques, the use of input enrichment as an implicit instruction and focused task in this study has been considered important. This study investigated the effects of input enrichment on Iranian EFL learners' grammar acquisition. The participants were 105 EFL learners studying English in Tofigh institute, Nahavand. They were divided into experimental and control group. The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of grammar instruction in terms of input enrichment conditions.

Regarding the question posed in this study, the result showed that for the chosen grammar point, students who were taught under the input enrichment conditions generally

outperformed those who had not been exposed to such instruction. There might be several reasons for the students' superior performance in the experimental group. One of the most important facets of this technique is that it promotes learners' grammar by providing them with plenty of opportunities to notice specific form in the written text. Other important aspect of this technique is that it triggers learners' conscious mind by providing them with a lot of communicative activity while their subconscious mind picks up linguistic features non-thoughtfully. When the learners were asked to repeat the task during post task activities, their fluency and the number of the targeted forms they uttered were dramatically increased.

Finally grammatical features are highlighted and automatically attract learners' attention and there is no need to compel them to pay attention to them. It could be claimed that it is similar to peripheral learning.

Generally speaking, according to the obtained results, the input enrichment teaching in EFL students tended to improve through exposure to abundant input. Specifically, input enrichment instruction not only affected the grammar acquisition of the participants and improved it but also the researchers assume that this technique corresponds to all level of language proficiency and to nearly all languages: Arabic, Persian etc. The conclusion that may be made from the above statistics analysis is that the participants who were taught based on focused task generally tended to score higher in vocabulary test. Also, the findings seem to imply that knowing more techniques of grammar could help EFL learners enhance their level of writing accuracy. In the following sections, the foremost findings of the study are summarized, and the results and some pedagogical implications are discussed.

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