



THE EFFECT OF ENHANCING OUTPUT ON DEVELOPING SAUDI SECONDARY SCHOOL EFL STUDENTS' LEARNING OF GRAMMAR

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Abstract:

Performance in grammar of English as a foreign language (EFL) is an essential part of successful communication. And communicative teaching of grammar is essential to the eventual mastery of EFL. The most effective grammar teaching can be achieved through output enhancement to teach language that both communicative and interactive. There are many techniques to teach grammar effectively in the context of the communicative and interactive language classroom. Participants in the study were first-year secondary school students during the first semester of the academic year 1438-1439 H. The researcher employed a teaching strategy based on output enhancement to teach grammar in meaningful and communicative contexts. The results show that the proposed teaching strategy proved to be effective in improving the students' performance in grammar. In addition, providing students with carefully-timed combinations of repetition and elicitation is very effective in helping them develop their learning of grammar. EFL instructors are recommended to integrate appropriate combinations of output enhancement techniques to teach grammar to their students.

Keywords: grammar teaching, output enhancement, recasts, elicitation

1. Introduction

Learning to use a language freely and fully is a lengthy and effortful process. In this regard, teachers attempt to help learners acquire both language fluency and accuracy. As such, grammar instruction plays an integral role in helping learners use language to achieve fluent communication and language precision. Ellis (2006) asserts that grammar has held and continues to hold a central position in language teaching. It is also affirmed that effective grammar teaching involves any instructional technique that draws learners' attention to some specific grammatical structure in such a way that helps them to understand it

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metalinguistically and process it in comprehension and production so that they can internalize it. In this process, there is a clear interplay between output enhancement techniques and activities in grammar teaching and learning.

EFL learners can achieve effective communication in contexts where they are exposed to meaningful, naturalistic input. Meanwhile, these learners need opportunities to produce the language and to modify their language based on their interactions. Clearly, there is a growing evidence of the effectiveness of a flexible curricular approach for grammar teaching, involving a variety of explicit and implicit technique combinations for output enhancement. Swain (1995) assigns the following roles to output: (a) output practice helps learners to improve fluency, (b) output practice helps learners to check comprehension and linguistic correctness, (c) output practice helps learners to focus on form, and (d) output helps learners to realize that the developing system is faulty and therefore notice a gap in their system.

2. Literature review

Output is the language that L2 learners produce, and it can be both written and oral. Output is the ability to express a particular meaning by retrieving a particular form or structure and the ability to string structures and forms together (Benati, 2017). There has been a lot of research showing the positive effects of output enhancement techniques and tasks in helping students practice and acquire grammar structures. Lightbown (1993) suggests using integrated combinations of output enhancement techniques and tasks that draw learner attention to form and meaning at all times. Meanwhile, it is asserted that any successful combination for grammar teaching has to include techniques enhancing output. Some examples of these successful combinations are explicit instruction and output enhancement (Alanen, 1995; Jourdenais, Ota, Stauffer, Boyson, & Doughty, 1995), corrective feedback and typographical enhancement in a communicative classroom (Leeman, Arteagoitia, Fridman, & Doughty, 1995), production activities and corrective feedback (Lyster, 2002), repetition and elicitation (Rassaei, Moinzadeh, & Youhanaee, 2012; Sheen, 2007).

2.1 Output enhancement

Research on EFL grammar teaching and learning reveals that input – despite being essential and necessary – is not sufficient alone, especially for older learners, to acquire the target language at a high level of proficiency. Schmidt (1992) stresses the need for learners to engage with language in their own output which is similarly developmental, so that by readily calling on a rich linguistic repertoire they can progressively 'automatize' their knowledge. As with new intake, learners' early efforts to output new forms are likely to require conscious attention, since the ease with which competent users call on language in their output is something which is only gradually accomplished (Hulstijn & Schmidt 1994). Here, research emphasizes the role of output, maintaining that the attempt to produce the target language encourages learners to notice their linguistic problems precisely, to test hypotheses, and to promote reflection that enables them to control and internalize linguistic knowledge (Izumi & Bigelow, 2000).

In the output enhancement stage, meaningful and communicative drills can be employed to help learners elaborate on and manipulate grammar structures in meaningful and communicative contexts. Meaningful drills require students to process meaning, but do not require them to communicate anything the hearer does not already know. Communicative drills require conveying actual content unknown to the hearer (DeKeyser, 1995). Meaningful drills are important to anchor grammar structures solidly in learner consciousness in declarative form. Simultaneously, these meaningful drills aim at the use of declarative knowledge repeatedly in order to improve its accessibility and to start the process of proceduralization. Afterwards, communicative drills lead to the fine-tuning of procedural knowledge and reinforcing learners' mastery of target grammar structures (DeKeyser, 1998). In this process, EFL learners have opportunities to produce the language and to modify their language based on their interactions. As a result, more "pervasive" varieties of instructional practice such as corrective feedback have become a regular part of language teaching approaches. Corrective feedback draws learner attention to problematic linguistic structures, either explicitly or implicitly, thus provides the opportunity for learners to notice their errors and to modify them accordingly, in an effort to advance in the acquisition of the target language (Laufer, 2005; White, 1998).

According to Mousavi, Alavinia, and Gholami (2018), corrective feedback is regarded as a vital part of form-focused instruction when the teacher tries to react against the learners' committed errors. Corrective feedback is defined by Sheen (2007) as "a teacher's reactive move that invites a learner to attend to the grammatical accuracy of the utterance which is produced by the learner" (p. 301). Corrective feedback according to Ellis, Loewen, Loewen, & Erlam (2006) takes the form of one or a combination of the following responses by a teacher when a learner makes an error: (1) an indication that the learner committed an error, (2) the provision of correct form of the error, and (3) the provision of some metalinguistic explanation regarding the error. The most comprehensive taxonomy of corrective feedback has been provided by Lyster & Ranta (1997) who classified corrective feedback into six categories: explicit correction, recast, metalinguistic feedback, elicitation, repetition, and clarification request. Among these categories, repetition and elicitation are employed in the current study.

Repetition is a form of implicit feedback in which the teacher repeats the student's incorrect utterance in the correct form while maintaining the speaker's intended meaning. Carroll and Swain (1993) call this type of feedback modeling, which should not be confused with positive evidence, because recasts follow errors. An example of a recast in an EFL setting might be:

Teacher: *"What does your father's do?"*

Student: *"He work as an engineer."*

Teacher: *"Ah, he works as an engineer"*. (emphasis is put on the on the correct form "works")

Elicitation refers to the situation where the teacher gives the students clues that there might be an error, such as a pause which would lead the student to an utterance. Elicitation, as the name indicates, is the teacher's attempt to elicit a correct response from a student. The

teacher might begin a sentence and have a student complete it with a short phrase, or the teacher might ask an eliciting question which would lead the student to a correct response. Referring to the previous example, an elicitation could be, "*No. You should say, 'He*" [the teacher pauses, waiting for the correct form].

Some significant studies compared the effects of elicitation and recasts on L2 knowledge. For example, Carroll and Swain (1993) investigated the effects of four different types of corrective feedback on the acquisition of English dative alternation by 100 adult ESL Spanish-speaking learners. Subjects received explicit information prior to instruction about the kind of feedback they would receive. Group A subjects were given explicit metalinguistic explanation about alternation when they made a mistake. Group B subjects were given a reformulated correct response (recast) whenever they made a mistake. Group C were asked if they were sure that their response was correct when they made a mistake. There were two control groups; one group were told that their response was wrong and another control group receiving no feedback. Results showed that even on initial feedback sessions, groups A (explicit metalinguistic explanations) and C (explicit correction) performed significantly better than the comparison groups. Group A performed significantly better than all groups except Group B (recasts) on short-term recall.

Rosalia (1999) examined the effectiveness of recasts in comparison to other forms of negative feedback in an adult ESL classroom. The researcher used recasts as a way of correction without interrupting the students' interaction. Like the teachers in Lyster and Ranta's study (1997), the researcher used recasts more implicitly than explicitly. That is, she often repeated her students' incorrect utterances, but did not always ask them to repeat her corrections or make it explicit to them that her repeated form was a correction. Results showed that when recasts were used in isolation, or not in comparison to teacher models, and with rephrasing language that is too difficult for learners, they were not effective and did not lead to significant noticing. On the other hand, when recasts were used with other forms of explicit feedback, such as metalinguistic feedback and explicit correction, they were effective implicit negative feedback.

Panova and Lyster (2002) conducted a similar study in an ESL context. Their study found similar results. Recasts accounted for 55% of all feedback instances, which is the same percentage as that found in the 1997 study, and they found the same percentage for clarification request, which accounted for 11%. One difference was that elicitation only accounted for 4% of feedback occurrences compared to 14% of the original study. Metalinguistic feedback, explicit correction, and repetition were similarly low in frequency.

Suzuki (2004) examined ESL classes with intermediate level adult learners and three teachers. Recasts were the most frequent feedback type (60%), followed by clarification requests. However, the percentage of clarification requests was 30%, which was much higher than the other two studies (11%). The other feedback types found were metalinguistic feedback, elicitation, explicit correction, and repetition, which occurred rather infrequently, not more than 5% each. What is significant in this study is the uptake rate; students tended to respond to teacher feedback almost all the time (97%), and recasts led to much more repair

(66%) than those in Lyster and Ranta's study (18%). The successful repair rate (54%) was much higher than those cases that were still in need of repair (43%).

Jimenez's (2006) study examined feedback in two Italian EFL classrooms at two different levels of language proficiency. This study found a high level of peer interaction with recasts being the most frequently used (37.8% and 38.3% in each class). These rates for recasts are relatively low compared to previous studies. Yoshida (2010) examined feedback in a second-year university level Japanese language course. Results showed that recast was the number one feedback move, which occurred 47 times and accounted for 51% of all moves.

Kamiya (2014) explored the effectiveness of intensive and extensive recasts on the acquisition of a planned target structure with 44 ESL language learners. The experimental groups had intensive recasts on errors regarding unreal conditional sentences for the first group, and extensive recasts regarding all the committed errors for the second group. The findings of the study showed that the experimental groups had higher performances with better improvements in the accuracy levels juxtaposed with the control group.

Fu and Nassaji (2016) examined teacher feedback, learner uptake as well as learner and teacher perception of feedback. Ten hours of classroom interactions were videotaped, transcribed and coded for analysis. Lyster and Ranta's (1997) coding system involving six types of feedback was initially used to identify feedback frequency and learner uptake. However, the teacher was found to use a number of additional feedback types. Altogether, 12 types of feedback were identified: recasts, delayed recasts, clarification requests, translation, metalinguistic feedback, elicitation, explicit correction, asking a direct question, repetition, directing question to other students, re-asks, and using L1-English. Results showed that 49.6% of all recasts led to learner uptake, whereas 45.3% of all recasts led to successful uptake. Elicitation achieved the highest percentage of learner uptake (94.1%). Of all 17 elicitation moves, 16 resulted in student uptake, and 64.7% (11 out of 17) led to successful uptake. Following elicitation, explicit correction ranked second in facilitating student uptake: 88.9% (16 out of 18) resulted in student uptake, and 61.1% (11 out of 18) led to successful uptake. Metalinguistic feedback was the next best technique. 53.8% (14 out of 26) of metalinguistic feedback moves resulted in student uptake, but only 19.2% (5 out of 26) led to successful uptake. Translation had a 50% (9 out of 18) uptake rate, and 33.3% (6 out of 18) resulted in successful uptake. Due to the small numbers of occurrence (1 time to 8 times) of the remaining feedback types, their uptake and repair rates were not as informative.

In this context, it is suggested that corrective feedback becomes part of contextualized grammar instruction. One important factor for using corrective feedback is whether it impedes the communicative flow. Data analysis reveals that none of the feedback types stops the flow of classroom interaction and that uptake – that is, student's turn in the error treatment sequence – clearly does not break the communicative flow (Lyster & Ranta, 1997). On the contrary, uptake means that the student has the floor again, rather than the teacher. However, they caution that overuse of corrective feedback techniques can lead to a teacher-driven classroom.

Another factor is the question of combination versus separation of corrective feedback techniques used to facilitate learner acquisition. In this respect, research has shown that all forms of negative feedback have a place in L2 learning. The more forms in different combinations, the better. In implementing corrective feedback, teachers should follow the following necessary procedures: assessment of learners' needs, analysis of the nature of errors, and employment of a combination of techniques that signals the provision of feedback and makes learners notice a mismatch between their output and the target structure (Doughty & Williams, 1999).

Mousavi, Alavinia, and Gholami (2018) investigated the comparison between short and long-term effectiveness of input-providing and output-prompting negotiation strategies on mastering the target structures. To this end, the participants were divided into three groups, namely two experimental groups who had a special kind of treatment, and one control group without any treatment. The participants within the first experimental group received either recasts or confirmation checks as input-providing strategies on errors, whereas the other experimental group participants were exposed to the other types of feedbacks under the category of output prompting strategies and prompts during 10 sessions of teacher-learner interactions with 54 young EFL learners. In addition, the other focus of the study was on the uptake following the above-mentioned strategies. The results revealed a significant difference among the groups under investigation in this study related to grammar-oriented uptake rates, because the rates of input-providing and output prompting classes were more than those of no feedback group. In addition, output-prompting group outperformed input-providing and control group in terms of grammar learning and retention in both short and long runs. The findings of the present study show that teachers could employ both input- and output-providing strategies judiciously and both seem to be effective.

2.2 Research problem & questions

The study problem can be identified in Saudi secondary school EFL students' poor performance in grammar. This might be due to the methods of grammar teaching that instructors use at this stage. Based on the researcher's experience as in teaching EFL to Saudi secondary school students, many observations were made. Although teaching English grammar to secondary school students aims at developing their ability to communicate in English, in reality instructors' presentations of grammar structures, in most cases, depend on mechanical, uncontextualized drills and activities. Moreover, students are required to apply these forms in contexts void of communication and interaction. Teachers give students lengthy formal grammar presentations void of any communicative contexts. Then, teachers engage their students in mechanical, uncontextualized drills which involve mere repetition so that they get their tongue round the new forms. Students remain passive all the time and are not required to participate except in answering the teacher's previously prepared exercises.

The problem of the study was further supported by reviewing previous related studies in the Saudi context such as the studies of (Al-Majed, 1996; Al-Musharaf, 2008; Al-

Naeem, 2007). These studies emphasized students' weakness with respect to mastering grammar structures. This weakness was attributed to the methods teachers use to present and provide practice on grammar structures. In addition, these studies highlighted the need to adopt better teaching strategies and techniques to improve Saudi EFL students' performance in grammar.

Therefore, the present study attempts to improve secondary school students' performance in grammar through output enhancement. In other words, the study addresses the following main question:

- What is the effectiveness of output enhancement in promoting first-year secondary school students' learning of grammar?

This main question is divided into the following two sub-questions:

- 1) What are the features of a teaching strategy to teach grammar to first-year secondary school in the light of output enhancement?
- 2) How far is the proposed strategy effective in promoting first-year secondary school students' performance in grammar?

2.3 Research hypotheses

Four hypotheses were tested in this study. The first two hypotheses compared the experimental and the control group means on the post-test. The other two hypotheses compared the experimental group means before and after the treatment.

Hypotheses comparing the experimental and control group mean scores on the post-test:

- 1) There is a statistically significant difference between the overall mean score of the experimental group students exposed to a teaching strategy based on output enhancement and the control group students receiving regular instruction on the post-test in favor of the experimental group.
- 2) There are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group students and the control group students on the post-test in each grammar structure in favor of the experimental group.

Hypotheses comparing the experimental group mean scores before and after the treatment:

- 1) There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group on the pre-test and the post-test in overall grammar performance in favor of the post-test.
- 2) There are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group on the pre-test and the post-test in each grammar structure in favor of the post-test.

3. Procedure

This part describes the participants, design, and the teaching strategy followed in the study. It also presents the procedure followed by the researcher in teaching grammar to the

experimental group students through the proposed teaching strategy. In addition, a description is provided for the testing procedure followed in the study.

3.1 Participants

First-year secondary school students were the target community of the study. Four intact classes from an secondary school in Riyadh represented the sample of the study. The four classes were randomly selected; two classes were taught by their classroom instructor through a teaching strategy based on output enhancement, and two other classes receiving regular grammar teaching by their classroom instructor to represent the control group. A pre-post test for measuring the students' performance in grammar was given to the two groups before and after the treatment.

3.2 Research design

The quasi-experimental design called the non-equivalent group design was employed. This design is identical to the pre-post test control group/experimental group design in all aspects except that intact groups rather than randomly assigned ones are used, creating a control problem in terms of selection bias. This makes the use of a pre-test necessary for this particular design.

3.3 Teaching strategy

In this teaching strategy, the researcher employed a variety of techniques and activities to help the experimental group students enhance their performance in grammar. Specifically, the researcher integrated the following output enhancement techniques: meaningful and communicative drills, as well as corrective recast and metalinguistic feedback.

Meaningful and communicative drills were used to help the students elaborate on and manipulate grammar structures in context. Another aim for meaningful drills was to anchor that target structure solidly in the students' consciousness, in declarative form, so that it was easy to keep in mind during communicative drills. Simultaneously, these meaningful drills aimed at the use of declarative knowledge repeatedly in order to improve its accessibility and to start the process of proceduralization. After that, communicative drills led to the fine-tuning of procedural knowledge and reinforcing the students' mastery of target grammar structures.

As for the students' errors in stages of form manipulation and processing, corrective feedback, through recast and metalinguistic feedback, was used in the course of delivering meaning and achieving communication. Specifically, feedback was provided in the form of metalinguistic feedback that demanded modification or self-repair on the part of students, and then, recasts were employed in case the students did not repair their utterance. This procedure was followed to achieve a high rate of uptake following recasts and elicitation.

3.4 Measurement instrument (the pre-post grammar test)

A pre-test was administered to the students of both the experimental and control groups to make sure that they were at the same level of performance before starting the experiment;

and hence the progress achieved by the experimental group students could be attributed to the grammar teaching they received through output enhancement. The pre-test was also used as a post-test to investigate the effectiveness of the proposed teaching strategy in developing the experimental group students' learning of grammar.

3.5 Validity of the test

To measure the test content validity, the first version of the test was given to 6 EFL professors to evaluate appropriateness of each item in measuring each of the target grammar structures. Moreover, they were asked to evaluate the test as a whole in terms of: (a) correctness, (b) number of items, and (c) suitability of the test items to Saudi EFL first-year secondary stage students' level.

The test proved to be mostly valid as the jury approved most of the questions and suggested the following:

- Modifying some of the questions in terms of words selected to be easier for the students to understand.
- Modifying some distractors of multiple choice questions to be more comprehensible to the students.
- Modifying or omitting some questions, because they asked for the same piece of information so that there would not be any repetition in the questions.

3.6 Piloting the test

The pilot study of the test aimed at (a) determining the suitable time to be allotted for the test and (b) obtaining item analysis results, including item difficulty and item discrimination. Therefore, 25 students participated in the pilot study. These students were randomly selected from first-year secondary school. Students of the pilot study belonged neither to the experimental group nor to the control group. They were excluded from the whole treatment.

3.7 Results of the pilot study

The pilot study results revealed that the majority of students obtained low scores with regard to their performance on the target grammar structures. Moreover, the students' performance was the worst in contextualized grammar questions that required them to link form with meaning (e.g. suppliance of the correct form of verbs in a dialogue). This may be due to the fact that they were accustomed to rote learning of grammar structures through memorization and retrieval of these structures in similar uncontextualized contexts. Hence, students' answers on the pilot study revealed their need for grammar instruction in meaningful, real-life contexts. In addition, the following results were revealed:

3.8 Test time

It was estimated that two classroom periods (90 minutes) would provide ample time for the students to read the test questions and write their answers. No one needed an extension of time to complete the test. This time was estimated in the following way:

$$\frac{\text{The time taken by the fastest student} + \text{the time taken by the slowest student}}{2} = \frac{40 + 82}{2} = 61 \text{ minutes}$$

3.9 Item Difficulty

The following formula was used to determine item difficulty for multiple-choice questions; each item took either 1 or 0:

$$IF = \frac{\text{Number of students answering correctly}}{\text{Number of students taking the test}}$$

(Nitko: 2001, p. 323)

As for open-ended questions (each item took either 1 or 0), item difficulty was calculated according to the following formula:

$$P = \frac{\text{Average score for an item}}{\text{Possible item score range}}$$

(Nitko: 2001, p. 323)

Through utilizing the previous two formulas, it was found that item difficulty ranged from 0.42 to 0.51 for multiple-choice questions and was above 0.50 for open-ended questions. Such results were satisfactory enough to accept all the test items in terms of item difficulty since they were neither too easy nor unreasonably difficult. This is due to the fact that item difficulty that ranges from 0.30 to 0.70 is usually considered acceptable for multiple-choice items (Brown: 1996, p.70), and item difficulty of 0.50 or more is considered suitable for open-ended items (Rust & Golombok: 1989, p.237).

3.10 Item Discrimination

The following formula was utilized to determine item discrimination for multiple-choice questions; each item took either 1 or 0:

$$\text{Discrimination} = \frac{10 \text{ correct high} - 10 \text{ correct low}}{\text{Number of students}}$$

(Nitko: 2001, p.321)

As for open-ended questions, item discrimination was calculated according to the following formula:

$$P = \frac{\text{Average score of the upper group on the item} - \text{average score of the lower group on the item}}{\text{Range of possible item score}}$$

(Nitko: 2001, p.321)

According to the previous two formulas, questions showing negative or low discrimination below 0.30 should be discarded from the test. In addition, item discrimination that is 0.40 or more indicates very good discrimination ability. Therefore, all the test questions were accepted as their discrimination level ranged from 0.44 to 0.65.

3.11 Reliability of the test

In order to establish the reliability of the test, it was administered to the randomly selected group of 25 students. Then, the test was administered one more time after two weeks to the same 25 students. Then, the Pearson correlation coefficient between the test/re-test results was calculated. Hence, the reliability coefficient was estimated using the following formula:

$$RAA = \frac{2R}{1 + R}$$

Where:

RAA = the reliability coefficient

R = The correlation coefficient between the test/re-test results

The reliability coefficient was 0.81, which is relatively high. Therefore, the test could be considered a reliable one for the purpose of the current study.

3.12 Scoring the test

The students' answers on the pre-post test were hand-scored by the researcher. The test did not require another rater because both multiple-choice and open-ended questions included in the test were closed. When scoring the test, one point was given for each correct response while zero was given for double, wrong or left answers. The test contained an equal number of 5 questions for each of the 6 grammar structures. Thus, the total number of questions in the test was 30, and so the whole test was also scored out of 30. The students' errors in vocabulary and spelling were disregarded.

4. Results & Discussion

Results of the study are presented by relating them to the study hypotheses. First of all, a comparison between the experimental and control groups on the pre-test was conducted using t-tests for independent samples to examine if there were any statistically significant differences between the two groups before starting the treatment. The following table shows that there was no statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups on the pre-test in overall performance in grammar.

Table 1: t-test results of the pre-test for the overall performance of the experimental and control groups in the target grammar structures

| Group | N | M | S.D. | D.F. | t value | Significance level |
|--------------|----|-------|------|------|---------|-------------------------------|
| Experimental | 38 | 13.77 | 5.34 | 71 | .470 | Not significant at 0.05 level |
| Control | 35 | 14.48 | 4.93 | | | |

According to the above table, t-test value =.470, which is not statistically significant at 0.01 level of confidence. This indicates that there are no statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups in overall performance in grammar. This means that the two groups were approximately at the same level at the beginning of the experiment.

A number of t-tests for independent groups were used to compare the mean scores of the experimental and control groups on the post-test in each of the target grammar structures. This is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: t-test results of the pre-test for the performance of the experimental and control groups in each grammar structure

| Item | Pre-test | N. of cases | Mean | S.D. | t. value | Significance level |
|---|----------|-------------|------|------|----------|--------------------|
| Grammar structure 1 <i>Possessive adjectives</i> | Exp. | 38 | 3.24 | 1.20 | .560 | .297 Not sig. |
| | Cont. | 35 | 3.40 | 1.19 | | |
| Grammar structure 2 <i>Plurals (regular/irregular)</i> | Exp. | 38 | 3.11 | 1.67 | .873 | .348 Not sig. |
| | Cont. | 35 | 3.25 | 1.83 | | |
| Grammar structure 3 <i>Present simple</i> | Exp. | 38 | 2.01 | .91 | .654 | .198 Not sig. |
| | Cont. | 35 | 2.06 | .74 | | |
| Grammar structure 4 <i>Prepositions of time</i> | Exp. | 38 | 3.42 | .93 | 1.05 | .059 Not sig. |
| | Cont. | 35 | 3.74 | .89 | | |
| Grammar structure 5 <i>Prepositions of place</i> | Exp. | 38 | 1.99 | .95 | 1.08 | .451 Not sig. |
| | Cont. | 35 | 2.03 | 1.17 | | |

Taking each grammar structure separately, $t = .560$ for the first grammar structure (*Possessive adjectives*), $t = .873$ for the second grammar structure (*Plurals (regular/irregular)*), $t = .654$ for the third grammar structure (*Present simple*), $t = 1.05$ for the fourth grammar structure (*Prepositions of time*), and finally $t = 1.08$ for the fifth grammar structure (*Prepositions of place*). All these t values are not statistically significant at 0.01 level of confidence and indicate that there are no statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups on the pre-test in all target grammar structures. This means that the two groups were approximately at the same level at the beginning of the experiment. It can also be noticed from the above table that the mean scores of both groups were low.

4.1 Testing the first hypothesis of the study

Hypothesis one states that "there is a statistically significant difference between the overall mean score of the experimental group students exposed to a teaching strategy based on output enhancement and the control group students receiving regular instruction on the post-test in favor of the experimental group." t-test for independent samples was used to find if there were statistically significant differences between the experimental group and the control group on the post-test in their overall performance in the target grammar structures, see Table 3.

Table 3: t-test results of the post-test for the overall performance of the experimental and control groups in the target grammar structures

| Group | N | M | S.D. | D.F. | t value | Significance level |
|--------------|----|-------|------|------|---------|---------------------------|
| Experimental | 38 | 21.36 | 6.15 | 71 | 9.19 | .000 |
| Control | 35 | 16.08 | 8.45 | | | Significant at 0.01 level |

According to the above table, t-test value = 9.19. This indicates that there are statistically significant differences at 0.01 between the mean scores of the experimental group and the control group in favor of the experimental group on the post-test in overall performance in grammar.

4.2 Testing the second hypothesis of the study

Hypothesis two states that "there are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group students and the control group students on the post-test in each grammar structure in favor of the experimental group."

To investigate the differences between both the experimental and control groups with respect to each grammar structure, a number of t-tests were conducted, see Table 4.

Table 4: t-test results of the post-test for the performance of the experimental and control groups in each grammar structure

| Item | Post-test | N. of cases | Mean | S.D. | t. value | Significance level |
|---|-----------|-------------|------|------|----------|---------------------------|
| Grammar structure 1 <i>Possessive adjectives</i> | Exp. | 38 | 5.02 | 1.14 | 9.46 | Significant at 0.01 level |
| | Cont. | 35 | 3.73 | 1.06 | | |
| Grammar structure 2 <i>Plurals (regular/irregular)</i> | Exp. | 38 | 4.98 | 1.56 | 7.34 | Significant at 0.01 level |
| | Cont. | 35 | 3.67 | 1.23 | | |
| Grammar structure 3 <i>Present simple</i> | Exp. | 38 | 2.97 | 1.13 | 5.73 | Significant at 0.01 level |
| | Cont. | 35 | 2.21 | .96 | | |
| Grammar structure 4 <i>Prepositions of time</i> | Exp. | 38 | 5.28 | 1.32 | 9.05 | Significant at 0.01 level |
| | Cont. | 35 | 3.90 | 1.10 | | |
| Grammar structure 5 <i>Prepositions of place</i> | Exp. | 38 | 3.11 | 1.95 | 6.40 | Significant at 0.01 level |
| | Cont. | 35 | 2.57 | 1.32 | | |

The above table shows that there are statistically significant differences at 0.01 level between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups on the post-test in each grammar structure in favor of the experimental group. Taking each grammar structure separately, t = 9.46 for the first grammar structure (*Possessive adjectives*), t = 7.34 for the second grammar structure (*Plurals (regular/irregular)*), t = 5.73 for the third grammar structure (*Present simple*), t = 9.05 for the fourth grammar structure, and finally t = 6.40 for the fifth grammar structure (*Prepositions of place*). All these t values are statistically significant at 0.01 level of confidence and indicate that there are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups on the post-test in all target grammar structures.

4.3 Testing the third hypothesis of the study

Hypothesis three states that "there is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group on the pre-test and the post-test in overall grammar performance in favor of the post-test". To determine the relative extent of change fostered by the implementation of the teaching strategy based on output enhancement from the pre-test to the post-test for the experimental group students, a t- test for paired samples was used. This t- test aimed at comparing the mean scores of the experimental group on the pre-test and the post-test in overall performance in the target grammar structures, see Table 5.

Table 5: T-test results comparing the pre-test vs. the post-test
 in the overall mean scores of the experimental group

| Test | N | M | S.D. | D.F. | t value | Significance level |
|-----------|----|-------|------|------|---------|---------------------------|
| Post-test | 38 | 21.36 | 4.18 | 75 | 14.51 | .000 |
| Pre-test | 38 | 13.77 | 6.90 | | | Significant at 0.01 level |

According to table (5), $t = 14.51$. This indicates that there are statistically significant differences at 0.01 between the overall mean scores of the experimental group on the pre-test and the post-test in favor of the post-test scores. Thus, it can be stated that these t-test results proved to be statistically consistent with the hypothesis. Therefore, the third hypothesis was confirmed.

4.4 Testing the fourth hypothesis of the study

Hypothesis four states that "there are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group students on the pre-test and the post-test in each grammar structure in favor of the post-test". To investigate the differences between the performance of the experimental group students on the pre-test and the post-test, a number of t-tests were used to compare their performance, with respect to each grammar structure, see Table 6.

Table 6: T-test results of the pre-test vs. the post-test
 for the performance of the experimental group in each grammar structure

| Item | Exp. Group | N. of cases | Mean | S.D. | t. value | Significance level |
|---|------------|-------------|------|------|----------|---------------------------|
| Grammar structure 1 <i>Possessive adjectives</i> | Post | 38 | 5.02 | 1.14 | 13.46 | Significant at 0.01 level |
| | Pre | 38 | 3.24 | 1.2 | | |
| Grammar structure 2 <i>Plurals (regular/irregular)</i> | Post | 38 | 4.98 | 1.56 | 11.79 | Significant at 0.01 level |
| | Pre | 38 | 3.11 | 1.67 | | |
| Grammar structure 3 <i>Present simple</i> | Post | 38 | 2.97 | 1.13 | 10.58 | Significant at 0.01 level |
| | Pre | 38 | 2.01 | 0.91 | | |
| Grammar structure 4 <i>Prepositions of time</i> | Post | 38 | 5.28 | 1.32 | 16.04 | Significant at 0.01 level |
| | Pre | 38 | 3.42 | 0.93 | | |
| Grammar structure 5 <i>Prepositions of place</i> | Post | 38 | 3.11 | 1.95 | 12.01 | Significant at 0.01 level |
| | Pre | 38 | 1.99 | 0.95 | | |

Table 6 shows that there are statistically significant differences at 0.01 level between the mean scores of the experimental group in the pre-test and the post-test in favor of the post-test in

each of the five target grammar structures, since the estimated t- values are (13.46) for *Possessive adjectives*, (11.79) for *Plurals (regular/irregular)*, (10.58) for *Present simple*, (16.04) for *Prepositions of time*, and (12.01) for *Prepositions of place*.

Based on these significant findings, the study four hypotheses were supported by the results. Statistical analyses of data indicate that the experimental group students who were taught according to a teaching strategy based on output enhancement performed much better on the post-test than the control group students who received regular instruction. Moreover, the experimental group students achieved significant progress in their performance in the target grammar structures after the treatment as compared to their performance before the treatment. Hence, these positive findings proved the effectiveness of the teaching strategy based on output enhancement in developing the experimental group students' overall performance in grammar, in addition to their performance in each grammar structure.

This progress in the experimental group students' performance in grammar might be attributed to several factors. Some of these factors are broadly related to the teaching strategy, and some factors are related to specific grammar teaching techniques and activities. One of the broad factors is using appropriate combinations of output enhancement techniques; these combinations were employed with the aim of teaching the target grammar structures effectively. Initially, the students were given sufficient time during grammar teaching tasks and activities to process and manipulate the target grammar structures in meaning-based contexts. Another broad factor is that while grammar teaching promoted attention to grammatical forms, it helped the experimental group students attend to word meaning, usage, spelling, and pronunciation: all valuable aspects of L2 learning. This result is supported by (Koprowski, 2000; Loewen, 2004; Poole, 2005; Williams, 1999).

Similarly, there are specific factors that might have promoted the experimental group students' progress in overall performance in the target grammar structures as well as their performance in each target grammar structure. In particular, meaningful and communicative drills helped the students process the target grammar structures. Meaningful and communicative drills integrated simultaneous attention to form and meaning. This incorporation of form into meaningful and communicative drills and activities increased the possibilities of raising the students' attention to and later use of the target grammar structures. In these meaning-based contexts of grammar teaching, the students were able to make links between their own intended meaning and the formal feature of language that was focused on. Thus, when the form in focus was an important carrier of the meaning in focus, the students benefited from the dual teaching of form and meaning. These results go in accordance with Doughty & Varela (1998), Doughty & Williams (1999), Jacobs (2005), and Lightbown and Spada (1993).

In addition, corrective feedback techniques played an important role in developing the experimental group students' learning of the target grammar structures. A combination of both explicit and implicit corrective feedback (recasts and elicitation) was employed to signal the provision of corrective feedback and to make the students notice a mismatch between their output and the target grammar structure. In this regard, the following procedures were

used when correcting the students' errors: (1) the students were given only one instance of correction within one exchange; (2) only errors concerning the target structure were corrected; (3) after corrective feedback had been provided properly, it was followed up with subsequent instruction, practice and exposure in meaningful and communicative situations. These practices of corrective feedback provision are supported by (Doughty & Varela, 1998; Ellis, Basturkmen, & Loewen, 2001; Kubota, 1995; Lyster, 2002; Muranoi, 2000).

5. Conclusions

Some conclusions can be made based on the significant results of the study and the findings of previous studies. First of all, the fundamental goal in the grammar teaching classroom is to teach language for communication. This highlights the importance of a flexible curricular approach for grammar teaching, involving grammar teaching technique combinations that promote output. Thus, it is entirely possible and necessary to combine grammar teaching techniques and activities, depending upon the particular acquisition circumstances.

There is focus on the provision of rich and varied opportunities for learners to use language in spontaneous, meaningful interaction. Research has indicated that providing students with carefully-timed combinations of explicit and implicit corrective feedback (such as recasts and elicitation) is very effective in helping students develop their learning of grammar. In this regard, corrective feedback plays an important role in raising students' awareness of their linguistic problems and has an impact on their interlanguage systems; when provided properly and followed up with subsequent instruction, practice and exposure in meaningful and communicative situations, corrective feedback facilitates and accelerates language acquisition. And allowing the students the freedom to work on their own and to monitor their work during grammar teaching tasks and activities promotes their progress and their free use of language in meaningful and communicative contexts.

Therefore, EFL instructors should integrate output enhancement techniques and activities to teach grammar structures to their students at the secondary school taking into consideration students' age, needs, interests, and linguistic proficiency levels. Another conclusion is that grammar teaching should be seen and incorporated within the perspective of the curriculum, rather than within the confines of a single lesson or activity. Curriculum designers and textbook writers should make use of output enhancement techniques and activities as means of developing students' performance in grammar.

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