Focus on Form Instruction and Development of Accuracy in Specific Language Structures

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Abstract

The study sought to develop accuracy among high school students in specific English grammatical structures through focus on form (FonF) instruction integrating the techniques of input enhancement, input processing and task essential language. The study used a counterbalanced design in which two (2) pre-sectioned classes were both exposed to different treatments, taking turns as the focus on form (FonF) and the whole language (WL) groups. The instruments used to gather data were teacher-made grammar tests and students' essays. The frequency of use and the errors on usage over the number of clauses were analyzed as evidence of accuracy in specific language structures. The findings showed that there was a significant increase in the frequency of use of the structures in the FonF groups' essays by around 19.46% on the average. While, the FonF group made more errors in the use of the structures, this is attributed to their higher frequency of use of the forms compared to the WL group. There is also no significant difference seen in the count of usage errors between the groups' tests and essays suggesting that FonF instruction was more effective in fostering grammatical accuracy and fluency through increased application of targeted structures in writing.

1. INTRODUCTION

Accuracy pertains to the effective use of appropriate forms and structures of the language when communicating. This aspect is part of being communicatively competent according to the model of Canale and Swain (1980), in which grammatical knowledge and skills are essential to express, interpret, negotiate for meaning, and perform other communicative functions. Brown (1994) also cited the need to develop grammatical competence as it occupies a prominent position as a major component of communicative competence and is necessary for communication to take place.

Communicative teaching is recognized as an approach that enhances language learning through input and output that promote the modeling and use of the language. However, the studies of Ellis (1997) and Mitchell (2000) stated that when students receive minimal instruction on grammar points during communicative lessons, their level of accuracy suffers. Furthermore, adequate access to communicative use of English is usually not available in English as a Second/Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) contexts; therefore, it is necessary to focus on form to strengthen grammatical competence (Celce-Murcia, 2006). In addition, second and foreign language learners pose hesitations in using English in communication because of the

lack of confidence and fear of committing mistakes in grammar and pronunciation. These problems limit the potential of the students in using and learning English.

There must be an in-depth examination of the way teachers administer a communicative classroom and a review of the structural approach to language learning. Grammar instruction, as part of the declarative knowledge or factual knowledge, is significant for the learners to develop procedural knowledge which is defined as behavior that consists of condition-action pairs that state what is to be done under certain circumstances or with certain data (Anderson, 1982, 1983, 1987, 1990, 1993, 1995). In simpler terms, procedural knowledge is fluency, while declarative knowledge is accuracy. According to Anderson (1987) and Anderson and Fincham (1994), proceduralization is achieved by engaging in the target behavior or procedure- while temporarily leaning on declarative crutches. Accuracy in language forms and structures thus is necessary to achieve fluency, which is the ability to communicate without hesitations and with minimal grammatical errors.

There is a need to focus the language learners' attention to form, for it has been observed that although some learners can "pick up" accurate linguistic form from exposure to the target language, only a few learners are capable of doing so efficiently, especially if they are post pubescent or if their language exposure is limited to the classroom, as is the case when English is taught as a foreign language (Spada & Lightbown, 1993; Lightbown, 1998). This correlates with the critical period hypothesis, which, according to Ellis (1985), is a period when language acquisition takes place naturally and effortlessly. Penfield and Roberts (1959) identified this period as falling within the first ten years of life, which is consistent with others saying that language acquisition is best before the age of puberty. This is viewed as true according to neurological research that suggests that brain functions become lateralized after puberty, meaning the sections of the brain have been set and assigned to language functions and others. This results in many cognitive activities becoming controlled, and 'absorption' of linguistic knowledge and skills may be more difficult (Brown, 1994; Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991; Scovel, 1998).

Harley (1992), Harley and Swain (1984), and Vignola and Wesche (1991) also stated that when classroom second language learning is entirely experiential and meaning-focused, some linguistic features do not ultimately develop to target-like levels. Accuracy is an important aspect in second language learning to pave the way for language fluency, yet while meaningful input and opportunities for interaction have been promoted, the language learners' development of accuracy on form is not given priority.

Studies carried out in immersion classrooms in Canada (Doughty & Williams, 1998) and elsewhere have shown that when a focus on form is entirely absent, the learners do not develop an adequate mastery of certain grammatical features. In fact, they appear to end up with a kind of classroom pidgin language (Nunan, 2003). The goal of creating communicative learners may not be sufficient if these learners do not have the ability to communicate appropriately and intelligibly.

Furthermore, the need for practice of forms was reinforced by Rutherford (1987) with the idea that learners do not learn structures one at a time. It is not a matter of accumulating

structural entities; learning is a gradual process involving the mapping of form, meaning, and use. It is also significant to note that the goal of communicative language teaching approach is to develop in the learners the communicative competence comprised of sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, strategic competence, as well as grammatical competence (Canale & Swain, 1980).

Therefore, exposure to the target language through meaningful input and output alongside opportunities for collaborative interaction may not be enough to build among the learners' accuracy and fluency in English. Thus, this study deemed it necessary to focus the learners' attention on linguistic form during the communicative tasks of reading and writing. Research by Spada and Lightbown (1993) and Lightbown (1998) has shown that teachers who focus students' attention on linguistic form during communicative interactions are more effective than those who never focus on form or who only do so in decontextualized grammar lessons.

Focus on form was defined by Long (1991) as an overtly drawing of students' attention to linguistic elements as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning or communication. Moreover, it often consists of an occasional shift of attention to linguistic code features—by the teacher and/or one or more students—triggered by perceived problems with comprehension or production (Long & Robinson, 1998).

Long (1991) also distinguished the difference between *focus on forms* versus *focus on form* in which the former is characterized as one of the synthetic approaches to language teaching that have as their primary organizing principle for course design the accumulation of individual language elements (e.g., forms such as verb endings or agreement features), while the latter, *focus on form*, entails a prerequisite engagement in meaning before attention to linguistic features can be effective. Thus, the two are different in the sense that *focus on forms* focuses on structures and is limited to focusing on formal elements of language, which sometimes excludes focus on meaning. *Focus on form* instruction, on the other hand, assumes that meaning and use must already be evident to the learner at the time that attention is drawn to the linguistic apparatus needed to get the meaning across (Doughty & Williams, 1998, p. 4).

In focus on form, communication comes first, and a focus on form or structure comes second. The advantage is that "the learner's attention is drawn precisely to a linguistic feature as necessitated to see the relationship between the language form and the communicative function by a communicative demand" (Doughty and Williams, 1998:3).

Robinson (2001) cited that since focus on form instruction is concerned with both language content (meaning) and language structure (form), the focusing on form must be unobtrusive so as not to disrupt students' attention on meaning. Doughty and Williams (1998) cite three criteria for the instruction to be considered unobtrusive. First is that the primary focus must be on meaning, next is that the target form to be focused on must arise incidentally (although the target form may be identified in advance through an analysis of learning problems). Lastly, learner attention is drawn to forms briefly (and perhaps overtly). These criteria show that the marriage among forms, functions, meaning, context, and communication is clearly set.

There are other considerations in planning for a focus on form instruction. One is whether to have a reactive or a proactive focusing on form, i.e., whether target forms must arise incidentally given the communicative lesson or whether the target forms are predetermined as necessary forms given the activities. It is noted that when incidental or reactive focus on form is practiced, difficulties arise, for instance, on the part of the teacher, considering the preparation and extent of knowledge he/she has about any form that may arise and considering different developmental levels of students. Thus, a proactive focus on form is usually favored upon to achieve institutional and national goals in language education. Given this, if target forms are to be identified in advance, it must be done through an analysis of learning problems and the goals of the national and institutional curriculum.

The study deemed that grammatical competence and accuracy can be developed through focus on form instruction, which presents, practices, and produces the target forms in meaning-based instruction, giving equal value to form and to communication.

This research sought to find out if a focus on form instruction, integrating the techniques of input enhancement, input processing, and task essential language, would develop accuracy in specific language structures. Specifically, it addressed the following questions:

1. Is there a significant difference between the posttest scores of students who were exposed to the focus on form (FonF) method and those who were exposed to the whole language (WL) method?
2. Is there a significant difference between the FonF group and the WL group's frequency of use of the following structures in their essays?
   a. Subject-verb agreement (SVA)
   b. Passive form of the verb
3. Is there a significant difference between the FonF and the WL group's usage errors in the target structures?

2. METHOD
2.1. Research Design
The study sought to determine if the focus on form method is effective in developing accuracy on specific language structures after they have been exposed to the method. The design used in this study was a counterbalanced design to address the limitations of purposive and convenient sampling of participants. The participants were two (2) pre-sectioned classes, which were both exposed in a different order to the focus on form (FonF) method and Whole Language (WL), which is a communicative language teaching method primarily used in the research locale.

A pre-test about the language structures was given to both groups before the instruction, and separate post-tests after every allotted period of instruction per structure. Another means to assess the accuracy of the language structures was through essay writing. The students were tasked to come up with the first chapter of their investigatory project in Science and English, and their essays in chapter 1: (1) the background of the study, (2) the significance of the study, and (3) the scope and delimitation of the study were assessed. These texts necessitate the use of and accuracy in specific language structures inherent in them. The

frequency of use and the errors in usage over the number of clauses written by the students were analyzed as evidence of accuracy in the language structures.

2.2. Research Locale and Participants

The study was implemented at a private high school in Quezon City, Philippines. The participants of the study were 13–14-year-old high school students who are bilingual, with Filipino as their mother language and English as a second language.

The students came from middle-class to upper-class families, presumably having adequate exposure to English given mostly professional parents, technological resources, and availability of language materials at home (e.g., books, technological devices, language games, etc.).

2.3. Treatment

The study used as its independent variable the method that focuses on form instruction, particularly the techniques of input enhancement, input processing, and task essential in developing accuracy in specific language structures, which served as the study's dependent variable. These language structures included subject-verb agreement and the passive form of the verb.

As a technique under form-focused instruction, input enhancement gives value to the input given to second language learners. This input may be in the form of texts chosen and organized quarterly based on the themes conceptualized in the language syllabus. A second technique, typographical enhancement, proposed by Sharwood Smith (1981, 1991) and investigated by Doughty (1988, 1991), is considered to be the "visual equivalent of stress and emphasis" in spoken input (Doughty & Williams, 1998). Enhancement is done typographically by printing in boldface, italicizing, and underlining the target forms (e.g., pronouns, verbs, prepositions) in the input. The technique aims to direct learners' attention to a specific target form while reading texts to promote 'noticing'.

Since research has shown that input enhancement alone is not sufficient to lead to the acquisition and learning of forms, another FonF technique was used. Input processing by VanPatten (1996, 2002) promotes the value of input in second language acquisition; however, he believes that giving input alone to the learners is not sufficient for second language acquisition. That is why in input processing, he aims for the learners not only to be exposed to the target language but also to work on understanding the underlying grammar in it. Processing of input entails providing the learners with explanations about the grammar, alerting the students to the problems they may encounter given the differences in the learners' interlanguage and the target language, and providing the students with exercises for them to demonstrate comprehension and practice using the target language forms. The theory of scaffolding is put into practice as the teacher provides explicit instruction on the language form, and as controlled, semi-controlled, and free practice of the grammar structures are given. This processing of input is done in moderation and contexts so as not to transform the classroom into a traditional structural classroom.

Another FonF technique used in this study is task essentialness. This technique is a structure-based task proposed by Loschky and Bely-Vroman (1993) wherein learners are given

tasks that would make them use the particular language form in communication activities, such as writing and speaking, wherein students are expected to produce the target language. From the word 'essentialness', the target language form is presented as essential in carrying out and accomplishing a language task, which during instruction provides the students not only practice in the language form but also an opportunity to use the language. In the study, the tasks given to the students were authentic tasks that students do in real-life deal such as active reading and researching, experimenting, interviewing, scientific and technical writing, and acknowledging and citing sources.

The focus-on-form techniques mentioned were all utilized in the study in the sequence given above with the goal of improving the learners' accuracy on specific language structures.

2.4. Research Instruments

The study utilized instruments that measure accuracy in specific language structures. These are teacher-made tests in the specific grammar topics and students' essays, wherein the frequency of use and correctness of usage were assessed.

2.4.1. English 1 grammar test

A teacher-made grammar test measuring the students' knowledge of target language structures: subject-verb agreement and passive voice of the verb. It is a forty (40) item objective test divided into two (2) parts to measure the students' ability to apply rules in subject-verb agreement and forming passive voice of the verb. The test was subjected to content validity by a pool of experts. The content of the tests had themes related to the content of the reading texts used in the quarterly lessons and assessments.

2.4.2. Students' essays

The students were exposed to and given training on research writing during the second quarter. They were required to write the first draft of their investigatory project—a project collaboratively done by the English and the Science teachers. The science teachers focused on content while the English teachers concentrated on accurate use of language structures as well as on the mechanics and organization of the paper. In Chapter 1, the students were required to discuss (1) the background of the study, (2) its significance, and (3) scope and delimitation, requiring the students to write these essays. Emphasis was placed on specific language structures relevant to writing scientific essays. These were subject-verb agreement in the first, second, and fourth essays, and the passive form of the verb in the third essay. To assess the accuracy aspect of the essays, the evaluation was guided by counting the frequency of use of the given language structures per clause in a sentence, and the errors in usage.

2.5. Data Gathering and Analysis Procedure
2.5.1. Preparatory Phase

The focus on form method, given the three techniques used in the study, was integrated into the lesson plans of the English Department of the research locale. Focus on form lesson plans were developed within meaning-based instruction, that is, every lesson starts with reading authentic material, processing of the material, and elicitation of the language structures, and finally, making the students practice and use the structures in varied communicative and authentic tasks. Afterwards, the lesson plans and materials were evaluated and content validated by a pool of experts coming from different schools and universities. Other

instructional materials included the syllabus for the quarter, the lesson plans, the grammar exercises, and the pre-writing/task worksheets on Investigatory Project: Chapter 1 essays.

2.5.2. Data Gathering Phase

The class had fifty (50) minutes per session for the duration of forty days. At the outset, a pretest was given to the participants for the analysis and description of their prior achievement and knowledge of the language structures that were taught and assessed. In the instruction of both groups, similar texts using different genres based on the quarterly theme of the level were given.

Typographically enhanced reading texts were given, particularly the essays: "Coffee gives robots a grip" and "The papermaking process". These selections were chosen to serve as samples for the target written output at the end of the quarter. These texts were typographically enhanced using boldfacing or highlighting of the target form, e.g., subject-verb agreement for "Coffee gives robots a grip" and passive voice of the verb for "The Papermaking Process".

After the reading phase, the texts were discussed according to content and predominant grammatical forms that were carefully chosen based on their inherence in the text and their essence in the understanding of the content and purpose of the text. These texts and forms served as instruments in the accomplishment of the quarterly project: Chapter 1 of the Investigatory Project (IP).

Finally, after the input processing stage, the researcher gave structure-based and communicative tasks to the students that were natural and authentic. The tasks were in the form of writing and speaking, wherein the target language structures were promoted and used. Not only individual but also collaborative outputs were given as part of the project making process, where the learners were asked to accomplish worksheets and other writing activities that serve as pre-writing to the sub-parts of Chapter 1: Introduction of the Investigatory Project (IP). These activities served as individual pre-writing tasks for the background, significance, and delimitation of the study. The writing prompts consisted of outlining, concept mapping, listing, brainstorming, reasoning gap task, editing and rewriting, sequencing, sentence and paragraph writing, etc. At the end of the quarter, the students were expected to complete the first draft of their paper.

To strengthen the lessons, the second phase of implementation was conducted in another context with a focus on the same language structures. Another set of posttests, parallel to the first, was given to measure the instructional and retention efficiency of the method. The forty-session allotted period for the implementation was divided into two (2) phases, and after each phase, a posttest was conducted. At the end of the first phase, the participants were post-tested and were required to write Investigatory Project (IP) essays, making use of the target forms. During the second phase, the language structures were recycled and strengthened in another context, and another posttest was given.

2.6. Data Analysis

The mean scores of the groups assigned as FonF and WL were computed, and the study used a t-test for independent means to compare the groups before and after exposing them to

the treatment. Test scores were computed using the same tool to assess the improvement of the groups, and significance in the mean difference at a .05 confidence level was also checked to see the relevance of the results. The same statistical treatment was used to compute the mean difference considering the frequency of use of the structures and errors in usage of the learners in the four (4) essays. To generate results, Microsoft Excel was used as well as SPSS or Statistical Package for the Social Sciences and SAS or Statistical Analysis System.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
3.1. Difference between the Posttest scores of the FonF and the WL groups

The mean scores of the FonF group were higher in both tests than the WL group. Both groups improved from the pre-test results, notably, the FonF group had higher improvement.

It was also important to consider the difference in the degree of improvement of the groups in the two separate lessons, in which both groups had a higher degree of improvement in lesson 2, that is, the passive form of the verb. Notably, little difference can be perceived between the two groups' mean scores in this particular lesson. Given the scores, the students experienced little difficulty in the production of the language structure—passive form of the verb, compared to subject-verb agreement, which ironically is a recurrent lesson in English classes from elementary to high school. This may be due to the complexity of some rules and many variables needed to be considered to observe subject-verb agreement, e.g., recognizing the subject of the sentence given intervening phrases and clauses between the subject and the verb, and other sub-rules in SVA considering different kinds of subjects, e.g., indefinite pronouns, collective nouns, etc. On the other hand, forming the passive form of the verb comprises formulaic rules and patterns that may be easier for the students to follow.

The mean of all test scores of the FonF totaled 16.49 with a standard deviation (SD) of 2.66, while the mean of the WL was 15.97 with 3.03 SD. To analyze if there was a significant difference between the means of the two samples, the t-test for independent means was used. The *t* value of 1.06 with a .28 significance was greater than the .05 level of significance. This indicates that there was no significant difference between the FonF and the WL group's posttest scores.

The *t*-test results showed that both the FonF and the WL group had almost equal scores in their posttests. It can be initially assumed that there was insufficient evidence to prove that the FonF teaching set-up significantly affected the test scores of the students.

3.2. The difference between the frequency of use of the target structures in the students' essays

The essays were analyzed by counting the number of clauses (independent and dependent) made in the essays, the frequency of use over the number of clauses, and the number of errors in usage.

The frequency of use was counted per clause of the essays since the two language structures taught (subject-verb agreement and passive form) relate to the verb, and in a sentence, a person can make multiple clauses, thus can use multiple verbs. Frequency of use was counted in the main clauses and subordinate clauses of the following types: relative clauses, noun clauses, adjectival clauses, and adverbial clauses.

The research was limited to assessing only the language structure taught in the quarter. Varied tenses or other forms of the verb used by the students were also not questions of correctness or incorrectness, since the discourse (investigatory project) inherently can shift in tenses.

The FonF group had higher scores with an 8.26 mean in the frequency of use of clauses as compared to 7.30 of the WL group in the essays observing SVA rules. This coincided with the essay observing the use of passive form, with the FonF group having 4.67 mean compared to the WL group with only 2.94. Notably, between the two structures promoted in the study, it was the use of the passive form that provided higher scores in students' frequency of use in the essays as well as in the means of the posttests.

To check for significance, the essay scores were evaluated by formulating a contrast given the formulation: contrast = - essay 1 - essay 2 + essay 3 + essay 4. The analysis was done in such manner because the essay activities, unlike the tests, were not given once in each period, which already made the first two activities more likely to affect each other. Thus, the scores were rather treated as related values. The contrast was formulated such that it tested if the combined scores of the essays from the FonF differed from the combined scores of the essays from the WL set-up. Hence, the contrast average value was tested if it was significantly different from zero using *t*-test. From the *t*-test results, the FonF group had a significant increase in the frequency of use per clause of the specific language forms in their essay, and had more frequent use by around 19.46% on the average.

Given a .05 level of significance, the *t* value of 2.1 with .04 significance which is lower, proves that there was a significant difference in the frequency of use of the language forms in the essays of the FonF and the WL group.

3.3. Difference between the errors in the usage of the language structures in the students' essays

The essays were further analyzed by counting the number of errors made in the use of the given language structures in the essays and by comparing the number of errors to other factors such as frequency of use and number of clauses written.

The FonF group made more errors in SVA rules than the WL by a small percentage. There was a small difference of .12 from the FonF group with the average of 1 compared to the WL with .88. It yielded very similar findings in the errors made in the passive form, wherein the FonF group made more errors by 11 compared to WL with almost no error. The difference between the two was significantly small at .11.

No significant difference was shown by the t-test results with the t value of 1.14, given a .26 significance compared to a .05 level of significance. This indicated positive results in the sense that the FonF group, although in the computation of means made more errors than the WL group, their mean difference posed no significance. It was also notable that the FonF group, with a higher frequency of use, made more errors than the WL. It can be assumed that the more

frequent one uses the language, the more frequent one makes errors as well. The FonF group was consistently confident in their use of the structures, thus increasing the chances of committing more errors, while the WL made fewer errors, mainly because of the infrequent use of the structure.

3.4.Implications of the Study
3.4.1. The value of output in second language acquisition (SLA)

Swain (1985) views the opportunity for output for second/foreign language learners as similarly essential as language input. By making learners create something through using the language, they get to determine the appropriate language forms needed for a particular task or purpose. This happens when learners experience struggles and difficulties in the task, and they engage in a trial-and-error stage and hypothesize on the needed forms to accomplish the task or to communicate a message. Also, when learners make mistakes in their outputs, they are provided with negative evidence that may promote 'noticing' of their mistakes and incapacities in particular forms, leading to the realization of what form is correct and when or how it is used.

Focusing on form happens when learners use the target language structures. Spada and Lightbown (2008) indicated improvements in the language performance of the learners exposed to form-focused instruction in their use of the language learned during grammar lessons. Other research from Day and Shapson (1991), Doughty and Varela (1998), Lyster (2004), Sheen (2005), and more provided similar findings of positive changes in learners' knowledge and use of certain language features. Definitely, instruction and provision of attention to language form and meaning in the ESL classrooms show efficiency in improving second language learning.

The study, with its positive findings pertaining to the essays written by the students through the task essentialness technique, enabled the students to pay attention to the target structure and was successful in making them use the target structures. The students were given an opportunity for output and were able to focus on particular structures needed to complete the writing tasks. Although the students who produced and used the structures made more errors than those who did not, the result was still considered positive since no significant difference was seen between the number of errors, whether they belonged to the FonF or WL group. The higher number of errors of the FonF group only shows that the group was able to use the target structure frequently, and although they may have experienced difficulties while using the language, the opportunity still focused the students' attention on the form.

The study, with its balanced use of integrated (through input enhancement and task essentialness) and isolated (through input processing) form-focused instruction, has maximized the students' frequent use of the language structures. Spada and Lightbown (2008) noted that focusing learners' attention on form before actual tasks maintains learners' positive motivation needed in order for them to produce outputs in the language. In this study, the participants became confident in using the target language structure and, at the same time, in engaging in hypothesis testing that enabled them to either use the structure correctly or incorrectly.

3.4.2. Errors as indicators of language development

With frequent use may come chances of committing errors as well. Recent second language researches see errors not as a downgrading factor in SLA anymore but as indicators of interlanguage development. James (1998) illustrated errors as significant in second/foreign language learning, given that errors are evidence of the learners' in-built syllabus or what they have taken in during language learning, and errors show that L2 learners develop an independent language system that is evidence of 'transitional competence'. Also, errors are significant for they indicate the importance for teachers to be aware of learners' progress in language learning and how language is learnt, including the importance for the students to get involved in hypothesis testing (Selinker, 1969).

Furthermore, Celce-Murcia (2006) described the need for negative evidence wherein the mistakes from the learners allowed them to pay attention or focus on the language form in an effective manner because the focusing was done in context and in a way that was relevant to the learners. In this light, the participants' production of errors in the language structures can be positively viewed as evidence of getting output and of getting involved in hypothesis testing, which both promote focusing on form.

3.4.3. The value of tasks

Also, the study shows positive findings against some criticisms about task essentialness. Willis (1996) criticizes the idea termed as 'structure trapping' as impractical since learners could actually avoid the chosen structure a teacher or task designer has built the task around. This can be particularly true when the learners perhaps do not possess or have no mastery yet of the target structure, and thus would avoid using it. The participants in the study with the significant frequency of use and with a number of errors clearly show that the learners did not avoid the language structure and that they used it, and may have actually had changes in their interlanguage, as evidenced by the errors.

3.4.4. Practice leads to accuracy and fluency.

DeKeyser (1998) and Anderson (1995) stated that for second language learners to achieve fluency or automatic processing and producing of the language, they must first engage in the practice of using that language, by communicating something in that language, leaning on declarative knowledge or knowledge of language rules and forms. This implies that teaching a second language is neither learning about language rules and forms nor making learners communicate all the time. It is all about having a balance of both.

Anderson's (1982) skill acquisition theory and DeKeyser's study (1998) emphasized the importance of focusing and explicit teaching of grammar for they believe that grammar, as declarative knowledge, aids in the development of procedural knowledge (skills). Furthermore, it was noted that maximum understanding of language rules, plus exercises on it, allows for the inculcation of declarative knowledge that is very useful during communicative tasks and that promotes procedural knowledge of language skills.

The study provided for this kind of practice so students can achieve accuracy and eventually fluency. More than pen and paper exercises, communicative practices, and context-embedded tasks were given that helped the students pay attention to the target forms and eventually to practice using these structures. Whether the students have fully developed mastery in the specific language structures or not is still in question. Significantly, the study has proven that the *FonF* techniques evaluated in the study provided effective focusing on form, considering the students' authentic writings wherein the specific language structures were frequently and significantly used.

It is true that Lightbown and Spada (2006) have stated that language acquisition is not an event that occurs in an instant or because of exposure to a language form, a language lesson, or corrective feedback. Language learning is an evolving and dynamic phenomenon that consistently hungers for research and discoveries.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following can be surmised from the research data gathered and analyzed:

1. The focus on form method can make learners pay attention to the form, not necessarily through conscious awareness of the language rules and forms, but more importantly, through unconscious and automatic use of the language structures in meaningful tasks such as essay writing.
2. Allowing the learners to use the language after the focus on form method promotes confidence in the use of the language structures taught, although close monitoring is still needed to help the learners achieve a higher degree of correctness in usage.
3. Language errors committed during the use of the target structures provide good evidence of learners' taking in aspects of the language and improving their interlanguage. Also, the errors provide evidence for learners engaging in hypothesis testing, enabling them to use the language and try out the knowledge and skills that they possess to accomplish a certain task.
4. The results of frequent use and the occurrence of errors in the essays provide evidence of developing learners' interlanguage and of positive motivation of the learners to use the target structure given a task and purpose for communication.
5. The focus on form method shares many comparable features with some existing methods in second language teaching, such as whole language instruction, as exhibited by the high scores achieved by both groups in the posttests.

In light of the research findings, the researcher recommends the following:

The school may conduct continuous evaluation of the language programs and curriculum suited to the profile and demographics of the learners, for example, considering gender as a factor in evaluating a particular language teaching method.

The language teachers may allow for integration of the focus on form method with other language teaching methods to maximize the effectiveness of second/foreign language learning.

Grammar should be taught in contextualized and meaningful situations, such as through communicative tasks, provision of language input, etc. Language input should be used, such as reading and listening, as substantial teaching and learning aids, not only as a springboard to the

language lesson. The input not only provides context and exposure to the target language, but it also aids in accomplishing various language tasks, given that input, input processing, and tasks are interconnected. Opportunity for output producing the target language may be provided to allow for practice of the forms and also noticing of the forms essential to achieve a communicative purpose and to complete language tasks. Language learners' mistakes may not be considered as a downgrading factor in second language teaching and learning, but as evidence of what the learners are taking in and the possible changing and improving in their current level, as well as an essential data on how language learning happens.

Language trainers, language program specialists, and curriculum designers may promote use of at least one technique under the focus on form method even outside the formal classroom set-up, e.g., in English online classes and tutorials. Focusing on form can be done even during the presentation or elicitation of the language structures.

Language researchers may conduct more studies about focus on form methods comparing techniques under the method to see the efficacy of each—more studies about focus on form method studying the development of language considering varied sets of participants, that is, studies set in elementary education, in tertiary education and in groups with lower socioeconomic status to see more of the method's applicability; more studies about focus on form method and the specific techniques under it considering gender as a factor to see which technique is more effective given differences and preferences for language learning as well as differing degrees of motivation taking into account gender; and more studies about the focus on form instruction with a higher number of participants to generalize the effectiveness of the approach in a particular context.

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