

Research Summary

Effects of Form-Focused Instruction in an EFL Context

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What is this study about?

Form-Focused Instruction (FFI) is an instruction that focuses on a target grammar. It promotes language learning by raising learner's awareness of the language features. The researchers investigated the effects of FFI by comparing it with Meaning Focused Instruction (MFI), which focuses on a content. This study was motivated by the first author's experience as a high school teacher in Japan. Her students rarely communicated in English when she asked them to, but in contrast, they actively communicated in English when they were given target grammatical structures. Thus, the study examined the following questions: 1. Do FF and MF activities differ in terms of the amount of learner verbal communication? 2. Can FF as well as MF activities offer access to their identity as L2 learners and cultivate learner investment in the context of a classroom activity?

What did the researchers do?

This study was conducted in a Japanese high school class with 24 female students. The researchers designed 30-minute activity lessons within a regular class period of 50-minute, and they introduced the activity four times with different target grammar. During the 30-minute activity time, one group was assigned a 15-minute FF activity first and then a 15-minute MF activity. The other group completed the same activity in the opposite order. All participants received the same instruction about grammar rules. The researcher audio recorded and videotaped the activities to transcribe and analyze their interactions. Additionally, ten focal students joined four stimulated recall sessions and follow-up interviews, where they were asked about what they were thinking at the time of the class activities.

What did the researchers find?

With regard to the first research question about the amount of communication, there was no greater difference between FF and MF activities based on the number of turn-taking and language switches between Japanese and English. However, in terms of the second research question on the content of the interaction, the researchers found that students were more actively engaged in interactions during FF activities through detailed interaction analysis. While the MF activities contained less interactive conversations, the data of FF activities included co-construction of sentences and repetition of others' utterances. Especially in FFI, participants used English when they encountered difficulties in grammar and vocabulary, which created social identity roles such as "requestor" and "requestee." Additionally, interview data suggests that the instruction to use a target grammar stimulated their ideas and motivated them to use English during the activities.

Practical Implications/Significance

This study indicated that the FFI could help learners engage in L2 communication and establish positive identity as English learners or peer helpers at a high school in Japan. Future studies are encouraged to examine learners in different situations with a variety of L1 backgrounds, ages, and learning contexts.

Original Text: Tomita, Y., & Spada, N. (2013). Form-focused instruction and learner investment in L2 communication. *The Modern Language Journal*, 97(3), 591–610. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2013.12031.x>