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Classroom research proposal

Introduction

This study is an attempt to reexamine the effectiveness of two kinds of form-focused instruction on oral accuracy and fluency of Arabic learners. Based on the instruction delivered, comparing among them, and analyzing the variety of features in both instruction and their effect; it will be determined which one is more effective for oral accuracy and fluency. R. Ellis (2005) defines instructions as “an attempt to intervene in the process of language learning” (p. 9). Moreover, Loewen (2020) states that, “ISLA is a theoretically and empirically based field of academic inquiry that aims to understand how the systematic manipulation of the mechanisms of learning and/or the conditions under which they occur enable or facilitate the development and acquisition of a language other than one’s first” (p. 2-3). In addition, Housen and Pierrard (2005) define language instruction as “any systematic attempt to enable or facilitate language learning by manipulating the mechanisms of learning and/or the conditions under which these occur” (p.2). Although, there is not always a clear correlation between type of instruction and type of learning, we assume that instruction is able to affect to a certain extent the learning mechanisms employed by L2 learners. Research should therefore contribute to improvements in instructional practice by investigating the effectiveness of different instructional approaches and techniques.

Keywords: Explicit instruction, implicit instruction, focus on form, focus on meaning, oral communication, interactive tasks.

Literature review

This review shares general findings about the effectiveness of implicit and explicit instruction as well as discussing some of the features that focus on form offers and concludes with the research question for this study. Moreover, the goal of this study is to examine the effect of explicit and implicit instruction on speaking for Arabic L2 learners who are English speakers in Grade 10. Furthermore, action research is conducted by the teacher, who is becoming the “practitioner”, and is observing and analyzing two types of instructional practices, to reflect about pedagogical choices as well as analyze the effectiveness of instruction used. However, Burns (2005) explains that the goal of observing the role of explicit and implicit instruction during an action research investigation is mainly to enhance the professional action and classroom practices rather than changing the production of knowledge about curriculum or educational systems. Therefore, this study can be used to help teachers and other educators uncover strategies to improve teaching practices.

Focus on Form versus Focus on Meaning

There is debate in foreign language (FL) teaching concerning the relative merits of focusing on formS (accuracy) as opposed to focusing on meaning (fluency). Long’s (1991) Interaction Hypothesis proposed Focus on Form (FonF) as medium to focus on formS and pure communicative approaches. On the other hand, Krashen’s (1985) Natural Approach invites learners to focus only on rich comprehensible input for grammar acquisition. In addition, Swain and Lapkin (1995), asked if input is only sufficient for learners to notice and produce the target language. Furthermore, Swain and Lapkin (1998) discussed the role of output in terms of metatalk or metalinguistic explanation, which may serve as deepening learners’ awareness of

forms and rules to make links between form, meaning, and function. However, it is believed that focus on form works when learners notice, “Focus on form proposes that noticing linguistic structures is most likely to occur when meaning is relatively clear, and learners have the attentional resources to give to linguistic form.” (Loewen, 2020, p.68). Therefore, Loewen (2020) argues that, “the goal to focus on form is to combine attention to meaning and form” (p70). When teachers combine both form and meaning they might capture learners’ attention to linguistic forms in a meaningful way because according to Schmidt (1990) this attention is important for language acquisition.

Focus on form is divided into explicit and implicit categories, which is the central scope of this study. Input enhancement, and input flooding as an implicit focus on form examples, can be implemented through drawing learners' attention to the target grammatical item so they can notice it. On the other hand, metalinguistic feedback, input- based instruction, present, practice, produce (PPP), output-based instruction, language related episodes (LREs), during meaning-focused activities are examples of explicit focus on form and some of these instruction are used in this study as well. R. Ellis (2009) explains how both explicit and implicit instruction are related despite being distinct concepts. So, how can we distinguish among them?

Explicit instruction and explicit knowledge

Explicit instruction encourages learners to learn the rules of a particular feature overtly rather than covertly. Learners develop a metalinguistic awareness of the lexical rules and their attention are drawn directly to the features that the teacher is trying to elicit for them. Many techniques are used for this kind of instruction such as metalinguistic explanation, presenting the target forms in isolation, controlled practice of the target forms, metalinguistic feedback, etc.

Several empirical research also have been conducted to compare the effectiveness of these two kinds of instruction;(Ellis,2005; Norris & Ortega, 2000; Scheffler &Cinciala,2011) have shown that the learners learn forms better when explicit form-focused instruction is utilized. In their study, based on the findings, they have stated that delayed explicit focus on form through metalinguistic feedback and meta-talk seems to be more effective than implicit focus on form through input enhancement and recast in L2 learning. Furthermore, Loewen (2020) claims that explicit instruction itself can add to the meaning-focused input that students receive in the classroom.

Implicit instruction and implicit knowledge:

Implicit instruction encourages learners to infer underlying rules without awareness (N. Ellis, 1994). Learners require a great deal of exposure to input so that they begin to recognize patterns and infer rules, therefore they will internalize these patterns. Many techniques are used for this kind of instruction such as recasts, implicit corrective feedback, prompts, presenting the target forms in meaningful contexts, input flooding and input enhancement, etc.

Loewen (2020) states that “a primary goal of L2 instruction remains the development of implicit knowledge in order for learners to be able to use the L2 fluently in spontaneous communication” (p. 26). Moreover, teaching implicitly requires instructors to use methods that may be unfamiliar to them based on their own language learning experience and to accept that what learners acquire may not line up perfectly with what they intend to teach. Not all research studies were in favor of explicit instruction, some of experimental studies supported implicit grammatical instruction such as Andringa et al (2011) who claimed that implicit instruction should replace explicit instruction in the classroom so learners could have the autonomy of expressing the forms the

way they want and not limiting them to particular forms that were taught explicitly. Moreover, they found implicit instruction to be more conducive to learners' overall accuracy in all aspects and to their written accuracy in particular. Furthermore, since one of the responsibilities of materials developers is to provide and sequence the content of teaching materials, Ellis (2009) states that, "becoming fluent requires a sufficient sample of needs-relevant authentic input for the necessary implicit tunings to take place" (p.152). Thus, designing communicative tasks to provide opportunities for focus on form in one of the recommended ways, especially implicitly, seems very much advisable.

In order to improve students' accuracy and fluency in speaking, it is necessary that language teachers find a way to help students improve their oral communication ability. Therefore, explicit and implicit instruction were described first. Then, to investigate the effectiveness of these instruction in improving the students' oral communication ability, an empirical study, using a pretest and a posttest design is conducted to compare both groups results and determine what instruction is more effective for oral accuracy and fluency.

As it was mentioned in this review, many studies have been conducted to determine the relative effects of implicit and explicit focus on form on oral accuracy and fluency for language learners. However, the studies that focused on the effects of the two teaching methods on L2 learners' pronunciation are insufficient especially for Arabic learners. Therefore, this research aims to show whether and to what extent these two types of instruction affect learners' oral accuracy and fluency in the Arabic classroom. So, the research question of this study is as follows:

- Do learners produce future-tense verb forms more accurately and fluently in speaking after explicit instruction or implicit instruction?

The study

In this study, one linguistic feature was selected to be the focus for both explicit and implicit instruction delivery. Appropriate means were employed to increase the perceptual salience of the target form. Therefore, two types of instructions are given to determine which one is more effective for oral accuracy and fluency.

Participants and context

The learners of Arabic in the present study follow typical learning patterns of foreign language development and they are completing the curriculum of the international languages from the Ministry of Education in Ontario as well as following the ACTFL benchmark for the proficiency level. The participants are 20 students who are in the intermediate level of Arabic (second year), at Appleby College in Ontario, Canada. Students are divided into two groups, their age ranges from 14 to 16. The learners are all L1 speakers of English who had studied Arabic previously for one year and completed the beginner level. 10 students will participate in group A (N=10), where the instruction will be delivered implicitly, and the forms will be taught implicitly. The other 10 students will participate in group B (N=10), in which explicit instruction will be employed.

Procedure

To accomplish the objectives of the study, a pre-test and a post-test were designed. This design will be used because it is the most suitable and practical to the context of this study for two main reasons: First, it will enable the researcher to tell which group made more progress by comparing their scores at the beginning of the instruction with their scores at the end. Second, due to COVID-19 the school will be operating differently and there will be 3, 80min periods a week,

per semester. All classes are divided into Group A and B. Group A will be on campus on odd days (1,3,5,7,9) and Group B on even days (2,4,6,8,10). On the days where students are at home, they will join classes virtually engaging in learning via a Hyflex model. Therefore, it is logical to divide the class to two groups and deliver two different instructions.

This study includes two independent variables (implicit and explicit focus on form), and a dependent variable (grammar knowledge enhancement of the students). For the first group implicit focus on form will be used, while for the second group explicit focus on form will be utilized. Next, twelve sessions (four weeks) of treatment will be done for both groups. For group A, the grammatical structures particularly the future tense will be taught implicitly through input enhancement by using some techniques such as underlining the future, bolding it, and using it abundantly in passages that discuss trips, vacations and future plans. This will be done without any explicit explanation of forms. While for group B, the same structure will be explained and presented explicitly by the teacher after doing the pre-test task or through metalinguistic explanation. Some examples or explicit instruction are; using the PPP approach, introducing the future on the board and in isolation, assigning controlled practices etc... After 12 sessions of treatment, a post-test in the form of an interactive task will be given to the students to assess their oral accuracy and fluency. For the aim of present study, it was also important to design small meaningful tasks to be given to students during the treatment sessions so they can practice the future tense. Therefore, the post-test or the task itself would naturally encourage the use of the target structure.

In both the pretest and the posttest there is a picture of a people packing and getting ready for a trip, so that in both tests (pre-test and post-test) students will use similar vocabulary and

grammar constructions for the same context (vacation, trip) to employ the future tense (e.g., <ana sa ousaferu eela... أنا سأسافرُ إلى). The pictures are used as prompts to stimulate the discussion between students who will be working in pairs and recording their dialogues at the same time. Moreover, both pre-test and post-test will test students' pronunciation in spontaneous interactive tasks when they have to focus not only on accurate and fluent pronunciation, but also on meaning. All stages are carefully designed to help learners shift their attention to the target linguistic feature (the future tense) while maintaining their primary focus on meaningful communication. With the aim of promoting autonomous and collaborative pair work, peer interaction activities comprising four stages were developed. In the first stage, students will watch a movie clip that will last for 5 minutes. After watching the movie clip, students will work together in dyads on a fill-in-the-gap sheet in which sentences depicting the clip contain verbs in the base form that students will put in the future tense. Unlike a traditional decontextualized fill-in-the-gap task, students will refer back to this sheet to discuss the movie and complete the task. The third stage is a discussion in pairs which students will talk about their future plans such as upcoming holiday break or event. (Similar to the movie topic. In the final stage, discussion questions designed to connect the movie and the learners' personal lives will be given.

Data analysis

Data from the test were examined using quantitative analysis techniques, specifically the CAF measurement. CAF is used to evaluate complexity, accuracy and fluency of students output in both pre-test and post-test. *Fluency* in the students' speech is a construct in which different sub-dimensions can be distinguished, such as speed fluency (rate and density of delivery), breakdown fluency (number, length and distribution of pauses in speech) and repair fluency (number of false

starts and repetitions) (Tavakoli & Skehan, 2005). On the other hand, *Accuracy* (or correctness) is referred to the degree of deviancy from a particular norm. Deviations from the norm are usually characterized as errors. Finally, the term complexity of the CAF triad is used to analyze the task complexity and to observe the properties of the features of L2 performance and proficiency (L2 linguistic complexity) (Skehan,2001). In sum, using CAF to evaluate students' results can increase the validity, reliability and efficiency of the collected data and to determine which instruction were more effective on students' oral performance. Furthermore, CAF method is utilized to study mean variance between the two groups in terms of pre-test and post-test scores. Therefore, results obtained through CAF, help to find out if there is any significant difference between groups according to pre-test and post-test scores.

Discussion

Although both methods of instruction teaching may be effective, there should be significant difference between post-test scores of the group A who received implicit instruction and group B who received explicit instruction. Probably group B will get higher scores than those who received implicit form-focused instruction for many reasons. First, Explicit instruction is necessary for learners to achieve high levels of pronunciation accuracy and teachers must correct them explicitly so learners would know how to improve and adjust. Moreover, it is important that teachers remind their learners that the goal is intelligibility and not native-like proficiency. Second, in order to improve their comprehension and production abilities, learners would need input-based instruction. Third, explaining the grammar rules explicitly to learners has shown many benefits and many studies have proved it.

Therefore, explicit focus on form might be more effective in terms of developing oral accuracy and fluency. It is predicted that findings of this study will emphasize and support Ellis, Loewen, and Erlam's (2006) report that explicit focus on form and metalinguistic feedback are more effective compared to implicit instruction and recast. Similarly, Dabaghi (2008), states that explicit focus on form is better than implicit instruction in terms of grammatical accuracy. Moreover, the outcome of the study is consistent with results gained from the research conducted by Nguyen, Pham, and Pham (2012), who have found that explicit focus on form instruction is more profitable than implicit focus on form in all aspects.

Conclusion

This research was a contrastive empirical study which aimed to find out whether and to what extent two different approaches of focus on form (implicit and explicit) affect students who are learning Arabic in their second year. The predicted results of the study would probably show that both focus on form categories are effective in enhancing oral communication among learners. However, explicit focus on form might be more effective than implicit one. Nevertheless, it is recommended to investigate the effect of other categories of form-focused instruction on different skills of learners and it is advised to use a combination of both instruction and to determine learners needs as well. Thus, studies can be conducted to reexamine the probable effects of implicit and explicit focus on form on different learners in different proficiency levels, ages, areas, and cultural and educational background. In the end, teachers and researchers should work together to create the best environment for their learners and let's agree with what Loewen (2020) emphasizes that reflective implicit and explicit instruction is what ISLA is and a combination of both is more effective than choosing one over the other.

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