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The Effect of Intensive Planned Focus on Form on the Implicit L2 Knowledge of Iranian EFL Language Learners*

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Abstract
Attention to form in input now seems to have found its way into second language acquisition (SLA), and it is recommended that language learners' consciousness be raised for language learning to occur and become intake. Input enhancement and output have received considerable attention in recent SLA as two attention-drawing devices. In the present study, we chose visual input enhancement to examine its effect on noticing and acquisition. To that end, two classes were randomly assigned to experimental and control groups. Both groups were exposed to ten different short stories for ten sessions for five weeks, but the type of exposure was different for each group. The English third person singular was highlighted for the experimental group through formatting techniques such as underlining, italicizing, and capitalizing. Language learners in the experimental group were supposed to answer the questions following each short story and write a summary for it. Both groups were post tested one week after the treatment on both Noticing Test and a Written Production Test. The results of two independent *t*-tests showed the superiority of experimental group over the control group in noticing and learning the third person singular. Implications of the findings are discussed.

Key words: *Input, Intake, Planned Focus on Form, Noticing*

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1. Introduction

Instruction now seems to be a sine quo non, if not indispensable, of second language acquisition (SLA) (Nassaji, 2013; Soodmand Afshar, 2021). Its effectiveness has long been proved (Kamiya, 2012; Long, 1983; Long & Crookes, 1992). Even its effects have been reported to be durable and stable (Norris & Ortega, 2000). There is now a unanimous consensus that instruction can promote the acquisition of L2 implicit knowledge (Ellis, 2002; Spada, 1997). These results and findings notwithstanding, the role of instruction in the promotion of SLA is still a matter of debate. On the one hand, there are non–interventionists who strongly oppose any intervention of instruction during the process of second language acquisition and who claim that the only necessary and sufficient conditions for acquisition to occur are through comprehensible input and that instruction plays a peripheral and monitoring role (Krashen, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1985, 1993). Acquisition, Krashen (1993) argues, is all unconscious. On the other hand, it has been shown that instruction can speed up the rate of learning, the ultimate level of attainment, and target–like accuracy (Doughty & Willams, 1998a; Long & Crookes, 1992) and that "without any focus on form or consciousness raising …, formal accuracy is an unlikely result" (Ellis, 2002, p. 175).

As Fotos (1998) argued, ESL settings are characterised by a series of features, one of which is the amount of exposure, or input which L2 learners encounter outside the classroom. These features are not present in EFL settings and situations. Besides, as Rouhi (2001) contended, immersion and naturalistic approaches have succeeded in partial fluency of L2 learners at the expense of accuracy. Focus on form, as a version of communicative approach to language teaching, since Long's (1991) introduction into the literature, has been a characteristic of immersion and ESL settings in which learners focus on content, or theme-based courses (Spada, 1997), and little has been done to incorporate focus on form into EFL settings. The number of the studies (VanPatten & Sanz, 1995; Salaberry, 1997; Long, Inagaki, & Ortega, 1998; Muranoi, 2000) which have striven to accommodate focus on

form have kept and insisted on the original focus on form introduced by Long. Hence, the results have not been so informative.

The original focus on form is not suitable and conducive to EFL situations as in Iran in which English is taught as a foreign language. Every attempt to incorporate focus on form into EFL settings without any modification and revision is destined to failure. How can we resolve this paradoxical theoretical failing of instruction and empirical working of it? Ellis (2002) proposed two solutions: (a) instruction only contributes to explicit knowledge with no effect on implicit knowledge, and (b) instruction can only be effective when "it consists of a focus on form" (p.225). It is the latter that we investigated in this study.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Focus on Form

Most practitioners in English language teaching attribute the rehabilitation and revitalisation of grammar instruction and its incorporation into second language acquisition to Long (Doughty & Williams, 1998b; Doughty & Varela, 1998; Fotos, 1998; Sheen, 2003; Williams & Evans, 1998). This, however, does not imply returning to the traditional, old–fashioned, step–by–step isolation, presentation, and, eventually, practicing of linguistic codes as such—not for the sake of communication but for grammar manipulation.

Arguing against the methods of language teaching as one method having no privilege over the other and one overlapping with the other, among other things, Long (1991) coined the term "Focus on Form" and distinguished it from "focus on forms", "which involves the intensive teaching of specific grammatical features in a structure–of–the–day approach" (Ellis, 2002, p. 225). For Long (1991), focus on form was to "overtly draw students' attention to linguistic elements as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning, or communication" (p. 46).

Since Long's introduction of focus on form into the literature, it has undergone drastic modifications and revisions. Spada (1997) argued that Long's focus on form was "spontaneous" in nature by which she

meant "meaning–based pedagogical events in which attention is drawn to language as a perceived need arises rather than in predetermined ways" (p. 73). As Doughty and Williams (1998a) contended, Long's focus on form had a more theoretical ring to it, and as such it was more suited to the immersion programs in which courses were content and theme based. Long and Robinson (1998), in an attempt to make focus on form more operationalised and more practical for pedagogical purposes, remarked that "focus on form 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" (p. 23). Doughty and Williams (1998b) employed the term focus on form to mean proactive attention to from—preselection of linguistic forms to be taught through communicative activities. Doughty and William's proactive attention to form corresponds to what Spada (1997) called "predetermined" and what Ellis (2002) called "planned." Ellis, Basturkmen, and Loewon (2001) defined focus on form as close as to Long's original definition. Thus, they stated that

> focus on form (1) occurs in discourse that is primarily meaning centered, (2) is observable (i.e., occurs interactionally), (3) is incidental (i.e., is not preplanned), (4) is transitory, and (5) is extensive (i.e. several different forms are attended in the context of a single lesson. (pp. 411-412)

This definition of focus on form, as Ellis, Basturkmen, and Loewon (2001) argued, has long not been attended to and requires a descriptive research design and methodology. Given the different viewpoints and definitions concerning focus on form, it seems to be difficult to arrive at a well–defined, well–executed, and all–inclusive workable definition of focus on form. Furthermore, other rival terms such as form–focused instruction (FFI) (Spada, 1997; Ellis, 2002), analytic/experiential teaching (Stern, 1983), focus on forms (Long, 1991), focus on meaning (Krashen & Terrell, 1983), and corrective feedback/error correction (Lyster & Ranta, 1998) are either confusing or mean the same thing as focus on form. We had better, therefore, first clarify distinguish between these terms.

2.2. Form–Focused Instruction

Spada (1997) argued that Long's focus on form was "Spontaneous" in nature by which she meant "meaning–based pedagogical events in which attention is drawn to language as a perceived need arises rather than in predetermined ways" (p.73). Spada used the term form focused instruction to stand for Long's focus on form, but she distinguished between the two, arguing that the latter is not "predetermined", but it is only "spontaneous" by which she referred to attention to linguistic form through the arousal of a perceived need.

Claiming that Spada's definition excludes traditional instruction involving the presentation and practice of discrete forms, Ellis (2002) presented a definition of form–focused instruction, which he argued, was an umbrella term or, what he called "a cover term," serving for a variety of other terms such as "focus on form," "focus on forms", "corrective feedback/error correction", and "negotiation of from". "The term form-focused instruction", (FFI), Ellis (2001) noted, "is used to refer to any planned or incidental instructional activity that is intended to induce language learners to pay attention to linguistic form" (pp.1-2). So defined, FFI, Ellis (2001) added, "includes both traditional approaches to teaching forms based on structural syllabi and more communicative approaches, where attention to form arises out of activities that are primarily meaning–focused" (pp.1-2). For Ellis, focus on form is a subtype of form–focused instruction on which we focus below. This position is also supported by Ellis, Bastukmen, and Loewen (2001; 2002).

Ellis (2001) conceptualized form–focused instruction into three types based on the following two fundamental criteria: (a) the primary focus of attention and (b) the distribution of attention to form. Table 1 shows the tripartite classification of FFI (Ellis, 2001; Ellis, Basturkmen, & Loewen, 2002). By "planned" is meant preselected forms, by "intensive" is meant focusing on a preselected form many times, by "incidental" is meant unpreselected forms, and finally by "extensive" is meant candidacy of many unpreselected forms for focus.

Table 1
Types of Form–Focused Instruction

Types of FFI	Primary Focus	Distribution
Focus–on–Forms	Form	Intensive
Planned focus–on form	Meaning	Intensive
Incidental focus–on–form	Meaning	Extensive

Focus on forms implies that the teacher and the students are aware that the primary purpose of the activity is to learn a preselected form and those learners are required to focus their attention on some specific forms intensively in order to learn them. Focus on forms can be achieved explicitly or implicitly, through structured input versus production practice and ultimately through functional production practice.

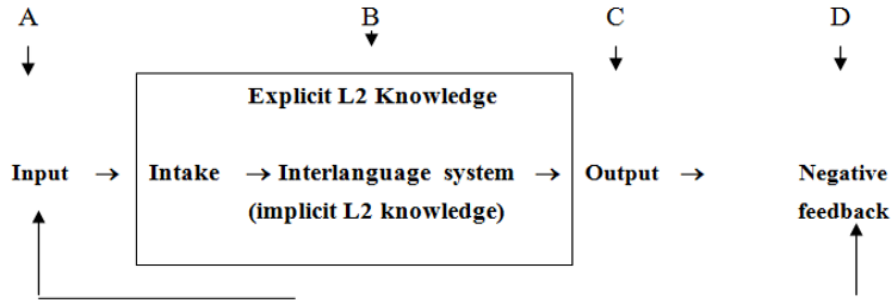

Figure 1: A Computational Model of L2 Acquisition

Planned focus on form is a type of FFI in which a specific preselected form is intensively targeted while the primary attention is on meaning. Planned focus on form is based on computational model of L2 acquisition which is centered on three premises: (a) intake, (b) acquisition, and (c) practice. The model, which is a metaphorical one, (See Ellis, 1997; Lantolf, 1996), is displayed in in Figure 1 taken from Ellis (1997).

According to this model, forms in input are first noticed and stored in short–term memory, then new forms are incorporated into long–term memory and interlanguage is restructured and finally newly stored and incorporated forms are practiced and produced in both speech and writing. Planned focus on form, like focus on forms, can be achieved through a number of options including enriched input and focused communicative tasks. Enriched input itself is of two types: (a) input flood and (b) input enhancement.

Incidental focus on form is a type of form–focused instruction in which a broad spectrum of unpreselected linguistic features is extensively targeted in the context of communication while the primary focus of attention is on meaning. Incidental focus on form is further divided into preemptive focus on form in which there is no failure or breakdown in communication and mutual understanding but either the teacher or a student opts for a particular form to make it the agenda of discussion because of its being problematic. Reactive focus on form refers to the lack of understanding in the mutual process of communication, and interactants strive to compensate for it either through implicit negative feedback such as recast or explicit negative feedback such as explicit correction, elicitation, and metalinguistic feedback (see Lyster, 1998; Lyster & Ranta, 1998).

In this study, we follow Ellis (2001) to define focus on form. Therefore, by focus on form, we mean preselecting specific forms in advance for extensive treatment reinforced by recasts within the context of meaningful communication. Therefore, throughout this study, by focus on form is meant "planned focus on form".

2.3. The Rationale for Focus on Form

Support for focus on form was at first partly theoretical and partly empirical based on the comparison of naturalistic and instructed interlanguage development, but later it gained support from classroom–based experiments which investigated the effect of focus on form (See Long & Robinson, 1998). Unlike first language acquisition which children acquire only through positive evidence (Cook, 1994; Cook & Newson, 1996), positive evidence alone is not sufficient, and L2

learners need negative or corrective feedback to notice and develop competence. Furthermore, because of limited capacity of L2 learners, they cannot pay attention to both form and meaning and process them simultaneously; therefore, "it is necessary to find ways of drawing learner's attention to form during a communicative activity" (Ellis, Basturkmen, and Loewen, 2002, p. 422).

Doughty and Williams (1998a) argued for a need for a focus on form in that current interest in focus on form is motivated, in part, by the findings of immersion and naturalistic classroom second language acquisition studies that suggest that when classroom second language learning is experiential and meaning–focused, some linguistic features do not ultimately reach target–like levels. They further argued that focus on form in its strong form can promote "learners beyond communicatively effective language toward target–like second language ability" (p. 2), and in its weak form "speed up natural acquisition processes" (p. 2). Such claims are also made by Long and Robinson (1998) who see the motivation for focus on form through interaction hypothesis which reiterates that the development of language takes place through "interaction between learners and other speakers, especially, but mostly, between learners and more proficient speakers and between learners and certain types of written texts, especially elaborated ones" (p. 22). Negotiation for meaning, input comprehensibility, form–function relationship and elicitation of negative feedback including recasts are the advantages and benefits of interaction hypothesis on which focus on form is based.

2.4. Input Enhancement

There is unanimous consensus that learners' attention should be drawn and directed to forms in input for input to become intake (Izumi, 2002; Wong, 2001). To put it another way, attention is as necessary for acquisition as comprehensible input is and, as Schmidt (2001) put it, "people learn about the things they attend to and do not learn much about the things they do not attend to" (p. 30).

The question which now arises is how the students' attention should be drawn to forms in input. Two specific pedagogic approaches to draw

the learner's attention to form have received considerable attention in recent SLA research, namely, input enhancement and output (Erlam, 2003; Izumi, 2002; Izumi & Bigelow, 2000; Wong, 2001). As Izumi (2002) argued, the two approaches are similar in that they draw learner's attention to form, but they are different in that input enhancement is an external–drawing device while output is an internal–drawing device. Input enhancement was first used by Sharwood Smith (1991, 1993) and was taken on by other researchers. Rejecting the term consciousness–raising as being misleading because of having a consciousness ring to it, Sharwood Smith (1991) coined the term "input–salience–creation" or "input enhancement" to obviate the shortcomings of consciousness–raising because input enhancement deals with text manipulation and operation on linguistic material and learner is not central here and what is made salient by the teacher may not be perceived by the learner (Izumi, 2002; Izumi & Bigelow, 2000; Wong, 2001; White, Spada, lightbown & Ranta, 1991). Sharwood Smith (1991) defined input enhancement as "the process by which language input becomes salient to the learner …" (p. 118). Following this definition, he enumerated colouring particular morphological inflections and embedding instances of a particular grammatical rule in a metalinguistic explanation as instances of creating input salience. Input enhancement can be achieved through a number of ways: input flooding (Leow, 1997), rule presentation (White, Spada, Lightbown & Ranta, 1991), and typographical or textual input enhancement (Doughty, 1991).

Following Izumi (2002), we adopted visual input enhancement for this study, which is "an implicit and unobtrusive means to draw the learner's attention to form contained in the written input" (p. 543). Visual input enhancement can be achieved through formatting and highlighting techniques as in underlining, bolding, capitalising, italicising, enlarging or a combination of more than one of these techniques (Izumi, 2002). Studies done on the effects of visual input enhancement can be categorized into four groups: (a) those yielding positive effects such as Doughty (1991), Rouhi (2001), Shook (1994)

and Williams, 1999; those yielding limited effects such as Robinson (1997); those yielding no significant effects such as Leow (1997); and those yielding negative effects such as Izumi (2002).

Previous research on the effects of visual input enhancement has produced completely mixed and confusing results. This confusion and lack of consistency, as Izumi (2002) discussed, can be attributed to three fundamental factors: (a) most of the above-mentioned studies did not incorporate a noticing component, (b) visual input enhancement itself was not the only factor affecting learning gains, but it was investigated along with other techniques, too, and (c) learnability of the target forms was overlooked in these studies. Following these limitations, the present study is an attempt to fill the gap. Therefore, the following research question was formulated:

What is the effect of visual input enhancement on the noticing and acquisition of the English third person singular-s?

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants of the Study

Forty female Farsi-native speaking students enrolled in Guyesh Language Institute for conversation classes in Qazvin, Iran participated in this study. They were all beginners, and they had been attending English classes for an average of three years, and their ages ranged between 13 and 19. They were randomly assigned into two classes, with one of the classes acting as the experimental group receiving visual input enhancement and the other as the control group receiving unenhanced input. Before the treatment began, the two classes were observed for two sessions to determine which forms they had most problems when they were speaking with each other or with the teacher. During these two sessions, they dropped third person singular "s" in simple present tenses when the subject was singular in form.

To make sure that "s" dropping was not due to time pressure in speaking, participants were given a simple short story in the third session and were first asked to read the story and then write the summary of the story on a piece of paper, using simple present tenses.

The analysis of their written summaries confirmed "s" dropping. This was done because we were interested in measuring the students' accuracy in writing, not in speaking.

In the fourth session, they were given a pretest, which also served us as the posttest to determine whether the two groups were homogeneous in third person singular "s" in order to embark upon our treatment. An independent-samples *t*-test was run which did not show a significant difference between the two group test scores ($t(40) = 1.52$, $p = .25$).

3.2. The Design of the Study

The research design which was employed in this study was a quasi-experimental design in that we had two groups which were assigned into experimental and control groups, in that the two groups were given a pretest and a posttest, and in that experimental group was given treatment, but the control group was just given placebo; there was no randomisation.

3.3. Variables of the Study

The variables investigated in this study were of four types: one independent variable, two dependent variables, and one control variable. The independent variable of this study was "visual input enhancement" which was operationalised as the "implicit and unobtrusive means to draw the learner's attention to form contained in the written input … [through] increasing the perceptual salience of the target form via combination of various formatting techniques (e.g., bolding, capitalizing, or underlining)…."(Izumi, 2002, p. 543).

"Noticing" and "acquisition" were considered the dependent variables of this study. They were analysed separately. Noticing was operationalised as recognising and underlining the structure embedded in the text of a short story (Fotos, 1993; Izumi, Bigelow, Fujiwara, and Fearnow, 1999). Acquisition, in this study, was operationalised as the target–language accuracy (Ellis, 2002). Finally, gender was controlled and only females were chosen to participate in the study.

3.4. Form in Focus and Selection of Form in the Study

In the English language, the subject agrees with the verb both in number and person. In terms of number, the subject is either singular or plural and in terms of person, it is of three types: first person, second person, and third person. Besides, in English simple present tense is formed by "subject + verb" and that when the verb is a main verb as in "take" and the subject is singular in terms of number and third person in terms of person, we should add an "s" to the end of the main verb so as for the verb to agree with the subject. It is further claimed that "es" is added when the main verb ends in "ch", "sh", "o", "s(s)", "z(z)", and "y"; otherwise, an "s" is added.

Keeping in mind the above discussion as for subject-verb agreement, the English morphological third person singular "s" was chosen to be investigated in this study. The selection was both pedagogically and linguistically motivated because of the following reasons. First, the majority of Iranian students have a lot of problem with this form both in speaking and in writhing although they know the subject-verb agreement rules concerning this form. Seldom do they use third person singular "s" in speaking and writing when it comes to maintaining rather long stretches of language such as narrating a simple short story and writing a free simple composition. This difficulty is due to the very fact that third person singular "s" is semantically redundant (Ellis, 1997). Second, the selection of third person singular "s" is also consistent with the third criterion which Harley (1993) suggested for likely candidates for focus on form which states that suitable structures are those that "are not important for successful communication, for example, third person singular–s in l2 English" (as cited in Williams & Evans, 1998, p. 140). The third reason for the selection of this form was the very fact that "[focus on form] succeeds for simple morphological features because it makes such forms salient to the learner and because they can be processed" (Ellis, 2002, p. 232).

3.4. Procedure

The experimental group was given a text in which the targeted form was highlighted through underlining, capitalising, italicising, enlarging,

bold type, and a combination of those techniques. Each session a new text was given and, all in all, the experimental group was given ten sessions such texts. Some questions were also added to the end of each text for participants to answer. The questions were designed in a way that they had to use positive answers and use third person singular "s", and use just main verbs. Two sample questions are given below:

1. What does Mr Robinson's friend advise him to do?
2. Does Mr Hodges run an editorial business?

The participants were instructed to read the text for meaning at first without the teacher's implicit or explicit instruction concerning the highlighted verb forms containing third person singular "s". Then, they were asked to answer the questions on the paper in front of the questions. After that, they were told to write the summery of the story on a separate sheet of paper. Having finished reading the texts, answering the questions and writing the summary of the story, they were told to hand in the sample texts and their summaries to their teacher. Then the researcher took them home and made corrections on only the targeted forms through reformulating them and provided them with correct answer and returned them to the participants the following session. This was done in order for participants to notice the gap—what they had produced and what was considered to be correct forms. This procedure continued for ten sessions. During this time, the control group was just given the same texts given to the experimental group, but without any highlighting the targeted form and questions; they were just told to read them.

To measure whether the participants noticed the targeted form, a noticing test was developed to tap into noticing. A short story, in which eleven verb forms containing third person singular "s" were included, was chosen. One week after treatment, the participants were read the short story once by the researcher and they were told to underline any special use of English which they had noticed during the treatment. When asked by the participants what was meant by special use of English, the teacher just commented any special use of English which

they noticed and tried not to be more specific. For convenience, instructions were given on test sheet.

Another second test, written production test, was developed to test the participants' acquisition of third person singular "s". It included three sub–tests: Grammaticality Judgment Test, Completion test, and Translation test. Completion test contained six items. The participants were asked to write the correct verb forms given in parentheses in front of each item in the blank for each item. Grammaticality Judgment Test consisted of only four items. In each item, a verb had been underlined and the participants were required to judge whether the underlined verbs were grammatically correct or incorrect. If incorrect, they were asked to make them correct. The Translation Test, which was a rather free production test, was a Farsi short story written in simple present and contained twelve sentences. The participants were asked to translate them into English. The teacher provided them with any words they did not know. Since our aim was to check whether they could use correct simple present tenses in English through translation, they were provided with English main verbs wherever it was possible they might use auxiliary verbs. Out of these twelve sentences, two sentences were eliminated because the verbs used in Farsi short story were negative and when translated into English, the translated verbs were negative too and third person singular "s" was not present because "s" is deleted when the verb is negative or when the sentence is in question form. Clear and unambiguous directions were given for each sub–test and participants had no problem in understanding what to do with the tests. Participants were required to finish answering the test in 20 minutes–six minutes was for completion test, two minutes for grammaticality judgment test, and twelve minutes for translation test.

Since the tests were researcher–made, their reliability had to be estimated. The Cronbach's alpha for both noticing and written production tests were .89 and .88 respectively. Both reliability coefficients were higher than .70.

3.6. Data analysis

The data for this study consisted of participants' underlining and written production one week after treatment. To measure and score noticing of the targeted form, the following procedures were adopted. For each correctly underlined verb form containing third person singular "s", one point was given and for those non-underlined verb forms containing third person singular, zero was given. Participants had underlined other verb forms and words which were underlined and were crossed out without assigning any grade. Then test scores were calculated for each individual by dividing the total correct scores by the total number of items, with each individual receiving a percent score for the whole test.

The same procedure was applied to written production test with a slight difference. Each correct response was given one point and each incorrect response was given zero. For those verb forms ending in "ch", "sh", "s(s)", "o", "z(z)", and "y", and "es" was considered the correct response and was given one point; otherwise, they were given zero if only "s" was added to them. For translation test, only verbs in ten sentences were taken into consideration and the rest of the sentence was ignored; of course, if subject-verb concord was ignored by the participants, they were given zero, too. After the test scores for both noticing and written production tests were collected, they were fed into a computer programme SPSS, version 23, for further data analysis.

4. Results

To test our first hypothesis to see that those participants receiving enhanced input notice the targeted form in the input greater than those who receive unenhanced input, an independent-samples *t*-test was run to make sure that the difference between the two groups was statistically significant. Tables 2 and Table 3 show the results of descriptive and inferential statistics for our hypothesis, respectively.

Table 2

Results of Descriptive Statistics

Group	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Experi	220	83.63	20.13
mental		51.36	35.91

control

Table 3: Results of Independent t-Test for Noticing Test

Group	N	Degrees of Freedom	T. Observed	Level of Significance
Experimental group	20	38	3.50	0.001
Control group	20			

Figure 2 graphically displays and compares the means of the experimental and control groups.

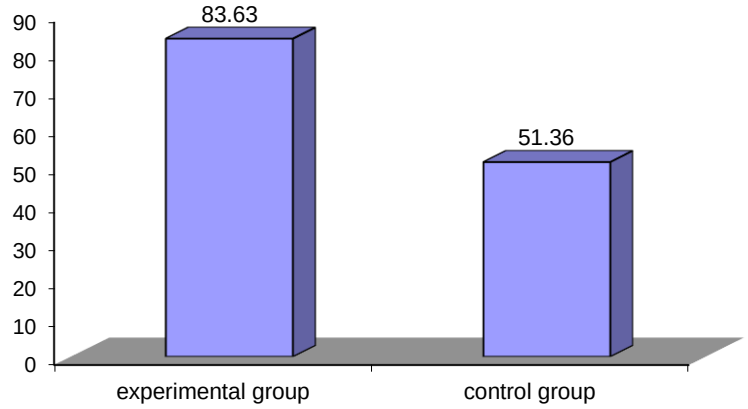

Figure 2: The Mean Values of the Experimental and Control Groups

According to the results of independent-samples *t*-test, there was a statistically significant difference between experimental and control groups ($t = 3.50$, $p < .05$). We can conclude that experimental group outperformed control group in noticing the third person singular "s".

To test the second part of the research question, another independent-samples *t*-test was employed to see whether there was a significant difference between the two groups. Table 4 and Table 5 show the descriptive and inferential statistics for our second hypothesis.

Table 4.
Results of Descriptive Statistics

Group	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Experimental	20	10.70	2.81
Control	20	8.35	2.47

Table 5
Results of independent t-Test

Group	N	Degrees of Freedom	T. Observed	Level of Significance
Experimental Control	20 20	38	2.80	0.008

Figure 3 displays and compares the means of both experimental and control group posttest, which indicates the superiority of experimental over control group.

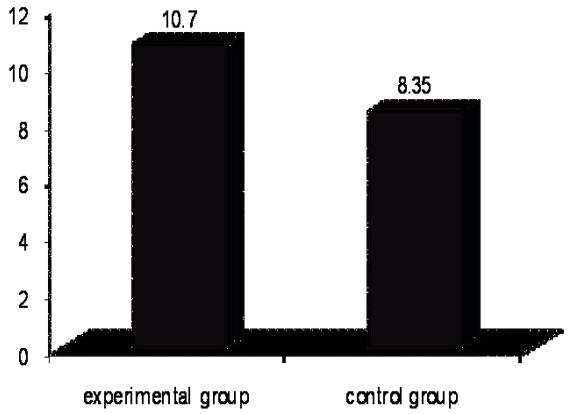

Figure 4: Bar Graph for Experimental and Control Group

According to the results of independent-samples *t*-test in table 4, we can find a statistically significant difference between experimental and control (t = 2.28, p < .05). This implies that the experimental group

produced third person singular "s" more accurately than did the control group.

5. Discussion

In this study, we set out to examine the effect of planned focus on form on noticing and acquisition on third person singular "s". We found that the enhanced input could result in noticing and acquiring third person singular "s". Below we discuss these findings in light of relevant theories.

The experimental group receiving visual input enhancement noticed the English third person singular "s" greater than did the control group receiving unenhanced input. According to the results of an independent *t*-test, a statistically significant difference was found between these two groups. This means that experimental group outperformed control group in noticing linguistic feature in input when their attention was drawn to it through enhancement. This finding is in line with Fotos (1993), Rouhi (2001), Leeman, Arteagoitia, Fridman and Doughty (1995), and Izumi (2002, but it is not in line with Leow (1997). Two factors may have contributed to the superior noticing of experimental group over control group. The most cogent reason can be the very fact that experimental group was exposed to texts during treatment period which arose their consciousness and attention and which subsequently led them to notice the form in later input. The frequency of the third person singular "s" in teacher's talk when talking to students and because of its abundance in the first units of their textbook can also be another reason.

The experimental group receiving visual input enhancement produced the English third person singular "s" more accurately than did the control group receiving unenhanced input. The results of an independent *t*-test showed a statistically significant difference between experimental and control groups in posttest, meaning that experimental group whose attention was drawn to third person singular "s" in input through textual enhancement acquired and produced it better and more accurately than did the control group. This finding is in line with Shook (1994), Jensen and Winther (2003), Doughty (1991), and Rouhi (2001),

but it is not in line with Leow (1997). "S" dropping by Iranian students is mainly partly because of its being semantically redundant, as Ellis (1997) stated. Further, because of its being unimportant for communication, as Harley (1993) asserted, and partly because of time constraints, it may be dropped. The superiority of experimental group over control group can be to a larger extent because of the saliency of the third person singular "s" in input during treatment sessions and its frequency in student-teacher interactions in the classroom and communicative input.

Although it has been claimed that explicit type of instruction seems to be more effective than implicit type of instruction (Norris & Ortega, 2000), and although it has been noted that, when explicit instruction is combined with implicit instruction, the results are more noticeable and remarkable (MacWhinney, 1997), the findings of this study yielded support to the efficacy of implicit instruction in an EFL setting.

We can argue that length of instruction and choice of linguistic features can be the two determining factors in form-focused instructions. In our own study, ten sessions were devoted to instruction, which is a rather long period of time compared to other studies done on form-focused instruction in which two or three tasks were done or two or three sessions were devoted to instruction. Concerning the linguistic feature in our study, we should note that English morphological third person singular "s" is much easier than passive voice or interrogatives which require movement to different parts of the sentence. Although it is by no means concluded that implicit instruction is effective for all forms in all settings for all individuals, we can cautiously contend that implicit instruction can be replaced by explicit instruction for easier, less processable linguistic forms in EFL settings as in Iran when instruction is lengthened and the targeted form is frequent in the input.

6. Conclusion and implications

Although we should be very cautious in generalizing our findings to other areas of related concern because of the limited scope of our study, the following implications are discussed. The first implication will be for language teachers in EFL settings. English language teachers are

supposed to relinquish teacher-fronted explicit instruction methods, flooding learners with a myriad of explicit rules and, instead, they are advised to provide learners with abundant exemplars of the target form because. As was concluded in this study, implicit instruction is effective for morphological forms as in the English third person singular “s”.

The second implication will be for syllabus designers. The selection of grammatical forms should be avoided in an old-fashioned, structural, linear manner in designing textbooks, but the choice of linguistic features should be based on the careful observation of learners during their interactions with one another or the teacher and, then those forms which are problematic and cause difficulties for them will be selected for syllabus and instruction.

The third implication goes to grammar textbook writers. Grammar textbook writers are recommended to introduce grammatical rules through consciousness-raising and attention-drawing devices and techniques such as those described and explained in this study. This has the advantage of noticing and consequently acquiring the particular grammatical rules.

The present study included the following limitations. We did not have a delayed posttest in this study to compare the results with those in posttest to show the stability and durability of the obtained findings. This was because we could not have access to the students after posttest because there should be at least one month interval between post and delayed posttests. Because of some restrictions, it was impossible for us to investigate the effect of visual input enhancement in speaking—one big restriction was that all the participants in the study were female and this did not allow us to record them while they were speaking.

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