Reexamining the Role of Implicit and Explicit Focus on Form: Iranian EFL Context

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Abstract

One of the most controversial questions raised by classroom second language acquisition (SLA) researchers is whether and how to include grammar in second language (L2) classrooms. Focus on form (FonF) was proposed as an alternative for the two polarized views, i.e., focus on formS and focus on meaning. It has been claimed that FonF is the most effective way of drawing learners' attention to language forms in the context of meaning-centered language use; however, there is no consensus as to the degree to which it should be explicit. To this end, this paper tried to investigate the role of FonF instruction in Iranian EFL context in general and the role of implicit and explicit FonF techniques on their linguistic accuracy in particular. 45 EFL learners were randomly assigned to two experimental and one control group. The instruction, using dictogloss, was introduced and lasted for three weeks. Then the participants from the three groups took three posttests including structured interview, multiple choice, and grammaticality judgment. The findings indicated that the experimental groups 1 and 2 receiving FonF instruction outperformed the control group. Further analysis of the scores of the participants in the experimental groups demonstrated the outperformance of the experimental group receiving implicit FonF technique through clarification request and recast compared to the experimental group receiving post task explicit FonF.

Keywords: Implicit focus on form, Explicit focus on form, Dictogloss, Feedback, Noticing

1. Introduction

The history of L2 teaching and learning has alternated between two single-minded approaches. Those that focused on analyzing the language, i.e., language usage (*focus on formS*) and those that focused on using the language, i.e., language use (*focus on meaning*). Though the second stance was considered to be more fruitful, researchers (e.g., Harley, 1993; Kwol & Swain, 1997; Lightbown, 1991; Lightbown & Spada, 1990; Swain & Lapkin, 1989) noted, among other things that as a result of an exclusive concern with meaning-based activities teaching makes available to L2 learners input that lacks in quality. In communicative language teaching (CLT) contexts, communicative activities alone were found to be insufficient for second language acquisition (Han, 2002). Experience with CLT and content-based instruction shows that meaning-based exposure to the language allows L2 learners to develop comprehension skills, oral fluency, self-confidence, and communicative abilities, but that they continue to have difficulties with pronunciation as well as with morphological, syntactic, and pragmatic features of the L2. Brown (1994, as cited in Xia, 2006) stated that CLT aims to be student-centered and meaning-based. Teachers working within the communicative context try to implement "real life" communication in the language classroom in order to get learners to develop linguistic fluency not just accuracy. This way of teaching does motivate and promote students' learning to a great deal. However, while we are emphasizing the pragmatic feature of the target language, we seem to "throw out the baby with the bath water" (p. 21).

Some SLA researchers (e.g., Doughty & Varela, 1998; Doughty & Williams, 1998; Williams & Evans, 1998) proposed that learners need to do more than simply to engage in communicative language use; they also need to attend to form and that an approach based on *focus on form* would work better. Recent classroom SLA research (Doughty & Varela, 1998; Kowal & Swain, 1997; Lightbown, 1991; Lightbown & Spada, 1990; Long, Inagaki, & Ortega, 1998; Mackey & Philip, 1998; Spada, 1987) has suggested that it is not only possible to integrate FonF with a focus on meaning but also that accuracy, fluency, and overall communicative skills are probably best developed through instruction that is primarily meaning-based but in which guidance is provided through timely form-focus activities in context. Long and Robinson (1998) argued that FonF attempts to capture the strengths of analytic approach while dealing with its limitations. FonF is defined by Long and Robinson (1998) as "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).

In spite of the arguments regarding the beneficial role of FonF instruction, one of the most controversial issues in the SLA research concerns the degree to which FonF should be explicit. Explicit FonF involves explicitly drawing learner's attention to deviance with or without an explicit rule explanation. Panova & Lyster (2002) argued that explicit correction signals to the student that there is an error in the previous utterance and unlike implicit correction, explicit correction involves a clear indication to the student that an utterance was

ill-formed and also provides the correct form. Implicit FonF, on the other hand, is indirect and can take various forms such as, repetition, clarification request, comprehension check, recast and corrective recast. The goal of the implicit and explicit techniques is to enable the learners to discern the gap between their interlanguage (IL) and the target language (TL) and to enable them to fill the gap. Whereas explicit corrective feedback can prompt learners to notice the gap by directly and overtly drawing their attention to the incorrect form it may turn a communicative task into a language-getting activity. Implicit corrective feedback, on the other hand, aims at inducing learners to detect the disparity between their IL and the TL without interrupting the communicative activity. According to Doughty and Varela (1998), arguments against explicit procedures center on the likelihood of precluding fluency, which has, after all, been the major advancement of communicative approaches to classroom language acquisition. In their view, a quintessential element of the focus must occur in conjunction with – but must not interrupt – communicative interaction. Implicit FonF techniques are potentially effective, since the aim is to add attention to form in a primarily communicative task rather than to depart from an already communicative goal in order to discuss a linguistic feature.

In this study attempts have been made to tackle and focus on one of the key issues in SLA, i.e., implicit and explicit FonF techniques and also to ascertain which one results in better accuracy rates. As discussed earlier, the disadvantage of explicit FonF is interrupting the natural flow of communication and there is a danger of turning communicative task into a language-getting activity and therefore precluding fluency. That is why in this study explicit FonF was provided at the end of the task and implicit FonF was provided through clarification request plus recast to first maximize the learners' attentional resources to the form and second examine some researchers' suggestion (e.g., Lyster, 1998; Lyster & Mori, 2006; McDonough, 2005) that the most successful L2 classroom would be the one in which a variety of feedback types is used and that the combinations of the feedbacks may work better than the isolated techniques.

The study was guided by the following questions:

1) Does focus on form instruction promote Iranian (Azeri) EFL learners' accuracy gains at intermediate level of language proficiency?

2) Is there any relationship between focus on form techniques (implicit and explicit) and learners' linguistic accuracy in general and their oral accuracy in particular?

2. Review of the related literature

2.1 The Role of Interaction, Corrective Feedback and Noticing in L2 Classroom

Interest in the potential role of corrective feedback in second language acquisition and teaching derives in part from the finding that exposure to comprehensible samples of a target language is necessary for acquisition but insufficient if learners are older children or adults and native-like proficiency is the goal (Long et al., 1998). Hammond (1995, as cited in

Rauber & Gil, 2004) pointed out that with the decline of the audio lingual method in the 1960s and 1970s and the popularity of communicative language teaching since then, less attention was given to the production of accurate output by EFL learners. The focus in EFL classes shifted, in the 1970s, to the ability to communicate, and form was believed to be acquired through learners' constant exposure to comprehensible input. However, the attitude of encouraging learners' communication and ignoring their local mistakes (grammatical or phonological errors that do not cause communication problems) in order not to inhibit fluency has generated some reflection regarding learners' intelligibility. Moreover, some L2 structures are unlikely to be acquirable from positive evidence alone (White, 1991, as cited in Long, et al., 1998), because learners would have to notice the absence of an option in the L2 that the L1 permits, such as placement of adverbs between verb and direct object in French or Spanish, but not in English (e.g., "She drank quickly the coffee"). This is unlikely, White suggests, when, as in adverb placement example, the error does not impede communication. This was evident in French Immersion classes in which immersion students were able to understand much of what they hear and read even at early grade levels. And, although they were well able to get their meaning across in their second language, even at intermediate and higher grade levels they often did so with nontarget like morphology and syntax (Swain, 1998). The data from the French Immersion classrooms also provide an explanation of why learners need to attend to meaning as well as linguistic aspects which otherwise may go unnoticed, unprocessed, and unlearned. In his *Noticing Hypothesis*, Schmidt (1990, 2001) argued that noticing is requisite for learning, stating that learners must consciously pay attention to or notice input in order for L2 learning to proceed. Those subscribing to the Noticing Hypothesis (Ellis, 1991; Gass & Varonis, 1994; Schmidt, 1990, 2001) also recognized the value of corrective feedback, assigning it a facilitative role in drawing learner attention to form. From this perspective, corrective feedback serves as a stimulus for noticing because such feedback triggers learners to recognize the gap between their IL and the target norm – this process in turn leads to subsequent grammatical restructuring. Similarly, Long (1996), in his updated *Interaction Hypothesis*, suggested the beneficial role of corrective feedback. He claimed that it provides not only direct and indirect information about what is grammatical but also additional positive evidence which may otherwise be absent in the input. According to Long, "*negotiation for meaning* and especially negotiation work that triggers *interactional* adjustments by the NS or more competent interlocutor" facilitates L2 development since it "connects input, internal learner capacities, particularly selective attention, and output in productive ways" (pp. 445–452). Negative feedback obtained during negotiation work or elsewhere may be facilitative of L2 development, at least for vocabulary, morphology, and language – specific syntax, and essential for learning certain specifiable L1–L2 contrasts. Gass (2003) argued that, what is intended is that through focused negotiation work, the learner's attentional resources may be oriented to (1) a particular discrepancy between what he or she "knows" about the second language and what is reality vis–a–vis the target language, or (2) an area of the second language about which the learner has little or no information. Learning may take place "during" the interaction, or negotiation

may be an initial step in learning; it may serve as a priming device, thereby representing the setting of the stage for learning, rather than being a forum for actual learning. Speakers in conversations negotiate meaning. Negotiation of meaning leads to modified interaction, which consists of various modifications that native speakers or other interlocutors make in order to render their input comprehensible to learners. At the discourse level, modifications include feedbacks such as recasts, comprehension checks, clarification requests, self-repetition or paraphrase, restatement and expansion of NNS statement and topic switches.

Negative feedback is not only of interest with respect to ultimate levels of L2 attainment, but also in light of studies showing a rate advantage for instructed over naturalistic acquirers, given that provision of some kind of "error correction" is one of the most pervasive instructional practices. The traditional approach, of course, is to provide explicit feedback on error, with the speaker's attention overtly directed at problematic code features. With implicit negative feedback, on the other hand, the message, not the code, remains the interlocutor's primary attention focus (Long et al., 1998).

Therefore, effective learning requires feedback, and the mere repetition of tasks by students is not likely to lead to improved skills. Learning often takes place best when students have opportunities to express ideas and get feedback from their peers. According to cognitive psychology, for learning to take place efficiently, the learner must pay attention to the learning objective, which incidental learning lacks. Widdowson (1990) also argued that incidental language acquisition is a long and rather inefficient business. From the perspectives of cognitive linguistics, there are some more good reasons to support error correction. To begin with, when L2 learners are not corrected, their errors tend to be stabilized and eventually fossilized. Based on McLaughlin's *information processing model* (1987, 1990, as cited in Tseng, no date), learning involves a shift from controlled towards automatic processing. Fossilization would arise as a result of inaccurate uses becoming automatic before the learner is native-like. Similarly, in their *Auto-input Hypothesis*, Schmidt and Frota (1986) suggested that when an error is not corrected, the erroneous form may serve as further input to the learner. If not corrected, the learner may incorrectly internalize the error. In a peer reading setting, other learners may modify their existing correct hypotheses to include the incorrect form. In a teacher to student conference setting, the student may perceive his or her incorrect forms as correct if the teacher did not indicate the errors. In addition, error correction may produce a consciousness raising effect, which is an essential element that accelerates the learner's language learning process. Schmidt (1993) described this consciousness raising effect as *noticing*, or bringing some stimulus into learner's focal attention either implicitly or explicitly. Smith (1994) and others argued that consciousness raising and input enhancement, through combinations of heightened saliency for target L2 items, metalinguistic commentary and/or negative feedback (i.e., correction), may be important components of effective classroom learning, at least for some parts of the target language system. Swain (1993) also indicated that noticing and hypotheses (of a second language) testing are two essential effects of output, which she believes is indispensable for

language learning. In brief, error correction offers consciousness-raising effect that incidental learning may lack.

2.2 Focus on Form Studies

Long and Robinson (1998) discussed a number of experimental studies that had compared the effectiveness of implicit and explicit teaching-learning conditions. The findings suggested that explicit FonF was better for simple rules than implicit learning was. The findings, however, were less clear-cut for complex rules, which generally appear to be difficult for learners in all conditions. Norris and Ortega's (2000, as cited in Gu, 2007) meta-analysis of experimental and quasi-experimental studies provided some positive evidence for the superiority of explicit instruction over implicit instruction and evidence for the durability of L2 instruction. Owing to its inherent indirectness, implicit corrective feedback has been considered less effective than explicit corrective feedback to attract learners' attention.

Panova & Lyster (2002) examined the range and types of feedback used by the teacher and their relationship to learner uptake and immediate repair of error. There were seven types of feedback in the study including: recast, translation, clarification request, metalinguistic feedback, elicitation, explicit correction, and repetition. The results revealed a clear preference for implicit types of reformulative feedback, namely, recasts and translation which accounted for 77% of the total number of teacher feedback turns. However, rates of learner uptake and immediate repair of error following them were low compared to that of other feedback types which encourage learner-generated repair. They argued that since the function of both recasts and translation, which accounted for more than three quarters of all feedback moves in their study, is to reformulate learner utterances by providing the correct model; therefore they do not necessarily require student responses. In contrast, other feedback types, such as repetition, clarification requests, elicitation, and metalinguistic feedback, are generally more successful at leading to immediate repair of learner errors and are able to prompt peer and self-repair. They suggested that techniques that promote negotiation of form by allowing students the opportunity to self-correct or to correct their peers resulted in the highest rates of uptake.

Hino (2006) investigated the connection between the process of SLA and negative feedback. The study focused on three feedback types: (1) implicit negative feedback that provided correct forms (e.g., recasts), (2) implicit negative feedback that encouraged modifications focusing on meaning (e.g., clarification requests), and (3) explicit negative feedback that provided the metalinguistic information utilized for modifications (e.g., metalinguistic cues). Their relative contributions to SLA were determined through a comparison of the extent to which learners modified their production toward greater accuracy after receiving each type of feedback. Additional factors were the grammatical focus of the feedback and the passage of time. Thirty-eight beginning-level learners of Japanese as a foreign language were engaged in picture-describing tasks with the researcher that solicited their production of an existential structure. During the tasks, the researcher provided designated types of negative feedback to

errors in learners' production. The major findings of the study were: (1) negative feedback showed the greatest facilitation on L2 production when encoded as metalinguistic cues followed by recasts, however, (2) clarification requests showed no significant facilitation. These findings underscored the importance of explicitness making negative feedback effective for SLA, and pointed to its encoding through models and metalinguistic information as crucial to this process.

Carroll and Swain (1993) designed an experiment in which they explored the effects of feedback on the ability of adult learners to recognize verbs that do or do not alternate in dative sentences. There were four experimental groups, each of which received different feedback conditions, and a fifth group served as a "no treatment" comparison group. Group A received explicit metalinguistic information. Group B learners were told explicitly when an utterance was wrong but were given neither explanation nor the correct form. Group C received "a reformulated correct response" or recast. When group D learners made an error, the experimenter asked if they were sure their answer was correct but were not provided with the correct form even if they persisted in their error. The results revealed that students in all the feedback groups performed better than the comparison group on recall sessions administrated immediately after the treatment sessions. In the first recall session, group A (explicit metalinguistic information) performed significantly better than groups B and D but not significantly better than group C, the recast group. However, in the second recall session, group A performed better than all other groups.

Campillo (2003) tried to investigate the effects of two types of feedback, that is, combination of more implicit feedback through repetition plus recast and combination of more explicit feedback through metalinguistic information and elicitation, on accuracy rates in both short and long-term learning. The participants in two groups worked on four different types of task including dictoglosses, text reconstruction, multiple choice, and close test. Group 1 received implicit feedback for the errors on the forms in focus and group 2 received explicit feedback for their errors. The treatments were introduced to the groups for 4 weeks. In order to determine the immediate effects of the treatments, the participants took a tailor-made test including the most frequent errors the students had made during the 4 weeks. To investigate the delayed effects they took another version of the test after treatment. The results of the analyses revealed that the combination of repetition plus recast (more implicit feedback) provided better accuracy rates, with significant differences in the text reconstruction task and in the test after treatment, i.e., immediate posttest, for conditional in group1. However, regarding the delayed test it was revealed that combination of metalinguistic information and elicitation (more explicit feedback) led to more accuracy rates.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

The participants of the present study were sampled from the population of Iranian EFL learners at intermediate level of language proficiency in Khoy city, West Azerbaijan province,

Iran. All participants were male and shared Azeri as their first language. Their age ranged between 16 and 28 years. They were studying English at Nima Language Institute for various purposes including academic achievement, communication in English, pursuing their education overseas, passing university entrance exam, etc. They were selected through the administration of Objective Placement Test developed by Cambridge University Press based on Interchange Third Edition. Out of 80 EFL learners, 45 met the criterion and were asked to participate in the study. They were randomly assigned to 2 experimental (15, 15) and one control group (15).

3.2 Materials and Procedures

To run the study first, 80 EFL learners took homogeneity test, i.e., Objective Placement. The test already contained some items related to the structure in question; however, some other questions about second conditional were added to the test which made the test suitable for serving a dual function: homogeneity test and pretest. Next, in order to focus on the aimed structure the dictoglosses containing the structure in focus were prepared and constructed by the teacher/researcher and were read to the learners twice with normal pace. Then, they worked in groups and shared their notes to reconstruct the text together. While they were presenting their reconstructed text to the class, the teacher had this opportunity to use FonF techniques including clarification request and recast for the experimental group 1 and post task explicit technique for the experimental group 2. The participants of the experimental group1 received clarification request for their erroneous utterances through their reconstruction process and after full production of the sentence during oral presentation. The clarification request signaled to the learner that there was something wrong with his production and also prompted other students to think about it and find out what was wrong, i.e., they also had the opportunity to correct their peers' erroneous sentences. If the students could not reformulate it while they had noticed the gap between their interlanguage and the target language, the teacher would recast that erroneous utterance maintaining the original meaning of the utterance and changing the erroneous part. The dictoglosses were also read to the learners in the experimental group 2 twice and then they reconstructed the text together without the provision of clarification request or recast during their reconstruction process or oral presentation to the class. Having reconstructed the text, they presented their reconstructed text and the teacher took notes about their problems. At the end of their oral presentation the teacher explicitly told them about their errors and provided them with the correct forms. The measures for the control group were similar to the experimental groups but the participants in the control group received neither implicit nor explicit FonF, though sometimes they themselves asked to be corrected. The treatments were introduced to the learners for 3 weeks – three sessions each week with each session lasting an hour and a half.

After treatment sessions, the participants from the 3 groups took 3 posttests including structured interview, multiple choice test, and grammaticality judgment. This was done to measure the consistency of the learners' performance over different types of tests, i.e., production and recognition, and to determine whether results obtained from one test could be

confirmed by other tests or not. The tests were constructed by the teacher/researcher. Structured interview aimed at measuring the learners' ability to produce the targeted structure orally. The participants were given the situations/statements which required the learners to use the aimed structure to reproduce those statements orally. Multiple choice required the learners to recognize the correct option from among the distracters. In grammaticality judgment test the learners had to choose the option that was not acceptable in the context of second conditional structure. The distracters for both grammaticality judgment and multiple choice tests were developed from the observation of the erroneous utterances of the learners during the treatment sessions. The reliability of the multiple choice and grammaticality judgment tests was calculated through KR–21 formula which turned out to be 0.58 and 0.73 respectively.

4. Data analysis

4.1 Analysis and Investigation of the Research Questions

To investigate the first question of the study that whether or not FonF instruction, through implicit and explicit techniques, affects Iranian (Azeri) EFL learners' accuracy gains at intermediate level of language proficiency, the data gathered from the 3 groups on 3 tests was submitted to SPSS. Since each participant had 3 scores from 3 tests (Structured interview, multiple choice, and grammaticality judgment), the total performance and standard deviation of the three groups were determined. As shown in table 1, the average means of the experimental groups 1 and 2 (16.21 & 14.28) on the three tests were higher than that of the control group (8.64).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for the total performance of the groups on 3 tests.

Group	Mean	Number	Std. Deviation
Control	8.6407	15	1.61115
Exp.1	16.2193	15	1.85195
Exp.2	14.2860	15	2.05012
Total	13.0487	45	3.71951

Note. Exp.1 stands for experimental group 1 and Exp.2 stands for experimental group

Table 2. ANOVA for the total performance of the 3 groups on 3 tests.

	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Between groups	465.219	2	232.609	68.076	.000
Within groups	143.511	42	3.417		
Total	608.730	44			

ANOVA for the total of 3 tests revealed that the F–observed for the 3 groups on 3 tests (68.076) was much larger than the F–critical (3.22) meaning that there was a treatment effect; however, to determine whether this difference is statistically significant or not, post-hoc analysis for the total accuracy gains of the 3 groups was employed.

Table 3. Post-hoc for the total performance of the 3 groups on 3 tests.

(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean Differences	Std. Error	Sig
Control	Exp.1	-7.57867*	.67497	.000
	Exp.2	-5.64533*	.67497	.000
Exp.1	Control	7.57867*	.67497	.000
	Exp.2	1.9333*	.67497	.024
Exp.2	Control	5.64533*	.67497	.000
	Exp.1	1.9333*	.67497	.024

* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

The results of the post-hoc analysis revealed that the mean differences among the three groups (N = 15) were statistically significant with the alpha set at $p \leq .05$. The average accuracy gain of the experimental group 1, receiving implicit FonF through clarification request plus recast, was higher than that of the experimental group 2, receiving post task explicit technique, and the control group. In addition, the mean score of the experimental groups 1 and 2 receiving FonF instruction were higher than that of the control group supporting the fact that FonF instruction would lead Iranian (Azeri) EFL learners towards more accuracy gains.

Table 4. Means of the 3 groups on 3 tests.

Group	S. Interview	M. Choice	G. Judgment	Number
Control	8.13	9.40	8.47	15
Exp.1	15.87	17.27	15.53	15
Exp.2	12.40	15.80	4.67	15

In order to determine the effects of implicit and explicit FonF techniques on oral accuracy of the participants, the accuracy gains of the learners in the three groups on each of the tests were investigated separately. As can be seen in table 4, the means of the experimental groups 1 and 2 and the control group on the three tests are different with the means of the experimental group 1 receiving implicit FonF higher than that of the other groups. The results of the groups' gains were then submitted to ANOVAs.

Table 5. ANOVA for the 3 groups on 3 tests.

Test		SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Interview	Between groups	450.133	2	225.067	47.013	.000
	Within groups	201.067	42	4.787		
	Total	651.200	44			
Multiple choice	Between groups	524.978	2	262.489	62.309	.000
	Within groups	176.933	42	4.213		
	Total	701.911	44			
G. Judgment	Between groups	445.644	2	222.822	58.200	.000
	Within groups	160.800	42	3.829		
	Total	606.444	44			

ANOVA for the 3 groups on 3 tests revealed that the *F*–observed for the 3 tests (Structured interview, 47.01; multiple choice, 62.30; grammaticality judgment, 58.20) was much higher than the *F*–critical (3.22) meaning that there was a treatment effect. Post-hoc analysis for the accuracy gains of the three groups on structured interview, which deals with their oral accuracy, was employed. The results demonstrated that there was a significant difference in the performance of the experimental groups on this test with alpha set at $p \leq .05$, that is, the mean scores of the experimental group 1 (N = 15) receiving implicit FonF through clarification request plus recast was significantly higher than that of the experimental group 2 (N = 15) receiving post task explicit feedback. Besides, the mean number of the experimental

group 2 was much higher than that of the control group (Table 6).

Table 6. Post-hoc for the structured interview.

Test	(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean Differences	Std. Error	Sig.
S. Interview	Control	Exp.1	-7.733*	.799	.000
		Exp.2	-4.268*	.799	.000
	Exp.1	Control	7.333*	.799	.000
		Exp.2	3.367*	.799	.000
	Exp.2	Control	4.267*	.799	.000
		Exp.1	-3.467*	.799	.000

With regard to the other tests, i.e., multiple choice and grammaticality judgment, their scores were also analyzed through post-hoc analysis. The results of the analyses for these tests revealed that there was no significant difference between the mean of the experimental groups 1 and 2.The following graph represents the accuracy gains of the groups on each of the tests separately.
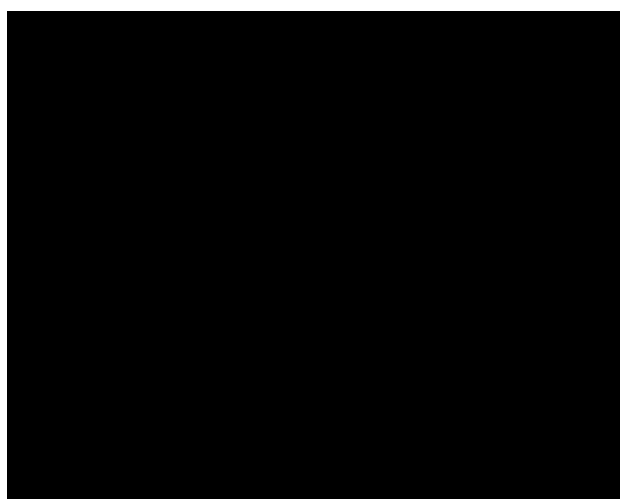

Figure 1. Separate Means of the 3 Groups on Each Test.

5. Discussion

The aim of the study was to deal with one of the most important issues in SLA, that is, whether teachers should focus on form or not and if yes, to what extent FonF should be explicit. This study, on the one hand, tried to focus on form within a communicative activity to see whether or not FonF instruction leads to more accuracy gains on the part of the Iranian (Azeri) EFL learners. On the other hand, since there is no consensus as to the effectiveness of the FonF techniques and their degree of explicit or implicitness, attempts were made to investigate the effectiveness of different FonF techniques. The study was guided by two

research questions. First, does implicit or explicit focus on form affect Iranian (Azeri) EFL learners' accuracy gains? Second, is there any relationship between focus on form techniques and learners' linguistic accuracy in general and their oral accuracy in particular?

The results of the analyses of the average accuracy gains of the three groups on three tests, through ANOVAs and post-hoc analyses, with alpha set at $p \leq .05$, revealed that the mean of the experimental groups receiving implicit and explicit FonF instruction was much higher than that of the control group which supported the claims that FonF instruction improves EFL learners' accuracy gains. The findings of the present study with regard to the first question can be considered as a supportive evidence for those studies that claim FonF instruction is an effective means of leading learners towards more accuracy by directing their attentional resources to notice the gaps in their interlanguage and their subsequent attempts to fill these gaps (e.g., Doughty, 2001; Ellis, 1994; Williams & Evans, 1998). The results of this study can also be compared with Xia's study (2006) claiming that form-focused instruction in a communicative classroom is beneficial to language learners, especially English majors. For their communication to be appropriate and successful, they need to gain linguistic accuracy as well as fluency.

Regarding the second question, the participants from the implicit FonF group outperformed the post task explicit FonF group in general and on the structured interview in particular. This means that implicit FonF technique through the combination of clarification request plus recast was more effective than post task explicit FonF technique. The implicit technique, on the one hand, tried to alleviate the major shortcoming of the implicit FonF by stimulating the learners' attention to discern the gap and providing them with the opportunity to produce modified output which according to Swain (1985) is necessary for L2 mastery and can be considered to represent leading edge of a learners' interlanguage. On the other hand, it dealt with the basic disadvantage of the explicit FonF, namely interrupting the flow of communication. According to Lyster (1998) clarification request provides learners with timely opportunities to make important form-function links in the TL without interrupting the flow of communication while maintaining the mutuality inherent in negotiation. To our knowledge, no study has compared the effectiveness of the clarification request plus recast with that of the explicit feedback; however, there are some similar studies that compared the combination of implicit techniques with explicit techniques or the combination of implicit techniques with isolated implicit techniques. For example, Campillo (2003) merged repetition and recast and compared it with explicit corrective feedback. The results revealed more accuracy gains for the group receiving combination of the corrective techniques. Moreover, Bell (2008) compared the effectiveness of the combination of elicitation plus recast with recast and elicitation in isolation and found support for the long term effects of the combination of implicit techniques compared to that of individual techniques. The results of this study can also be interpreted in the lights of the theoretical approach called *transfer appropriate processing* (TAP) which states that learners retrieve knowledge best if the processes for retrieval are similar to those that were used in the learning condition. Spade &

Lightbown (2008) argued that though TPA has only recently begun to receive attention in the SLA literature, it seems that it would predict that language learned during communicative activities in which learners' attention is briefly drawn to form would be more easily retrieved in communicative situations than, say, on decontextualized tests. This is consistent with the observation of many teachers and researchers: students who perform well on tests are not necessarily fluent users of the test items in spontaneous speech.

6. Conclusions and Implications

Both theory and research suggest that directing learners' attention to linguistic forms during meaning focused activities can help learners to develop accuracy as well as fluency. This study found that FonF instruction contributes to the learners' accuracy gains. Implicit FonF technique was found to be more conductive to their overall accuracy in general and to their oral accuracy in particular, i.e., though both FonF techniques develop their linguistic accuracy, implicit technique through the combination of clarification request plus recast turned out to be more effective than explicit post task technique. The findings of the present study can be reassuring to the teachers who already employ FonF techniques in their classes and encouraging to those who cast doubt on the beneficial role of FonF instruction. Since it is claimed that FonF does improve fluency as well as accuracy rates of the students, teachers should not be discouraged to stop communication for a moment to focus on form. In addition, the findings of the present study indicates that teachers can combine variety of techniques in dealing with their learners' accuracy problems as some SLA researchers (e.g., Lyster, 1998; Lyster & Mori, 2006) stated that the most successful L2 classroom would be the one in which a variety of feedback types is used and that the combinations of the feedbacks may work better than the isolated techniques. Although this study supports the provision of FonF (specially implicit) instruction, it would be interesting for further and a supplementary research to incorporate learners from both genders, different first language backgrounds and linguistic levels using FonF techniques other than those used in this study.

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