The Impact of Planned Input Enhancement and Incidental Focus on Form Strategies on the Writing Performance of Turkish Pre-Service Students

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ABSTRACT

In FL (foreign language) classrooms, focus on form instruction emphasizes overt references to difficult or more complicated forms and meaningful engagement. After the age of the communicative method, corrective feedback has gained prominence in recent decades. In addition, in recent years, the usefulness of various forms of feedback in educational settings has gained substantial traction in the second language literature, which has sought to throw additional light on many aspects of this approach. Because of the significance of error correction, the present research aimed to investigate the effects of planned and incidental focus on form on the writing performance of intermediate-level Turkish EFL learners. In order to carry out this research, forty EFL students were enlisted as participants. The participants were then divided into two groups: Planned focus on form and incidental focus on form. Writing pre-and post-tests were the other tools used in this investigation. The findings of a t-test on independent samples indicated that in terms of writing performance, EFL students in the planned focus on form group outperformed those in the incidental focus on form group. The study results have implications for teachers and students who adopt a planned method of education.

INTRODUCTION

According to researchers, studies about writing skill has attracted considerable interest during the last decades. Dolek and Hamzadayi (2018) state that international articles indicate that people with proficient writing abilities have a higher standing than those without. Writing, however, is undoubtedly the most challenging ability for students of a foreign language to acquire. According to the natural order hypothesis, writing is the last language skill to be learned; still, it is just as important as the other abilities.

Students of English as a foreign language (EFL) place a premium on writing instruction because it is a critical talent for achieving success in school and the workplace; moreover, students should pay close attention to form instruction in writing as part of the English curriculum at language institutes and universities (Bhowmik, 2021). One formal education technique that emphasizes the subject's point of view is the Learning Focus-on-form approach. Although others regard a focus on form as a return to classic grammar instruction approaches, focus on the form

can be done without frequent, random explanations and grammar practice. It implies the opposite: limiting what is explicitly taught (Ellis, 2009).

This study's results may raise students' awareness of the need to construct diverse writing assignments in various contexts and identify the varied impacts of focus on form teaching styles. Specifically, it investigates whether a focus on form favorably improves the presentation of language learners. This research offers a new information foundation for the crucial factors influencing the presentation of FL writing tasks, and the outcomes may be used by EFL students and teachers, text developers, and institution teachers. Studies on second language learning in the classroom have also shown that focusing on form, especially during instruction, helps students learn better (Ellis, 2009).

Review of related literature

Since the 1990s, there has been considerable interest in form-focused training, and many articles have supported the notion that formal education is necessary for FL development (Gumus, 2021; Kellem & Halverson, 2018; Brown, 2005). Studies on second language learning in the classroom have also shown that focusing on form, especially during instruction, helps students learn better (Ellis, 2009). According to cognitive theory, if we want our students to become fluent in the SL, we should enable them to practice using it by having them communicate in it while still retaining the necessary declarative information in working memory (Saw, 2017). Ramírez-Castañeda (2020) stated that more than fifty percent of academic papers and more than ninety percent of online pages are published in English each year. This evidence highlights the importance of English and writing skill in today's society. A form-focused education focuses on form; it attracts learners' attention to linguistic characteristics that occur incidentally in a session where meaning and communication are the primary emphases (Long, 1991).

Many language students aim to possess a firm grasp of EFL writing, but it is not easily attained. The lack of communicative objectives in ELT curriculum design exacerbated the problem in the Turkish setting. As an essential component of EFL, writing has received insufficient attention from students and teachers in the general instruction of English in many Turkish schools and organizations. However, as the emphasis on communicative language teaching has grown in the current decade, the emphasis on learning writing has increased. Writing is regarded as one of the most essential aspects of language instruction. Urbanova and Oakland (2002) believe that written language has a substantial social and educational function and high social prestige in modern society. While some learners and teachers recognize the importance of writing in learning English, most students need help with writing. There are a lot of intelligent children who need help to write down their ideas. You can tell this just by listening to what they say.

Erkaya claims that Turkish EFL students might increase their writing proficiency in a foreign language (2009). Form-focused education plays a significant part in the EFL classroom, and a range of second or foreign-language abilities may be advanced via a meaningful focus on the form (Ellis, 2009). Focusing on form training also aids the development and formation of grammatical, logical, and textual concepts in the target language's writing (Hişmanoğlu, 2005). In order to help students improve their writing skills, teachers can become more aware of and understand their current teaching and learning practices. They can also pay closer attention to the

best ways to teach writing by using planned and incidental lessons to assess students' writing abilities (Cole & Feng, 2015).

This research aims to determine if form-focused instruction is helpful for teaching foreign language writing. In addition, this research aims to demonstrate the significance of form-focus, its instructional value, and its significant role in enhancing second-language writers' skills. This research expands implications from several perspectives. It is essential to highlight that little research on the influence of form-focused training on L2 writing was undertaken in EFL contexts in Turkey, and as far as the researcher knows, not many research papers have looked at how communicative tasks affect Turkish EFL learners` writing in a foreign language.

Research Questions

The goal of the research was to examine the influence of planned and incidental focus on form teaching on the writing of EFL learners. The following research question will be addressed.

To what extent does planned and incidental focus on form instruction affect Turkish EFL Learners writing performance?

Based on the study's objective, the following null hypothesis was developed:

There is no substantial difference between planned and incidental focus on form teaching in terms of the writing performance of Turkish EFL students.

METHODOLOGY

This research aimed to examine the relationship between planned and incidental attention to form (independent variables) and the quality of writing produced by EFL students (dependent variable). To achieve this, a quasi-experimental study with pre- and post-tests was conducted. Generally, a typical experimental study uses comparisons to evaluate research problems (Mackey & Gass, 2005). Due to non-probability and simple random sampling, this study is quasi-experimental. As most focus on form or corrective feedback replies by teachers in English classes are accidental rather than planned or purposeful, the incidental group served as the control group, and the planned focus on form instruction group served as the experimental group.

Participants

The participants in this research were forty intermediate EFL students from a public university in Turkey. The sample was selected using the convenience sampling approach from the same population following a homogeneity test. Then, each person was randomly allocated to either the "planned" or "incidental" group, where their attention was specifically directed to the form. This study's participants were 20 students in each group. As a teacher at the university under investigation, the researcher was responsible for 14 teaching sessions.

Instruments

In this investigation, multiple tools were used. Following is a quick explanation of the studied instruments.

Nelson proficiency test

The Nelson Proficiency Test was used to standardize the level of language proficiency among the participants at the beginning of the study. The Nelson English Language Tests (Fowler & Coe, 1976) are comprised of primary to advanced-level assessments. This research used exam 200 B from the Intermediate level to homogenize the subjects. One standard deviation (SD) above and below the mean was the benchmark for determining whether student performance was homogeneous. Cronbach Alpha was used to assess and report the exam's validity.

Pretest and post-test

The supplemental instruments utilized in this research were a pre-and post-test in writing, which the teacher used to obtain quantitative data on the participants' writing performance. The pretest duration was 45 minutes. It was an argumentative topic about "eating at school." Students were required to compose a 300-word essay on the issue and support their arguments with reasons. The writing pretest was administered one week after the Nelson test and before the beginning of the research. After completion of the procedure, all students in each group were given a post-test with a writing topic different than the pretest. The subject of the post-test was:

Teenagers have unfettered access to computers in today's culture. It may have more negative effects on children than positive ones: Do you agree or disagree?

Both the pre-and post-tests were written to gauge the students' capacity to express agreement and disagreement, yet, the topics and questions covered were obviously different. The similarity between the pre-and post-tests was guaranteed by using the same writing style for each. The researcher looked at a number of important validity- and reliability-related factors to decide what would be included in the pre-and post-tests. The exams were collected from the intermediate-level Interchange course book. Initially, the researcher attempted to take into account the crucial validity elements of content validity, face validity, and test comparability. Therefore, it was crucial to examine whether or not the students had prior knowledge of the writing topics. Therefore, it was crucial to examine whether or not the students had prior knowledge of the writing themes.

In addition, Mackey and Gass (2005) claimed that writing researchers must pick a suitable subject based on the same essay format since the pretest and post-test must be of equal difficulty. The researcher was able to locate writing topics that corresponded to the subjects in the students' English textbooks. As a consequence, this study's pre- and post-test exam questions challenged participants to express and defend their viewpoints. Thus, the criterion-related validity of the exam was also crucial. By picking examples from the Writing tasks of the General Module of IELTS, the researcher attempted to use a test that was equivalent to a recognized writing test.

Rubric Allen (2009)

Students' pre- and post-test compositions were evaluated using criteria Allen (2009) developed for evaluating participants' writing. The five writing-related criteria this rubric emphasizes are content, organization, grammar, language usage, and mechanics. Each factor on this scale gets its score. This scale was utilized in the study because it provides the researcher with more valuable diagnostic information and a more accurate image of the individuals' writing skills, as well as the ability to identify the strengths and shortcomings of the writer.

Procedure

To conduct this study, an initial convenience sample of 40 EFL learners between the ages of 18 and 25 studying English at one of the public universities in Turkey was selected from the total population of 50 students. These participants were randomly separated into incidental and planned focus-on form groups. The Nelson proficiency test as a general English proficiency test was conducted to determine whether or not the students' general English competence is homogeneous. After removing 10 students from the research, 40 were chosen from the original group of 50. The students took a pretest on one of the course book themes. The pretest was 45 minutes long. It was a contentious matter about school meals. Students were required to produce a 300-word essay on the issue and defend their position with supporting arguments. For the pretest, all groups were given the same subject. After this step, the compositions were analyzed and graded using an Allen (2009) writing rubric, and the findings were considered. Following the completion of all procedures, the treatment began.

The incidental groups, as the control group, did not receive planned prior attention on form throughout the 14 sessions during the semester. Students were obliged to compose an essay, and after completion, the lecturer collected the essays. The teacher returned the papers at the following session and spent time addressing students' queries about their essays and the provided comments. It was believed that the students would possess the proper paperwork. In her written corrective feedback notes, the lecturer evaluated the content, use of cohesive devices, words, grammar, punctuation, task purpose, and syntax, as well as the language's appropriateness, pronunciation, format, organization, and coherence. The teacher indicated the position of errors using lines, circles, and highlighting and added comments next to the student's work. It was simple for the students to identify their errors and connect them to the teacher's detailed remarks. It was helpful to call attention to the errors since they represented an issue that needed to be addressed. However, the teacher did not address the complexities and difficulties that students may encounter while writing; she permitted the correction of additional material and possible errors after the fact and did not provide students with preventive assistance.

In contrast, the experimental group received planned attention and delayed written correction feedback as two essential components of their writing activities. Before each lesson, the teacher sent the students supplemental worksheets that she had created at home for each paper subject. Each handout had words, phrases, and parts of grammar that were thematically important or highly relevant to the topic of the assigned essay. Teacher-made handouts paid close attention to grammatical structures that were appropriate for the essay subject at hand as a planned focus on the writing. The students were first given 15 to 20 minutes to review the handout and practice applying the language principles as a pre-writing language exercise. Before starting their essays, students were invited to address any questions they may have had about the handout.

Additionally, the teacher assisted the class in identifying and applying the language features shown in the handouts. Before writing, the teacher supplied the students with sample sentences demonstrating the correct and acceptable usage of the terminology or structures offered. Then, students were instructed to compose an essay on the specified subject, and the teacher collected their essays as she did with control group essays. She then provided both groups with delayed written correction comments.

The experimental and control groups had the same course length. After 14 sessions, the researcher administered a post-test in the form of a 45-minute written exam to each group to assess

the efficacy of the treatments on the students' writing. To examine the impact of the treatment, the post-test subject was different from the pretest subject. The current study's last step was using the research rubric to evaluate the participants' writing samples.

DATA ANALYSIS

The acquired information was put into SPSS for analysis. To examine the normality of the data, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used. Various statistical techniques were employed to test the study hypotheses, including descriptive and inferential statistics. Using descriptive statistics, the group means, and standard deviations were determined. In order to examine the hypotheses, inferential statistical methods were used. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was performed to determine if the pretest and post-test had a normal distribution. The independent samples t-test was then conducted to see if there were any significant differences between groups.

The Nelson test was administered to fifty intermediate-level students. The students with uniformity ratings between 30 and 40 were selected. The descriptive statistics, KR-21 reliability index, and normality tests for the Nelson are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Nelson

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance	Skewness		Kurtosis	
					Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Nelson	50	33.10	9.6	92.4	-.23	.22	.61	.51
KR-21	.83				Ratio	-.98	Ratio	1.02

The Nelson test reliability for the KR-21 was 0.83. The data distribution on the Nelson matched the criteria for normalcy. The percentages for Skewness and kurtosis were less than +/- 1.96 times their standard errors. To demonstrate that the participants had the same level of general language competence prior to the main analysis, an independent t-test was conducted to determine the means of their Nelson test scores. On the basis of the data shown in Table 2, it can be concluded that the unintentional focus on form group (M = 34.4, SD = 3.4) and the intended focus on form group (M = 33.9, SD = 3.19) had Nelson test means that were rather similar.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Nelson by Groups

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Control	20	34.4	3.4	.577
Experimental	20	33.9	3.19	.565

Table 3. Independent Samples t-test for Nelson

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
			Sig	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Nelson Test	Equal variances assumed	.006	.94	-.83	50	.500	-.70	.85

A t-test was also conducted to check that there was no statistically significant difference between the two classes' mean values prior to the experiment. The results of the t-test for the Nelson test are shown in Table 3.

Levine's test for the equality of variances is .006, p<0.05. Before the experiment, there was no statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups, as shown by

| | | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | |
			Sig.		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Nelson Test	Equal variances assumed	.006	.94		-.83	50	.500	-.70	.85

the t-test (t = -0.83, df = 36, p>0.05).

Inferential Data Analysis

At the beginning of the research, all students in the groups were given a pretest to see whether or not the students' writing outcomes were comparable. The descriptive data for the pretest ratings are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of Pretest in Writing

Pretest	N	Minimum	Maximum	mean	SD	variance
Incidental Pretest	20	7.2	11.3	9.2	1.7	2.3
Planned Pretest	20	8.2	11.4	9.2	1.6	2.4

Table 4 demonstrates that the incidental group's mean score is 9.2 with a standard deviation of 1.7, whereas the intended focus on form group's mean score is 9.2 with a standard deviation of 1.6. As shown in Table 5, the means of the groups differed slightly. However, the differences between groups had to be statistically evaluated; hence, the assumption of the parametric test had to be examined. A presumption is that the data should have a normal distribution. The test of normalcy for the pretest between the groups is shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Tests of Normality of for Group's Pretest Scores

	Group name	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Pretest	Incidental	.12	25	.200[*]	.94	25	.28
	Planned	.15	25	.08	.95	25	.081

According to Table 5, the Significance level for the incidental group is 0.28, and for the planned group, it is 0.08. Since the Sig values are greater than 0.05, there is no substantial difference between the two groups' writing pretest scores. We may thus infer that the data were regularly distributed. Thus, a t-test is needed to assess the pretest group differences. Table 6 illustrates the outcome.

Table 6. Independent Samples t-test for pretest

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Pretest	Equal variances assumed	.006	.93	-.9	50	.350	-.7100	.90

Levene's test used to see if the variances were the same gave a value of.006, which is less than 0.05. As a result, it is presumed that the variances are identical, and it is shown that using independent samples to do a t-test is legitimate. The t-test findings (t = -.9, df = 36, p>0.05) indicate that there was no statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups on the writing pretest. Therefore, it is possible to infer that the groups' writing abilities were comparable at the outset of the research. After administering treatments to the learners in the study over the course of 14 teaching contexts, a post-writing examination was administered. The descriptive statistics for the post-test in writing are shown in Table 7.

Table 7. Descriptive Statistics of Writing Post-test

Post-test	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Incidental	20	10.00	14.00	13.00	1.8
Planned	20	11.00	18.00	17.00	2.4

The mean score for the incidental focus on form group is 13,00, and the standard deviation is 1.8, as shown in Table 7. In addition, the planned focus on form group has a mean of 17 and a standard deviation of 2.4. As seen in Table 7, the means of the groups differed marginally. However, the differences between groups had to be statistically evaluated; hence, the assumption of the parametric test had to be examined.

As noted before, one of the assumptions is that the data should have a normal distribution. Pretest and post-test findings were submitted to the same normality test. Tabulated in Table 8 are the results of the post-test normality test.

Table 8. Normality of Posttest

	Group name	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Post-test	Incidental	.14	25	.056	.92	25	.067
	Planned	.13	25	.200*	.93	25	.104

a. Significance Correction

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

The results of the Shapiro-Wilk test demonstrate that all groups' p-values are greater than the significance level.05 (as shown in Table 8), suggesting that the data are regularly distributed. Regarding this, the parametric t-test might be run. Table 9 illustrates the outcome.

Table 9. Independent Samples t-test for Post-test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
post	Equal variances assumed	0.3	.31	4.32	50	.000	2.411	.57	1.32	3.43

Levene's test for the equality of variances is F=0.29 with a significance level of.31, as shown in Table 9. The null hypothesis asserting that there is no difference between the two groups is rejected based on the t-test findings (t = 4.32, df = 36, p 0.05). It shows that there is a statistically significant difference between the scores of the two groups. In comparison to students in the incidental focus on form group, those in the experimental group or planned focus on form group performed better.

Discussion

This study evaluated the effects of planned and unplanned form-focused instruction on the writing abilities of Turkish EFL learners at the intermediate level. The findings of the independent samples t-test suggested that planned focus on form teaching had a greater impact on writing performance than incidental focus on form instruction; hence, the P value is less than 0.05. The results of this research indicate that a planned emphasis on form training improved the writing abilities of adult EFL learners. This study's findings conclude that both groups' writing skills improved between the pre-and post-tests. However, planned concentration on form education produced better results than incidental focus on form training. This study's findings concur with those of Ferris and Robert (2001), who found that students who got feedback did much better than those who received no response.

According to Foster and Skehan (1996) and Mehnert's (1998) research, students cannot concentrate on both form and meaning simultaneously.; hence, learners find it challenging to simultaneously pay attention to both form and content. Consequently, throughout the writing process, according to Foster and Skehan (1996), the learner's focus is immediately oriented toward meaning, while the form is naturally neglected.

According to Ellis (2008), acquiring a second language involves the self and others. One of the mechanisms via which sharing happens is scaffolding. According to him, scaffolding is the process by which one learner (either an expert or a starter) helps another learner who is a beginner do a task that they cannot execute on their own. In the present study, teachers might assess, refresh, and reinforce their students' knowledge in order to assist them in writing better essays. Students in

the experience group benefited more from the teacher's scaffolding tactics. They were able to make more effective use of their limited time and effort while writing than their counterparts in the control group.

Yoshida (2008) uncovered an ESL context study examining learners' preferences for recasts versus prompts or a mix of various forms of corrective feedback. Seven Japanese students learning English in an immersion environment in Australia participated in stimulated recall sessions, and the results revealed that most students preferred time for self-repair over the planned correction or feedback alone. Researchers also acknowledge that individual variations, including intellect, cognition, and learning styles and techniques, play an essential part in designing successful methods for teaching target language grammar via experimentation (Gürsoy & Eken, 2018).

CONCLUSIONS

This research aimed to determine the efficacy of planned and incidental focus on form on the intermediate level of writing performance in EFL learners of Turkey. Based on the findings, the P value is lesser than 0.5, so the results of the t-test demonstrated that planned/intentional focus on the form had a significant influence on EFL learners' writing performance. Critically, this study's findings suggest that students benefit from linguistic scaffolding to improve their essay writing and that instructors' deliberate scaffolding measures are as beneficial as their ad hoc focus on form interventions. The findings support the idea that L2 acquisition programs need positive and negative feedback. This study also suggests that academics and practitioners have access to a broader range of focus on form choices by making the planned focus on form part of meaning-oriented programs to pay more attention to form.

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