

## THE ROLE OF PROACTIVE FOCUS ON FORM TEACHING TECHNIQUE ON TEACHING ENGLISH PREPOSITIONS

**Intesar Othman Elwerfalli**, PhD in Applied Linguistics,  
**Youssif Zagwani Omar**, PhD in English Education,  
**Nora SaadAlarefi**, MA in Applied Linguistics



**Crossref** <http://dx.doi.org/10.26739/2433-202x>

**Issue DOI** <http://dx.doi.org/10.26739/2433-202x-209-2019-1-3>



**Article DOI** <http://dx.doi.org/10.26739/2433-202x-2019-1-3-9>

**Annotation:** several studies have examined the effect of explicit and implicit teaching strategies on different areas of grammar. There were different findings and opinions about their effect on teaching learners of English as a second language. This study is an attempt to test two teaching strategies, namely, input flood and deductive teaching, to find out which one has the most influence on learning English prepositions. The study was conducted on 40 female third-year high school students in Benghazi. They were divided into two classes: 20 students in each. One class received deductive teaching (Control Group), and the other class received input flood teaching strategy (Experimental Group). The results showed that although both groups improved from pre-test to post-test 1, the improvement of the experimental group in post-test 2 remained one month after the treatment was conducted.

**Key words:** focus on form teaching, explicit/implicit teaching strategies, input flooding, deductive teaching, English prepositions English prepositions.

### 1. Introduction

A number of grammar instruction strategies and techniques are presented to improve learners' productive and receptive English skills. Yet, the existing problem of teaching grammar is whether to teach it explicitly or implicitly. That is, to teach grammatical rules as a separate skill or to be indirectly incorporated with other language skills. As teaching grammar at high school in Libya is based on explicit teaching strategy (deductive teaching), this study attempts to test an implicit teaching technique to show its effectiveness both on short and long periods of time.

### 2. Literature Review

Many researchers and studies have emphasized the importance of teaching grammar as an essential element for learning any language. That is because grammar, as Chomsky (2006) clarifies, "generates an infinite set of 'structural descriptions,' each structural description being an abstract object of some sort that determines a particular sound, a particular meaning, and whatever formal properties and configurations serve to mediate the relation between sound and meaning" (pp. 91-92). Grammar is core in any language as it indicates the

**Japan, Osaka**

meaning of a sentence structure in various contextual situations. Grammar is used as a set of forms and structures to give both shape and function of language.

Grammar, according to Crystal (Cited by Machin, Hindmarch, Murray, and Richardson, 2013) is "the structural foundation of our ability to express ourselves. The more we understand how it works, the more we can watch the effectiveness of the way we and others use language" (p. 169). Grammar, moreover, is a branch of linguistic science that is mainly concerned with the description and analysis of words separately (morphology) and how these words function in formal language structures of sentences (syntax).

### **2.1 Focus on Form**

To show importance of grammar to language, Omar (2018) emphasizes that "language as a system of symbols includes sounds (phonology) and syntactic structures (grammar) for communication with people, who use the same vocal symbols in forms of speech and syntactic structures in forms of sentences" (p. 379). This indicates that teaching grammar is core in foreign language learning. Goodman (1986) defines grammar as "the system of language. It includes the limited number of rules necessary to produce an almost infinite number of utterances that will be understood by speakers of a specific language" (p. 13).

House and Harman (1982) believe that "since grammar is a science, it must describe and analyse the basic facts of speech, and explain and interpret the laws governing the behaviour of language" (p.16). Chomsky (2006) shows the importance of teaching grammar as grammar "is a system of many hundreds of rules of several different types, organized in accordance with certain fixed principles of ordering and applicability and containing certain fixed substructures which, along with the general principles of organization, is common to all languages" (p. 77).

However, the ongoing debate is about how to teach grammar. Some scholars prefer explicit teaching strategies while others believe that grammar should be taught implicitly combined with other language skills. In other words, the focus on teaching grammar to be either proactive or reactive. The former entails the selection in advance of an aspect of language on which to focus; whereas, the latter requires the instructor to notice and be prepared to handle learning problems as they arise.

Generally speaking, proactive focus on form (or pre-emptive focus on form) requires a teacher or a learner to initiate explicit attention to a linguistic form in order to prevent an erroneous form to occur. The reactive focus on form takes place when a student has said something erroneous and the instructor or another student reacts to this error and corrects it (Kamiya, 2012). Baleghizadeh (2010) has distinguished the difference between these two types of focus on form as: "Reactive focus on form addresses errors (i.e. performance problems) which have emerged in the context of meaningful communication. Pre-emptive focus on form, on the contrary, addresses problems which are predicted to occur and thus block communication" (p. 122).

**Japan, Osaka**

For the purpose of this study, only proactive (pre-emptive) focus on form is discussed as it is to be adopted for the teaching of third year high-school students in Benghazi. Focus on form teaching techniques can be implicit. It takes place in instructional tasks that do not provide specific guidance on what is to be learned from the task. This means that a teacher teaches some language skills using indirect teaching techniques. Moreover, teachers provide examples, illustrations, or visualizations of knowledge components without a direct statement (or rule) that specifically directs the learner on what is to be learned.

Izumi (2012) believes that in an implicit focus on form class, natural communication is generally not interrupted, and learners are less likely to notice the targeted form. In line with Izumi, Ellis (2009) emphasizes that implicit teaching is a kind of teaching where teachers do not outline learning goals or make explanations overtly, but rather simply they present the information or problem to learners and allow them to make their own conclusions.

**Ling (2015) defines implicit instruction as:**

The teaching methods emphasizing students must be naturally acquired through situational scene when learning grammar. Implicit grammar teaching is also known as suggestive method, mainly adopting the inductive thinking method, and inducing the grammar rules through communicative use of the language. Learners contact with English mainly through scenes. This teaching method makes communicative teaching method as representation, emphasizing the unconsciousness, abstractness, and automaticity of grammar study. (p. 557)

Similarly, Norris and Ortega (2000) see that implicit instruction is "neither rule presentation nor directions to attend to particular forms were part of treatment" (p. 473). The teacher's role implicit instruction has, then, be shifted to be a facilitator, rather than an expert in the classroom. In other words, the teacher's role is not to teach, but to provide the rich context to students in classroom, so that they have a large number of activities in the classroom to read, write, listen, and speak in the target language. In this situation, the classroom shifts into a whole language (WL) classroom.

In this regard, Omar (2012) emphasizes that "it is crucial that in the WL classroom, teachers have good relationships with learners. The teacher's role in the WL classroom is not to teach, but it is to facilitate the process of learning and help learners acquire new knowledge".

However, Izumi (2012) has provided some of the techniques that are used to achieve implicit focus on form. These techniques include input flood, input enhancement, task-essential language, and recast. In this study, only input flood teaching technique is utilized.

In its wider sense, input flooding is a process whereby input is enhanced to contain an abundance of occurrences of the target form. Wong (2004) sees that in input flood, "the input learners receive is saturated with the form that we hope learners will notice and possibly acquire. We don't usually highlight the form in any way to draw attention to it nor do we tell learners to pay attention to the form" (p. 37)

Moreover, Han, Park, and Combs (2008) believe that input flooding strategy builds the salience of a target language feature through artificially planned recurrence. A number of studies supported input flooding strategy. For example, the study of Van Patten, Williams, and Rott (2004) which has shown that reiteration is a vital factor in achieving language proficiency.

Another type of instruction is deductive teaching. It is a kind of explicit teaching. It is a strategy aims to provide learners with grammatical rules, describe how new structures are formed, what their components are, and in which type of context they can be used. The information in this strategy is given by the teacher (teacher-centred) and requires a teacher to present grammatical patterns followed by examples, and then the learners practice them. It is based on the idea that the presentation of grammatical rules achieves optimal learning. Instructors present a rule, define it and then provide instances, which are followed by practice sessions on the subject of the rule. Opportunities for practice and feedback may be provided in order to master a concept. This type of instruction provides a clear clarification of grammatical rules; it is a direct method and may result in making the learning task easier and less intimidating.

A considerable number of studies such as Fey and Finestack (2009) and Tezi (2014) have examined the effects of deductive teaching and input flood on learning grammar. The results demonstrate that deductive teaching is more appropriate and effective in teaching grammar as it aids the speedy mastering of the linguistic elements. However, the studies of Trahey and White (1993) and Bouffard (2015) showed that input flood teaching was more effective on teaching grammar.

In general, both deductive teaching and input flooding teaching strategies have been praised by some researchers and criticised by others. Despite the criticism of these two kinds of teaching, this study has adopted them in order to figure out which one is more effective in teaching English prepositions.

## **2.2. English Prepositions**

Various researchers in the literature agree that prepositions are difficult to learn because they have different meanings in other languages. According to Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary, a preposition is a word that is used before a noun, a noun phrase, or a pronoun, connecting it to another word. Prepositions, also, show a relationship in space or time or a logical relationship between two or more people, places or things.

With respect to form, Ballard (2013) states that English prepositions comprise two types: single-word preposition and multi-word preposition. The first type includes only one word such as on, in, at, for, with, and others; whereas, the second type consists of two or three words such as according to, on behalf of, in front of, and the others. Fang (2000) states that preposition can connect a noun to another noun, a noun to an adjective, or a verb to a noun. According to Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, and Svartik (1985), classify prepositions as:

**Japan, Osaka**

1.	Space  (specify the direction of an entity relative to a referent)  out of)  (towards- into - away)  above and below, between)  through,across)	Position and direction  Static position ( to, from, at, on,  Movement in a direction  Relative preposition (opposite,  Passage ((behind,
2.	Time  between, during)	Time position (at, in, on) Time duration (from ... to,
3.	Cause and purpose (because of, on account of, for)	
4.	From means to stimulus (by, with, without)	
5.	Accompaniment (with, unlike)	
6.	Concession It can be expressed with different degree of formality by prepositions (in spite of, for all) Prepositions for exception (except for)	

### 3. Methodology of the Study

In this study the researchers conducted Quantitative Research Method, in which they based on getting results statistically, using a quasi-experimental research design, in which the researchers presented pre-test, post-test 1, and post-test 2 among two different groups (Control Group and Experimental Group) in order to remark the differences and effects of teaching prepositions.

#### 3.1. Problem of the Study

Studies and research reveal that most Libyan students encounter challenges regarding using English prepositions in both oral and written contexts. Based on these research and studies and their own noticing, the researchers see that most Libyan learners of English encounter challenges in using English preposition system. Most Libyan learners of English confuse using preposition system when they speak or write in English.

#### 3.2. Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study was to explore the challenges Libyan learners of English encounter regarding preposition system in English. Thus, the study focuses mainly on carrying out a thorough investigation about some facts related to English preposition system, through literature review and having pre-test, post-test 1, and post-test 2 on two groups of Libyan students.

#### 3.3 Participants of the Study

The participants in this study are third year high-school students in Benghazi. There are 40 female participants. The researchers equally divided the participants into two classes, in which each class contained 20 students. The students' age ranged from 17 to 18 years old. The participants' English level is acceptable as they studied English in the preparatory and secondary stages. The participants

have almost the same background as they speak Arabic as their first language and had been learning English as a foreign language for six years attending two to three sessions per week on average.

#### **3.4. Instrument**

The present study employed a quasi-experimental research design with pre-test, post-test1, and post-test 2. The pre-test was given one day before the procedure. At the end of the week, post-test1 was held. That is, at the end of the last treatment session, the immediate post-test 1 was administered to the participants in the two groups in order to assess short-term effects of the treatments. Then, after one month, post-test 2 was given to recognise long time effect. The type of task used to collect data is Multiple Choice Questions. It is used to figure out which teaching strategy is more effective in teaching prepositions to Libyan learners of English.

#### **3.5. Procedures and Data Collection**

The participants were divided into two groups, which could be named mechanically as the "Control" and "Experimental" groups. Each class contained 20 students. One group (control group) received deductive teaching, and the other group (experimental group) received input flooding teaching. The treatment was conducted for three classes that lasted for 180 minutes. Both procedures were conducted by the researchers.

#### **3.6. The Control Group (CG)**

The participants in the deductive teaching group were provided three handouts containing explanations and exercises about prepositions. The lessons were instructed in accordance with the book Prepositions the Ultimate Book. Class instruction was given only in English. Arabic was not used. The tasks used in this group were varied. This group had different kinds of exercises such as multiple choice questions and fill in the blanks. The instruction of this group was as follows:

A hand-out of each lesson concerning prepositions was distributed to each student. The group received systematic preposition instruction throughout the one-week treatment. The course concentrated on uses of prepositions.

#### **3.7. The Experimental Group (EG)**

The participants in the experimental group, however, were instructed with a focus on form teaching technique. It was input flooding teaching strategy. With this group, the original texts selected for the study were modified in a way that they contained more examples of the target structures. It was exposed to numerous occurrences of prepositions both oral and written, and performed a number of form-focused activities. The instruction of this group was as follows:

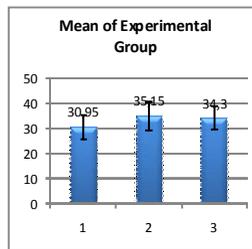
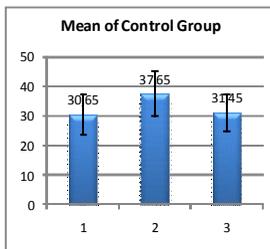
Authentic texts (a set of materials containing different uses of prepositions) were adapted from English- Online website. In every class, the participants were given the texts along with reading activities to complete. There were six texts with their tasks for three lessons (two texts in every class) which were handed out to the students during each lesson.

## 4. Results and Findings

### 4.1. Descriptive Statistics

The data revealed that the level of students in the pre-test was very close. In post-test 1 the control group outperformed the experimental group. In post-test 2, which was conducted one month after the teaching course, the experimental group showed better results than the control group.

Test Group	Pre-test		Post-test 1		Post-test 2	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
CG (n- 15)	30.65	6.861	37.65	7.631	31.45	6.278
EG (n=15)	30.95	4.751	35.15	5.622	34.3	4.589



In other words, the results of this study showed that there were no differences before conducting the treatment. The data revealed that in post-test 1, the results in both groups were better than the results of pre-test. The case with post-test 2 is different as although both groups improved in post-test 2, the improvement of group EG was better.

Before conducting the treatment, a pre-test was done in order to figure out whether there are any differences among the subjects. The ANOVA results showed that the scores did not differ significantly:  $F(11, 8) = 1.493, p = .291$ . The results of post-test 1 showed that there are no differences between the two groups:  $F(9, 10) = 1.001, p = .495$ .

### 4.2. Independent Sample T-Test Results

An independent - sample t-test was conducted to compare the pre-test scores, post-test 1 scores, and post-test 2 scores between the two groups. The results revealed that there were no significant differences in the scores for pre-test:  $t(38) = .161, p = .412$ . However, the results showed that there were significant differences between the two groups in post-test 1:  $t(38) = -11.180, p < 0.001$  and post-test 2:  $t(38) = -11.286, p < 0.001$ .

### 4.3. Paired Sample T-Test Analysis

A paired-sample t-test was conducted to compare pre-test with post-test1 and pre-test with post-test2 for each group. The results of group CG revealed a significant improvement in the participants' performance from pre-test to post-test1:  $t(19) = -8.808, p < .001$ . However, there was no significant difference from pre-test to post-test2:  $t(19) = 1.414, p = .173$ . This result suggests that this group's performance remained unchanged after 1 month of instruction.

With respect to group EG, the performance of this group showed significant differences from pre-test to post-test1:  $t(19) = -4.284, p < .001$  and from pre-test to post-test2:  $t(19) = -13.975, p < .001$ . This result suggests that this group performance improved after the treatment and remained 1 month after instruction.

### 5. Conclusion

Based to the literature review and data statistics, it has been clear that although both teaching strategies have proven effective and improved learners' performances, the input flood teaching strategy has improved learners' language levels and remained one month after the treatment was conducted. Moreover, the group which received input flood teaching strategy gained more vocabulary and improved their reading and speaking skills.

The results of this study are in line with those of Trahey and White (1993); Bouffard (2015); and Arani and Yazdanimoghaddam (2016) which have shown that input flood teaching strategy is effective and can assist students to learn more effectively and result in better learning of structures.

### References

- Arani, S. and Yazdanimoghaddam, M. (2016). The impact of input flooding and textual enhancement on Iranian EFL learners' syntactic development. Teachers College, Columbia University Working Papers in TESOL & Applied Linguistics, 16(1), 25-37.
- Baleghizadeh, S. (2010). Focus on form in an EFL classroom. Native Royal Journal, Retrieved on Sep. 15, 2018 from <http://www.novitasroyal.org>.
- Ballard, B. (2013). The frameworks of English: Introducing language structures. USA: Palgrave Macmillan .
- Benati, A. (2017). The role of input and output tasks in grammar instruction: Theoretical, empirical and pedagogical considerations. Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching, 3(3), 377-396.
- Bouffard, P. (2015). The effect of input flooding and explicit instruction on learning adverb placement in L3 French. The Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics, 18(2), 1-27.
- Chomsky, N. (2006). Language and mind (3rd ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ellis, R. (2009). Corrective feedback and teacher development. L2 Journal, 1(1)
- Elwerfalli, I. (2014). The Acquisition of the English article system by Libyan learners of English: A comparison between deductive teaching and textual enhanced input strategies. Unpublished PhD thesis. University of Northumbria. UK.
- Fang, A. C. (2000). A lexicalist approach towards the automatic determination for the syntactic functions of prepositional phrases. Natural Language Engineering, 6, 183-201.

Fey, M. E. and Finestack, L. H. (2009). Research and development in children's language intervention: A 5-phase model. In R. G. Schwartz (Ed.), *Handbook of child language disorders*. (pp. 513-531). New York: Psychology Press.

Goodman, K. (1986). *What's whole in whole language?* Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann. Han, Z., Park, E. S., and Combs, C. (2008). Textual enhancement of input: issues and possibilities. *Applied Linguistics*, 29(4), 597-618.

House, C. H. and Harman, S. E. (1982). *Descriptive English grammar (2nd ed.)*. USA: Prentice-Hall, INC.

Izumi, S. (2012). Focus on form in second language acquisition. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*. 24, 541-577.

Kamiya, N. (2012). Proactive and reactive focus on form and gestures in EFL classrooms in Japan. *System*, 40, 386-397.

Ling, Z. (2015). *Explicit grammar and implicit grammar teaching for English major students*. USA: Prentice-Hall, INC.

Machin, L., Hindmarch, D., Murray, S., and Richardson, T. (2013). *A complete guide to the level 4 certificate in education and training*. England: Critical Publishing Ltd.

Norris, J. M. and Ortega, L. (2000). Effectiveness of L2 instruction: A research synthesis and quantitative meta-analysis. *Language Learning* 50(3), 417-528.

Omar, Y. (2012). *Synthesis of whole language and learning English as a foreign language*. Missouri Bulletin English. Volume 1, Spring 2012.

Omar, Y. Z. (2018). Syntactic theory perception on language acquisition. *Journal of Faculty of Arts*, 42, 378-391.

Quirk, R., Greenbaum, S., Leech, G., and Svartik, J. (1985). *A comprehensive grammar of the English language*. London: Longman. Tezi, Y. L. (2014). *Using inductive and deductive methods in teaching grammar to adult learners of English*. Unpublished MA Thesis. University of Ataturk.

Trahey, M. and White, L. (1993). Positive evidence and pre-emption in the second language classroom. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 15, 181-204.

Van Patten, B., Williams, J., and Rott, S. (2004). Form-meaning connections in second language acquisition. In B. Van Patten, J. Williams, S. Rott, & M. Overstreet (Eds.), *Form-meaning connections in second language acquisition*. (pp. 1-26). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Wong, W. (2004). Processing instruction in French: The roles of explicit information and structured input. In B. Van Patten (Ed.), *Processing instruction: Theory, research, and commentary*. (pp. 187-205). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.