UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK AND LEARNER UPTAKE IN SELECTED IRANIAN EFL CLASSROOMS

YASSAMIN POURIRAN

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By

YASSAMIN POURIRAN

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra
Malaysia, in Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of
Philosophy**

July 2014

DEDICATIONS

To my family who teach me to be a better person

Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia, in Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK AND LEARNER UPTAKE IN SELECTED IRANIAN EFL CLASSROOMS

By

YASSAMIN POURIRAN

July 2014

Chairman: Professor Jayakaran Mukundan, PhD

Faculty: Educational Studies

Considering the well-proven benefits of participation in communicative interactions and the incorporation of focus on form instruction into communicative classes, this study investigates how frequently reactive focus on form is employed in communicatively oriented English as Foreign Language classes (EFL). Despite the extensive number of empirical studies on the type, rate, and effectiveness of planned reactive focus on form, incidental focus on form in general has not enjoyed this much attention in EFL contexts, and an investigation of their frequency and effectiveness is almost missing from the literature on focus on form studies. In this concern, the present study expands current accounts of focus on form instruction by investigating the role of reactive Focus on Form Episodes (FFEs) in raising students' awareness and noticing of linguistic items in EFL settings.

This study investigates the connection between teachers' incidental focus on form: namely, reactive focus on form and learners' uptake and immediate repair of errors in communicative EFL classrooms for adults. Moreover, the study examines the linguistic focus of FFEs, i.e., vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. The data is drawn from transcripts of oral corrective feedback moves of 10 audio and video-recorded classrooms at intermediate level totaling 60 hours. Ten teachers, experienced and less-experienced, participated in this study. This study is a descriptive type which employs qualitative data collection procedures methods, quantitative data are also collected to complement the qualitative one. The results reveal a significant difference in the ratio of uptake following certain corrective feedback types. In addition, some new types of incidental focus on form have been discovered in EFL classrooms which are named as: *integrated feedback* and *ancillary feedback* by the researcher.

There is also a meaningful difference of experienced and less-experienced teachers' beliefs in using different types of corrective feedback in their

classes. The results show that experienced teachers use incidental focus on form techniques more frequently than their counterparts. Furthermore, teachers' beliefs and their self-reported practices were explored through a questionnaire. This study supports the notion that conducting activities which can integrate a focus on form into L2 communicative activities can contribute to learning a foreign language in terms of both accuracy and fluency. Possible reasons are discussed from different aspects of learners' age, their motivation, and instructional settings. This study finally aims to focus on the EFL teachers' awareness to make accurate decisions on integrating different types of incidental focus on form practices with communicative methodology.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat, Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk Ijazah Doktor Falsafah

MAKLUM BALAS PEMBETULAN DAN PENGGUNAAN FOKUS SAMPINGAN OLEH PELAJAR KE ATAS SUSUNAN AYAT DI DALAM KELAS PENGAJARAN BAHASA INGGERIS SEBAGAI BAHASA ASING TERPILIH DI IRAN

Oleh

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Pengerusi: Profesor Jayakaran Mukundan, PhD

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Dengan mengambil kira manfaat yang terbukti dengan penyertaan di dalam interaksi komunikatif dan penggabungan tumpuan kepada susunan ayat di dalam kelas komunikasi, kajian ini memberi tumpuan kepada kekerapan fokus reaksi di dalam ayat yang digunakan berdasarkan komunikasi di dalam kelas Pengajaran Bahasa Inggeris sebagai Bahasa Asing (EFL). Walaupun terdapat banyak kajian empirikal terhadap jenis, kadar, dan keberkesanan fokus reaktif ke atas susunan ayat, fokus sampingan ke atas susunan ayat secara umumnya tidak diberikan perhatian yang setimpalnya di dalam konteks EFL dan penyelidikan terhadap kekerapan dan keberkesanan mereka adalah hampir tidak dapat ditemui dari kajian literaksi di dalam fokus terhadap susunan ayat. Oleh itu, kajian ini akan mengembangkan kajian terhadap fokus di dalam susunan ayat dengan membuat penyelidikan ke atas peranan fokus reaktif di dalam Form Episodes (FFEs) untuk meningkatkan kesedaran pelajar dan memberi perhatian kepada elemen linguistik dalam (EFL).

Kajian ini membuat penyelidikan ke atas hubungan di antara fokus sampingan guru ke atas ayat, iaitu, fokus reaktif ke atas ayat; dan penggunaan dan pembaikan segera kesilapan di dalam kelas komunikasi Pengajaran Bahasa Inggeris sebagai Bahasa Asing untuk orang dewasa. Selain itu, kajian ini membuat penyelidikan terhadap fokus linguistik FFEs, iaitu, perbendaharaan kata, tatabahasa dan sebutan. Data diambil dari transkrip maklum balas pembetulan lisan dari 10 audio dan video yang dirakam di dalam bilik darjah untuk peringkat pertengahan berjumlah 60 jam. Sepuluh orang guru, yang berpengalaman dan yang kurang berpengalaman, telah mengambil bahagian di dalam kajian ini. Reka bentuk deskriptif yang menggunakan kaedah kualitatif yang dilengkapkan dengan maklumat kuantitatif telah digunakan. Keputusan menunjukkan perbezaan

yang ketara di dalam nisbah penggunaan berdasarkan jenis maklum balas pembetulan tertentu. Tambahan lagi, terdapat beberapa jenis fokus sampingan yang baru telah ditemui di dalam kelas EFL yang dinamakan sebagai maklum balas bersepadu dan maklum balas wajib oleh pengkaji.

Terdapat juga perbezaan yang ketara di antara kepercayaan guru-guru yang berpengalaman dengan yang kurang berpengalaman di dalam penggunaan pelbagai jenis maklum balas pembetulan di dalam kelas. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa guru-guru yang berpengalaman menggunakan fokus sampingan dengan lebih kerap ke atas teknik susunan berbanding dengan rakan-rakan mereka. Tambahan lagi, kepercayaan guru dan amalan guru telah diselidik menggunakan borang soal selidik. Kajian ini menyokong pandangan bahawa aktiviti yang dijalankan yang boleh mengintegrasikan fokus ke atas ayat ke dalam aktiviti komunikasi bahasa kedua dapat menyumbang kepada pembelajaran bahasa asing dari segi ketepatan dan kelancaran. Sebab-sebab tersebut yang berkaitan telah dibincangkan dari aspek umur pelajar, motivasi pelajar, dan situasi pengajaran. Kajian ini juga, bertujuan untuk memberi perhatian kepada kesedaran guru EFL untuk membuat keputusan yang tepat dalam mengintegrasikan pelbagai jenis fokus sampingan ke dalam bentuk ayat dengan metodologi komunikatif.

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I owe special thanks to my parents, for teaching me the value of education. Finally, thanks must surely go to my husband and my daughter for their kind help, without their support this dissertation would not have been possible.

This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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DECLARATION

Declaration by Graduate Student

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CF	Corrective Feedback
CIH	Comprehensible Input Hypothesis
CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
EFL	English as Foreign Language
ESL	English as Second Language
FonF	Focus on Form
FFE	Focus on Form Episodes
FFI	Focus on Form Instruction
IL	Inter Language
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
NS	Native Speaker
NNS	Non Native Speaker
S	Student
SL	Second Language
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
T	Teacher
TEFL	Teaching English as a Foreign Language
TL	Target Language

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the last decades, there has been a shift from strictly communicative methods to methods including focus on form in the communicative language teaching classrooms. During the past decades the focus of classroom instruction has shifted from language forms to functional language in communicative settings (Brown, 2004). In studies of classroom-based second and foreign language learning, much analytic attention has been given to the concepts of repair and correction as components of an instructional practice used to facilitate language learning.

In this research, the terms are used interchangeably to refer to actions taken by teachers and students that point to and help learners modify target language forms that are problematic to them. Considering language learning and teaching and specially English as Foreign Language (EFL), the language itself and how it is used in the interaction between learners and teachers is the major issue in the classrooms. The most common interaction exchange found in the studies on classroom discourse consists of moves, which are normally classified as: (1) Initiate, (2) Response and (3) Follow-up (Wells, 1996, p. 167). The follow-up move refers to all the moves following a student's response, whether they are corrective, negative, or affirmative in nature.

According to Askew and Lodge (2000), the relationship between teaching and learning is being known as a dynamic and lively process, rather than a one-way process of transmitting the knowledge (as cited in Pouriran & Mukundan, 2012). They also note that learning is supported by a whole range of processes, one of which is feedback. Corrective feedback and errors play a significant role in the process of teaching/learning in a foreign language. Errors can be described as deviations from the standard form of the target language (Ellis, 1997). They display the students' interlanguage system, providing some information that where the students have over-generalized foreign language rules or where they have wrongly transferred first language rules to the foreign language (Lightbown & Spada, 1999). Corrective feedback indicates that a student has used the target language incorrectly, and she/he can receive it through various responses.

Recently, an extensive number of studies in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research have been on focus on form (Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Doughty & Williams, 1998b; Long & Robinson, 1998; Lyster, 1998; Ellis et al., 2001a, 2001b). The important and essential theme in all of the studies has been the emphasis on the need for the combination of meaning-focused and form-focused

instruction in the second language (L2) classroom (Loschky & Bley-Vroman, 1993; Hulstijn, 1995; Skehan, 1998; Ellis, 2001). Ellis (2001) explains focus on form as "any planned or incidental instructional activity that is intended to induce language learners to pay attention to linguistic form" (p. 1-2). In other words, focus on form instruction involves "any pedagogical effort to draw learners' attention to language either implicitly or explicitly" (Spada, 1997, p. 73). At the same time, educational research has demonstrated that through the study of teachers' beliefs, which are a determining factor in teachers' classroom practices (Borg, 2001; Basturkmen, Loewen and Ellis, 2004), a lot can be learnt about the nature of instruction.

In the early 1990s, SLA began to utilize theories of information processing which were derived from cognitive psychology. Schmidt (1990, 1995) introduced the Noticing Hypothesis, which points out that learners must consciously notice forms in the input for acquisition to take place. Noticing, on the other hand, is not considered as being synonymous with acquisition. According to Ellis (2001), Noticing allows learners to analyze forms in short-term memory but it does not guarantee that they will be combined into their developing interlanguage. The noticing hypothesis contradicts Krashen's (1981) which claims the unconsciousness of the process of acquisition. Van Patten (1990, 1996) has also made use of the Information Processing Theory to maintain that language learners, particularly at the early stages of acquisition, have difficulty in simultaneously paying attention to meaning and form and therefore often prioritize the former at the expense of the latter. He states that learners will only be able to pay attention to form, when the input is easy to understand and when learners are concerned with processing meaning.

Swain's Comprehensible Output Hypothesis proposes that comprehensible input might not be enough for some aspects of L2 acquisition so the comprehensible output may be required. According to this hypothesis, learners need some opportunities to produce comprehensible output. Thus, the role of output is to provide opportunities for meaningful language use in different contexts for learners (as cited in Farrokhi and Gholami, 2007). Swain proposed that the modified output could be the result of sufficient chances for output and also an opportunity for teachers to provide feedback. Then, she suggested that modified output is the sign of "the leading edge of a learner's interlanguage" (as cited in Suzuki, 2005, p. 2).

Ellis (2001) and Ellis, Basturkmen, and Loewen (2002) distinguish between "planned" versus "incidental" focus on form. Ellis defines planned focus on form, involving "intensive attention to preselected forms" (as cited in Loewen, 2003, p. 320). In planned focused on form, the teacher decides in advance which linguistic features will be aimed within the meaning-focused settings in the lessons. On the other hand, incidental focus on form (Ellis,

2001) happens without any preparation during meaning-focused classroom activities and covers different linguistic items.

Focus on Form Instruction (FFI) has been investigated for more than thirty years. The most common findings reveal that a good number of variables which enhance the effectiveness of FFI are: developmental stage of learners, the context, and the material of instruction Thus, some discrepancies in terms of the findings emerging from various studies are expected. Nonetheless, Gerzic (2005) identifies two findings as being consistent: (a) explicit FFI is instrumental in advancing language learning and (b) the natural order of acquisition is not changed by FFI. It is noteworthy, though, that studies on incidental focus on form seem to have under-researched some significant variables in FFI processes such as the effect of linguistic focus, the effect of language teaching experience, and the role of teachers' beliefs.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Learning a foreign language takes place in classroom setting and that is the only place which a learner can have an access to the target language (Brown, 2001). The learners in foreign language classrooms receive instruction based on different skills such as: reading, listening, speaking, and writing. In learning a foreign language, learners encounter variety of language problems and these hinder them from learning and finally affect their proficiency in negative ways. This phenomenon is also found in the learning of English as a foreign language (EFL) by the Iranian English language learners. It is probably because of the lack of exposure and opportunity to practice as environment discourages learning in English. Communication and interaction mainly facilitate the use of first language or mother tongue.

This research grew out of the researcher's interest in the extent to which language schools have been able to promote their practices in line with current trends in teaching methods in the EFL context of Iran. Although prescribed textbooks and examination syllabuses have undergone some changes, whether the methods of teaching and classroom dynamics have also improved remains to be explored. In the case that classroom teaching fails to keep in pace with the development on the theoretical and research front, then Thornbury's (1998) observation would hold true. Mohamed (2006) states that Thornbury claimed that teachers have not departed from the more traditional synthetic approaches and those new approaches have not made any long-lasting impression on the current practice of English language teaching, though numerous second language (L2) acquisition theories and teaching methods have emerged over the years. In this respect, researchers such as Burns, Kumaravadivelu, and Nunan have also suggested that although teachers may acknowledge their advocacy of a particular method or approach such as Communicative Language Teaching, the tenets

underlying these approaches are rarely implemented in the classroom (as cited in Mohamed, 2006).

The researcher who has worked as an English teacher and a supervisor in one the reputable English language institutes in Iran where the instruction of the L2 is based on communicative language teaching, has observed that learners at intermediate level of language proficiency make errors such as grammatical, phonological, and lexical while participating in classroom discussions and activities and this leads learners to produce more ungrammatical utterances in their oral output.

The present study aims to seek some information about the relationship between corrective feedback types and learner uptake. Is it possible that some corrective feedback types lead to learner uptake while some types impede the possibility of a self-correction by the student? Can teachers' actions really affect students' learning? It has been noticed that some corrective feedback types provide the opportunity for learners to correct the errors by themselves; on the other hand, some corrective feedback types present the correct forms implicitly without more giving extra information. So, which corrective feedback types, then, actually lead learners to produce uptake in EFL settings?

Several studies have been conducted regarding corrective feedback and uptake (Ellis, Basturkmen and Loewen, 2001a; Panova & Lyster, 2002), so the present study is not the first and the only study in this area. However, most of these studies have been done in different settings like immersion classrooms or adult ESL settings, and not many studies have focused on Iranian classrooms (where the L1 is Persian). Swain's Output Hypothesis (1985) questions and criticizes Krashen's Natural Approach (1987) and Comprehensible Input Hypothesis, but Krashen's hypothesis seems plausible to Iranian EFL teachers and learners in practice. In a pedagogical context where students do not trust the fluency of their teachers, and teachers lack confidence in their fluency as a foreign language instructor, the best material for teaching and learning might be authentic 'reading material' or 'listening material'.

Researchers like Swain (1985), Long (1991, 1996), Pica (1992, 2000), and Gass (1994), however, point out the importance of language acquisition through negotiation of meaning and focus on form in classroom settings. Particularly, the research result of Mayo and Pica (2000) showing that nonnative teachers could have a positive role model toward nonnative students. It means that even nonnative speakers can help each other through activities for negotiation of meaning and from. The present study can further our understanding of interactional patterns between nonnative teachers of English and EFL learners.

In order to investigate the role of linguistic environment on SLA, this study hopes to investigate the provision and incorporation of focus on form instruction within communicatively oriented EFL classes. A considerable number of studies on reactive focus on form, mostly referred to as corrective feedback in the literature, have been conducted so far including a number of major descriptive studies by Lyster (1998a, 1998b), Lyster and Ranta (1997), Ellis et al. (2001a), Farrokhi (2003), Loewen (2003, 2005). These studies have explored the effect of corrective feedback on short term and long term second language development (Doughty & Williams, 1998a; Han, 2002; Lyster, 2004; Radwan, 2005), the corrective feedback that leads to successful uptake as an immediate response to feedback (Panova & Lyster, 2002; Tsang, 2004; Sheen, 2004; Ellis & Sheen, 2006), how learners perceive negative feedback (Mackey et al., 2000; Carpenter et al., 2006).

Some studies have also examined particular instructional contexts, immersion classes (Swain, 1998; Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Lyster, 2001, 2004), adult ESL settings (Ellis et al., 2001a; Panova & Lyster, 2002), adult EFL settings (Rouhi, 2001, Sheen, 2004). It has been suggested that it would be better if teachers limit themselves to providing corrective feedback, where the need for this assistance is obvious (Ellis et al., 2002). This perspective seems to weaken the value of experienced teachers' judgment on recognizing if and when to draw attention to a specific form which may prove problematic for learners. Teachers and curriculum designers cannot assess whether or not focus on form instruction will assist L2 learners to develop grammatical and lexical points (Poole, 2005a). Lack of such studiers that describe incidental focus on form in communicative contexts (Ellis, 2005) seems a serious and fundamental issue since evaluating the efficacy of this instructional approach cannot be done until there are examples of how it works in intact communicatively-oriented classes. Almost all studies of this nature have dealt with reactive episodes without considering the crucial role of teachers' teaching experience, so the present study attempts to address this main element.

Moreover, most of the empirical studies on focus on form instruction and interactional feedback have been conducted in immersion and ESL contexts. Very few studies support the role of FFI in different learning and teaching contexts in developing and more developed countries where socioeconomic, pedagogical policies and political issues may differ from each other (Poole, 2005b). Thus, the findings from these countries cannot be generalized to EFL settings. With regard to the use of uptake to determine the effectiveness of focus on form instruction in EFL settings, no more studies have demonstrated various discoursal modes in which uptake may be acknowledged.

Finally, in the L2 education, the relationship between teachers' beliefs and their way of teaching has been ignored. In this regard, it is needed to conduct

more empirical studies. One of the reasons of this limitation may be the context of the previous studies, most of the studies have been carried out in developed countries with native teachers and a few number of learners. In fact, more nonnative speakers teach English in the world (Lin, 1999), also the number of EFL teachers is higher than ESL teachers (Graddoll, 1997), and so the present research cannot be considered as a representative of other contexts. Considering such contextual gaps, Borg (2003) believes that more researches must be conducted in less-developed and non-western countries with nonnative language teachers. This study seeks to address these issues. Educational research has recognized a notion of teachers as active decision-makers whose instructional practices are powerfully influenced by their cognitions about teaching and learning. Research on teaching has focused increasingly on describing what teachers actually practice in the classrooms and on understanding the cognition which underlies these practices. However, there is little descriptive data about Iranian teachers' practices with respect to incidental focus on form and even less insight into their beliefs which these practices are based on. Moreover, the linguistic focus of reactive focus on form episodes has not been investigated in the Iranian EFL context. In the light of these observations, there is a gap in the related literature.

Research on teachers' implementation of incidental focus on form has not yielded a clear understanding on the impact teaching experience has on their decisions. Ellis et al. (2002) suggest that teachers should use reactive focus on form types in order to raise learners' attention to problematic forms. While reactive focus on form, commonly termed as corrective feedback, has been investigated extensively in ESL contexts (e.g., Doughty & Williams, 1998a), less attention has been received in EFL settings. Ellis et al. (2001b) raised concern over the lack of empirical studies on reactive focus on form in EFL classrooms. More specifically, there is a need for further analysis of issues such as which type of incidental focus on form leads learners to produce more uptake. In general, the distribution of linguistic foci (vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation) has not been probed. Finally, the existing body of research does not offer a clear picture of Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs on incidental focus on form or the extent their beliefs are realized in practice. It is these questions that prompted the present study.

1.2   Significance of the Study

This study hopefully sheds more light on the nature of communicatively oriented EFL classes in Iran. Its findings can complement the recent studies on input and interaction conducted predominantly in ESL contexts. It explores interactional patterns employed between EFL teachers and their students, and then examines on the various types of focus on form instruction supplied by Iranian EFL teachers. The extent of opportunities for

uptake moves by EFL learners and the role of teaching experience are also investigated in this study.

The purpose of this study was to investigate what kind of incidental focus on form were used by teachers and to examine did they lead students to correct by themselves or they needed help either form the teacher or other students. Also, teachers' beliefs regarding the use of incidental focus on form were analyzed. While the effectiveness and the features of focus on form have been investigated in many researchers, it has largely been restricted to what Ellis et al. (2001a, p. 16) refers to "intensive attention to pre-selected forms". On the other hand, incidental focus on form takes place automatically, without any pre-planned focus in meaning-focused classroom activities and different types of linguistic features are emphasized (Ellis et al., 2001a). Ellis et al. (2001a) assert that planned focus on form concentrates on the same linguistic item (intensive) but in incidental focus on form more than one linguistic item may be emphasized (extensive).

Due to the important claims related to incidental focus on form, the frequency of it in L2 classrooms should be investigated, in addition, it should be explored that whether there are any variations in its occurrence. This study hopes to account for what exactly focus on form instruction constitutes and how it is carried out in EFL settings. As Sheen (2000) states, focus on form instruction can have a range of meanings, ranging from very communicative to less communicative. The most problem with focus on form instruction has been the lack of studies that describe spontaneous focus on form in communicative context (Ellis, 2005).

This study has also explored similarities and differences pertaining to the provision of feedback between the teachers. In reference to the previous studies done in the area, it does not appear that studies similar to them have been done in the Iranian EFL environment. Since the linguistic, cultural, and educational environments in Iran, generally speaking, are unlike other countries, it would be interesting to find out if the findings of the current study correspond to or contradict previous studies' findings in this area. Furthermore, this study investigates the occurrence of uptake following incidental focus on form instruction. Considering the importance of uptake as an index to evaluate the effectiveness of focus on form practices within communicative language teaching paradigm, a critical evaluation of how uptake is measured in the literature and whether such definition accounts for all instances of uptake constitutes the objective of this study. Certainly accumulating this data from intact classroom settings can contribute considerably to the ongoing EFL practices in general and especially in Iran.

Finally, this study also examines teachers' beliefs on incidental focus on form. Understanding teachers' beliefs on the use of incidental focus on form is of paramount importance in order to see whether there is an association

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between teachers' beliefs and their practices. If this relation is proven, one may conclude that reactive focus on form episodes may be triggered by their belief networks despite the fact that they occur spontaneously during meaning-focused tasks. Teachers' beliefs are relatively unexplored particularly in the Iranian EFL context, to address this issue; this study examines the extent to which beliefs of teachers can be reflected in the classroom interactions. Overall, the findings of this study may provide some further insights for teacher education and help bridge the gap between theory and classroom pedagogy by clarifying the value of reactive focus on form, the learners' output, and teachers' beliefs. The researcher attempted to consider the following major objectives in the present study:

1.3   Research Objectives

1. To analyze what kinds of incidental focus on form types occur in English classes in EFL settings in a private language institute in Iran
2. To identify which incidental focus on form types lead to more learners' uptake
3. To determine the impact of incidental focus on form used in the repair of different kinds of learners errors
4. To evaluate teachers' beliefs (experienced/less-inexperienced) regarding incidental focus on form use in their classes

1.4   Research Questions

The research questions that served to guide this study are as follows:
1. What kinds of incidental focus on form episodes are used by experienced and less- experienced teachers in EFL classrooms?
2. To what extent does incidental focus on forms result in the repair of different kinds of learner errors in experienced and less-experienced teachers' classes?
3. What types of incidental focus on form lead learners to the production of uptake in both experienced and less-experienced teachers' classes?
4. What beliefs do the experienced and less-experienced teachers hold about the use of incidental focus on form in their classes?

To address the above-mentioned research questions, naturalistic classroom interactions between teachers and EFL learners regarding the frequency of reactive episodes were audio and video-taped.

1.5   Limitations of the Study

There are several important limitations that need to be taken into consideration when interpreting and applying the findings of this research as described above. An obvious limitation of the present study is the duration of observation; the data represent just 10 classes (60 hours) during one semester (6 hours for each class). Due to impossibility of gathering the same

teachers and the same learners, the researcher could not collect more data. Consequently, findings are limited to participants of only one level of proficiency, i.e. intermediate EFL learners' classes and the findings clearly cannot be extrapolated to other proficiency levels. Additionally, these data were collected among adult and female EFL learners in a private language school in Iran. The learners came from several different mixed educational backgrounds, as discussed in Chapter 3. These findings can only be extended to other foreign language learners with caution. It is not known, for example, whether child or adolescent language learners benefit from interactions with their teachers in a manner similar to adults. In interpreting the results of this study, learner characteristics and gender as well as characteristics of the learning context should be considered.

Moreover, this study has not addressed focus on form's effectiveness in promoting long-term L2 acquisition. While the results propose that incidental focus on form can result in the noticing of linguistic items and in the production of uptake manifested in different modes during classroom interactions, it remains to be seen whether such uptake moves culminates in language acquisition in the long term. To gain evidence of acquisition, it would be necessary to show that the learners possess the autonomous ability to use the linguistic feature, for instance, by examining whether they can produce the form correctly and properly on subsequent occasions without prompting. This constitutes another limitation of this study like many other studies on focus on form instruction in the literature.

The survey questionnaire was the main instrument in verifying teachers' beliefs in this study. It is believed that questionnaires are not very reliable tool to obtain accurate data from them and in many cases, people misinterpret themselves. In other words, a response effect is highly likely, with teachers giving replies, which are not precise reflections of their real attitudes, but are given to create a positive impression to the researcher (Mohamed, 2006). However, it has been argued that such data are still beneficial, since they reveal feelings and beliefs about an ideal professional, in this case, teaching situation (Davies, 1997). Similarly, Block (1998) contends that such replies may reflect the type of discourse that is suitable in one discourse community and therefore a reflection of the community as a whole. However, it can be interpreted that the responses received by teachers from the questionnaire can be regarded not very accurate since the teachers were aware of the core issue of the research, namely, the impact of incidental focus on form in their teaching practices. Thus, this is an unavoidable limitation of this study. Despite these limitations, it is felt that this work represents a step towards a better understanding of teachers' beliefs about incidental focus on form.

1.6 Definitions of Terminologies

The definitions of the terms in this study are outlined below.

1.6.1 Error

Errors are regarded as indicators of language difficulties in the process of acquiring a language. In addition, errors are the inevitable features that help teachers and students to understand the language acquisition process. Mistakes or errors that occur in the speech or writing among the language learners are because of factors such as negative transfer, fatigue, and carelessness. These are considered as a part of learning and acquiring a language. An error can be described: "an utterance, form, or structure that a particular language teacher deems unacceptable because of its inappropriate use or its absence in real-life discourse" (Hendrickson, 1978, p. 387). This explanation can be interpreted that the correct form of an utterance can be judged by speakers of the target language and teachers. Moreover, some researchers state: "an error is a form unwanted by the teacher" (Allwright and Bailey, 1991, p.85), which means that the teacher has expected a certain answer and when that answer is not delivered, she/he will treat the answer as an error. This, then, implies that a teacher can judge both inappropriate utterances (context or subject related errors) and grammatically incorrect forms.

1.6.2 Corrective Feedback

Ellis, Loewen and Erlam (2006) describe *corrective feedback* as follows: Corrective feedback (CF) takes the form of responses to learner utterances that contain error. The responses can consist of (a) an indication that an error has been committed, (b) provision of the correct target language form, or (c) metalinguistic information about the nature of the error, or any combination of these (p. 340) (as cited in Ajideh & Fareedaghdam, 2012).

1.6.3 Focus on Form

Long and Robinson (1998) explain focus on form instruction as:

> *During a meaning-focused classroom lesson, focus on form often consists of an occasional shift of attention to linguistic code features – by the teacher and/or one or more of the students – triggered by perceived problems with comprehension or production (Long and Robinson, 1998, p.23).*

In other words, focus on form could be explained as resources which are available to students and it tries to draw students' attention to the linguistic items incidentally which the main focus is on meaning (Long, 1997). In this study, focus on form refers to raising the students' attention to erroneous

linguistic structures and giving them corrective feedback either by the teacher or other students.

1.6.4 Incidental Focus on Form

Raising learners' attention to linguistic items is not preplanned in incidental focus on form, and the linguistic items are addressed as they arise spontaneously in the course of meaning-focused classroom activities (Ellis et al., 2001a). The operational definition of incidental focus on form refers to the time in which the teacher interrupts the flow of communication incidentally and tries to raise learners' attention to their erroneous linguistic items either directly or indirectly.

1.6.5 Negative Evidence

Information provided to the language learner which indicates that an utterance is somehow not allowable in the target language (Oliver, 1995). Negative evidence is defined operationally as any type of evidence for a grammatical structure that uses what is *ungrammatical* to help the learners determine the rules for grammaticality.

1.6.6 Uptake

The other key construct in this research is uptake. It should be noted that, uptake happens when a learner produces an incorrect utterance and following that a teacher does a corrective feedback move. Lyster and Ranta (1997) state uptake as:

> *A student's utterance that immediately follows the teacher's feedback and that constitutes a reaction in some way to the teacher's intention to draw attention to some aspect of the student's initial utterance (Lyster and Ranta, 1997, p. 49).*

Uptake is operationally defined as immediate incorporation of a particular focus on from episode in the subsequent verbal responses by the learners (Lyster & Ranta, 1997). In this study, uptake is defined as: the reaction which is done by a student to teacher's corrective feedback. Students can correct the linguistic errors by themselves or they can receive some help either from the teacher or other students in order to correct their errors.

1.6.7 Reactive Focus on Form

Reactive focus on form happens when learners make non-target utterances which oblige teachers to correct the errors by themselves or by other learners (Ellis et al., 2001b). The operational definition of reactive focus on form in this study is referred as: when the teacher perceives the learners' utterance as inaccurate or inappropriate and draws their attention to the problematic

feature through negative feedback and the feedback is given either by the teacher or other students.

1.6.8 Teachers' Beliefs

The term refers to teachers 'pedagogic beliefs' (Borg, 2001), which are related to convictions about language and the teaching and learning of it. These beliefs are manifested in teachers' teaching approaches, selection of materials, activities, judgments, and behaviors in the classroom. In this study the operational definition refers to teachers' beliefs (experienced & less-experienced) in using incidental focus on form in their classes while giving learners corrective feedback. This study attempts to discover that whether teachers' approaches of giving immediate feedback lead learners to produce more uptake.

1.7 Chapter Summary

This descriptive study is divided into five chapters. Chapter one relates the rationale of this study, including the theoretical orientation to the learning problem investigated and the purpose of this study. This chapter also includes a definition of key terms. Chapter two presents a thorough review of the related literature. It begins with a review of the theoretical approaches and major developments, namely, Long's Interaction Hypothesis, Krashen's Input Hypothesis, Swain's Pushed Output Hypothesis, and Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis. It then discusses and justifies the rationale for focus on form practices within communicative classes.

Chapter three, methodology, describes the research design, the participants, the materials adopted in this study, the data collection procedures including qualitative and quantitative methods, and the details of the data coding and transcription procedures applied for the qualitative and quantitative analyses of the data throughout this study. Chapter four provides the findings of the study in terms of the research questions and evaluates the findings in the light of the results of other studies and empirical findings presented in the literature. Chapter five discusses the findings, summarizes the whole of the study and enumerates the implications of the study and finally, the limitations and further suggestions are presented.

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