Comprehension and production practice in grammar instruction: Does their combined use facilitate learning of English tense and aspect?

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Abstract

This article presents the results of an experimental study investigating the differential effects of two grammar teaching options on learning tense and grammatical aspect. The treatment conditions were implemented with young adult EFL learners in two first-year classes at the university level.The first group was given comprehension practice only, the second group was given both comprehension and production practice. Descriptive statistics indicated that the second group outperformed the first group. However, the statistical analysis (ANOVA) revealed that the instructional effect did not amount to statistically significant learning gains.

Key words: Learning, foreign language, form focused instruction, comprehension, production, linguistic forms.

Pratique de la compréhension et pratique de la production dans l'enseignement de la grammaire: Leur utilisation conjointe facilite-t-elle l'apprentissage des temps et des aspects?

Résumé

L'article expose les résultats d'une étude quasi expérimentale visant à évaluer l'effet relatif de deux approches différentes de l'enseignement des règles grammaticales relatives à l'usage des temps et des aspects. Deux groupes d'étudiants algériens inscrits en première année de licence ont participé à la recherche. Le premier groupe a reçu un enseignement de grammaire basé sur la pratique de la compréhension alors que le deuxième a reçu un enseignement opérant sur la compréhension et la production langagière. Les statistiques descriptives semblent indiquer une meilleure performance du deuxième groupe mais les analyses statistiques (ANOVA) réalisées sur les moyennes des deux groupes ne montrent pas une différence statistique significative.

Mots-clés: Apprentissage, langue étrangère, règle grammaticale, compréhension, production, éléments linguistiques.

الاستيعاب والأداء في تدريس قواعد اللغة: هل يسهل جمعهّما تعلم قواعد الأزمنة؟

ملخص

يعرض هذا المقال نتائج دراسة تجريبية لمقارنة مقاربتين مختلفتين لتدريس قواعد الأزمنة للغة الأنجليزية. أجريت الدراسة على قسمين في السداسي الأول لطلبة السنة الأولى جامعية. تلقى الفوج الأول مقاربة تعتمد فقط على القدرات الاستيعابية للطالب، والثانية تعتمد على القدرات الأدائية زيادة على القدرات الاستيعابية. أظهرت نتائج المتوسطات الحسابية تفوق نسب المجموعة الثانية، وأظهر استخدام تحليل التباين الأحادي عدم وجود فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية.

الكلمات المفاتيح: تعلم، لغة أجنبية، قاعدة نحوية، استيعاب لغوي، أداء، وحدات لسانية.

1-Introduction:

Early in my teaching career I was swept along by the communicative language teaching approach (CLT) with its focus on providing learners with opportunities for authentic communication, and was very concerned with the issue of grammar instruction for me time. More recently, given the theoretical and empirical evidence which supports some form of grammar teaching in the classroom, particularly to intermediate to advanced learners, my main concern has shifted to how to teach grammatical structures to EFL students. Aquisition on communica-tive classroom on context and grammar-free language programmes have shown that CLT-trained students have 'significant shortcomings in the accuracy of their language[(1 '; they continue to experience difficulties with grammatical accuracy in their oral and written production.

Though few researchers would deny the importance of communicatively-oriented language instruction, many now recognize that it needs to be complemented with some attention to linguistic form. The question remains, however, as to how best to achieve this. The exact nature of this kind of 'attention to linguistic form' and the various forms it can take are still far from clear and studies comparing approaches to grammar teaching are still few and far between. Furthermore, there is no clear agreement on definitions and procedures to implement this attention to form[(2)]. If learners are to benefit from alternative approaches to grammar instruction form-focussed instruction, as professionals we need to better understand when and how focus on form occurs in the classroom. This study aimed to contribute to current understanding of the role of formal class-room instruction by extending theoretical and empirical work on the relationship between two grammar teaching options.

This article will begin by first presenting the theoretical, pedagogical arguments for the facilitative effects of form focused instruction and synthesizing findings from research that has investigated two particular options. It will then present an experimental study on the effects of form focused instruction by comparing a comp rehension-based instructional approach to another instructional approach where comprehension and production practice are combined. The target grammatical item is tense and grammatical aspect.

2. Formal Instruction and Language Acquisition:

Language Acquisition Research comparing instructed with uninstructed language learning identified clear advantages for formal instruction compared to naturalistic linguistic exposure: a) it speeds up the rate of learning, (b) it affects acquisition processes, leading to long-term accuracy, and (c) it appears to raise the ultimate level of attainment[(3] . In an extensive meta-analysis, Norris and Ortega[(4] summarised findings from fifty-one studies whose data came from four distinct types of instructional environments. Norris and Ortega found that explicit, form-focused instructional environments resulted in more accurate and advanced learning outcomes than those who followed implicit approaches.

The question in SLA is no longer one of justifying the facilitative role of formal instruction, but one of deciding which type of formal instruction is more effective in developing the learner's linguistic system. In addition to perspectives from language acquisition theory, there are also pedagogic reasons in favour of L2 form-focused instruction (FFI) in the language syllabus. As noted in the introductory section, experiential learning approaches growing out of communicative language teaching (CLT) such

as thematically -oriented, project-geared approaches which informed the new curriculum framework and program development of English Language teaching (ELT) carried out in the late 1990's and the beginning of the twenty first-century by the Ministry of Education in Algeria, were criticised for not helping learners develop high levels of grammatical accuracy.

The idea that second language learning requires a certain amount of focus on form, which is particularly helpful in promoting accuracy, has gained currency in the last ten to fifteen years. Two proposals have been made in the research literature to overcome the shortcomings of focusing solely focus on meaning and communication. One is to encourage learners to focus and notice language forms in the input. The other is to provide learners with opportunities for language production.

At the outset, it should be stressed that form-focused instruction FFI (also known as focus on form instruction) is used to characterize a wider range of instructional approaches. It is important to clarify the terminology used by different researchers to refer to instruction that deliberately focuses on the formal properties of language with the aim of facilitating the development of the target language. There is a lack consistency in the definition of the term, with terms such as form-focused instruction, focus on form instruction, 'Focus on Form', and 'Focus on Forms', being used sometimes interchangeably, sometimes contrastively[5] .

The first distinction with regard to the type of instruction can be between form-focused instruction (FFI) and meaning-focused instruction (MFI). FFI has been distinguished from MFI which focuses exclusively on meaning exchange (meaningful input) during classroom instruction and no overt reference is made to rules and language forms[6]. Focus on form (FonF), as defined by Long and Robinson[7] , refers to 'an occasional shift of attention to linguistic code features-by the teacher and/or one or more students-triggered by perceived problems with comprehension or production'. Focus on FormS differs in that it 'refers to instruction that seeks to isolate linguistic forms in order to teach them one at a time' within the context of a planned approach to form form focused instruction[8] .

Research throughout the 1990s and the beginning of the 21st century has expanded focus on form definitions. For example, in the late 90's Spada[9] introduced the term form-focused instruction (FFI), defining it as 'any effort to draw learners' attention to form within communicative and meaning-based contexts'. The model provided by Ellis[10] conceptualized FFI as 'any planned or incidental instructional activity that is intended to induce language learners to pay attention to linguistic form, where 'form' stands for grammatical structures, lexical items, phonological features and even sociolinguistic and pragmatic features of language'.

Thus, definitions go from the narrow one as the definition provided by Long and Robinson and interpreted as meaning a reactive, unplanned approach used to draw learners' attention to form, to broader definitions such as the ones which allow for planning of the elements to be focused on in order to attract the learner's attention. In the research reported here, we attempted to adhere closely to the broader conceptions of FFI as used by Spada and Ellis; that is, we primarily considered instructional approaches that relate to a planned explicit approach to FFI. Apart from explicitness and planning classroom instruction has also been operationalized as proceeding in terms of choices related to two components: i) exposure to relevant comprehensible input, and

ii) opportunities for production practice. Each of these components presents multiple possible options for implementation, and they can also be combined in various ways in a single instructional intervention. In this study, two different form focused options will be considered: comprehension-based instruction and production-based instruction. From the teacher's point of view, the key issue here is this: to what extent should instruction be directed at developing form-meaning connections through comprehension practice only as opposed to providing opportunities for learners to practice in production tasks? This is discussed in the subsequent section.

3. Comprehension Practice Versus Production Practice in FFI:

Comprehension-based -also referred to as reception-based, input-based- approaches have built on an argument for language development as a natural outcome of language comprehension. In other words, language development both in comprehension and production results from comprehension practice alone. This emphasis on the importance of relevant input comprehension in promoting learners' linguistic knowledge has its origins in Krashen's Input Hypothesis; the hypothesis that holds that language acquisition is driven in a receptive modality and depends entirely on comprehensible input.

The early comprehension-based methods inspired by Krashen's[(11)] Input Hypothesis (e.g. Natural Approach) recommended the delay of practice (speaking) in foreign language teaching until the teacher is convinced that the language forms which are being taught are fully comprehended. Classroom instruction was limited to implicit exposure only (listening to L2 speech and reading L2 texts); that is, no attempt was made to manipulate the input to focus on particular grammatical structures. Contemporary input-based methods gradually shifted to more focused techniques that manipulate the input to make a particular feature of the L2 grammar more salient and thus more likely to be noticed by the learner. Various pedagogical input-based instructional techniques have been devised to help learners pay attention to grammatical forms while also providing them with the input they need.

In this study, three types of input-based instructional activities are used in the instructional material to illustrate the comprehension-based option, including input flood, input enhancement, and consciousness-raising (see section 4.4). Another input-based option for targeting problematic grammatical forms is Processing Instruction (PI) and Structured Input (SI)[(12)]. PI unlike other input enhancement techniques (e.g input flood, text enhancement), is much more explicit: learners process information via comprehension practice and are expected to pay conscious attention to specially designed input i.e., structured input.' (see section 4.4).

Although input-based approaches employ various procedures, what these have in common, however, is that students are not at any stage engaged in activities requiring them to produce the target structure. In contrast to reception-based approaches to classroom instruction, production- or output -based approaches emphasize the importance of building into instruction opportunities for production practice. As a component of traditional ELT methodology production practice encompasses different kinds of language-related performance but some general design choices are considered basic. The most common and typical lesson follow the presentation-practice-production (PPP) procedure [(13)].

Many L2 teachers upgrade the importance of classroom activities for eliciting the production the target structures either in speaking or writing (for example repetition, manipulation, and bank-filling exercises). However as noted earlier receptive-based methods reject any role whatsoever for traditional practice-oriented instruction on the assumption that language proficiency results from comprehension rather that production practice. Recent views about SLA, however, have shifted from production practice as a result of 'acquired competence' to part of the process of learning'[(14)]; from a way of practicing already-existing knowledge to a way of creating linguistic knowledge[(15)].

According to Swain's[(16)] Comprehensible Output Hypothesis (COH) opportunities to production practice are as important to linguistic development as opportunities to comprehension practice. Swain explained that comprehension and production have different psycholinguistic requirements; learners may well understand the meaning of an utterance without a full linguistic analysis of the input, but that when they want to convey meaning (produce language forms) they have to experience syntactic processing and pay attention to the grammaticality of their messages. Production practice, from this perspective has three major functions which are essential to language acquisition: (1) a hypothesis-testing function, (2) a metalinguistic function, and (3) a noticing function.

In terms of pedagogical consequences (section 4.4) this position implies that in order to promote their language learning learners need to be 'pushed' from a semantic processing mode by requiring them to encode comprehensible output and pay attention to the grammaticality of their written and spoken messages. The term production practice, therefore, is used in a wider meaning than that used in the traditional PPP sequence, in which practice refers to a mechanical drill-like activity such as repetition and manipulation.

How researchers have viewed and examined the role the of comprehension and production practice in language learning. There have been a few attempts to confirm the effectiveness of combining the two forms of practice for grammar teaching. We shall introduce two strands of research on the effectiveness of comprehension and production practice: input-processing studies and comprehension vs production studies.

The input-processing studies carried out by VanPatten [(17] and his colleagues involved experimental comparisons of an input-based instructional technique named processing instruction (PI) and traditional production (output)-based instruction (TI). These studies provided evidence that learners who received processing instruction - without any kind of TI and production practice - performed as well on comprehension and even production tasks as those who had TI and production practice. In other words, language development both in comprehension and production results from comprehension practice alone.

The arguments for the importance of production practice have been supported by several comprehension vs production studies (see below). Although studies within this line of research have contributed to our understanding of how comprehension and production practice affect learners' comprehension and production of target forms and structures, it remains unclear which of these two forms of practice is more effective. It must be remembered that these studies have employed various designs, investigated different output-based options and compared them with some specific input-based

techniques. Therefore, it is difficult to draw definitive conclusions. They can, however, be classified into the following categories:

i)Findings by Erlam[(18)] found that comprehension(input)-based and production (output)-based instructions are equally effective in promoting L2 knowledge.

ii) Studies by Allen[(19] ; Toth[(20] ; Morgan-Short and Bowden[(21] suggested the superiority of output-based over input-based instruction.

iii) A study by DeKeyser and Sokalski[(22)] found that 'comprehension and production skills in an L2 are to some extent learned separately' i.e., L2 instruction via input-based practice will only serve to develop learners' ability to comprehend the target feature, not to produce it.

4. The Study:

Motivated by encouraging literature and research this study aimed at finding out whether comprehension and production practice in isolation or in combination will lead to linguistic development as measured by learners' performance on a variety of reception and production tasks. It examined whether drawing the learner's attention to specific linguistic features while engaged in comprehension-focused tasks and a combination of comprehension and production practice will affect their acquisition of target linguistic features. Moreover, the study compares the effects of comprehension practice only vs the effects of a combined use of comprehension and production practice on learners' linguistic development. Previous research has informed the design of the current study in a number of ways.

4.1 Design and Research Questions:

Considering that we could easily and conveniently gain access to intact classes, the present study was quasi-experimental in character and was conducted by the participants' regular teacher in the course of normally scheduled classes. The students remained in their original groups as allocated at the beginning of the academic year. Two groups of learners were compared with reference to the acquisition of tense and grammatical aspect and were distinduished according to the type of practice given: The first group (Comp-Group: *n* =19) was given comprehension practice only. The second group (Comp plus Prod Group: *n* =19) was given both comprehension and production practice. Contrary to other studies, the present study follows a pretest, treatment, and immediate posttest design to measure the effects of the two types of treatment. Based on the research reviewed above, we posed the following research question and hypotheses:

Research Question: Does a combined use of comprehension and production practice result in greater learning than when only comprehension-based instruction is provided?

Research hypotheses:

Hypothesis1: a comprehension-focused instructional treatment would lead to improved performance on tasks involving the comprehension and production of English tense and grammatical aspect as measured by their respective tasks. Therefore positive results are expected.

Hypothesis2: a comprehension-focused instructional treatment that incorporates production practice would lead to improved performance on tasks involving the comprehension and production of English tense and grammatical aspect as measured by their respective tasks. Therefore positive results are expected.

Hypothesis3: a comprehension-focused instructional treatment that incorporates production practice will enable learners to comprehend and produce English tense and grammatical aspect more effectively than comprehension-based instruction only.

4.2 Subjects:

The present study was carried out in an EFL context at the university level. The participants were all Algerian undergraduate students taking their first semester in a BA course in English Studies. Participants averaged about 19 years of age with some others as old as 30. Their level in English should correspond to their years of instruction and also to personal effort in their studies. Students attended one of two intact classes, all of which were selected to test the hypotheses. After the administration of the pretest, two classes were assigned to the treatment conditions (comprehension practice only vs comprehension and production practice). Students had to be present at all treatment and testing sessions in order to be included in the study. A total of 38 students (those who had attended all treatment/testing sessions) were included in the final analyses of results

4.3 Targeted Linguistic Structures:

Tense and grammatical aspect were chosen as target features of the study for several reasons. Firstly, the acquisition of tense and aspect figure among the central grammatical categories in L2 learning Secondly, they occupy a prominent place in the 'grammar syllabus' of the Licence degree. Thirdly, from our past teaching experience, we have found that tense and aspect constitute a major source of errors for students at different stages. As noted by Moumene[(23] English tenses seem to be a problematic area for Algerian students who show limited use of the various tense forms and uses for expressing their ideas. This linguistic feature is relatively complex and places heavy cognitive demands on the students.

After the English article system, the acquisition of tense and aspect is the most problematic area of English grammar for EFL students. It is, however, still unclear why L2 learners perceive these linguistic structures as problematic. Recent accounts of L2 tense- aspect acquisition research proposed several factors as responsible for the difficulties in learning to use tense and aspect including (1) universal (and possibly innate) predisposition by learners to mark some salient grammaticizable notions, (2) L1 influence, (3) individual learner characteristics, (4) input /interaction, and (5) instructional variables[(24] . It is beyond the scope of this study to solve controversial issues concerning the acquisition of temporal expression in English. In this study, we attempt to situate the concerns of learning morphosyntactic structures in a pedagogical context. The focus is on the role of instructional intervention on the development of a learner's system of tense-aspect.

4.4 Instructional Treatments:

Two sets of teaching materials were prepared on the basis of grammar handbooks, coursebooks and online grammar sites contained the same number of activities, oral/written activities. The set of materials covers sixteen 90-minute classes spread over the period of four weeks and took place during regularly-scheduled classes of grammar. The instruction involved the following form focussed macro options: Negative evidence in the form of metalinguistic information and explicit rule explanation, comprehension-based and production-based instruction. Explicit rule explanation was made equal for both treatment groups so that the difference between them would be

limited to the presence or absence of learner output. The explicit instruction sheets that were delivered to learners included a conceptual explanation as to 1) How the targeted tense is formed, 2) The basic meanings of the targeted tense and 3) The additional meanings of the targeted tense (appendix A).

The set of materials designed for the Comp-Group (appendix A) consisted of activities where learners engage with language receptively, i.e. work with language input in the form of listening and reading tasks that did not require immediate production of the targeted structure. For example, learners hear or see the target structure in the input and respond in some way to input utterances by stating whether they are true or false or by choosing the best answer from among the options presented. The reading texts, where target forms were bolded, were followed by multiple choice comprehension questions or true/false questions. Activities used both aural and written stimuli but most of them were written. In accordance with the pedagogical options available for input-based instruction, the types of input enhancement used in this instructional package included: (i) input flood that 'exposes learners to input rich in some specific linguistic feature' and 'requires them to process this input primarily for meaning'**(25 ,** (ii) textual enhancement consisting of 'typographically highlighting a particular grammatical structure in written passage'**(26)**, iii) structured input tasks (also called grammar interpretation activities)which are comprehension-based tasks that require 'learners to process input which has been specially structured so as to help them understand the target item**(27** ; there is also no immediate need to produce the target linguistic element **(28** , and iv) consciousness-raising exercises designed to allow students to develop an explicit knowledge of grammar without necessarily articulating grammatical rules.

The set of materials designed for the Comp plus Prod Group consisted of the same explicit instruction, the same set of input-based tasks covered by the input-only group. However, their focus was the production of the targeted structure. For example, where the input-only group had to choose the correct option or state whether they are true or false, the Comp plus Prod Group was required to produce sentences. In addition the Comp plus Prod Group worked on a number of production-based mechanical, meaningful and then communicative written and oral activities. The mechanical and meaningful activities limited or controlled students' language production while the communicative activities reflected normal communication. In line with the output hypothesis (see section 2) other recent output-oriented tasks, all of which involve language production, were also employed in the present study.They mainly included: i)dictogloss, a form of dictation which 'requires learners to process the whole text at once'**(29** . Students listen to a short text and then work individually (in pairs or in small groups) to reconstruct the text from memory and some notes and ii) input-output cyles (an integrated skills technique for language learning in which students learners read (or listen to) a text and individually or in pairs work to write a reconstructed version of the text.

4.5 Testing:

A pretest / posttest design was adopted to assess the impact of the two types of formal instruction on the learners' inter language system. The same test was used as a pre- and posttest. The purpose of the pretest was to characterize the learners' state of knowledge of the structures used in the study. The post-test was conducted immediately after the treatment session. The test comprised both reception and written production tasks. The following is a detailed description of the test (appendix B)

Written gap-fill production: A grammar test covering the various English tense-aspect forms was used to assess the familiarity of EFL learners with these tense-aspect forms. In this test students completed a rational cloze instrument consisting of a descriptive passage eliciting verbs from all three simple tenses: present (12 verbs), past (6 verbs), future tense (1 verb) and 5 aspectual forms of the present, 7 aspectual forms of the past and 3 aspectual forms of the future. From the lexical aspect viewpoint, the distribution of the 34 missing verbs includes: 12 state verbs, 22 dynamic verbs (of which 18 are activity verbs and 4 accomplishment verbs).

Grammaticality judgement test (GJT): In the test, the learners gave grammaticality judgments on 45 test items, half of which contained ungrammatical or problematic tense/aspect usage (29 sentences).These ungrammatical sentences were made by students during previous exams. The rest of the sentences were generated for the purpose of the test. The rationale for selecting these items was primarily pedagogical and practical rather than theoretical.

Picture description task: For this task students looked at 8 numbered pictures telling the story of a girl involved in various activities. Participants had to tell the story that the pictures suggest by writing sentences to describe what was happening in each of the pictures. The contexts carefully elicit the use of target

5. Results:

To answer the research questions proposed for study, the results data were analyzed to determine a) whether there were any significant changes within groups regarding their performance over time, and b) whether there were any significant differences between groups regarding their performance after the treatments. The alpha-level of significance $p < .05$ was determined prior to data collection and was used throughout the study which is a generally accepted standard for all statistical analyses for all social and education research.

5.1 Comparison of baseline performances in the pretests:

Pretreatment equivalence of groups in their knowledge of English verb tenses and grammatical aspect was checked by submitting the pretest scores to statistical analyses. As demonstrated in Table 1 below, the pretest Mean differences in the two groups were quite marginal: On the GJT the pretest Mean was at 19.52 for the Comp-Group and 19.26 for the Comp plus Prod Group; On the written gap fill production task, the pretest mean score was at 19.50 for the Comp-Group, and at 16.37 for the Comp plus Prod Group. On the picture description task the pretest mean score was 4.02 for the

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for the Pretest

Test	**Comp-Group**			**Comp plus Prod Group**		
	M	SD	n	M	SD	n
GJT (Max/36)	19.52	4.68	19	19.26	4.17	19
Written gap-fill Production (Max =34)	19.15	8.75	19	16.37	7.76	19
Picture description(Max/10)	4.02	0.92	17	4.70	1.10	17

Comp-Group, and 4.70 for the Comp plus Prod Group. ANOVAs performed on pretest scores indicated that there were no statistical significant differences between the

scores performance on the reception and production of the target structure was similar at the time of pretesting.

5.2 Comparison of students' mean performance on pretest and posttest:

For the sake of clarity, the presentation of results is divided into two parts. The first part concerns the data referring to the reception of the targeted feature, whereas the second part has been devoted to the examination of the results of the tests tapping the participants' production of the target feature.

Reception data: The results of scoring for reception data are presented in Table 2. The Comp plus Prod Group with a mean of (Mean =19.50) outperformed the Comp-Group (Mean = 18.89) on the posttest. A one-way between-groups ANOVA was conducted to explore the impact of input practice only and input-based instruction combined with output practice on the posttest scores as as measured by the grammaticality judgement posttest. The results (Table 3) showed that there was no statistically significant difference at the $p<.05$ level between the mean scores in the posttest of students who received their verb tense practice through reception-based tasks in combination with production-based and those who only used reception-based practice.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics for the pretest and posttest on reception data

Test	**Comp-Group**	**Comp plus Prod Group**
Grammaticality Judgement Test		
Pretest		
Number	19	19
Mean	19.52	19.26
Standard Deviation	4.68	4.97
Posttest		
Number	19	19
Mean	18.89	19.50
Standard Deviation	4.14	5.26

Table 3: One way ANOVA on Grammaticality Judgement test

Source of variation	Sums of squares	Degress of Freedom	Mean square	F
Between groups	3.4803	1	3.4803	0.16
Within groups	808.2895	36	22.4525	
Total	811.6997			

The significance level is $p<.05$

What still remained to be seen is whether the differences between the pre- and posttest for the groups were significant and attributable to the different practice methods. Repeated ANOVA procedures indicated that the mean scores were not significantly different over time (Treatment group $F(1,18)= 0.02$, $p=0.889$; $F(1,18)= 0.02$, $p= 0.889$; comparison group $F(1,18)=1.15$, $p= 0.297$) (See Appendix C for statistical tables).Thus,there was no significant loss of learning for Comp Group group on the receptive measures between pretesting and post testing.

Production Data: The results of the production tests are displayed in Table 4.This table shows that the subjects from the Comp plus Prod Group showed better performance on the written gap-fill production tests (M=17.39) than subjects from Comp-Group(M=16.28)

Table 4: Descriptive statistics for the pretest and posttest on production data

Test	**Comp-group**	**Comp plus Prod**	**Comp-Group**	**Comp plus Prod Group**
	Written gap-fill		**Picture description**	
Pretest				
Number	19	19	17	17
Mean	19.15	16.37	4.02	4.70
Standard Deviation	8.75	7.75	0.92	1.10
Posttest				
Number	19	19	17	17
Mean	16.28	17.39	5.52	5.75
Standard Deviation	5.25	4.55	1.93	1.34

However, ANOVA results (table 5) revealed that there was no statistically significant difference at the p<.05 level in test scores for the two groups. The F observed value for the effect of treatment the is 0.56.This amount of F-value at 1 and 36 degrees of freedom is lower than the critical F, that is, 4.11 for both tests. This might indicate that both types of instruction are capable of bringing about important changes in the learners' performance as measured by the written gap-fill production posttest. On the picture description task, table 4 reveals that the subjects from the Comp plus Prod Group showed better performance (M = 5.75) than subjects from the Comp-Group (M = 5.52). The ANOVA results shown in Table 6 indicated that there was a statistically significant difference at the p<.05 level in scores for the two groups. Repeated ANOVA procedures for each group indicated that the mean scores did not significantly change from pretest to posttest. (Treatment group F(1,16)= 6.3, p=0.02; comparison group F(1,16)= 11.66, p=0.0035). This means that the differences between the pre- and posttest for the two groups were significant and attributable to the different practice.

Table 5 One-way ANOVA on written gap-fill Production

Source of variation	Sums of squares	Degress of Freedom	Mean square	F
Between groups	11.6053	1	11.6053	0.56
Within groups	748.9474	36	20.8041	
Total	760.5526	33		

The significance level is p<.05

Table 6: One-way ANOVA on picture description tests.

Source of variation	Sums of squares	Degress of Freedom	Mean square	F
Between groups	0.1176	1	0.1176	0.04
Within groups	88.3235	32	2.7601	
Total	88.4412	33		

The significance level is p<.05

To summarize, the above analyses indicated that Output-free input-based instruction did not bring a significant improvement over time. Slight progress was observed in the input plus output group but not to a statistically significant level. The findings in relation to the effect of the treatment type do not seem to fully substantiate the claim for the superior role of the Comp plus Prod Group**.**

6. Discussion:

This discussion has two main goals: to explore whether comprehension-focused instruction in conjunction with and without with production practice has an impact on learners' ability to the comprehend and produce English tense and grammatical aspect and to determine whether these two instruction types result in differential effects. To summarize the findings in terms of the three research hypotheses presented above, the results did not confirm Hypothesis 1, which predicted that L2 instruction that is primarily comprehension-based would lead to improved performance on tasks involving the comprehension of English tense and grammatical aspect as measured by the grammaticality judgement posttest in the short-term. Similar to the comprehension task findings, production task results suggested that comprehension practice alone did not result in a gain in ability to produce the target form. However, hypothesis 1 was partially confirmed, in that the comprehension-only group was able to obtain statistically significant gains on the production of the target forms measured by a picture-based description. This means that the practice effect was not skill-specific in the sense that the subjects given only comprehension practice improve more on the comprehension tests. At the same time, these findings do lend less support to skill-acquisition theory which claims that comprehension and production do not draw on the same underlying knowledge source i.e. L2 instruction via input-based practice will only serve to develop learners' ability to comprehend the target feature, not to produce it[30].

The results of the present study provide partial support for hypothesis 2, which stated that a comprehension-focused instructional treatment that incorporates production practice would lead to improved performance on tasks involving the comprehension and production of English tense and grammatical aspect as measured by their respective tasks.

According to the descriptive findings of the comprehension task, learners showed a slight improvement in performance. However this positive effect did not reach statistical significance. On the other hand, the increase from the pretest to the posttest on the picture-based description test was statistically significant. Again the results do partially support hypothesis 3. They do not conclusively show that a comprehension-focused instructional treatment that incorporates production practice will enable L2 learners to comprehend and to produce the target structure more effectively than comprehension-based instruction only.

The instructional effect, statistically speaking, did not amount to significant learning gains on the grammaticality judgement and written gap-fill tests. However, both instructional groups made significant gains on the picture description posttest. It is also important to consider these findings in relation to other studies that have examined the effects of comprehension and production practice. To start with, the findings were unexpected and did not statistically confirm what has been largely found by other studies. The results related to our first hypothesis differ from those of previous research that have found support for the positive effect of input-based instruction[(31] . On the other hand, the findings seem to be partially consistent with the general trends observed in other studies providing support for the positive effects of production-based instruction where the output conditions did result in greater learning than did the non-output conditions. For instance, Erlam's[(32] study showed that when instruction incorporates output-based practice, meaning-oriented output activities in particular, they might be more effective for developing both comprehension and production abilities than when only input-based instruction is provided. The results of Izumi's[(33)] study also showed that output instruction benefited learners to a greater extent than a comprehension-focused instructional treatment for the acquisition of English relativization, with resulting positive gains for production groups suggesting that comprehension-based practice is not more effective than production practice.

Coupled with the findings for Hypothesis 1 and 2, the weak findings in relation to Hypothesis 3 do not seem to fully substantiate the hypothesis for the superior role of input-plus-output instructional treatments over that of input-based instruction in language learning. Thus, in answer our research question, it cannot be stated with confidence that a combined instructional treatment had a significant effect with respect to learners' comprehension and production of English tense and grammatical aspect. Why was the impact of the intervention not so promising? why the receptive and productive measures failed to reach statistical significance? One reason that the impact of the intervention was not as significant as we might have expected might be that our students came from an instructional context in which L2 grammar instruction(if any) was quite traditional and explicit. The students were probably less used to learning in the implicit conditions demanded by the type of input tasks such as enriched input and enhanced input or recent classroom applications of the Output Hypothesis such as dictogloss and input-output cyles.

The students most likely would have benefited more from (a) giving them a longer training period at the beginning of the experimental period, (b) extending the experimental period to the whole semester, or even (c) extending the time allocated for each session which would have given students more time to build up confidence in classroom activities. If this explanation were confirmed by further research, it might be concluded that contextual factors other than the tasks themselves play a role in learners' ability to comprehend and produce the target forms. Another related reason that may explain the findings is the individual differences.

Although the participants' individual differences were not inspected, it might be assumed that the measure of success in the two groups that underwent the treatment was not so much the type of instruction they received but their individual characteristics, their positive attitude and eagerness to learn. An attempt to establish how many of the participants actually benefited from the treatment and whether the gain was maintained

over time would have helped to interpret the collected data more fully. Researchers recognize that individual differences that comprise such factors intelligence, cognitive and learning styles and strategies play an important role in experimentation aiming at establishing effective ways of teaching target language grammar.

Erlam's[34] study demonstrates that the cognitions and perceptions the participants hold might be of greater significance than the mode of instruction in a particular group which means that individual variables have to be carefully considered when exploring the effectiveness of different options in L2 instruction. According to Erlam, instruction that targets language input and does not require students to engage in language output may benefit learners who have higher language analytic ability and greater working memory capacity. In contrast, output-based instruction seems to minimise the effect of differences in language learning. Future research can shed more light on this issue.

7. Conclusion:

The absolute predominance of any of the two approaches i.e. comprehension-only vs.comprehension-plus-production was not established in this quasi-experimental study. Nevertheless, the study indicated that the comprehension-plus-production instructional treatment had a practically (although not statistically) significant effect on gains in grammatical accuracy in the use of the target form. Despite the relative complexity of the structures and the brevity of instruction, the participants managed to attain better control of the target linguistic forms, as evidenced by the descriptive results. From a theoretical perspective, though it may be hard to give an answer to the debate between the two different views to grammar teaching, this study stresses the important roles of production (in addition to comprehension) practice and contributes to the understanding of the efficacy of teaching interventions. More specifically, it contributes to the body of comparative studies on form focused options in grammar teaching. Pedagogically, the results seem to support the use of production as well as well as comprehension-based practice in the classroom as a means for building grammatical accuracy.

Although the instructional materials incorporating the principles of a combined approach are scarce and rare, their preparation is not very problematic, as evidenced by the treatment materials included in the present study. At the same time, it needs to be pointed out that the implementation of the approach in the language classroom and the weight given to the two options is bound to be the function of the inherent characteristics of a particular educational context as well as the specific conditions in which teachers operate. It would be imprudent to assume that the findings of this study constitute sufficient grounds for the formulation of far-fetched pedagogical recommendations. There surely exists the need to explore the issue much further and more research needs to be carried out on the differential effects of the grammar teaching options on various cross-linguistic structures with better operationalization of instructional treatments.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: examples of teaching materials used

I) Sample materials on explicit rule instruction:

The present simple:

Form*:* The simple present tense is represented by the third person singular's inflection on verbs .It has a range of meanings, some much more common than others.

Basic Meanings: The simple present tense has a range of meanings, some much more common than others. the most commonly targeted ones are listed below.

The simple present tense expresses states, as exemplified in 1, habitual actions as in 2, and general statement of facts or scientific truths as in 3.

1.a)He owns three cars b)He seems to be tired.

2.a)They always go to the mosque on Friday b) I usually have lunch at around one.

Notice that this meaning requires the use of time expressions (always, frequently etc.)

3.a) The Moon goes round the Earth. b) Water boils at 100 degrees centigrade.

Another common meaning is future actions in 4.

4.a) The film starts at two o'clock. b) The next train leaves in fifteen min.

Additional Meanings: The simple present also occurs in particular contexts:

It is used by commentators at sport events.This is referred to as instantaneous present.

The simple present can be used to refer to past events.This is known as the narrative, or historical present, as shown in 5.

5.a) The phone rings .She picks it up and listens quietly [...] b) A man goes to visit a friend and is amazed to find him playing[...]

The simple past Form: ed inflection (verb +ed Other changes on irregular verbs

Basic Meanings:We use the Simple Past to express the idea that an action started and finished at a specific time in the past. Sometimes, we may not actually mention the specific time, but we do have one specific time in mind. There can also be a few actions happening one after another.

1.a) I saw a movie yesterday. b) She washed her car.

2.a)He arrived from the airport at 8:00, checked into the hotel at 9:00, and met the others at 10:00. b) Did you add flour, pour in the milk, and then add the eggs?

The Simple Past can be used with a duration which starts and stops in the past. A duration is a longer action often indicated by expressions such as: for two years, for five minutes, all day, all year, etc. as in 3.

3.a)I lived in Brazil for two years. b) They sat at the beach all day.

Additional tense meanings for the simple past: The Simple Past can also be used to describe a habit which stopped in the past. It can have the same meaning as 'used to' .we often add expressions such as: always, often, usually, never, when I was a child, when I was younger, etc.as in 4.

4.a)I studied French when I was a child. b) He played the violin.

The simple past is often used (instead of the simple present) to express a more polite tone.

5.a)I wanted to ask you a favour b)Did you want to see me now?

II) Sample materials with compehension focus:

(1) Input-based oral activity:

Listen to the sentences about Jennifer. Indicate whether each sentence describes something that is a) in progress right now? , b) usual or general statement of fact? or c) changing

1. When people need help with their automobile, they call her.
2. Right now it is 9:05 A. M, and Jennifer is sitting at her desk.
3. She comes to work on time.
4. Her cell phone is ringing.
5. She answers it .It is her friend Bob.

6. He usually works in the first floor but he's working in the second floor this week while the office is being decorated.
7. In our city it gets dark at around 6 p.m.
8. It's getting dark - we'd better go home.
9. The bus is stopping.

(Self designed)

(2) Input-based written activity (structured input)

Students are a given a text (Lisa's letter to Rebecca).Thye have to indicate whether each sentence describes something that is a) In progress right now?, b) usual or general statement of fact? or c) changing.

(3**) Input-based written activity: (input enhancement and consciousness raising)** Students are a given an enhanced text to notice the highlighted forms.(tense construction V+ ed).

They have to decide why the simple past is used in the following sentences?

'He put on his slippers, went to the door and opened it'.

a) states in the past b) actions that happened one after the other

'His eyes were red; grey hair fell over his shoulders and from his wrists hung heavy chains.'

a) states in the past b) actions that happened one after the other

(4) Input-based written activity: consciousness raising

Now decide why do we use the simple past in the following sentences?

1. I saw two colorful fishes in the lake yesterday.
2. He entered a room, lit a cigarette and smiled at the guests.
3. Mary tried the soup but it was too hot to eat.
4. I lived in Algiers for 10 years.
5. They saw us playing football.
6.He married a woman who lived in the same village.

III) Sample materials with production focus

(1) Production-based written activity: mechanical drill(Irregular Past Participles)

1. She has never _____ (let) her daughter have a boyfriend.
2. Have you already _____ (read) today's newspaper?
3. The house has been _____ (sell).
4. He has _____ (lose) his wallet again.
5. I have _____ (write) three essays this week.

(2) Production-based written activity: dictogloss Task

Students listen to a text. On the second reading, students note down key words. Then they are asked to reconstruct the text orally in their own words

(3) Production-based written activity: input-output cycles

Students read a short passage and underline the parts they feel are particularly necessary for its subsequent reconstruction (Input 1).Put the passage away and reconstruct it as accurately as possible (Output 1).This step is followed by class discussion and important ideas are written on the black board. listen the passage a second time (Input 2) and were directed to underline it as in Step 1.As in step 2, reconstruct the text as accurately as possible on another output sheet(Output 2).

Appendix B: The tests used in the assessment procedures

Written Production test: Directions: below is a passage from which some verbs have been removed. Read the passage quickly to get its general meaning then go back to the beginning and write the missing words using the verb and the corresponding tense before the blank. If you are not sure of an answer leave the blank and continue on to the next verb. Once you have finished do not go back and change your answer.

Example: now I (write) (present simple)…am writing... a letter .I (see) (future simple)...will see… you in the afternoon.

Said always **(travel)** ***(present perfect)*** _____ a lot. In fact, when he **(be) (*simple past)*** _____ only two years old when he first **(fly) (*simple past)***

_____to Tunisia. His mother **(be) (*simple present)*** _____ Italian and his father **(be) (*simple present)*** _____. Algerian. Said **(be born) (*simple past (passive))*** _____ in France, but his parents **(meet) (*past perfect)*** _____ in Belgium, after they **(live) (*past perfect continuous)*** _____there for five years. They **(meet) (*simple past)*** _____. one day while Said's father **(read) (*past continuous)*** _____ a book in the library and his mother **(sit) (*simple past)*** _____ down beside him. Anyway, Said **(travel) (*simple present)*** _____ a lot because his parents also**(travel) (*simple present)*** _____ a lot. As a matter of fact, Said **(visit) (*present continuous)*** _____ his parents in France at the moment. He **(live) (*simple present)*** _____ in Tunisia now, but **(visit) (*present perfect continuous)*** _____ his parents for the past few weeks. He really **(enjoy) (*simple present)*** _____ living in Tunisia, but he also **(love) (*simple present)*** _____ coming to visit his parents at least once a year. This year he **(fly) (*present perfect)*_____** over 50,000 miles for his job. He **(work) (*present perfect continuous)*** _____. for a software company for almost two years now. He **(be) (*simple present)*** _____. pretty sure that he**(work) (*future continuous)*** _____ for them next year as well. His job **(require) (*simple present)*** _____ a lot of travel. In fact, by the end of this year, he **(travel) (*future perfect)*** _____ over 120,000 miles! His next journey **(be) (*simple future)*_____** to New Zealand. He really **(not like) (*simple present)*** _____ going to New Zealand because it is so far. This time he is going to fly from Paris after a meeting with the company's partner. He **(sit) (*future perfect continuous)*** _____ for over 17 hours by the time he arrives! Said **(talk) (*past continuous)*** _____with his parents earlier this evening when his sister **(telephone) (*simple past)*_____** to let him know that the software company **(decided) (*past perfect)*** _____ to merge with another company in New Zealand. The two companies **(negotiate) (*past perfect continuous)***…….…… for the past month, so it really **(not be) ((*simple past)*** _____ much of a surprise. Of course, this **(mean) (*simple present)*** _____ that Said will have to catch the next plane back to Tunisia. He **(meet)(*future continuous)*** with his boss at this time tomorrow.

Grammaticality Judgement Test: 10 Sample sentences (out of 45) Read d each sentence carefully before you answer. If you think a sentence is good. circle G (grammatical) next to it. If you consider it a bad English sentence. circle U (ungrammatical).

Example: Lucy always watches television after school.……G……

1. She is finding her watch.
2. He ate a cake for an hour.
3. By this time next year I will write three chapters.
4. It is developed our knowledge.
5. They are living in a rented house.
6. He said that there is a ball in the water.
7. I will come before he will leave.
8. I am getting up at 7 every morning
9. She cannot to come.
10. Julius Caesar has expanded the Roman Empire

Picture description task: Instructions for the picture description task Students were shown eight numberd pictures. These pictures tell a story. Based on the pictures they are asked to write sentences describing what is shown and tell the story that is suggested. Students were told that they should aim at grammatical accuracy, textual cohesion, and logical sequencing.

Appendix C: Statistical Tables

Table 1 GJT (Comp-Group): Repeated-measures ANOVA

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between group	12.7368	1	12.7389	1.15	0.297717
Within group					
Subjects error	497.8964	18			
-Error	199.2652	18	11.0702		
Total	749.8947	37			

Table 2 GJT (Comp plus Prod Group): Repeated-measures ANOVA

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between group	0.5329	1	0.5329	0.02	0.889108
Within group					
-Subjects	518.0921	18			
-Error	426.0921	18	23.6718		
Total	944.7171	37			

Table 3 Written gap-fill production (Comp-Group): Repeated-measures ANOVA

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between group	4.11	1	4.11	0.23	0.6372
Within group					
-Subjects	448.07	18			
-Error	320.70	18	17.89		
Total	775.8837	37			

Table 4 Written gap-fill production (Comp plus Prod Group): Repeated-measures ANOVA

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between group	4.1118	1	4.1118	0.12	0.7330
Within group					
-Subjects	8.31.7105	18			
-Error	626.7632	18	34.8202		
Total	1462.5855	37			.

Table 5 Picture Description (Comp-Group): Repeated-measures ANOVA

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between group	19.115	1	19.155	11.66	0.003549
Within group					
-Subjects	51.2206	16			
-Error	26.25	16	164.06		
Total	96.5956	33			

Table 6 Picture Description (Comp plus Prod Group): Repeated-measures ANOVA

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between group	9.5294	1	9.5294	6.3	0.23203
Within group					
-Subjects	28.3676	16			
-Error	24.2206	16	1.5138		
Total	62.117633	33			