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Research Paper

Combined Effect of the Phase of Explicit Instruction and Feedback Timing on Task Performance and Grammar Acquisition

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Abstract

This study investigated the combined effect of the phase of explicit instruction and feedback timing on task performance and grammar acquisition. Fifty pre-intermediate learners were randomly assigned to 3 major conditions and 5 sub-conditions: pre-task explicit instruction with either immediate or delayed feedback, main-task explicit instruction with either immediate or delayed feedback, and control group. All groups were given a grammaticality judgment test (GJT) and an elicited imitation test (EIT) as the pre- and post-test. During the treatment period, the 4 experimental groups completed three tasks within three weeks. The third task was analyzed for task performance (CAF). The results indicated that among groups, the pre-task/immediate group was the most fluent group and that they had the most attempts to use the target form as much as main task/delayed group. The pre-task/delayed group produced the longest units with highest accuracy and most correct use of the target form. However, none of the differences were significant except for pre-task (the group that received explicit instruction before task completion) and delayed feedback group which statistically produced longer units and made fewer errors compared to

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the control group. Additionally, the groups which received explicit instruction within the task completion (main task with either immediate or delayed feedback) statistically made fewer errors than the control group. Regarding performance on GJT and EIT, although pre-task/immediate group gained the highest scores, the differences were not statistically significant. It can be concluded that providing explicit instruction of structure before task with delayed feedback can benefit task performance in terms of complexity and accuracy, and providing explicit instruction within task completion with either immediate or delayed feedback to promote accuracy.

Keywords: Explicit Instruction, Feedback Timing, L2 Acquisition, Task Performance

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1. Introduction

"A task-based curriculum may not succeed in enabling learners to achieve high levels of linguistic accuracy" (Ellis, 2019, p. 22). To compensate, Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT) can include some facets of direct intervention when focus on form happens in more explicit ways. Task Supported Language Teaching (TSLT) may have a contribution in the acquisition of the linguistic features that learners could not learn naturally. The stage of explicit instruction is controversial in TBLT (Ellis, 2018). Explicit instruction can be provided before task completion or within task completion. Few researchers have addressed the impact of prior explicit instruction on both task performance in terms of complexity, accuracy, and fluency (CAF) and the attempt to use target structure and its correct use (Ellis et al., 2019; Mochizuki & Ortega, 2008) and acquisition (Li et al., 2016; Shintani, 2018). Additionally, few researchers have addressed the effect of explicit instruction, when learners are performing the task, on the development of implicit knowledge (Samuda, 2001; Spada & Lightbown, 2008; Spada et al., 2014).

On the other hand, comparing the findings of Mochizuki and Ortega (2008) and Ellis et al. (2019), it can be argued that explicit instruction does not necessarily result in greater accuracy, complexity, and fluency. In order

to compensate for any shortcoming of explicit instruction in lessons including a task, it is believed that incorporating another focus on form technique can benefit the development of both task performance and structure acquisition. Following Saito and Lyster (2012), Spada and Lightbown (2008), Spada et al. (2014), it is convincing that corrective feedback can be a choice to be incorporated. Feedback timing as a variable which influences the feedback efficiency has not been investigated sufficiently (Li et al., 2016). This research is an attempt to explore the degree to which the effectiveness of explicit instruction in two stages of task performance can be influenced by feedback timing.

2. Literature Review

Many studies have examined different ways in which explicit instruction can be incorporated in performing tasks. Explicit instruction can be provided either before task completion (pre-task instruction) or during task performance (main-task instruction). For example, Ellis et al. (2019) reported a study where two groups completed two dictogloss tasks using past passive forms. The analyses revealed that pre-task explicit instruction resulted in eliciting more attempts to use the linguistic feature but did not lead to more accurate use compared to task only group. In addition, it had a negative impact on complexity, accuracy, and fluency. Similarly, in Kowal and Swain's (1997) study, learners received an explanation on the target form, and then they completed a dictogloss task. However, the results revealed that the explanation led to the least structure use, and the learners avoided using the target form if it was not essential for completing the task or if it was beyond the learners' current developmental stage. Sadeghi and Pourhaji

(2021) also investigated the effect of pre-task explicit instruction on L2 oral performance and reported that explicit instruction is a negative predictor of fluency but it contributes positively to complexity and accuracy. As an instance of main-task instruction, Samuda (2001) examined how explicit instruction embedded into task performance affects acquisition and use of the target form (modals). He concluded that the participants began to use the target structure after providing explicit explanations, and there were gains in implicit knowledge.

Few studies have compared pre-task and main-task explicit instruction. As Ellis (2018) has referred, Spada and Lightbown (2008) and Spada et al. (2014) were two studies which examined integrating explicit instruction into the performance of a task. Spada and Lightbown (2008) examined the ideal conditions for isolated and integrated form-focused instruction (FFI) including the linguistic feature, learners' levels, and the learners' L1. Teaching/learning method inclinations of teachers/learners, learners' sense of language knowledge (especially in their L1), and learner's age influence the conditions. Isolated FFI can be used for preparing learners for a task completion or after the task in which learners have had trouble with a target form. In integrated FFI, there is an attempt to draw learners' attention to form within task completion or content-based instruction. In a later investigation, Spada et al. (2014) designed a quasi-experimental study to understand the extent to which two types of FFI contribute to acquisition. Both groups received a 12-hour focus on form instruction on English passives lasting for three days. In the integrated instruction, the communicative activities were meaning-oriented and quick instruction or feedback to the passive form were provided. In the isolated instruction, form-based activities were presented separately which were before content/meaning-based activities. In the form-based activities, the teacher drew participants' attention on the

target form, providing relevant instruction and feedback, whereas there was no direct attention to the target structure in the meaning-based activities. Two tests (an error correction task and an oral production task) were administered as pretest, posttest and delayed posttest. Two types of instruction contributed to learners' progress, but the differences between groups were not significant. However, integrated FFI group outperformed on the oral production task while isolated FFI did on the error correction test.

Michaud and Ammar (2022) investigated the effect of the timing of explicit instruction on acquisition of a target structure. The results revealed that explicit instruction embedded in a task facilitates the development of both explicit knowledge and implicit knowledge but the effectiveness of explicit instruction is not significantly influenced by the time (pre-task, task, post-task) at which it is provided.

Considering the above shortcomings of pre-task instruction (e.g., the ineffectiveness of explicit instruction in improving task performance and acquisition), it seems that inclusion of another focus on form technique may help increase the effectiveness of explicit instruction in a task-based lesson. Corrective feedback has long been employed by different researchers (e.g., Naderi, et al., 2024; Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Rassaei, 2019; Shen & Chong, 2023). Recasts and prompts have been explored as important feedback treatments as the focus of much SLA research (Farrokhi et al., 2018; Lyster, 2004). They can be provided either immediately after erroneous utterance (immediate feedback) or after task completion (delayed feedback).

2.1 Feedback timing

Although a number of variables affecting corrective feedback have already been investigated (e.g., research setting, target feature, the type of feedback, the length of the treatment and learner variables), few studies have addressed the role of feedback timing in corrective feedback. Although

immediate feedback is usually preferred due to psycholinguistic importance attached to learning-through-interaction, teacher guides (Scrivener, 2005) advise delaying feedback until the learners have completed the task. Immediate feedback may assist input processing as learners can benefit from the feedback to make the correct target form the next time it is needed. Delayed feedback on the other hand helps the learners develop explicit knowledge of target structure (Li et al., 2016).

From an educational perspective, based on their proposed model addressing feedback timing, Hattie and Timperley (2007) argued that immediate feedback (feedback about task) might lead to faster rates of acquisition while it can detract from the learning of automaticity and associated strategies of learning during fluency building concluding that immediate feedback is more favored. Form an SLA perspective, Siyyari (2005) investigated the extent to which two different versions of focus on form, namely implicit focus on form applying corrective recast and delayed explicit focus on form, differed. He found that the former led to more gains in accuracy in oral production compared to the latter one. Varnosfadrani (2008) compared immediate and delayed feedback with 56 intermediate English learners. He provided the learners with feedback on their grammatical errors implicitly or explicitly within or after the communicative activity. The results obtained from individualized tests showed no significant differences for feedback timing. However, the results cannot be taken as solid evidence since the type of feedback may interfere with the effectiveness of feedback timing.

Concerning the preference for immediate feedback or delayed feedback with respect to task performance, in language pedagogy teachers are advised to avoid immediate feedback if the target is fluency rather than accuracy (Scrivener, 2005). However, as Li et al. (2016) argue, theoretical positions in SLA see immediate feedback as facilitating interlanguage development in

fluency work. There are claims to support this belief. One claim derived from interaction hypothesis is that immediate feedback including recasts makes cognitive comparison possible leading to form-function mapping as well as development of implicit knowledge (Doughty, 2001). Another framework is that, as transfer-appropriate processing (TAP) suggests, in immediate feedback, learners process the needed linguistic forms activating "learning processes in a context primarily focused on communicating. This learning will be available for subsequent use in spontaneous communicative events" (p. 278). Of course, TAP supports prompts, too. Lyster (2004) argued for prompting learners while communicating because it may accelerate the proceduralization of the linguistic features that learners had already partially learnt. On the other hand, in the case of delayed feedback, two theories namely preparatory attention and memory theory (McDaniel et al., 1998) and reactivation and reconsolidation theory (Nader, 2003) may justify the efficiency of this kind of feedback implementation. Preparatory attention and memory theory suggests that acquisition is improved if whole attention is drawn to only one task. Additionally, while performing on a task, learners notice the information gap that may result in paying attention to this information when it is available to them (Quinn, 2014). Reactivation and reconsolidation theory proposes that to develop declarative and procedural memories, the processes of retrieval and reconsolidation should be fostered which is more possible through delayed feedback since retrieval and reconsolidation can take more time.

Some studies have investigated feedback timing, but they have not arrived at conclusive findings. Li et al. (2016) reported gains in accuracy in immediate and delayed feedback groups but no-feedback group did not improve in accuracy. They reported no effect on elicited imitation test, but both the immediate and delayed feedback resulted in a higher score in

grammaticality judgment test, with immediate feedback being superior over delayed feedback. In Quinn's study (2014), the learners were randomly assigned to immediate, delayed, and no CF groups. All three conditions showed statistically significant improvements on the tests, but there were no statistically significant differences among the groups.

2.2 Studies on bundling explicit instruction and feedback timing

In Samuda (2001), the teacher tried to attract students' attention to form applying recast. When the students could not use the target structure properly, the teacher provided explicit explanation that resulted in the structure use and gains in students' procedural knowledge of the target form. In both Spada and Lightbown (2008) and Spada et al. (2014), isolated and integrated form-focused instructions were compared. In integrated instruction, both feedback and explicit explanations were provided to help learners acquire structures that happen in a communicative activity. Spada and Lightbown (2008) indicated that both types of instruction could be benefiting the learner, but its extent depends on the linguistic feature, the learner, and the learning conditions, and there was no significant group difference in their study. However, the group receiving isolated instruction gained superior scores for passive in the error correction test whereas integrated instruction group outperformed on the oral production task. Saito and Lyster (2012) investigated form-focused instruction with and without feedback. They suggested that form-focused instruction with corrective feedback might enhance L2 grammar and pronunciation.

Overall, the studies (e.g., Ellis et al., 2019) indicated that pre-task explicit instruction has a negative impact on task performance, and although the learners attempt more to use the target structure, they are not accurate in applying it (De la Fuente, 2006; Ellis et al., 2019; Kowal & Swain, 2007). On the other hand, since correct use does not mean acquisition, the researches (Li

et al., 2016; Shintani, 2018) showed that pre-task explicit instruction does not lead to increase in implicit knowledge of the target form, and it leads to implicit knowledge to a lesser extent if learners have prior knowledge of the target form. Nevertheless, main-task explicit instruction results in more implicit knowledge (Spada et al., 2014). To the best of our knowledge, no research seems to have studied the effect of incorporating another focus on form technique (feedback timing here) to reinforce efficiency of explicit instruction in different stages on both task performance and grammar acquisition.

As referred to earlier, this study is an attempt to investigate the facilitative role of explicit instruction of the target form in different stages (before task completion and within task completion) along with feedback timing in task performance and acquisition of the target linguistic feature (past perfect tense). The following research questions were posed for scrutiny:

1. Which task implementation condition and feedback timing combination leads to better task performance in terms of CAF?
2. Which task implementation condition and feedback timing combination leads to better acquisition of the English past perfect tense?

3. Method

3.1 Participants

Fifty learners (25 male and 25 female), who were studying English at pre-intermediate level in Asatir language school, Ardebil City, were asked to participate in this study. Although the participants demonstrated relatively low L2 proficiency (Level: A2/B1 based on the institutional placement test), they were able to participate in meaning-oriented interaction. On the other hand, the target structure (past perfect tense) had not yet been taught at this level. To check whether the participants did not know the target form, the syllabus of the language school and the results of untimed GJT (pretest) were

scrutinized. The participants were bilingual (speaking both Azari-Turkish and Persian), learning English as a foreign language. The participating learners were assigned randomly to 5 groups, with 10 participants in each group, as follows: pre-task explicit instruction with either immediate (pre/immediate group) or delayed feedback (pre/delayed group), main-task explicit instruction with either immediate (main/immediate group) or delayed feedback (main/delayed group), and control group. One-way ANOVA did not indicate any significant differences among the groups in their pre-test scores on the GJT, $F(3, 80) = .22$, $P = .88$; or pre-test scores on the EIT, $F(3, 80) = .91$, $P = .44$.

3.2 Instruments and Materials

Following Ellis (2004, 2005), Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005), Ellis and Loewen (2007), Ellis et al., (2006), an untimed grammaticality judgment test (GJT) and an elicited imitation test (EIT) were developed to measure both learners' explicit knowledge and implicit knowledge of the target form. Untimed GJT was a computer-based test with 20 sentences: 11 sentences targeted past perfect tense and the rest of sentences targeted 9 other structures which were evenly divided between grammatical and ungrammatical. Participants were asked to indicate if each sentence is grammatical or ungrammatical, write a percentage for their degree of certainty, and clarify whether they relied on a rule or relied on their intuition about grammaticality of each sentence. Each sentence was displayed on a new page, and the participants were not able to come back to the part of the test that they had already completed on previous pages. This test provided 3 measures: a percentage judgment accuracy score based on the participants' dichotomous responses, a percentage certainty score (more than 80%), and a percentage score related to the participants' reported use of rule for judging the items. Each item was scored as correct/incorrect, and the items left unanswered

were considered incorrect. A percentage accuracy score was calculated. In taking elicited imitation test, learners listened to a set of sentences containing the target form one at a time. After each sentence, they were required to judge if it is correct, and then repeat it in the correct form within a specified time limit. This test consisted of 30 sentences of which 10 were distracters. Half of the target items (10 sentences) were ungrammatical. The reliability for the grammaticality judgment test, estimated by Cronbach's alpha, was .68 for GJT and .71 for EIT.

Three narrative passages seeded with the target form (past perfect tense) were used to perform a dictogloss task in treatment sessions. The learners were required to listen to the teacher reading the passage containing the target structure before presenting it on PowerPoint with one or two sentences and vocabulary annotations on each slide. The teacher read each slide. Then the teacher read the passage third time. Finally, the learners were given ten minutes to work in pairs to reconstruct the text and retell the story to the whole class with each learner in each pair retelling half of the story. Additionally, the passages were of appropriate difficulty determined by readability formula, Gunning Fog Index, (i.e., 8.09 to 9.81) as analyzed by Text Inspector tool. Considering task performance, complexity, accuracy, fluency and attempt to use/correct use of the target form were measured. The utterances were segmented into AS units (analysis of speech). Following Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005), Ellis (2018), Ellis et al. (2019), the complexity measure was the mean length of AS unit. Accuracy was measured by the number of errors per AS unit. Fluency was assessed through average pause length. Considering the use of feature, target use was calculated by the number of attempts at past perfect tense divided by total number of words, and correct target use was calculated by number of correct uses of past perfect tense divided by total number of attempts.

3.3 Procedure

The design of this study is quasi-experimental, with two pre-tests, 4 different treatments, as well as 2 post-tests. Stage of explicit instruction is the independent variable, and feedback timing is considered as the moderator variable. Oral performance and performance on GJT and EIT are considered as dependent variables.

Due to the Covid-19, it was not possible to give tests or treatments face to face. The whole study was carried out online. The participating learners were given two tests. This test battery consisting of untimed grammaticality judgment test (GJT) and elicited imitation test (EIT) measured their explicit and implicit knowledge of the target form at the start and end of the study period.

Then, the participants were divided semi-randomly into 3 main groups: pre-task explicit instruction group, main-task explicit instruction group, and task-only group. Treatment lasted for three sessions, 25 minutes each, spread out over three weeks, and targeting past perfect tense. The passages used for tasks performed by learners in task-only group had been seeded with another different structure (passives) rather than past perfect tense. Participants in all three groups attended three sessions conducting one dictogloss task each session. The purpose was to compare how learners performed the same focused tasks in different experimental conditions. One of the texts was a news report about a dog from American English File 2. Two others that concerned a dancing couple and a family newly purchasing a car were adopted from Zavalex.ru website. The learners were not told what form they were required to practice. In the group 1, the researchers provided explicit instruction before task, but in the group 2, explicit instruction was integrated into the performance of task (i.e., explicit instruction was provided after the learners listened to the story). Then they started to work in pairs in order to

reconstruct the stories. Explicit instruction contained a short grammar lesson on the English past perfect tense and a 5-minute practice activity. In task-only group, the learners did not receive explicit instruction and feedback unlike those in experimental conditions, and they only performed the tasks.

Each of the two major groups, which received explicit instruction, was additionally divided into two subgroups namely immediate feedback and delayed feedback. The teacher provided either immediate feedback or delayed feedback in response to students' errors in using the target linguistic feature depending on experimental conditions. Following Li et al. (2016), in the immediate feedback group, for each task and each student, the teacher repeated the erroneous utterance via prosodic emphasis and paused for 3-5 seconds encouraging the learner for self-correction. If this failed, it was followed by recast – reformulating – and all the time full recast was provided unless the learner's utterance was just lexically incorrect, which received partial recast. In the delayed feedback group, after completing the task, the teacher quoted the erroneous utterances that the participants had produced while performing the task and pushed the learners for self-correction. The teacher paused for 3-5 seconds. If this failed, it was followed by recast. Although different prompts can be considered equivalent (Yang & Lyster, 2010), delayed feedback (elicitation) is more explicit and salient which can be compensated through prosodic emphasis through the repetition technique (Li et al., 2016). The treatment sessions were recorded to ensure that the instructional treatment was implemented as intended.

In order to measure task performance, the speech production resulting from the third task was transcribed and analyzed. Finally in session 4, all the participants took GJT and EIT as posttest to investigate the effect of 4 different experimental conditions on acquisition. Both tests had two versions ‒ pretest and posttest ‒ and both versions were created by randomly

scrambling the same items. However, the time interval was sufficient (4 weeks) to make sure that there was little or no practice effect.

4. Results

4.1 Task performance

To measure the task performance, both global aspects of language use and target structure use were measured. The utterances were segmented into AS units. The complexity measure was the mean length of AS units. The accuracy was measured by the number of errors per AS-units. Fluency was assessed through average pause length. Attempt to use target structure was calculated by number of attempts at past perfect tense divided by total number of words. Finally, correct use was calculated by the number of the correct use of past perfect tense divided by the total number of attempts. The descriptive statistics pertaining to the participants' performance in final task appear in Table 1.

Table 1.
Descriptive Statistics for Task Performance

	Construct	Measures	Pre-task				Main-task				Control	
			Immediate		Delayed		Immediate		Delayed			
			Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
General	Complexity	Length of AS unit	8.71	2.44	9.57	2.26	7.9	0.99	8.15	0.78	7.23	0.57
	Accuracy	Errors per AS units	0.39	0.20	0.18	0.14	0.24	0.17	0.21	0.18	0.51	0.14
	Fluency	Average Pause length	1.15	0.56	1.68	0.99	1.31	0.27	1.49	0.37	2.36	0.51
Target-related	Target use	Incidence of past perfect tense	0.84	1.14	0.42	0.23	0.41	0.23	0.84	1.12	0.45	0.13
	Correct target use	Error-free past perfect tense	0.80	0.22	0.86	0.17	0.74	0.22	0.77	0.16	0.65	0.16

These results indicated that, overall, the learners receiving pre-task instruction and immediate feedback paused shorter and made more attempts

to use past perfect tense (.84) than other groups except main/delayed group in the case of target use (.84). Pre/delayed group produced longer AS units, made fewer errors, and obtained the highest mean in the correct target use (.86).

Since all assumptions for ANOVA were met (There were two categorical independent variables and one continuous dependent variable. The data were normally distributed, and the variances were equal.) (Larson-Hall, 2010), A two-way ANOVA were used. The two-way ANOVA on task performance showed that there was a statistically significant difference among groups only in the case of complexity, F (4, 45) = 2.761, p = .03 and accuracy F (4, 45) = 6.658, p = .00 (Tables 2 and 3). The post hoc test results showed that pre/delayed group showed statistically higher complexity and accuracy than control group. Additionally, both main/immediate, and main/delayed groups statistically made fewer errors than control group. However, the results for other variables indicated that there was no significant difference among groups: fluency F (4, 45) = 1.537, p = .20 (Table 4), attempt to use the target structure F (4, 45) = .960, p = .43 (Table 5), and correct use F (4, 45) = 1.531, p = .20 (See Table 6).

Table 2.
Two-way ANOVA for Task Performance Results (complexity)

Source	Df	SS	MS	F	Sig
Between groups	4	29.481	7.37	2.76	.03
Within Groups	44	117.462	2.670		
Total	49	35550.5			

$p \leq .05$

Table 3.
Two-way ANOVA for Task Performance Results (accuracy)

Source	Df	SS	MS	F	Sig
Between groups	4	.788	.197	6.658	0
Within Groups	45	1.331	.030		
Total	50	6.974			

$p \leq .05$

Table 4.

Two-way ANOVA for Task Performance Results (fluency)

Source	Df	SS	MS	F	Sig
Between groups	4	2.011	.503	1.537	.20
Within Groups	45	14.721	.327		
Total	50	123.458			

$p \leq .05$**Table 5.**

Two-way ANOVA for Task Performance Results (attempt)

Source	Df	SS	MS	F	Sig
Between groups	4	2.078	.519	.960	.43
Within Groups	45	24.34	.541		
Total	50	44.26			

$p \leq .05$

Table 6.

Two-way ANOVA for Task Performance Results (correct)

Source	Df	SS	MS	F	Sig
Between groups	4	.230	.057	1.531	.20
Within Groups	45	1.688	.038		
Total	50	31.409			

$p \leq .05$

4.2 Acquisition of Target Structure

In pre-task instruction group, the learners who received immediate feedback obtained a superior mean score (M = 68.40) in comparison with learners who received delayed feedback (M = 63.00). In addition, in main-task instruction group learners who received immediate feedback recorded higher mean (M = 63) in posttest compared to the learners who received delayed feedback (M = 61.20). Table 7 displays means and standard deviations for all participating groups. However, the results of the two-way

ANOVA indicated that the difference between groups was not significant on the post-test, F (4, 45) = 2.098, p = .09 (table 8).

Table 7.
Descriptive statistic for GJT results

Groups	**N**	**M**	**SD**
Pre/immediate	10	68.40	13.54
Pre/delayed	10	63.00	18.00
Main/immediate	10	63.00	23.62
Main/ delayed	10	61.20	23.16
Control	10	44.10	20.97

Table 8.
Two-way ANOVA for GJT

Source	Df	SS	MS	F	Sig
Between groups	4	3427.920	856.980	2.098	.09
Within Groups	45	18378.900	408.420		
Total	50	201447.000			

P ≤ .05

The descriptive statistics for EIT appear in Table 9. The learners' mean in pre/immediate group (M = 47.50) was higher than that of pre/delayed group (M = 45.50). Main/delayed group showed higher score (M = 43.50) than main/immediate group (M = 36) and control group (M = 35.00) suggesting that the learners benefited delayed feedback more in main-task instruction group. Two-way ANOVA showed no significance for mean differences, F (4, 45) = 1.824, p = .14 (Table 10).

Table 9.
Descriptive Statistics for EIT

Groups	N	M	SD
Pre/immediate group	10	47.50	11.60
Pre/delayed group	10	45.50	11.16
Main/immediate group	10	35.90	13.93
Main/delayed group	10	43.50	17.16
Control group	10	35.00	10.54

Table 10.
Two-way ANOVA for EIT

Source	Df	SS	MS	F	Sig
Between groups	4	1285.000	321.250	1.824	.14
Within Groups	45	7927.500	176.167		
Total	50	95325.000			

$p \leq .05$

5. Discussion

The study attempted to examine which task implementation condition (i.e., pre/immediate, pre/delayed, main/immediate, or main/delayed experimental condition) leads to better task performance and better acquisition of past perfect tense. Investigating the results related to the general production quality indicated that Pre/delayed group statistically produced longer units and made fewer errors compared to control group. Additionally, both main/immediate, and main/delayed groups statistically made fewer errors than control group. Although pre/immediate group was the most fluent, and attempted more to use past perfect tense just like main delayed group in latter case, pre/delayed group used the target structure most correctly than other groups, but none of these differences was statistically significant.

In the case of pre/delayed group, the result that pre/delayed condition was favored for complexity and accuracy compared to control group differs from some other studies that have examined the effects of pre-task explicit instruction (Mochizuki & Ortega, 2008; Li et al., 2019) and feedback timing (Sadeghi & Belali, 2020) on task performance which report results showing that above-mentioned technics do not lead to improvement in task performance. There is possible answer to this question why in this study pre/delayed condition indicated improved complexity and accuracy. When the learners receive explicit instruction before task completion, the task may not be cognitively demanding resulting in the possibility of giving more attention to what they want to say – sequencing ideas and choosing to focus

on producing longer sentences (Ellis, 2008). On the other hand, complexity is achieved while drawing on "rule-based system and thus requires syntactic processing, and it is related to restructuring" which is the result of taking risks (Skehan, 1998, as cited in Ellis, 2003, p. 114). Receiving delayed feedback after task completion may make learners aware of the correct form which is reinforced by next pre-task explicit instruction resulting in more complexity in subsequent performance.

Regarding accuracy, when learners receive explicit instruction before task completion and then are provided with delayed feedback after task completion, they are aware of the need to use the given structure, and will attempt to do so while performing the task. It must be noted that the explicit instruction may or may not affect accuracy. It can be concluded that delaying the feedback is favored. Preparatory attention and memory theory and reactivation and reconsolidation theory predict that delayed feedback will be more effective.

Additionally, two groups namely main/immediate, and main/delayed groups had the good condition for accuracy, too. The learners who were provided with main-task explicit instruction were able to make more error-free sentences whether they received immediate feedback or delayed feedback. This finding echoes that of Samuda (2001) and Spada and Lightbown (2008). One explanation for this finding is that greater accuracy was the result of monitoring explicit knowledge use in turn resulting from the explicit instruction that the learners were provided in main-task stage (Ellis, 2008). The immediate feedback was effective because it is provided before errors are proceduralized and reinforced through communicative practice (Fu & Li, 2020), and there was proximity between explicit instruction and immediate feedback which allowed the learners to control the resources. The

efficiency of delayed feedback was also reinforced by main-task explicit instruction benefiting subsequent performance.

Regarding GJT and EIT, pre/immediate group had the most gain in both explicit and implicit knowledge of target linguistic feature, but the difference was not significant, either. The findings of this study confirm those of previous research on the impact of pre-task explicit instruction on acquisition (Shintani, 2018; Williams & Evans, 1998). The reason why the difference was not significant can be attributed to this fact that the participant may not be developmentally ready for this complex and late-acquired structure as it was the case for Li et al. (2016).

6. Conclusion

This study which was an attempt to investigate the combined effect of the stage of explicit instruction and feedback timing which can shed some light on how to provide guidelines for a successful task implementation. We compared how the learners performed on the task and scored in GJT and EIT in four different task implementation conditions. We found that explicit instruction before task completion and providing delayed feedback improved accuracy and complexity. Additionally, providing main-task explicit instruction with immediate feedback or delayed feedback resulted in the production which was more accurate. No task implementation condition resulted in a significant increase in explicit or implicit knowledge.

Research results can have relevance for teachers and teacher educators. Teachers need to be familiarized with optimized conditions of task implementation: teachers can be advised when they should provide explicit instruction and what kind of feedback timing can trigger the effect of explicit instruction within a task-based lesson. Therefore, it would be helpful for training teachers in this regard. Additionally, research findings may advise material developers about providing and sequencing the content of teaching

materials (Fazilatfar & Beedel, 2008). Teachers and material developers can design and implement tasks in classroom contexts with a higher degree of efficacy. For instance, as findings of this study indicate, if teachers provide explicit instruction before task completion and delay feedback to end of task, the learners can have chance of improving accuracy and complexity regarding task performance.

It is suggested to replicate this study with more participants. Due to the Covid-19, it was not possible to give tests or treatments face to face. All things were done online. The participants could be supervised more efficiently with more effective instructions especially in the case of pretest (Some participants neglected the EIT section so they were excluded). There was no possibility to give delayed posttest to get more valid results. It may be worth conducting a similar study to control for some of the variables which were extraneous in this study.

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