# The Impact of Proactive and Reactive Focus on Form in Multimodal Settings on EFL Learners' Comprehension and Production of Modal Auxiliaries

Mahsa Adloo [*]                    Gholam Reza Rohani [**]

## Abstract

**The major objective of this experimental research was to assess the differences between two varieties of focus on form instruction, namely proactive and reactive across multimodal vs. traditional input settings in both comprehension and production of modal auxiliaries. The participants of the study were 75 Iranian English as a foreign language (EFL) high school students at the elementary level in three classes. The students in each class took part in a pre-test including both comprehension and production items. Then, they were randomly exposed to one of the three types of grammar instruction, i.e. proactive focus on form in which students were exposed to multimodal input through preplanned techniques of input enhancement and input flood, reactive focus on form in which the tasks occurred in multimodal episodes including negotiation and correction by the instructor through recasts, clarification requests, and repetition techniques. Lastly, in the control group, the students were provided with a pamphlet and their teacher's explanations. The post-test was then administered to the three groups, and the results were analyzed by conducting a one-way-analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) which revealed a significant difference among these three groups. The results showed that the proactive group outperformed the reactive and control groups both in the comprehension and production of modal auxiliaries. At the end of the experiment, a brief survey which was accomplished through an interview revealed that the majority of the**

**students highly favored PowerPoint presentations, teacher's explanations, and video clips respectively.**

The success of language learning to a large extent depends on multiple sets of abstruse factors; among these factors, the strategy of grammar learning needs to be explored and investigated (Supakorn, Feng, & Limmun, 2018). One of the major issues in second language pedagogy is teaching language forms, particularly grammar (Ellis, Basturkmen, & Loewen, 2002). The troublesome property and multi-use of the English modal auxiliaries provide a serious challenge for foreign language learners (Abdul-Fatttah, 2011).

Focus on form (FonF) is regarded as a kind of treatment or instruction for teaching a linguistic form in the context of a communicative task (Long, 1991). Teaching forms through communicative activities and procedures for achieving this consideration carry great importance (Doughty & Williams, 1998). As Ellis, Basturkmen, and Loewen (2002) stated, form-focused instruction can be distinguished by two varieties; incidental focus on form and planned focus on form. Proactive focus on form is a planned method of instruction, and Reactive focus on form is considered to be incidental in response to learners' errors (Fotos & Nassaji, 2007).

In the last fifty years, technology has afforded a great extent of L2 audiovisual materials and other supplies of authentic input for foreign language (FL) learning (Galimberti & Miralpeix, 2018). Le Vine and Scollon (2004) argued that multimodality embraces various modals which can be utilized in communication, including speech, pictures, color, and taste. Other researchers proposed that the concept of multimodal involves the interaction of more than two instruments (Gu, 2007; Hu, 2007; Zhang, 2009; Zhu, 2008). Due to the different theories and practices in this context, the crux of the matter is the meaning-making potency of the divergent multimodal discourse designs as an overriding element of visual literacy which paves the way for language learners to deal with new modes

of information portrayal more efficiently (Farias, Obilinovic, & Orrego, 2011).


## Literature Review
### The Theoretical Background of Form-focused Instruction

Several second language acquisition scholars such as Schmidt (1993), Sharwood Smith (1993), and Van Patten (1989) argued a method that entails a substantial notice of the grammatical forms of the second language which is a principal theme in second language acquisition. They pointed out the pivotal role of form-focused instruction (FFI) in the teaching of a language. Despite its crucial role in second language pedagogy, some researchers detected a few problems while applying this technique. For example, Ellis (1997) argues that form-focused tasks or activities have two disadvantages:

1. FFA (Form-Focused Activities) will be beneficial if the learner can acquire the issue in question, which is the Teachability Hypothesis presented by Pienemann (1985).
2. When learners are corrected after misstating certain structures, they might feel anxious (psycho-affective block to learning introduced by Krashen, 1997).

Another problem regarding the focus on form instruction is practicality; chiefly, class size matters (Poole, 2003). As Long (1991) and Long and Robinson (1998) mentioned, focus on form instruction seems to be suited to small classrooms that are intended to enable teachers for verbally addressing their students' problematic structures, presumably through classroom discussion, Q/A sessions, and incidental and planned public speaking situations. Besides schooling problems, Long (1991) and Long and Robinson's (1998) implication of focus on form instruction forces instructors to have the capability of native or near-native fluency; especially, in oral situations, they should have the authority of recognizing students' form-based mistakes and correct them simultaneously. Butler (2004), for example, accounts that elementary school EFL teachers in Japan are at low levels of L2 proficiency, especially in the area of oral

grammar. Another report is presented by Yu (2001) who claims that similar levels of low-proficiency teachers are prevalent among Chinese EFL teachers who think that the grammar-translation method is their only option and that this method is the most acceptable one for them since they can mainly teach English in Chinese. Hence, teaching English via the native language is currently used across many settings due to low L2 proficiency on behalf of teachers (Poole, 2005).

However, Robinson and Long (1998) and Doughty and Williams (1998) have been found to oppose the claims against focus on form instruction. Long and Robinson believed that this approach is stimulated by interaction hypothesis and has a positive impact on interlanguage development. They found that the result of focus on form could be noticing that was proposed by Schmit (1993). Moreover, Ellis, Basturkmen, and Lowen (2001) reported that learners who participated in communicative focus on form activities benefited from grammatical accuracy and use of new structures. Furthermore, other surveys on focus on form also assign a key role for grammar instruction in terms of communicative approaches (e.g., Doughty & Williams, 1998; Ellis, 1994, 1995; Long, 1996, 2000; Norris & Ortega, 2000; Spada, 1997).

Nevertheless, practically, focus on form instruction is interpreted flexibly. For instance, Shak and Gardner (2008), under the heading focus on form, offered grammar tasks encompassing sentences to be completed with a correct grammatical form or to match a picture to active or passive sentences. There are various ways in which focus on form is understood in second language classrooms. Furthermore, inductive instruction can be beneficial when combined with problem-solving activities or structured input tasks particularly when the central attention is on form and meaning (Takimoto, 2008).

## The Experimental Background of Form-focused Instruction

Regarding the experimental background of FFI, there are some studies focusing on the issue of form-focused instruction that mainly emphasized the provision of different tasks and techniques under the

umbrella of this topic. For example, investigating extraversion versus introversion in language learners and their impacts on the incidental FonF was the subject of Kim and Nassaji's (2017) study. Twenty-eight ESL students, making two classes of advanced and upper-intermediate, as well as their teacher participated in the study. The process of data collection was conducted through classroom observation lasting for nearly seven weeks via background and personality trait questionnaires. Before commencing the instruction, the data were first obtained from the instances of FonF episodes. The findings demonstrated that extraverted learners had more tendency towards form-focused episodes (FFE) in the advanced class, and the introverted learners in the upper-intermediate class achieved more successful uptake.

Furthermore, Keyvanfar and Bakshiri (2011) made a comparison between the effect of proactive and reactive focus on form on grammar acquisition of 88 Iranian EFL learners at beginner and upper-intermediate proficiency levels. The findings revealed that disregarding the level of proficiency, the proactive FonF method was more influential in enhancing participants' grammatical knowledge. They concluded that in an EFL setting like Iran with no adequate exposure to linguistic forms, planned grammar instruction would be more beneficial. Also, Hawkes (2012) investigated the impact of focused attention on form when learners repeated tasks as a post-task activity. The results revealed that the participants shifted their focus towards form in the activities, implying the fact that task repetition may be an effective option for instructors who intend to practice task-based language teaching (TBLT) in their classrooms. However, Thornbury (2004) found that reactive method of instruction is more fruitful than proactive instruction. He expressed that following each learner's proceeding course is easier if we provide them with feedback on their communicative errors rather than pre-empting the errors via pre-planned methods.

A recent study by Kamyia (2018) concerned, specifically, framing the issue of proactive versus reactive focus on form. He clarified some points regarding these two principal types of form-focused instruction. He made

it clear that in unplanned proactive focus on form, instructors may shift learners' attention to exert the planning opportunity to focus on enhancing the accuracy of students' statements in the following tasks. Moreover, in case of a planned proactive focus on form, teachers must consider the use of form (s) in task creation which is imperative to fulfill the task (i.e., task-essentialness), in this sense they can make sure that students focus on the form(s). Problem-oriented reactive focus on form is probably the only kind of focus on form that can be presented implicitly. By and large, as it was mentioned by Ellis, Basturkmen, and Loewen (2002), due to theoretical and empirical reasons, teacher's significant function in a communicative activity is to be twofold, performing as a communicative partner while noticing on form when needed.

However, in the previous studies concerning the focus on form treatment, certain limitations exist. First, research on the subject has ignored applying reactive and proactive focus on form on teaching complex grammatical structures such as modal auxiliaries to date. Second, no study in the literature has ever tried to compare proactive and reactive focus on form techniques in teaching modal auxiliaries through multimodal settings. Next, what is not yet clear is the impact of these two approaches on the comprehension and production of problematic grammatical rules such as modal auxiliaries in EFL settings. Finally, research on the subject has been mostly restricted to comparisons of proactive and reactive focus on form without considering students' attitudes towards the treatments they received. Hence, the primary goal of this project is to check whether there is any significant difference between the effect of these two types of focus on form (proactive and reactive) with different input modalities and also in comparison with traditional instruction on EFL learners' comprehension and production of modal auxiliaries.

**Focus on Form Subcategories: Proactive Vs. Reactive**

Proactive focus on form is a type of instruction in which "attention is given to linguistic items identified as problematic, although no immediate

error has been produced" (Loewen, 2011, p. 579). As noted in Ellis et al. (2001), teacher-initiated and learner-initiated are two ways to present proactive instruction. In the former, instructors try to draw learners' attention to a linguistic form which is predicted to be problematic for them and in the latter, learners may ask their instructor a question regarding a linguistic structure in which they have difficulties. Ranta and Lyster (2007) claimed that exposing learners to multiple inputs that include comprehensible input and enhanced input with noticing tasks would promote learners' attention to the input features.

One of the issues related to focus on form technique in language classes is the concept of corrective feedback. Fotos & Nassaji (2007) conceptualized reactive focus on form as a pedagogical technique in which correction occurs after committing communication errors. Furthermore, Baleghizadeh (2010) argued that reactive focus on form is regarded as valuable negative evidence; it extensively comes about when some unacceptable forms and errors arise during conducting communicative activities, and the instructor tries to supply the correct structures or requires the students to correct their classmates.

**Focus on Form Tasks and Techniques**

The current study applied exposure-based focus on form technique to provide learners with proactive focus on form so that they could tackle the problematic areas of modal auxiliaries. According to Ellis (2012), exposure-based focus on form is categorized into enriched input and enhanced input. Regarding the reactive focus form instruction, recast, clarification requests, and repetition were considered in this study.

**Input flood.** Ellis (2001) pointed out that input flood as a type of enriched input involves fulsome exemplars without any device to draw attention to the target feature. That is to say, attention is attained as a result of repeated exposure to a linguistic feature.

**Input enhancement.** Ellis (2001) believed that input enhancement which is another option of enriched input highlights the target structure and, therefore, draws learner's attention to it. The major aspect of input enhancement is emphasizing the target structure in some manner through

bolding, glossing, or underlining. It aims to improve the saliency of the structure so that it is more likely to be noticed (Ellis, 2012).

**Recast.** Recast as a type of implicit feedback necessitates the instructor's restating of a learner's erroneous utterance through changes in one or more elements reserving the intended meaning untouched (Ellis, 2008).

**Repetition.** Repetition can be called the instructor's replication of student's erroneous statement by highlighting the error mainly by changing the intonation (Servat Shirkhani & Zia Tajeddin, 2016).

**Clarification request.** Clarification requests play the role of prompting students to notice the form and requesting for meaning clarification (Loewen & Nabei, 2007). Through a reformulated utterance, students understand that due to a mistake, their utterance was misunderstood by their teacher and try to make the necessary changes.

## Purpose of the Study

Since grammar is an overriding and momentous concept in the senior high school context for university entrance exam preparation (Underwood, 2017) and due to the existence of many perplexing areas in terms of modal auxiliaries, this study intended to check if Iranian EFL learners are competent enough to handle divergent semantic functions of modal auxiliaries. Moreover, the aim of this experimental project was to examine the effect of two varieties of focus on form instruction, namely proactive and reactive across multimodal versus traditional input settings on Iranian EFL learners' comprehension and production of modal auxiliaries. Besides, the study sought to explore students' attitudes towards the treatment they received and the instructional materials to which they were exposed. Therefore, the administration of this study shed some lights on the following research questions:

**Q1:** Which of the three types of instruction, i.e., proactive and reactive focus on form with multimodal input, and the traditional teaching can significantly enhance the EFL learners' comprehension of modal auxiliaries?

**Q2:** Which of the three types of instruction, i.e., proactive and reactive focus on form with multimodal input, and the traditional teaching can significantly enhance the EFL learners' production of modal auxiliaries?

**Q3:** What is the attitude of each of the three groups, i.e., proactive focus on form, reactive focus on form, and the traditional (control) groups towards the treatment they experience?

## Method

### Participants

The participants who were 75 female junior high school students (seventh grade, aged 12-13) were recruited through intact sampling from one of the junior high schools of Shiraz (Vali-e-Asr), Iran. The sample subjects were drawn out of 90 students who volunteered to partake in the oxford placement test. They had enrolled in three separate classes. At the beginning of the study, each class consisted of 30 students. After administering Oxford placement test and determining student's level of English language proficiency, i.e., elementary level, there remained 25 subjects in each of the three classes which were then randomly assigned to proactive, reactive, and control groups.

### Instruments

To conduct this study, the following instruments were employed:
  a) Oxford Placement Test (OPT): To assure that learners were in the same proficiency level, Oxford placement test version 2 (2001), the product of Oxford university press was administered.
  b) Teacher-made grammar test: Two parallel forms of a 30-item grammar test, including 15 production and 15 comprehension items were designed and applied as the pre-test and post-test. The content validity of the tests was also approved by designing a table of specifications and by consulting two experts, who were experienced English teachers at that junior high school. The reliability of the tests was calculated through Cronbach alpha which indicated the high

correlation index of .86.

c) Powerpoint presentation: All structures and rules of modal auxiliaries and the tasks related to them and based on the respective textbook were mentioned in the powerpoint presentations of both proactive and reactive groups.

d) Pamphlet: The 15-page pamphlet prepared for the present study included all the grammar box sections on modal auxiliaries found in high school English textbooks followed by clarifying examples.

e) Video clip: As a multimedia instructional aide, short video clips on different modal auxiliaries were prepared from different sources, mainly educational websites.

**Procedure**

To administer this research, the following steps were taken:

**Administering the Placement Test**

To begin the study, three seventh grade classes at Vali-e-Asr high school were chosen. To make sure about their linguistic homogeneity in terms of their English language proficiency, 90 students in the three classes took the Oxford Placement Test version 2 (2001). The results indicated that 75 out of 90 students scored within the range of 16 to 29 which is titled elementary (lower to upper) based on the Oxford Placement Test instructions. Thus, three linguistically homogenous groups, each including 25 subjects were used in the current study.

**Administering the Pre-test**

In the next stage, the researcher-made grammar test was exerted as a pre-test to all the participants to know about their performance before the treatment (see appendix A). The pre-test also acted as a further measure to make sure about the students' homogeneity in terms of their knowledge of modal auxiliaries. The participants were given 30 minutes to answer all the items.

**Modal Auxiliary's Instruction**

Modal auxiliary's instruction was accomplished in six teaching sessions across all three groups of the study. Each session lasted about 30 to 45 minutes. Modal auxiliaries that were elected to be instructed in the current study included will, be going to, may, might, must, should, can, could, be able to, and past modals which express possibility, deduction, and advisability. As the type of instruction was different for each group, the procedures of modal auxiliaries' instruction are described comprehensively in the following sections.

**Instruction for the proactive group.** In the planned proactive multimodal group, the teaching materials were presented through different input modalities, including visual and auditory inputs. Students were exposed to these inputs through pre-planned techniques of input enhancement and input flood. At first, the students received their pamphlets to see the grammar rules followed by their examples in context. It should be noted that the content of the pamphlet was the same across all groups. Next, the rules of the specified modal auxiliaries and their examples were illustrated through a powerpoint presentation. All definitions, principles, and structures that were mentioned in the powerpoint slides were explained thoroughly by the instructor. The keywords of the structures were highlighted, underlined, and provided in different colors to expose the learners to comprehensible enhanced input. The other technique that provided repeated opportunities for attention to the pre-selected structures was input flood in which multiple examples (four to five examples) followed each newly taught modal auxiliary. After that, several activities were inserted in the slides to practice the specified modal auxiliaries. In the case where the students were unable to answer the questions included in the activities, the teacher answered them. At the end of each session, the students watched the related video clips of modal auxiliaries. The duration of each video clip was about 2 to 3 minutes. In

this group, each video clip was played two times to enhance comprehension.

**Instruction for the reactive group.** In the reactive multimodal group, teaching materials were introduced through various input modalities, including visual and auditory inputs. The students were exposed to these inputs through the pamphlet, powerpoint slides, video clips, and teacher's explanations. At first, the pamphlets were given to the students. Then, the structures of modal auxiliaries were taught via powerpoint slides accompanied by teacher's explanations. Only one example proceeded each structure. Subsequently, the related activities were illustrated, and students had to answer items one by one in turn. Meanwhile, whenever students committed errors in responding to the items, the instructor corrected them by using oral corrective feedback techniques including clarification requests, recast, and repetition. At the end of each session, the students watched the respective video clips of modal auxiliaries once.

**Instruction for the control group.** In the control group, students were not subjected to multimodal input. They only benefited from the pamphlet and the teacher's explanations. Based on the researcher's random inquiries from experienced high school teachers in Shiraz, the traditional way to teach grammar included the major phases of orally explaining the grammatical points, writing down a few relevant examples on the board and then requiring the students to do the relevant exercises in class or as a take-home activity. The students received the respective activities in the form of printed handouts. They were then given some time to do the exercises. The answers were then given by the teacher, and the students could check their answers.

**Applying an Oral Interview**

At the end of the last treatment session, the researcher had an oral interview with ten randomly selected students from each group. Each interview took about 10 minutes, and it contained three questions (see appendix B). It should be noted that the control group students had to

answer only one question. The main purpose of the interview was to explore students' attitudes towards the treatment they received and the type of input to which they were exposed.

**Administering the Post-test**

After the treatment was over, all the students in the three groups attended a post-test which was the parallel form of the pre-test (see appendix D).

## Results

**ANCOVA Results for Comprehension and Production Tests**

Before implementing the ANCOVA, some preliminary analyses were carried out to examine the specific assumptions of normality, linearity, homogeneity of variances, and homogeneity of regression slopes that are associated with the ANCOVA. According to the results, no assumption in this regard was violated.

According to the normality assumption, the distribution of post-test scores across the three groups should be normal. A non-significant result indicates normality. As it is shown in Table 1., the Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistic indicates normality for the reactive (p= .2), and the control (p= .2) groups, while the proactive group with the p-value of .047 violates the assumption. Although the probability value for the proactive group is less than .05, it can be regarded as an approximately normal result since the p-value is close to .05. However, to assure that post-test scores are normally distributed across the three groups, the histogram of residuals was checked and compared with the corresponding normal probability plot of the residuals. According to Figures 1. and 2., the histogram of residuals is approximately normal without excessive skew or kurtosis. Besides, the normal probability plot of the residuals is also linear, supporting the condition that the error terms are normally distributed.

Table 1.

*Tests of Normality for Post-test Scores*

| | Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a] | Shapiro-Wilk |
|---|---|---|

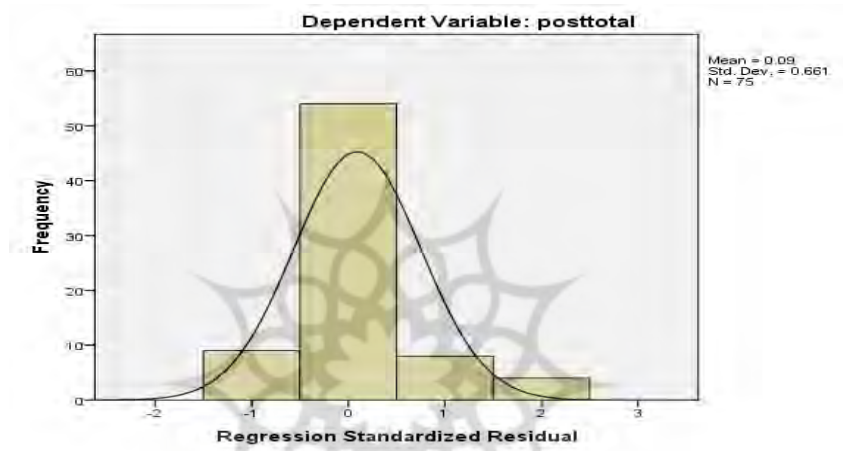| group | | Statistic | df | Sig. | Statistic | df | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Post-test total | proactive | .175 | 25 | .047 | .953 | 25 | .297 |
| | reactive | .108 | 25 | .200* | .977 | 25 | .823 |
| | control | .126 | 25 | .200* | .969 | 25 | .622 |



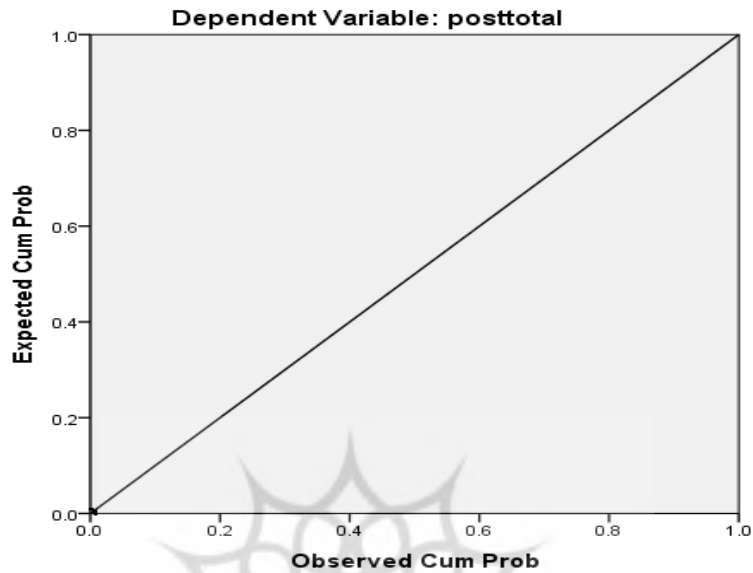Figure 1.
*The Histogram of Residuals*

Figure 2.
*Normal Probability Plot of the Residuals*

Regarding linearity, a scatterplot was executed to check the linear relationship between the covariate (pre-test scores) and the dependent variable (post-test scores) for each of the three groups. An indication of a curvilinear relationship violates the linearity assumption. As Figure 3. illustrates, there is a moderate and nearly positive correlation between each pair of variables. Therefore, the assumption of linearity is not violated.
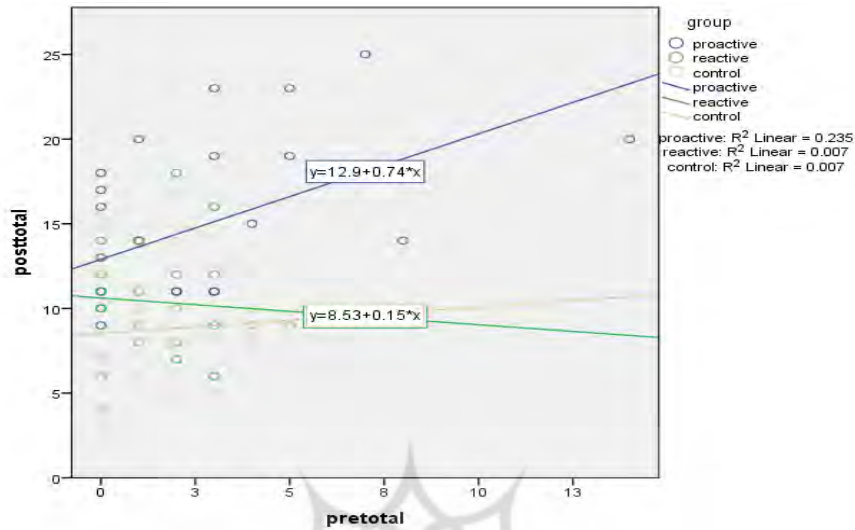
Figure 3.

*Scatterplot for the Linear Relationship between the Covariate (Pre-test) and the Post-test*

Another assumption that should be considered in running an ANCOVA is the homogeneity of variances in post-test scores for each of the three groups. If the probability value in the Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances is smaller than .05, the assumption is violated, and the variances are not equal. As the homogeneity of the variances in scores for each of the three groups which took the post-test was checked, the variance in post-test scores was homogenous for each of the three groups. Table 2. depicts the probability value for the Levene's Test which is .14, and therefore, greater than .05. Accordingly, the assumption is not violated.

Table 2.

*Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances*

| Dependent Variable: | Total Post-test | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| F | df1 | df2 | Sig. |
| 1.983 | 2 | 72 | .145 |

The final assumption elucidates the relationship between the covariate and the dependent variable for each of the three groups. It was necessary to check if there is any statistically significant interaction between the covariate and the treatment manipulation. If the interaction between the covariate and the dependent variable is significant, the assumption is violated. As Table 3. displays, there is no statistically significant interaction at an alpha level of .05 among the covariate (the pre-test scores) and the treatment manipulation. $F(2, 69) = 1.83$, p= 0.16 >.05. Thereupon, the assumption of homogeneity of regression slopes is not violated which confirms the earlier deduction gained from the inspection of the scatterplots for each of the three groups.

Table 3.

*Tests of between-subjects Effects*

Dependent Variable:  Total Post-test

| Source | Type III Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Corrected Model | 625.982[a] | 5 | 125.196 | 8.881 | .000 |
| Intercept | 4346.615 | 1 | 4346.615 | 308.339 | .000 |
| group | 126.554 | 2 | 63.277 | 4.489 | .015 |
| Pre-test total | 17.043 | 1 | 17.043 | 1.209 | .275 |
| group * pre-test total | 51.757 | 2 | 25.879 | 1.836 | .167 |
| Error | 972.685 | 69 | 14.097 | | |
| Total | 11232.000 | 75 | | | |
| Corrected Total | 1598.667 | 74 | | | |

To answer the first and second research questions, the following statistical analyses were conducted.

Table 4.

*Descriptive Statistics for Comparing Comprehension Post-test Scores*

Dependent Variable: post-test comprehension

| group | Mean | Std. Deviation | N |
|---|---|---|---|
| proactive | 9.44 | 2.859 | 25 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| reactive | 6.88 | 2.438 | 25 |
| control | 5.64 | 2.018 | 25 |
| Total | 7.32 | 2.905 | 75 |

It is clear from Table 4. that the mean scores of comprehension for the proactive group is higher than the reactive and control groups.

Table 5. provides the main ANCOVA results for the comprehension test. After controlling for pre-test scores, there was a statistically significant difference between the three groups in post-test scores in terms of their comprehension, $F(2, 71) = 13.48$, $p = .000 < .05$, partial eta squared $= .27$. The actual difference in the mean scores of the groups can be seen in the medium effect size obtained.

Table 5.
*ANCOVA for Comprehension Test*

| | Dependent Variable: | post-test comprehension | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Source | Type III Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. | Partial Eta Squared |
| Corrected Model | 222.413[a] | 3 | 74.138 | 13.097 | .000 | .356 |
| Intercept | 1783.110 | 1 | 1783.110 | 315.000 | .000 | .816 |
| Pre-test comprehension | 34.653 | 1 | 34.653 | 6.122 | .016 | .079 |
| Group | 152.685 | 2 | 76.342 | 13.486 | .000 | .275 |
| Error | 401.907 | 71 | 5.661 | | | |
| Total | 4643.000 | 75 | | | | |
| Corrected Total | 624.320 | 74 | | | | |

Furthermore, the estimated marginal means on the dependent variable (comprehension post-test), for the three groups are illustrated in Table 6. separately; Proactive group (M = 9.22), Reactive group (M = 7.97),

Control group (M = 5.71). Thus, the null hypothesis regarding the first research question is rejected.

Table 6.

*Estimated Marginal Means of Groups*

| Dependent Variable: post-test comprehension | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Group | Mean | Std. Error | 95% Confidence Interval | |
| | | | Lower Bound | Upper Bound |
| Proactive | 9.229[a] | .483 | 8.266 | 10.193 |
| Reactive | 7.019[a] | .479 | 6.063 | 7.974 |
| Control | 5.712[a] | .477 | 4.761 | 6.663 |

Table 7. displays information regarding the mean, standard deviation, and the number of participants in each of the three groups for the production post-test scores while the effect of the covariate has not been statistically removed. It can be inferred from the production mean scores that the proactive group gained higher scores than the reactive and control groups.

Table 7.

*Descriptive Statistics for Comparing Production Post-test Scores*

| Dependent Variable: post-test production | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Group | Mean | Std. Deviation | N |
| Proactive | 5.36 | 2.899 | 25 |
| Reactive | 3.48 | 1.327 | 25 |
| Control | 3.20 | 1.848 | 25 |
| Total | 4.01 | 2.310 | 75 |

As the main ANCOVA results are presented in Table 8., the corresponding probability value to our independent variable (Group) reveals the fact that our groups are significantly different with respect to their post-test production scores; since the probability value is p = .001< .05. Therefore, there is a statistically significant difference between the three groups in post-test scores, in terms of the production of modal auxiliaries.

Table 8.

*ANCOVA for Production Test*

Dependent Variable: post-test production

| Source | Type III Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. | Partial Eta Squared |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Corrected Model | 70.070[a] | 3 | 23.357 | 5.104 | .003 | .177 |
| Intercept | 902.258 | 1 | 902.258 | 197.159 | .000 | .735 |
| Pre-test production | 1.083 | 1 | 1.083 | .237 | .628 | .003 |
| Group | 69.302 | 2 | 34.651 | 7.572 | .001 | .176 |
| Error | 324.917 | 71 | 4.576 | | | |
| Total | 1603.000 | 75 | | | | |
| Corrected Total | 394.987 | 74 | | | | |

In addition, Table 9. represents the estimated marginal means on the dependent variable (post-test production) for each of the three groups; proactive group (M = 5.36), reactive group (M = 3.49), and control group (M = 3.18). These values differ from the means shown in Table 8 since they are the adjusted means by the use of the covariate in the analysis. By and large, these results suggest that the difference between the production post-test scores of the three groups is significant, and this difference is mainly due to the type of instruction to which they were subjected. Thus, the null hypothesis regarding the second research question is rejected. Moreover, the participants in the proactive group improved more on their production post-test scores compared with the reactive and control groups.

Table 9.

*Estimated Marginal Means of Groups*

Dependent Variable: post-test production

| Group | Mean | Std. Error | 95% Confidence Interval | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Lower Bound | Upper Bound |
| proactive | 5.362[a] | .428 | 4.509 | 6.215 |
| reactive | 3.491[a] | .428 | 2.637 | 4.346 |
| control | 3.187[a] | .429 | 2.332 | 4.042 |

## The Results of the Interview Questions

The last research question of the study formed the qualitative aspect of the project to determine EFL learners' attitudes towards different instructional methods to which they were exposed and to analyze these attitudes in the framework of two basic factors including multimodal input and method of instruction. To have a vivid picture of the differences in attitudes towards the treatment they experienced, three questions were designed, and ten students of each group were interviewed. It should be noted that the students of the control group were only asked the third interview question since they weren't subjected to multimodal input settings.

**IQ1:** In your opinion, which of these input resources was more effective in your learning and which one was less effective?
A) Powerpoint   B) Video clip   C) Teacher's explanations   D) Pamphlet

Figures 4 and 5 illustrate the percentages of the answers to the first interview question in the form of a bar chart for each group. As shown in these Figures, the majority of the students believed that the powerpoint presentations and teacher's explanations were the most effective input resources in their learning, and the pamphlet and video clip were the least effective inputs in order of priority.
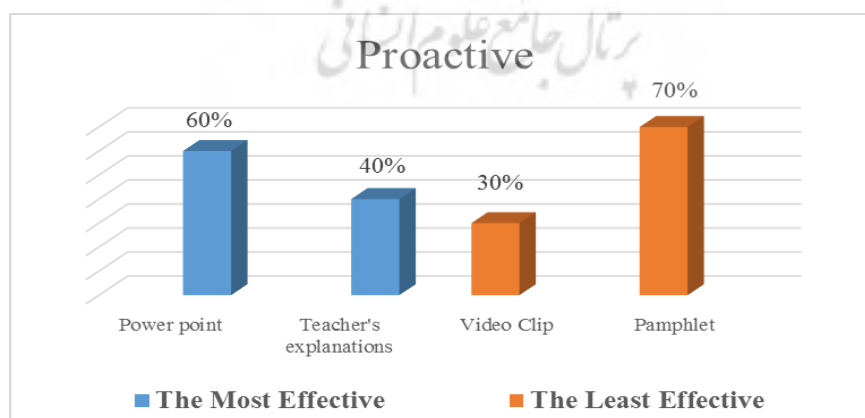


Figure 4.

*Proactive Groups' Attitude towards the Effectiveness of Input Resources*
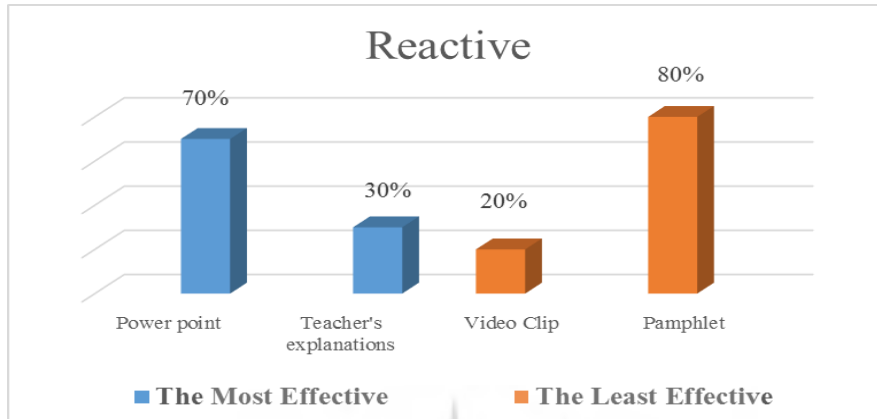


Figure 5.

*Reactive Groups' Attitude Towards the Effectiveness of Input Resources*

**IQ2:** Which of these input resources was more appealing and which one was less appealing to you while learning the grammar of modal auxiliaries

 A) Powerpoint    B) Video clip    C) Teacher's explanations   D) Pamphlet

The results obtained from this interview question is illustrated in the form of a bar chart for each of the two groups in Figure 6. and 7.



Figure 6.

*The Most and Least Appealing Input Resources for the Proactive Group*
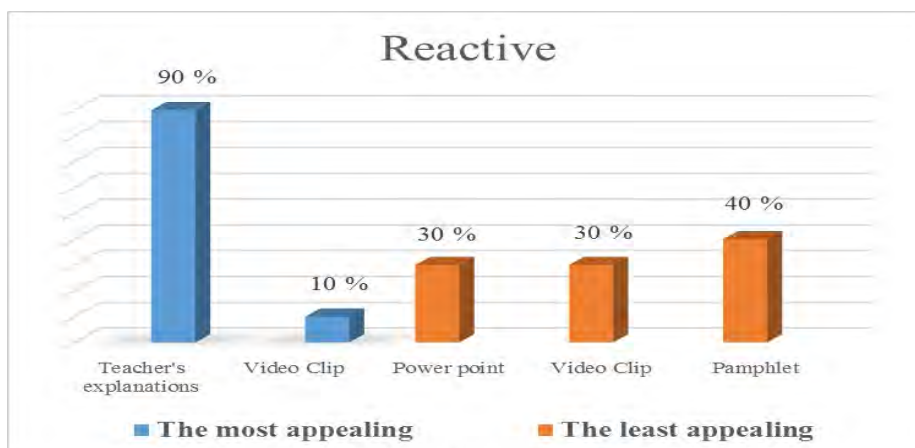
Figure 7.

*The Most and Least Appealing Input Resources for the Reactive Group*

According to Figure 6. the most appealing input for most of the interviewed students of the proactive group was powerpoint (60%), and the least appealing input for them was pamphlet (50%). Furthermo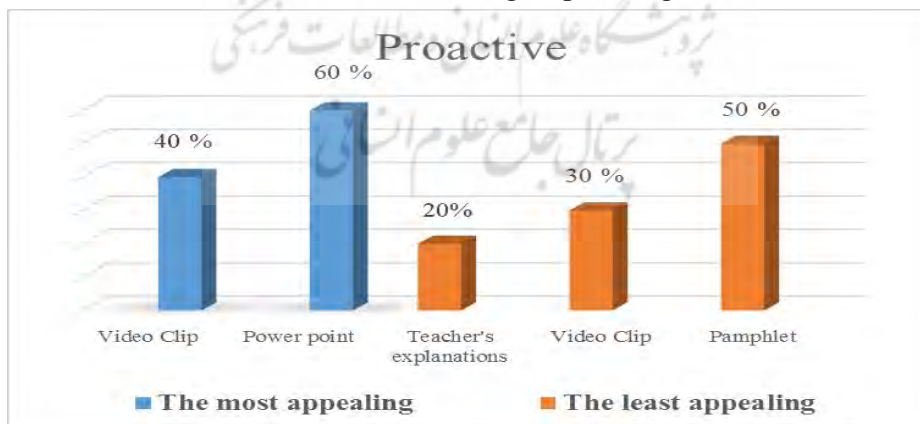re, it can be inferred from Figure 7. that the most appealing input for the majority of the reactive group students was teacher's explanations (90%) while the least appealing input for them was pamphlet (40%).

**IQ3:** In your opinion, what changes in the teaching process that you observed would improve the quality of instruction?

The last interview question was provoked various opinions across the three groups. Tables 9, 10, and 11 categorize the most common answers to this question for each group.

Table 9.

*The Proactive Group's Attitudes towards the Instruction*

| Students' suggestions | Number of students in percent |
| --- | --- |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | Devoting some time to practice the intended modal auxiliaries through conversational strategies. | 20% |
| 2. | Receiving auditory input for improving their listening skills (except video clips). | 10% |
| 3. | Doing the activities on their own and receiving feedback from the instructor when it is necessary. | 20% |
| 4. | No change in the process of instruction. | 50% |

Table 10.

*The Reactive Group's Attitudes towards the Instruction*

| | Students' suggestions | Number of students in percent |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | Mentioning the powerpoint activities in their pamphlet and doing activities in groups or pairs. | 10% |
| 2. | Introducing more examples by the instructor for their better understanding of the intended modal auxiliaries. | 30% |
| 3. | Introducing some activities to be done at home. | 10% |
| 4. | Presenting more video clips for each session. | 10% |
| 5. | No change in the process of instruction. | 40% |

Table 11.

*The Control Group's Attitudes towards the Instruction*

| | Students' suggestions | Number of students in percent |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | Introducing conversations with the intended modal auxiliaries to be memorized and practiced. | 40% |
| 2. | Applying other teaching materials such as CDs and video clips. | 30% |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 3. | Doing activities in pairs. | 10% |
| 4. | No change in the process of instruction. | 20% |

On the whole, regarding the students' overall attitudes towards the proactive and reactive methods of instruction, approximately half of the students in both groups were satisfied with the instruction they received and suggested no changes to be implemented in the process of instruction. Therefore, they were more satisfied with the method of instruction than the control group.

## Discussion

The main objective of the present study was to explore the effectiveness of the two types of form-focused instruction; namely proactive and reactive across multimodal vs. traditional input settings on Iranian EFL learners' comprehension and production of modal auxiliaries. In addition, the second part of the inquiry surveyed EFL learners' attitudes towards the treatment they received and the various types of instructional inputs to which they were exposed. The statistical analysis of the ANCOVA showed the significance of the difference among means of the comprehension post-test scores and the group with proactive focus on form along with multimodal input scored higher on modal auxiliary's comprehension post-test. Accordingly, the first research hypothesis is rejected, and it is implied that when we provide a condition in the teaching process which accretes repetitive opportunities to notice target language features, we may observe more satisfactory results concerning learners' comprehension of the specified linguistic forms. Therefore, the observed effectiveness of proactive focus on form method of instruction on students' comprehension of the intended modal auxiliaries in the current study may be attributed to the constructive properties of the teaching method and the sweeping input modalities.

The results of the ANCOVA for the production post-test scores suggested that the three groups were significantly different with respect to

their production of the modal auxiliaries. Interestingly, the proactive focus on form group, along with multimodal input, achieved higher production post-test scores than the reactive and control groups in descending order. Moreover, it can be implied that as reactive focus on form entails a responsive intervention on the part of the teacher in the form of occasional conversion of attention to overriding errors (Long & Robinson, 1998), it provides fewer opportunities for the instructor to elucidate the key grammar points as it becomes more time consuming. Therefore, this may be the reason for learners' weaker production.

In general, the findings of this study are consistent with those of previous research studies (e.g., Coşgun Ögeyik, 2011; Doughty & Williams, 1998; Ellis, 2015; Gao, 2009; Kim & Nassaji, 2017; Loewen, 2004; Robinson & Long, 1998; Takimoto, 2008; Tomita & spade, 2013; Van Patten, 1989) which endorse the profitable effects of form-focused instruction for improving knowledge of different linguistic forms. A study concerned specifically with the impacts of various types of form-focused instruction was conducted by Takimoto (2008), which gave priority to the input-based instructions that focus on target linguistic structures. In his study, he focused on the effect of several types of form-focused instruction on comprehending and producing polite types of requests in the English language. The treatment and control groups were compared based on input and output-based pre-tests, post-tests, and follow-up tests. The findings revealed that the three treatment groups gained higher scores than the control group, proposing that in this investigation explicit input-based instruction was profitable for developing learners' comprehension and production of polite English requests.

Although no previous research known to date by the researcher has been found to investigate the impact of proactive and reactive focus on form on learning modal auxiliaries, in particular, there are various studies (e.g., Bakhshiri & Mohammadi, 2014; Ghelichi, 2017; Keyvanfar & Bakhshiri, 2011; Moghimi & Khalaji, 2015; Rooholamin, Biria & Haghverdi, 2016) whose findings are supportive of the momentous effects of proactive focus on form in developing different second language

knowledge skills and confirm the superiority of this method over the reactive focus on form. Besides, some of these studies suggested that this method of instruction could considerably enhance the acquisition of certain grammatical structures.

The results of this experimental setup bear a close resemblance to the study conducted by Bakhshiri and Mohammadi (2014). Their objective was to compare and contrast proactive and reactive focus on form on grammar progression of Iranian EFL learners through evaluating students' writing compositions. After comparing the participants' writing compositions on the pre-test, post-test, and delayed post-test, it became clear that learners who received proactive FoF outperformed the group with the reactive FoF method of instruction in both immediate and delayed productions. Moreover, the findings of Keyvanfar and Bakhshiri's (2011) study also authenticated the current study. They undertook a study to compare the influence of proactive and reactive FoF on the grammar progression of 88 Iranian EFL learners who were at two proficiency levels of beginner and upper-intermediate. The results reported that the proactive FoF proved to be more impressive on the grammar advancement of the learners in comparison with the reactive FoF. They strongly believed that in EFL settings like Iran with the least degree of exposure, applying planned grammar instruction is irrevocable. The findings of these studies are in concordance with those of the present one in the sense that utilization of proactive focus on form may remarkably draw EFL students' attention to the specified grammatical structures and as a result, it furnishes high progression in students' comprehension and production of the intended grammatical rules.

Concerning the noteworthy impacts of the proactive focus on form on linguistic structures, Tode's (2007) argument is in line with the present study. He declared that repetitive contrivances that provide an opportunity for learners to notice the linguistic features during language use are necessary to create a parturient form-focused instruction. Besides, Ghelichi (2017) speculated that a traditional instructional syllabus based on abstract grammatical explanations would lead nowhere even for explicit

linguistic knowledge and explicit learning. Macro and Masterman (2006) also suggested similar approaches. They asserted that "the development of grammatical accuracy (i) cannot easily be hurried, (ii) is individually developed (iii) requires continuous exposure to both positive and negative evidence in both receptive and productive tasks" (p. 322).

The findings of the current study can be aligned with a large number of studies (e.g., Farias, Obilinovic, & Orrego, 2011; Kessler, 2013; Ting, 2014; Ruan, 2015; Cárcamo, Cartes, Velásquez, & Larenas, 2016; Galimberti & Miralpeix, 2018) that gave credit to the advantages of applying multimodal input and technological materials in foreign language pedagogy. Royce (2002) through an analysis of a multimodal text extracted from an environmental science textbook evaluated some of the demarches that TESOL professionals can discover with their students; the copresence of visual and linguistic modes in their textbooks. He declared that instructors should overrate the progression of their students' multi-modal communicative potency by technologizing various modes of communication. Therefore, given the revolutions in communication modes in recent years, material designers and language teaching professionals need to be increasingly concerned with improving learners' multimodal communicative competencies.

However, there exist some research (e.g., Doughty & Verela, 1998; Ghaniabadi, Hasheminejad, & Amirian, 2015; Lightbown & Spada, 1990; Muranoi, 2000) whose findings run counter to the findings of the current study, and acknowledge the superiority of the reactive focus on form over the proactive method. For example, the study of Ghaniabadi, Hasheminejad, and Amirian (2015) examines the impact of proactive and reactive focus on form instructions on students' grammatical accuracy. The participants were divided into three groups, including the reactive and proactive focus on form as treatment groups, and the other group was appointed as the control group without treatment. The findings indicated that both methods of instruction developed students' grammatical accuracy while reactive focus on form showed more satisfactory results.

Regarding the third research question, the interpretations of the oral interview suggested that the most commonly preferred input modalities for students were the powerpoint presentations and teacher's explanations in terms of their effectiveness in their learning. In addition, the majority of the students found the teacher's explanation, powerpoint, and video clips as the most appealing inputs among other input modalities. Furthermore, with respect to the students' attitudes towards the instruction to which they were exposed, nearly half of the students in both proactive and reactive groups were satisfied with the related methods of instruction and showed greater interest towards their method of instruction than the control group. Moreover, some students in the traditional group suggested applying other teaching materials such as CDs and video clips to be used in their English classes. Thus, this can give credit to the worthiness of technological tools that were employed in the proactive and reactive groups.

It could be suggested that the main reason for the students' tendency towards proactive and reactive focus on form is deficiencies of the current teaching technique, which is prevalent among the majority of Iranian high schools. According to Ghelichi's (2017) assertions, it is unlikely to promote any implicit or explicit linguistic knowledge of students through traditionally-oriented instructions adopted in Iranian high schools. The findings of this interview question could be connected with Framarz Zadeh's (2016) investigation which considered students' perceptions and attitudes towards effective EFL teachers. A questionnaire was developed to survey different aspects of effective teacher including relational factors, environmental dynamics, common standards, performance assessment, knowledge of the language, and classroom planning. The findings revealed that all of these factors were overriding in effective teaching from EFL learners' perspectives. Therefore, from the findings of the current study and the other mentioned works we can deduce the fact that the role of teachers and effective teaching cannot be denied.

## Conclusion

Given the growing importance of grammar instruction in second language pedagogy, more attention is needed to facilitate the respective learning and teaching processes. Since the grammar issue is a complicated one, it remains controversial among grammarians and researchers; many teachers may try to teach grammatical structures mentioned in the textbooks based on deductive approaches. Their belief traces back to the long experience of traditional instructions that are far from modern teaching trends. It seems to be the case in most of the Iranian high schools in which the shortcomings of the formal EFL curriculum have failed to fulfill the practical needs of the learners such as their communicative needs. It can also justify the establishment of so many private language institutes throughout the country. This problem may be governed by the quality and the type of instructional methods and materials commonly used at junior and senior high school levels. By substituting other teaching strategies and integrating feasible materials such as the ones adopted in the current study, we can take positive steps towards an improved educational system.

However, the project was limited in several dimensions. Firstly, the scope of this study is narrow and is limited to the relative efficacy of the proactive versus reactive focus on form techniques to improve the accurate use of modal auxiliaries by elementary langue learners. Although it has gone some way towards enhancing the quality of instruction in EFL contexts, this should not emulate instructors to focus on teaching specific grammatical items through focus on form instruction. Secondly, there exists a central concern with the use of junior high school students, namely gender imbalances. The participants of this study were all female students. In addition, while this study investigated the effectiveness of proactive and reactive focus on form, it did not explore the exact nature of focus on form episodes employed in the study. It was not obvious what traits of focus on form techniques or interactions were drastic in their effectiveness. Other factors such as the type of grammatical form, the overall context of instruction, and the learners' age might have influenced the findings of the study. In addition, this study was conducted in an adult

EFL context with the elementary level of language proficiency. More broad research is required to have more transparent results with regard to the learners' age groups, other proficiency levels, and other contexts (ESL settings) in the implementation of proactive and reactive focus on form instructions.

In general, the present study provided a springboard for a new way to do focus on form by taking into account the students' opinions regarding the changes to be exerted in the process of instruction. Taken together, the present study may contribute to the line of research on the proactive and reactive focus on form as alternative methodologies, especially in teaching grammar. Therefore, such research endeavors may produce the most noteworthy insights which draw on systematic approaches to synthesize quantitative and qualitative methodologies regarding second language learners' needs.

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**Appendix A. Table of specifications for the researcher-made tests**

| content | Basic modals | Past modals |
|---|---|---|
| Number of production questions | **10** | **5** |
| Number of comprehension questions | **10** | **5** |
| May/might | **4 items** | |
| Can/could | **4 items** | |
| should | **4 items** | |
| must | **4 items** | |
| Will/be going to | **4 items** | |
| must have | | **4 items** |
| should have | | **3 items** |
| May/might have | | **3 items** |
| Natural frequencies | √ | √ |
| Normal test length | √ | √ |
| Authenticity of items in non-test situations | √ | √ |
| Content relevance and representation based on the 7th-grade coursebook | √ | √ |
| Main sources for designing test items | High school English books | High school English books |
| Test format | Multiple choice/fill in the blanks | Multiple choice/fill in the blanks |
| Score for each content area | **20** | **10** |

**Appendix B. Pre-test items**
## Part A: Comprehension questions

-A: Tick √ the sentence, a,b,c or d which best matches the sentence on the right.

1. a: He might be Iranian.                        He has an Iranian passport.
   b: He must be Iranian.
   c: He will be Iranian.
   d: He should be Iranian.

2. a: He can't pass the exam.           He has studied all night.
   b: He may pass the exam.
   c: He shouldn't pass the exam.
   d: He must pass the exam.

3. a: I will buy a big house.          I am going to work hard and save money.
   b: I can't buy a big house.
   c: I will not buy a big house.
   d: I could buy a big house.

4. a: She should visit a doctor.       Maryam is sick today.
   b: She can visit a doctor.
   c: She shouldn't visit a doctor.
   d: She could visit a doctor.

5. a: He could run 200 meters in 22 seconds.     When Tom was 16, he was a fast runner.
   b: He can run 200 meters in 22 seconds.
   c: He should run 200 meters in 22 seconds.
   d: He must run 200 meters in 22 seconds.

-B: Choose the correct answer.

6. A: Ali fell asleep in class this morning.
   B: He…………….too late last night.
a: might have stayed up    b: must have stayed up    c: might stay up    d: must stay up

7. I thought I had some money in my bag, but I don't. I …………. it.
a: must spend    b: might have spent    c: should have spent    d: will

spend

8. Sara is feeling terribly sick today. She ……………... eat anything.
a: can　　b: could　　c: can't　　d: couldn't

9. We have enough milk in the fridge so we ……………… buy some more.
a: might not　　b: must　　c: might　　d: mustn't

10. Mahsa didn't pass the exam. She ………………hard.
a: must have studied　　b: should have studied　　c: might have studied
d: may have studied

-C: Make the best choice to complete each sentence.

11. Susan should/might go to the park. She is bored.
12. Ali doesn't like his bedroom. He told me that he is going to/will paint his bedroom tomorrow.
13. Sam isn't eating his food. He might/must not be hungry.
14. John was not in his room. He must have been/should have been in the kitchen.
15. The teacher was thirsty. She may have drunk/ should have drunk some water.

## Part B: Production questions

-A: Fill in each blank with the best modal verb given below.
(can/can't/could/couldn't/should/shouldn't/may/might/may not/might not/must/mustn't/will/be going to)

16. I ………… do my homework. My teacher always checks if we have done the exercises.
17. Children …………….. eat junk food every day.
18. My sister is late. She……………….be in traffic.
19. I am very tired. I …………….. sleep last night.
20. My mother is a good cook. She ………………. cook pizza tomorrow.
-B: Write five different things you do before you go to school.
21. I should…………………………………………………………………..
22. I am going to/will…………………………………………………………..
23. I must…………………………………………………………………….
24. I can…………………………………………………………………

25. I may…………………………………………………………...
- C: Complete each of the following sentences with the words in the parentheses and the best past modal that suits the context.
26. Sara couldn't visit the doctor because she came by bus. She (take)…………………………….a taxi.
27. When I walked into the house the TV was on, but the house was empty. Dad (forget)…………..………………to turn it off before he left the house.
28. On the first day of Nowrooz, my father came home late. He (be)……………………….....in traffic.
29. You (wash)…………………………….. the apples you ate this morning. I'm sure that's the reason you are sick now.
30. She didn't come to your birthday party because she was angry with you. I think you (invite)………………………………her.

## Appendix C. The main Interview Questions

١.   به نظر شما کدامیک ازاین منابع در یادگیری شما بیشتر و کدامیک کمتر موثر بوده؟

الف)پاورپوینت    ب)کلیپ    ج)توضیحات معلم    د)جزوه

٢.   کدامیک از این منابع در طول یادگیری دستور زبان افعال کمکی برای شما بیشتر و کدامیک کمتر جذاب بوده؟

الف) پاورپوینت    ب)کلیپ    ج)توضیحات معلم    د)جزوه

٣.   به نظر شما چه تغییری در فرایند تدریس میدادیم بهتر میشد؟

## Appendix D.  Post-test items
### Part A: Comprehension questions
-A: Tick √ the sentence, a,b,c or d which best matches the sentence on the right.

1. a: She should be relaxed.          Maryam is angry today.
   b: She can be relaxed.
   c: She could be relaxed.
   d: She shouldn't be relaxed.

2. a: He may paint everything.        When Tom was 20, he was a good painter.

b: He should paint everything.
c: He must paint everything.
d: He could paint everything.

3. a: He can't be tired.　　　　　He practiced all day.
   b: He may be tired.
   c: He shouldn't be tired.
   d: He might not be tired.

4. a: I will become a doctor.　　　I am going to study hard and pass the exam.
   b: I will not become a doctor.
   c: I could become a doctor.
   d: I can't become a doctor.

5. a: He could be Iranian.　　　　He has an Iranian restaurant.
   b: He must be Iranian.
   c: He will be Iranian.
   d: He should be Iranian.

-B: Make the best choice to complete each sentence.

6. Susan should/might visit a dentist. She has a bad toothache.
7. Ali doesn't like his school. He told me that he is going to/will change his school next year.
8. Sam doesn't drink his juice. He might/must not like it.
9. John was not in the classroom. He must have /should have been in the yard.
10. Mina was thirsty. She may have / should have drunk some water.

-C: Choose the correct answer.
11. A: Ali woke up late this morning.
    B: He……………too late last night.
a: must have stayed up    b: might stay up    c: must stay up    d: might have stayed up

12. I thought I had some chocolate in my bag, but I don't. I …………. them.
a: must eat    b: might have eaten    c: should have eaten    d: will eat
13. Mahsa was very tired. She ………………hard.
a: must have worked

b: must not have worked
c: might have worked
d: may not have worked

14. Sara is feeling terribly sick today. She ……………... study for the exam.
a: can     b: can't     c: couldn't     d: could

15. We have enough fruit in the fridge so we ……………… buy some more.
a: might not     b: must     c: might     d: must not

## Part B: Production questions

-A: Write five different things you do before you go to the cinema.

16. I should ……………………………………………………………
17. I am going to/will…………………………………………………….
18. I must…………………………………………………………….
19. I can…………………………………………………………………
20. I may…………………………………………………………………

-B: Fill in each blank with the best modal verb given below. (can/can't/could/couldn't/should/shouldn't/may/might/may not/might not/must/mustn't/will/be going to)

21. We …………….. eat fast food every day.
22. My sister is late. She………………be at home yet.
23. I ………… wash the dishes. My mother is very sick today.
24. I need to sleep right now. I …………….. sleep last night.
25. My sister is a good cook. She ………………. cook pasta tomorrow.

- C: Complete each of the following sentences with the words in the parentheses and the best past modal that suits the context.

26. On the first day of New Year, my father came home late. He (be)…………………………..in traffic.
27. Sara couldn't arrive on time because she came by bus. She (take)……………………..a taxi.

28. When I came back home the door was open, but nobody was in the house. Dad (forget)…………………………to close it before he left the house.

29. You (wash)…………………………..the vegetables you ate this morning. That's the reason you are sick now.

30. Tom could speak English very well when he was a child. He (have)……………………an English teacher.