

Investigating the Effect of Visually-enhanced Input on the Acquisition of Lexical Collocations by Iranian Intermediate EFL Learners: A Case of Verb-noun Lexical Collocations

Mansoor Fahim

Islamic Azad University, Science and Research Branch, Tehran, Iran
Email: Dr.mfahim@yahoo.com

Ramin Vaezi

Islamic Azad University, Science and Research Branch, Tehran, Iran
Email: Ramin2003@hotmail.com

Abstract—This study evaluates the potentially relative effectiveness of visual/textual input-based enhancement on the acquisition of Verb-Noun lexical collocations by Iranian intermediate EFL learners. To this end, ninety-six intermediate learners were selected and randomly assigned to three equal groups. Having administered a pre-test, the three groups attended ten sessions of intervention in which all the learners received the same set of ten reading passages; nevertheless, the first experimental group (EG1) received reading passages in which the collocations bolded or CAPITALIZED. The subjects in the second experimental group (EG2) underwent a conventional-based treatment. The control group (CG) received no specific instructions. Later, the three groups took a post-test. The results indicated that both visually/textually enhanced input and conventional method of teaching have a statistically significant effect on the acquisition of target items. Moreover, it can be concluded that visual/textual input-based enhancement can be as beneficial as conventional method of teaching.

Index Terms—visual/textual enhancement, conventional instruction, lexical collocations, Iranian EFL learners

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Overview

The field of second language acquisition (SLA) is witnessing an increasing interest in the idea that drawing learners' attention to the formal features of second language (L2) input is beneficial, and in some cases necessary, for optimal L2 development (Schmidt, 1990, 1993; Sharwood Smith, 1991, 1993). This interest has challenged researchers to develop pedagogic techniques that enhance input, and has resulted in a large body of research on input enhancement. The idea behind input enhancement is that by making formal aspects of L2 input more salient learners will be more likely to notice targeted forms, resulting in more intake, the subset of the input data that becomes available for further language processing.

During the past decades input has become even more important in the work of researchers using cognitive models to second/foreign language learning (Ellis, 1999; McLaughlin, 1987; Sharwood Smith, 1993, 1994; Tomasello, 1998). From a cognitive perspective, access to input is considered as perhaps the most important requirement for language development. It has been indicated that input provides essential positive evidence including the language data that allows acquisition to occur (Gass, 1997). A fundamental question in the field of SLA is to what extent and in what ways learners' attention should be drawn to certain forms. One of the methods of formal instruction which focuses on the concepts of 'noticing' and 'consciousness-raising' is the focus-on-form (FonF) approach.

In a FonF instructional approach, learners' attention will be attracted to certain forms. One of the implicit methods of FonF instruction is 'input enhancement' (Sharwood Smith, 1991), which aims at increasing the learners' noticing threshold by making the input salient and easily recognizable through manipulating different aspects of it (Sharwood Smith, 1993). Manipulation of input often takes the form of *visual/textual input enhancement*, in which the target forms become visually salient. In addition, given the importance of formal instruction in the present SLA research, this study will attempt to investigate the overall effectiveness of 'visual/textual input enhancement' as an important trigger in which the target items become visually/textually salient (i.e., Verb-Noun lexical collocations) while processing for meaning.

B. Statement of the Problem

The researcher thinks there is not enough study to investigate the effect of visual/textual input enhancement on the acquisition of preselected target features. Taking into account the learners' limited capacity in noticing all aspects of L2 input, current theorizing in SLA has underlined the importance of language teaching methods which are more likely to help the learners in noticing the information that might otherwise be ignored. Visual/textual input enhancement is one of the latest methods that take implicit 'attention-drawing' activities into account closely.

Apparently, one of the fundamental components of language proficiency which make a positive contribution to the ways learners speak, listen, read and write is a sufficient knowledge of lexical collocations. It has been indicated that prefabricated language chunks and routinized formulae have an important role in language acquisition and use (Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992). Thus, it is of great importance that L2 learners have a good knowledge of the particular patterns in which words are frequently grouped. Firth (1968) argues that lexical collocations form a significant part of a words' meaning; that is, one cannot perceive the genuine meaning of a word without knowing its relevant collocations. Accordingly, if collocational associations are not learned as part of the L2 knowledge, the learners' speech or writing will be immediately decided upon as non-native or simply as odd. Some instances of wrongly-used lexical collocations are, *undertake suicide, *perpetrate a sin, *strong engine, *a rush of anger, etc.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A. The Importance of Input Enhancement

Sharwood Smith (1991) contends that the most obvious way to try to affect subconscious processing beneficially is by making relevant target forms in the input salient. He further argues that making the input salient (input enhancement) has a highly positive effect on the rate and accuracy of L2 acquisition. Apparently, this salience does not involve directly manipulating the subconscious processes— this is by definition impossible— but it expands or restricts the information on which the processes may operate. On the importance of input enhancement Sharwood Smith (1994, p.181) writes the following lines:

"Whether the enhancement is subtle or very explicit, the learner's brain must still register it. What we know of learners includes the fact that they are very good at ignoring what appears to the outside observer to be very obvious.... This is why we need to do a great deal of research on the matter to see what works best."

White (1998) has also stressed the importance of input enhancement. They have suggested that input enhancement can help L2 acquisition in two main ways: by drawing learners' attention to certain properties of L2, and by helping them 'unlearn' their incorrect analyses of L2. Thus, input enhancement appears to affect learners' knowledge and performance in the second language, and it seems reasonable to expect language teachers and syllabus designers to make use of input enhancement.

B. Visual Input Enhancement: Previous Studies

Visual input enhancement is an implicit and unobtrusive means to draw the learners' attention to linguistic forms contained in the written input. The basic method of enhancement is simply increasing the perceptual salience of the target forms via a variety of typographical techniques (e.g. highlighting, underlining, bolding, capitalizing, shadowing, color coding, etc.), which is also known as *visual/textual enhancement*. Thus, the enhancement embedded in the overall reading lesson aims to achieve the integration of attention to form and attention to meaning.

Previous studies on the effects of visual input enhancement— both those that used short-term treatments with rather limited exposure to the input (Alanen, 1995; Leow, 1993; Robinson, 1996; Shook, 1994; Williams, 1999), and those that adopted longer-term treatments with a greater amount of input exposure (Doughty, 1988, 1991; White, 1998) —produced quite mixed results. Three of these studies (Doughty, 1991; Shook, 1994; Williams, 1999) yielded positive findings for the facilitative effects of input enhancement, whereas four other studies (Alanen, 1995; Robinson, 1997a; White, 1998) showed only limited effects. Finally, the other two studies (Doughty, 1988; Leow, 1993) found no significant effects at all. It should be mentioned, however, that various differences in these studies make direct comparison among them difficult.

In short, visual/textual input enhancement serves to draw the learners' attention to certain linguistic forms in the input that might otherwise go unnoticed or unlearned (Sharwood Smith, 1991). Sharwood Smith (1993) argues that visual/textual input enhancement contributes to the 'input-to-intake' process because it highlights language forms that learners tend to ignore. This claim is also in line with the current theorizing in SLA that 'noticing' is essential to L2 acquisition (Schmidt, 1990, 1995). It is, therefore, natural that input enhancement should have gained considerable popularity in the field of SLA.

C. Lexical Collocations

Benson (1989) argues that typical lexical collocations consist of nouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs. That is, lexical collocations, in contrast to grammatical collocations, do not contain prepositions, infinitives, or clauses. Verb + Noun collocations, the topic of my research, are classified as lexical collocations. According to Benson (1989), lexical collocations fall into six major categories:

1. V. + N. → e.g. *withdraw an offer/reach a verdict*
2. Adj. + N. → e.g. *rough estimate/reckless abandon*

3. N. + V. → e.g. *bomb explodes/ alarms go off*
4. N. + N. → e.g. *bank manager/flock of sheep*
5. Adv. + Adj. → e.g. *totally unaware/deeply absorbed*
6. V. + Adv. → e.g. *appreciate sincerely/apologize humbly*

D. The Necessity of Teaching Lexical Collocations

The lack of lexical collocational competence is noticeable when non-native speakers of English need productive language knowledge. Students either use only the limited number of lexical collocations they know or under the influence of their first language “create” unnatural and farfetched collocations. Most intermediate and advanced students know such common lexical collocations as *have a quarrel*, *make a decision*, and *take the responsibility*, but few know the similar collocations like *pick/provoke/start a quarrel*, *arrive at/reach/take (BrE) a decision*, and *assume/bear/shoulder/undertake the responsibility*. Lexical collocational familiarity of English learners lags far behind their passive language knowledge. One reason for this is that a large number of ‘verb + noun’ collocations are “arbitrary and non-predictable”. For example one can say: *commit a crime* and *perpetrate a crime*, *commit a fraud* and *perpetrate a fraud*. However, one can only say *commit suicide*, not **perpetrate suicide*; *make an effort*, not **do an effort*. One can say *hold a funeral*, but not **hold a burial*. Likewise, *make an estimate* is frequently used, but not **make an estimation* (Benson, 1989). Therefore, the overgeneralization of collocational range is quite risky. In fact, Benson who based his observation on citations from various newspapers and magazines even concluded that “many native speakers of English need help with Lexical collocations” (Benson, 1990). Thus, from many researchers we can reasonably infer that, since collocational capacity can not be spontaneously acquired, the teaching of (lexical) collocations is absolutely integral to the encoding of a language by non-native speakers.

Moreover, the existing literature on collocations obviously shows that a good knowledge of collocations and high language proficiency are closely interrelated (Ellis, 1999; Gitsaki & Taylor, 1997; Zhang, 1993). Emphasizing the importance of lexical collocations to linguistic competence, Ellis (1999) argues that learners’ fluent use of word sequences (i.e. frequent collocations, phrases, and idioms) is a very important index of native-like competence. Schmidt and McCarthy (1999) also noted that an increase in the learners’ knowledge of collocations will lead to an improvement in their oral skills and reading comprehension. Briefly, it can be claimed that native-like performance of L2 learners relies on their stock of collocations. Simply put, learners’ lack of collocational knowledge makes them sound odd and not very competent in their language use--prevalent problem in the present EFL situation in Iran.

Thus, the importance of lexical collocations on the one hand, and the significance of formal instruction (in this particular case, visual/textual input enhancement) on the other hand, have encouraged the present researcher to conduct such a research.

III. PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of this study is to determine whether visually/textually enhanced input has any statistically possible significant effect on the acquisition of Verb-Noun lexical collocations by Iranian intermediate EFL learners. Thus, an attempt made to investigate whether Verb-Noun lexical collocations taught through visual/textual input enhancement (making the input salient for the learners by **bolding** or CAPITALIZING) are learned better by the Iranian EFL learners at an intermediate level. This study also takes the effects of the conventional teaching method into consideration.

It needs to be noted that, given the limitation of space, the study focuses only on one of the six types lexical collocations proposed by Benson (1989); namely, type one, Verb-Noun collocations. The selection of this particular Verb-Noun Collocations is motivated by the following two reasons:

1. Common use:

The Verb-Noun collocations are among the most common collocations in English. According to Benson, Benson, and Ilson (1986) many lexical collocations in English consist of a verb and a noun, such as *bring in an acquittal*, *file a complaint*, and *put on airs*.

2. Source of difficulty for non-native speakers (NNS's):

Collocational studies conducted by various researchers in EFL/ESL, such as Bahns and Eldaw (1993), Newman (1988), and Aghbar (1990) have indicated that lexical collocations and, more specifically, the Verb-Noun collocations are responsible for many ESL/EFL students’ errors and thus pose difficulties for them. Benson, et al. (1986) have also touched briefly on the problems non-native speakers have with the Verb-Noun combination. The authors then state that students learning English as a foreign language have a great deal of difficulty in selecting the correct verbs.

Regarding the objectives of the present investigation, the research null hypotheses addressed in this study are as follows:

H0 (1): Visually/Textually enhanced input does not have a statistically significant effect on the acquisition of Verb-Noun lexical collocations by Iranian intermediate EFL learners.

H0 (2): Conventional method of teaching does not have a statistically significant effect on the acquisition of Verb-Noun lexical collocations by Iranian intermediate EFL learners.

H0 (3): There is no statistically significant distinction between visually/textually enhanced input and conventional method of teaching regarding the influence these two methods exert on the acquisition of Verb-Noun lexical collocations by Iranian intermediate EFL learners.

IV. METHOD

A. Participants

A total of 128 male students aged between 19 and 28, with Persian as their mother tongue were selected in this study from some language schools in Esfahan, a city in Iran. In order to classify them in almost homogenized groups and screen the required number of subjects, they were given The Comprehensive English Language Test (CELT). Then, those who scored one standard deviation above and below the mean (i.e., $\text{mean} \pm 1$) were selected for the main part of the study. So the total number of the subjects of this study was 96. Furthermore, all the students participated in the research project voluntarily.

B. Instruments

1. The Comprehensive English Language Test (CELT)

In order to have a representative sample of the population under study a multiple-choice CELT was administered as the standard of the homogeneity of the learners. Having obtained the CELT results, the researcher decided to choose the participants whose score range was one standard deviation above and below the mean (i.e., $\text{mean} \pm 1$). The rationale behind such application was to make sure that the EFL learners of all groups were all at the intermediate level of language proficiency and; therefore, could serve the purpose of the researcher.

2. Pre-test

Before the instructional treatment started, the subjects were pre-tested in order to ensure that all three groups were equivalent in terms of their general knowledge of Verb-Noun lexical collocations. The pre-test comprised 30 multiple-choice items from which Verb-Noun lexical collocations were missing, and the subjects were required to complete the sentences by selecting the correct choice.

3. Post-test

In order to determine the effect of instructional intervention on the acquisition of the target forms (i.e., Verb-Noun lexical collocations), a 30-item multiple-choice post-test parallel to that of the pre-test was also constructed by the researcher.

4. Reading Passages

The third instrument was ten reading passages selected for the purpose of presenting the participants with the Verb-Noun lexical collocations. Several passages were selected from the accessible collocation books on the market. The readability of the selected passages was determined based on Fog's readability formula and. Finally, ten passages which had the almost the same readability indices (about 19.80) and were of the average same length-210 words- were chosen to be used for reading materials. One important consideration in selecting the passages was to select texts that would not require culture-specific or discipline-specific background knowledge. It is clear that all the reading passages were authentic and they were geared to the proficiency level of the subjects in the research since they were all extracted from language teaching materials designed for intermediate EFL learners. Furthermore, the subjects in all the three groups read the same set of reading materials.

C. Procedures

1. Pilot study

In addition to the main study, in order to standardize and validate the tests, this study involved a pilot study. In this phase of the study the poor items were either revised or replaced by better items. To do so, 84 multiple-choice questions were made of the selected passages to be used for the pre-test and post-test. Then, the tests were administered to 30 subjects with similar characteristics as those of the target groups. Based on the psychometric characteristics of the items, i.e., item facility, item discrimination, and choice distribution, the tests were modified and certain items were discarded the final version had 30 multiple-choice items for the pre-test and 30 for the post-test. The face validity of the tests was also established through the expert opinion of the advisor and two English teachers teaching intermediate EFL learners in several language schools. Since the pre- and post-test utilized in this study were researcher-made, Cronbach's alpha test was run to measure their reliability. The results of the pilot tests indicated reliability indices of 0.763 and 0.821 for the pre-test and post-test, respectively. Needless to mention, such reliability indices proved that the researcher-made tests were acceptable for the purpose of the study.

2. Main Study

In order to accomplish this research, as mentioned before, ninety-six male EFL learners aged from 19 to 28 participated in the study. It should be mentioned that no matter how old or educated they were, all participants were intermediate learners studying English at the intermediate level of language proficiency in some of the language schools in Esfahan, Iran. Through considering the normal distribution of the subjects' scores on the proficiency test, those scores which were one standard deviation above and below the mean were decided to be in the group of subjects. The participants were randomly assigned to three control and experimental groups (32 students each). Then, to evaluate the

learners' knowledge of Verb-Noun lexical collocations prior to the application of any type of intervention, a 30-item multiple-choice pre-test designed to elicit the target items in question for all three groups (i.e., two experimental and one comparison group). Next, instructional treatment was given during students' regular time class, and it lasted for ten sessions. Participants in all the three groups separately attended these ten sessions of instruction in which they were all given reading passages identical in their semantic content. Both of experimental groups and the control group were taught by the same person using different instructional ways specially constructed for each group. As for the students in Group One (EG1), the perceptual salience of the Verb-Noun lexical collocations in the reading passages was made via a variety of different typographical techniques such as **bolding** or CAPITALIZING, while this was not the case with Groups Two and Three. In other words, during the instructional sessions the students in Group One were taught through the unobtrusive and implicit means of visual/textual input-based treatment. In teaching the target items to students in the second group (EG2), the researcher applied one instructional treatment, *termed conventional instruction*, embodied a strong interface position, incorporating explicit instruction in English and Persian with immediate production practice to promote classroom SLA. Explicit teaching involves, exactly as the name implies, 'actually teaching' the target items, where learners are given explanations about the target features and students are directly taught how to use it correctly. Conventional instruction involved instructor presentation of rules and examples followed by an immediate production task (e.g., fill-in-the-blank, rewrite a paragraph). Unlike the experimental groups, the students in Group Three, the comparison group (CG), simply read the texts and ask for help in case of difficulties. After completing the treatment phase of the study, to determine the potential effect of instructional treatment on the acquisition of the target forms (i.e., Verb-Noun lexical collocations), a 30-item multiple-choice post-test parallel to that of the pre-test was also constructed by the researcher.

3. Scoring Procedure

As far as the scoring of *The Comprehensive English Language Test* (CELT) was concerned, each correct answer was assigned a single point, and all the correct answers added up to a total sum. There was no negative point for the items not answered at all. Likewise, in scoring the pre-test and the post-test, each item was graded dichotomously: one point for a correct item and zero for an incorrect one. There was no negative point for wrong answers or the items not answered at all. Therefore, since there were thirty items in each test, the grades were added up to a total sum of thirty.

V. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

In order to investigate the aforementioned null hypotheses, a number of descriptive and inferential statistical procedures were used. The results obtained through such analysis will be explained and delineated in the following section. For the groups to be comparable and for an experiment like this to be meaningful, the experimental and control group members were expected to indicate no significant differences concerning the Verb-Noun collocations under investigation at the present phase. In other words, members of the all three groups were expected to enjoy the same level of knowledge regarding the target items in question. In fact, this kind of homogeneity among the subjects made it possible for the researcher to compare the groups at the end of the study, and to see whether different kinds of intervention yielded different results. In order to meet the above-mentioned requirement, a pre-test was given to all three groups to gauge their knowledge of target items in question. Table 1 depicted the descriptive statistics of the participants' mean scores on the pre-test across the three groups.

TABLE 1.
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR EACH GROUP'S PERFORMANCE ON PRE-TEST

	Groups		
	EG1	EG2	CG
Mean	13.8000	14.1522	14.0584
Std. Deviation	2.215	2.183	2.114
Variance	4.905	4.766	4.471
Minimum	12.00	11.00	12.00
Maximum	18.00	19.00	18.00

Table 1 tells us that the means are statistically very close to each other on this pre-test ($13.80 \approx 14.15 \approx 14.05$). Therefore, it can be deduced that the learners in the three groups did not differ greatly from one another in terms of their knowledge of the lexical collocations in focus. That is, the participants' prior knowledge of Verb-Noun lexical collocations was statistically almost equal. In order to investigate the impact of visual/textual input-based treatment on the subjects' performance on Verb-Noun lexical collocations (i.e., the first null hypothesis), a paired-samples t-test was run. This t-test was intended to compare the obtained mean scores of the participants in Group One (taught via visual/textual input enhancement in the treatment phase) on the pre- and post-test to indicate the effectiveness of the treatment. The descriptive statistics, along with the results of the t-test for Group One, are presented in Tables 2 and 3, respectively.

TABLE 2.
PAIRED-SAMPLES DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR GROUP ONE

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
pair 1	PRE-TEST	13.8000	32	2.21533	.43014
	POST-TEST	21.6333	32	3.01128	.54978

TABLE 3.
PAIRED-SAMPLES T-TEST RESULTS FOR GROUP ONE

PAIRED SAMPLES T-TEST RESULTS FOR GROUP ONE								
	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig.(2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 Pre/Post-test	-13.613	1.81092	.40493	-14.46000	-12.765	-33.617	19	.000

By looking at Table 2, it can be deduced that the mean score obtained on the post-test (21.63) is higher than the one obtained on the pre-test (13.80). However, to ensure whether this difference between means was significant a paired-samples t-test was employed. Table 3 demonstrates that there is a significant difference in the scores obtained from the pre- and post-test because the probability value is less than 0.05 (the critical value). Accordingly, the first null hypothesis was rejected because visual/textual input enhancement was shown to exert a positive effect on the acquisition of the given Verb-Noun lexical collocations.

In order to examine the second null hypothesis, a paired-samples descriptive statistics along with the paired-samples t-test result are given in table 4 and 5.

TABLE 4.
PAIRED-SAMPLES DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR GROUP TWO

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
pair 1	PRE-TEST	14.1522	32	2.18352	.30127
	POST-TEST	22.1000	32	2.66267	.30355

TABLE 5.
PAIRED-SAMPLES T-TEST RESULTS FOR GROUP TWO

PAIRED-SAMPLES T-TEST RESULTS FOR GROUP TWO								
	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig.(2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 Pre/Post-test	-9.0000	2.4960	.55813	-10.1682	-7.8318	-16.125	19	.000

On a closer inspection of Table 4, one can clearly see that the subjects in Group Two gained a higher mean score on the post-test after receiving the treatment (Post-test=22.1000>Pre-test=14.1522).

In addition, It can be concluded from the information indicated in Table 5 that there is a significant difference in the performance of the participants on the pre-and post-test because the probability value is less than 0.05 (the critical value). It can be maintained that conventional instruction has a positive effect on the acquisition of Verb-Noun lexical collocations by Iranian intermediate EFL learners. In a word, the second null hypothesis was rejected.

The descriptive statistics in table 6 reveal that the mean score obtained by Group Two (22.1000) is greater than mean score obtained by Group One (21.6333) which is, in turn, higher than the mean score belonging to Group Three (14.3617). In other words, the members of the experimental groups (EG1 and EG2) achieved better results those of the control group (CG).

TABLE 6.
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS ON THE POST-TEST

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
1	32	21.6333	3.01128	.54978	20.2265	21.9735	24.00	32.00
2	32	22.1000	2.66263	.30355	24.2125	26.4522	25.00	32.00
3	32	14.3617	1.61316	.29452	13.9210	15.1357	14.00	20.00
Total	96	19.3633	7.28704	.59200	20.3333	21.1833	14.00	32.00

Moreover, to determine whether or not the observed differences were significant at the critical value (Sig.) of $p < 0.05$, a one-way between groups ANOVA was conducted. In fact, the results of the ANOVA helped clarifying the third null hypothesis. Table 7 presents the results of the ANOVA.

TABLE 7.
THE RESULTS OF ANOVA ON THE POST-TEST

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	310.689	2	155.344	12.756	.000
Within Groups	962.092	79	12.178		
Total	1272.780	81			

Since the Sig. value is less than (0.05), then it can be mentioned that there is a statistically significant difference somewhere among the mean scores for the three groups. By looking at Table 7 carefully, one can conclude that the three groups differed significantly with respect to their mean scores on the post-test because the significant value is observed to be 0.000, which is less than the critical value (0.05).

The researcher also ran a Scheffe Post-hoc test to indicate where the differences among the three groups (i.e., sets of scores) occur. In other words, the post-hoc test was employed to show where exactly the differences lie. Table 8 provides the results of the post-hoc test.

TABLE 8.
THE RESULTS OF THE POST-HOC TEST

(I)TEACHING	(J) TEACHING	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	EG2	-.7333	.49087	.299	-1.9036	.4369
	CG	10.5667*	.49087	.000	9.3964	11.7369
2	EG1	.7333	.49087	.299	-.4369	1.9036
	CG	11.3000*	.49087	.000	10.1297	12.4703
3	EG1	-10.5667*	.49087	.000	-11.7369	-9.3964
	EG2	-11.3000	.49087	.000	-12.4703	-10.1297

*The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

Referring to this table, the difference between Group Two (EG2) and Group Three (CG) is significant. Similarly, the difference between Group One (EG1) and Group Three (CG) seems to be significant. And accordingly, it can be claimed that Group Three is significantly different from Groups One and Two, but there seems to be no statistically significant difference between Groups One and Two. Therefore, the third null hypothesis of the present study is not rejected. In other words, there is no statistically significant difference between visual/textual input enhancement and conventional-based instruction in terms of the influence they exert on the acquisition of Verb-Noun lexical collocations.

VI. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

A. Discussion

According to the findings obtained in the light of running different statistical tests, it was deduced the subjects in Group One, who were taught via visual/textual input enhancement, appeared to have benefited from this implicit and unobtrusive Focus on Form method of formal instruction. This was based on the assumption that using typographical cues to enhance the targeted items would increase their perceptual salience, which in turn would push participants to notice the enhanced structures and select them as intake, leading to better performance on the post-test.

The most convincing explanation for such a finding may come from the works of Sharwood Smith (1991, 1993, 1994), who is the originator of input enhancement. Sharwood Smith (1994) contends that "the most obvious way to try to affect the subconscious processes beneficially is by making relevant evidence in the input specially *salient*" (p.178). Therefore, it can be claimed that the findings of this study lend support to Sharwood Smith's speculations (1994) that input enhancement has a positive impact on the rate and accuracy of L2 acquisition. Besides, the results of the research question provide further empirical support for (Doughty, 1988; Shook, 1994; Williams, 1999).

The second null hypothesis, stating that the conventional method of teaching does not have a statistically significant effect on the acquisition of Verb-Noun lexical collocations by Iranian intermediate EFL learners, was also rejected. The results attributed to the second null hypothesis seem to be well matched with the view of researchers in favor of explicit instruction. However, some opponents do not advocate explicit methods (Skehan, 1996b; Thornbury, 1997). Skehan (1996b), for example, comments that:

"The belief that a precise focus on a particular form leads to learning and automatization (that learners will learn what is taught in the order in which it is taught) no longer carries much credibility in linguistics or psychology."

This shows that conventional instructions are somehow capable of teaching target items mostly through context-reduced, non communicative exercises, such as repetition, memorization, transformation of structures, etc.

However, the use of explicit instruction in foreign/second language teaching has been recommended by researchers who believe in the insufficiency of implicit instruction as a means of inducing changes in the learners' interlanguage system (Jourdenias, 1998; White, 1998; Izumi, 2002).

The results of the analysis of the third null hypothesis revealed that that there was no statistically significant difference in the performance of Groups One and Two after receiving various types of interventions. In other words, the students in visual/textual input enhancement group did not perform significantly different from the students in Group Two. Therefore, the third null hypothesis was not rejected, and it was revealed that an implicit and unobtrusive

method of formal instruction such as visual/textual input enhancement can be as effective as conventional-based treatment which involves a lot of practice and explanation.

And accordingly, it can be claimed that the results of the present study are not in the same line with the views of the advocates of explicit instruction who maintained that learners receiving explicit instruction demonstrate higher levels of intake than those experiencing more implicit conditions (Robinson, 1997a; Rosa & O'Neill, 1999).

On the other hand, visual/textual input enhancement, which was employed in the current study to expose participants to the unaccusative structures in L2 English, rests on the implicit end of the implicit-explicit continuum, focuses on the written mode of language, and is preemptive by nature. The significantly advantageous effect of input enhancement observed from this study suggests that the processing of L2 form can be aided by such an implicit and preemptive type of instructional technique. Importantly, the benefit of enhancement was significant and substantial when compared to the control group condition. It may have been that L2 participants in this study were able to successfully draw their attention to the perceptually manipulated input materials. The findings, therefore, confirm the theoretical expectation in the focus-on-form literature regarding the favorable role of added salience (which was achieved in this study through a manipulation of the external input properties) in garnering more attention from L2 learners. The learning benefits of L2 participants may then be accounted for by the function of the added salience. Precisely speaking, an input made perceptually salient will be more likely to be noticed and processed by learners and to be incorporated into the learners' developing language system.

On the other hand, Sharwood Smith's claim that visual/textual input enhancement promotes the rate and accuracy of second language acquisition is strongly supported by the findings obtained in the present study.

B. Conclusions

Based on the findings of the present study, both the conventional explicit method of teaching and the implicit Focus on Form method of visual/textual input enhancement were beneficial to learning. Actually, the results of this research proposed some evidence in favor of the facilitative role of formal instruction in second language acquisition. Such results are consistent with a lot of researches aimed at proving that formal instruction is advantageous (Long, 1983; Norris & Ortega, 2000). However, the present findings seem to run counter to Krashen's (1982) view that comprehensible input is the necessary and sufficient requirement for L2 acquisition, and that there is no need for formal instruction.

It was also indicated in the present research that visual/textual input enhancement is not just one of a variety of techniques that may aid learners in acquisitional processes but as a kind of Focus on Form approach contributes to L2 acquisition. In a word, textual enhancement can result in better acquisition of enhanced information in the text.

Furthermore, it can be concluded from the obtained data that Focus on Form approaches like visually/textually enhanced input can be as conducive and effective as explicit instruction which require a lot of practice. Whereas practice cannot occur without some degree of noticing, the obverse is not the case; noticing can occur without practice. Hence, as the findings of this study show, it is perfectly possible to teach target forms in the sense of helping learners to notice and learn Verb-Noun lexical collocations without having them involve in activities that require repeated practice of the target items concerned.

Finally, it can be claimed, based on the comparison made between Groups One and Three in this study, that language learners have a limited capacity in noticing and that, therefore, they cannot attend to all aspects of L2 input. As mentioned before, the participants in Group One received the same reading materials as those in Group Three did. Nevertheless, for the students in Group One, the specific category of lexical collocations in focus made salient via **bolding** or CAPITALIZING. Such being the case, these subjects were indirectly helped to notice target items, and this made up for their limited capacity in noticing. Therefore, they indicated a good gain of the Verb-Noun lexical collocations in question. On the other hand, the learners in Group One, whose attention was not drawn to the target items in focus, did not show a significant intake of the Verb-Noun lexical collocations.

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Mansoor Fahim is an associate professor of Teaching English as Foreign Language (TEFL) at Islamic Azad University Science and Research Branch in Tehran, Iran. He teaches First Language Acquisition, Discourse Analysis, Second language learning theories, and Psycholinguistics. He has published many papers in academic journals. Dr. Fahim has also co-authored and translated many books on ELT and has supervised many M.A and Ph.D. theses.

Ramin Vaezi, born in Esfahan, Iran, obtained his MA in Teaching English as Foreign Language (TEFL) from Islamic Azad University Science and Research Branch in Tehran, Iran, in 2010. He has also co-authored a book on English reading comprehension. His areas of research interest include Second Language Acquisition, assessment, and vocabulary teaching and learning. He has presented articles in different national conferences such as The Second Regional Conference on English Literature and Applied Linguistics. Mr. Vaezi has been teaching English in different institutes of higher education and language schools in Tehran and Esfahan for the last six years.