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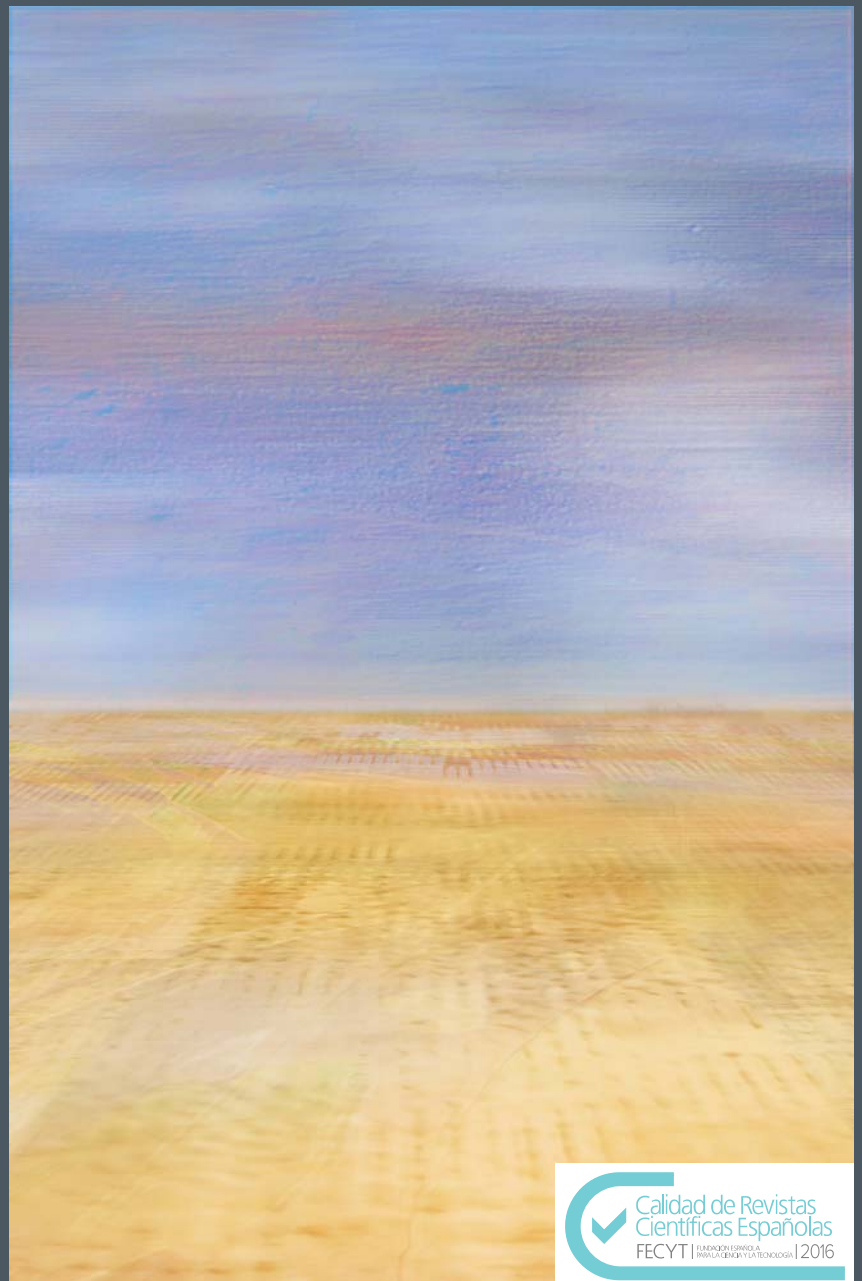
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**Método de enseñanza centrado en la forma en la pedagogía de la expresión oral en ILE: refutación de la hipótesis *trade-off***

**Form-focused Skill Training in EFL Speaking Pedagogy: Empirical Counterevidence to Trade-off Hypothesis**

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# Form-focused Skill Training in EFL Speaking Pedagogy: Empirical Counterevidence to Trade-off Hypothesis

## Método de enseñanza centrado en la forma en la pedagogía de la expresión oral en ILE: refutación de la hipótesis *trade-off*

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### **Abstract**

The Trade-off Hypothesis claims that learners have limited cognitive resources which hinder simultaneous accuracy/fluency in cognitive processing. However, inspired by the adaptive control of thought theory (ACT), this study postulates that the integration of form-focused instruction (FFI) into a three-phased sequence, called form-focused skill training (FFST), may promote a simultaneous development in both accuracy and fluency. To test this hypothesis, the developmental process of oral skills in a sample of EFL learners (N=56) was examined. The results of the quantitative and qualitative analyses (ANCOVA and Content Analyses) of the data obtained via oral proficiency test, semi-structured interviews and observations, revealed significant differential effects of FFST on the participants' simultaneous development of oral accuracy and fluency. The study proposes an approach which may pave the way for an integrated model for teaching speaking, and in turn has pedagogical implications for researchers, practitioners and materials developers.

*Keywords:* speaking performance, accuracy, fluency, skill acquisition theory, adaptive control of thought, form-focused instruction

## Resumen

La hipótesis *trade-off* sostiene que los aprendientes cuentan con recursos cognitivos limitados que dificultan la precisión y la fluidez simultáneas en el procesamiento cognitivo. Sin embargo, inspirado por la teoría del Control Adaptativo del Pensamiento (ACT, por sus siglas en inglés), este estudio postula que la integración de la enseñanza centrada en la forma (FFI, por sus siglas en inglés) en una secuencia de tres fases, llamada método de enseñanza centrado en la forma (FFST, por sus siglas en inglés), puede producir un desarrollo simultáneo en la precisión y la fluidez. Para comprobar esta hipótesis, se analizó el proceso de desarrollo de las destrezas orales en una muestra de aprendientes de Inglés como Lengua Extranjera (EFL, por sus siglas en inglés) (N=56). Los resultados de los análisis cuantitativos y cualitativos (ANCOVA y análisis de contenido) de los datos obtenidos mediante una prueba de competencia oral, entrevistas semiestructuradas y observaciones, desvelaron efectos diferenciadores significativos del FFST en el desarrollo simultáneo de la precisión y la fluidez orales de los participantes. El estudio propone un enfoque que, posiblemente, sienta las bases para un modelo integrado para la enseñanza de la expresión oral y, a su vez, conlleve implicaciones pedagógicas para los investigadores, profesionales de la enseñanza y creadores de material didáctico.

*Palabras claves:* rendimiento en la expresión oral, precisión, fluidez, teoría de la adquisición del lenguaje, Control Adaptativo del Pensamiento, enseñanza centrada en la forma

## Introduction

Speaking requires a diverse array of linguistic, cognitive and affective competencies to be mastered, leading to a considerable number of challenges for the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learner. To address such challenges in foreign language (L2) speaking skill instruction, research has covered two major approaches, namely the indirect and the direct approaches (Dörnyei & Thurrell, 1994; Tarone, 2005). The former entails that language learners are not actually taught how to speak, but rather they incidentally acquire conversational competences, and the latter centers around a systematic program of teaching the micro skills, communication strategies, language input and processes where students attend to conversational rules to be effective and produce error-free and fluent speaking.

An exploration of both approaches reveals that the L2 speaking instruction seeks an interactive direction (Brown, 2007). On the one hand, tasks with a focus on language-based objectives are provided, and

on the other hand, message-based activities that focus on communicative interaction and meaning are exercised. This seems consistent with Bailey's (2003) contention that all of language performance is pervaded by the distinction between accuracy and fluency. Accordingly, an L2 curriculum is required to include both language-based and message-based activities in promoting the learners' accurate as well as fluent oral performance.

Arguably, considering that students' needs and challenges most likely directs the goals and content of what is taught (Nation & Macalister, 2010), the question of whether it is more imperative to work on either accuracy or fluency or both in the language classroom remains. To account for the balance between accuracy and fluency, Skehan (2009) portrays the existing tensions in the form of a Trade-off Hypothesis. The assertion is that performance in each area requires attention and working memory involvement so that attending to one may have negative effects on the other. While accuracy is realized by learners drawing on their rule-based system, fluency requires them to draw on their memory-based system (Ellis, 2008). Thus, it is hypothesized that, as a result of their limited processing capacity, learners will hardly focus simultaneously on the two aspects and will prioritize only one (VanPatten, 1990). This leads to the emergence of trade-offs, which result in a close tension between form and automaticity. However, in reality, accuracy and fluency are so closely related that one without the other would hardly lead to successful interaction (Hobbs, 2012).

Research abounds into EFL learners' oral accuracy and fluency. A previously conducted meta-analysis of the literature by the present researchers, however, unveiled some limitations of earlier research in this line of investigation. First, very few studies addressed the impressibility of speaking performance in particular when the simultaneous development of accuracy and fluency is concerned. Second, since a number of studies employed the interventions in one single session (e.g. Birjandi & Ahangari, 2008; Abdi, Eslami & Zahedi, 2012), the question of whether the application of only one session of a specific treatment would result in valid interpretations remains. Last but not least, some studies failed to provide detailed descriptions of the employed treatments and teaching materials including the rationale in designing tasks or the implementation procedures (e.g. Rouhi, & Marefat, 2006; Hassaskhah & Rahimizadeh-Asli, 2015). As such, in an attempt to empirically challenge the Trade-off Hypothesis, the present research sets out to explore the plausibility of a framework to maintain a balance between accuracy and fluency so that facilitating one does not influence the other in a negative manner.

## Theoretical Framework

This study draws upon a major model within skill acquisition theory, namely Adaptive Control of Thought (ACT) (Anderson, 1995, 1996, 2007; Anderson & Lebiere, 1998; Lee & Anderson, 2001). The roots of skill acquisition theory are found in different schools of psychology, amalgamating elements of both behavioristic and cognitive theories. The main claim is that “the learning of a wide variety of skills shows a remarkable similarity in development from initial representation of knowledge through initial changes in behavior to eventual fluent, spontaneous, largely effortless and highly skilled behavior” (DeKeyser, 2007, p. 97). Development, according to this theory, involves the employment of declarative knowledge followed by the automatization of procedural knowledge (VanPatten & Benati, 2010), where the former refers to the conscious knowledge of concepts piled up in memory as propositions, and the latter is the unconscious knowledge of how things are done (Richards & Schmidt, 2010).

As a model within this theory, which describes an architecture that underlies cognitive processes, ACT represents three stages of skill development: cognitive, associative and autonomous. These are the stages through which one proceeds from the rule-bound declarative knowledge to the more automatic proceduralized stage. According to this model, knowledge is stored in propositional form. Initial access to this declarative knowledge demands conscious effort. Through proceduralization, the formal declarative knowledge is deliberately put into operation in performance (VanPatten & Benati, 2010). During this stage, errors in the original declarative representation of the stored information are gradually detected and eliminated. Then, by means of successive practice, errors disappear and performance becomes free from attentional control so that skills are less reliant on working memory resources.

Ever since the introduction of the model, a number of studies have addressed its implications or some of its intervening variables. The results have been controversial; while some of the studies have failed to produce evidence in support of the application of ACT to EFL teaching (e.g. Cook, 1993, cited in Muranoi, 2007; DeKeyser, 2003), some others have provided supportive evidence for its benefits in EFL instruction (e.g. O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Towell & Hawkins, 1994, cited in Jordan, 2004; Johnson, 1996; DeKeyser, 2001 among others). Of the latter current of research,

Ranta and Lyster (2007) state that the ACT sequence pedagogically underlies the instructional materials used in research into the impact of form-focused instruction (FFI). They argue that the application of the three-part structure of ACT offers a reasonable sequence for teaching target-language (French) structures in the Canadian immersion program in which the focus of instruction is students' subject-matter curriculum. They report that instructional treatments in these studies promote awareness of specific language features, allow for practice in different meaningful contexts and highlight the role of teachers' feedback.

Although this justification is based on observations of a large body of research, it fails to elaborate on the discussions of the implications of the sequence so as to provide a rationale for the efficacy of the ACT model in promoting fluency. That is, what is seen in Ranta and Lyster's (2007) analyses is the study of earlier research into the impact of form-focused instruction on students' accuracy only. In addition, their study is in fact a report of the implementation of awareness-provoking tasks, practice and feedback as three discrete instructional procedures and does not practically assess the cognitive-associative-autonomous sequence in developing students' language proficiency.

Nonetheless, an appraisal of Ranta and Lyster's (2007) account justifies the fact that the three-phase structure of ACT is theoretically advantageous in EFL instruction, especially where a subject-matter curriculum is concerned, in that it provides a logical sequence for selecting activities that promote awareness of target-language forms, on the one hand, and activities that build fluency, on the other. More importantly, the proposal is seen to bring noticing, fluency, automaticity, output and feedback together, concepts which have often been discussed in second language acquisition (SLA) literature in isolation (*ibid*). Interestingly, Ranta and Lyster suggest that the "cognitive-associative-autonomous" stages appear too abstract a term and thus choose to label the sequence as "awareness-practice-feedback".

In our view, the proposed label seems to move in line with the ACT cognitive-associative-autonomous sequence in discussions of skill training. In other words, what are normally discussed in studies of form-focused instruction as awareness, practice and feedback, usually employed in promoting student's accuracy, appear to parallel the three-phased sequence of the ACT model in depicting the process of fluency development. Accordingly, this underexplored interrelationship accounted for the approach of the present study.

## The Present Study

The diverse results (even contradictory in some cases) obtained from previous studies led the researchers of the present study to seek to shed light on this line of investigation. Moreover, the review of current literature revealed the dearth of any successful empirical research in investigating the feasibility of simultaneous training of accuracy and fluency. As a result, this study intended to examine a suggested model, namely form-focused skill training (FFST), for developing simultaneous oral accuracy/fluency among EFL students. More specifically, what this research attempted to explore was whether the integration of form-focused instruction into a skill acquisition model, in addition to their explanations of grammar instruction and skilled performance, could help justify a balance between accuracy and fluency. Drawing upon such a purpose, the study adopted a mixed-methods approach and sought answers to the following questions:

1. Do EFL learners in the FFST group experience a significant improvement in accuracy compared to those of FFI?
2. Do EFL learners in the FFST group experience a significant improvement in fluency compared to those of FFI?
3. What are the learners' impressions of an FFST-based course?

## Method

### Participants

The study was conducted with an initial sample of sixty-eight 18 to 27 year old undergraduate students (14 male, 54 female) within the A2 level of CEFR. They were all Persian native speakers majoring in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). The study was carried out in one of the mandatory academic courses; as a pre-requisite for the bachelor's degree, the participants had to take a compulsory course of Speaking and Listening delivered in four credit units. As a result, since it was practically impossible to disrupt the university schedules, the participants were selected based on intact group design. Three intact classes were randomly assigned to three distinct groups comprising two experimental

groups (FFST and FFI) and one comparison (REG). For the sake of group homogeneity, it was decided that the data belonging to students who (a) had little or no previous knowledge of the target structure, which was measured by administering a pretest, (b) were similar in terms of demographic information enquired in the study background survey, and (c) attended all the training, treatment, and assessment sessions were chosen from the original pool for final analyses.

To ensure that the sample included only participants who had similar language proficiency, an Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was conducted as the pre-test. The final sample of the participants (N=56) who qualified to be included in the analysis were assigned to Group one (REG: N=16), Group Two (FFI: N=18) and Group Three (FFST: N=20). The reason for grouping learners into three groups was to measure the differential effects of instructional materials and procedures on their speaking performance geared to form-focused skill training (FFST), form-focused instruction (FFI) and regular instruction (REG).

## Instruments

To cross verify the same information, and increase credibility and validity of the answers to the research questions formulated in the present study, different instruments were used to triangulate the data. In particular, this triangulation provided both quantitative and qualitative data for the phenomenon under investigation. The instruments which were used were as follows: The OPT (Oxford Placement Test, Allen, 2004), tests of speaking proficiency (the speaking module of the First Certificate of English, FCE), semi-structured interviews, observation, and the teacher-made instructional materials.

It should be noted that, as for the validity of the instruments, four experts (experienced instructors) were asked to provide ideas about the appropriateness, practicality and clarity of the speaking proficiency test as well as the clarity, quality and length of the interviews. As for the instructional materials, the experts were asked to comment on the comprehensibility and sufficiency of each instructional unit, decide on tasks in each unit for the awareness phase, revise the tasks by excluding, adding, segmenting and arranging them from easy to difficult in each unit, and provide ideas about the size, format, spelling and the typographic fonts.



## Procedures

Prior to the main study, the adequacy of the instruments and the treatments were examined in a pilot study. The objectives of the pilot study were to probe into the procedures of data collection, verify the appropriateness of the assessment instruments and developed interventions, and finally to explore the tasks to avoid any challenges for the learners in the main study. The detailed procedures appear below.

## Screening process

In order to determine if the participants were eligible to be included in the study sample, they were tested through the OPT in the first class meeting. In the second week, before the instruction began, the participants were given an open-ended question to express their ideas about the main difficulties and challenges in this skill. The rationale for this targeted screening was to address learners' needs and challenges in speaking. In week three, the intended participants were subjected to a speaking proficiency test. One other parallel form of the test was also administered in order to probe into students' gain of the treatment and to study if the treatments had any impact on their speaking accuracy and fluency. The post-test was given in week nine.

## Adopting the instructional booklet

Following Ranta and Lyster's (2007) framework, the target structure was introduced by means of awareness-provoking input for learners. Thus, the topic of *language awareness* was particularly relevant at the construction of the instructional units. Taking Tomlinson's (2003) perspective into consideration, language awareness is "a mental attribute which develops through paying motivated attention to language in use" (p. 251). In a similar route of inquiry, van Lier's (2001) justification of the introduction of *attention* in language teaching is that paying deliberate attention to specific language features may help learners notice the gap between the performance of proficient users of the target language and their own performance.

Inspired by Lyster (2012), the instructional booklet comprised a cover page and four units. The cover page included a bolded title of *active vs. passive*, as well as the table of contents. The page was designed using bold and highlighted texts to help the learners to notice the to-be-instructed target structure. This was helped by the use of typographically enhanced phrases, texts and designs. The page also included a table of contents showing the different components of the booklet, comprising the title of the units as well as the target element. The page was, in fact, a preface to warm up the students and prepare them to face a particular structural form different from what they already know about in their L1.

Each of the four units was comprised of eight parts. The purpose of Part 1 was to expose the learners to the target structure by asking them to read texts, containing the target form being highlighted. Part 2 was an induction of the target form, stimulating learners' rule-discovering and analytical skills. Part 3 provided explanations and descriptions of the target form so as to boost learners' awareness of the target structure. Throughout the process, procedures were used which attempted to maximize the potential interactive collaboration between the learner and other learners, and between the learners and the teacher. Hence, Part 4 and Part 5 encouraged working with peers. Parts 6, 7 and 8 included written exercises serving as practice activities employing analysis-based tasks (Lyster, 2004). In particular, Parts 6 and 7 were cloze-text tasks pertinent to the activities in Parts 4 and 5. The tasks were adopted around the students' regular curriculum, which had actually the aim of preparing the students for academic presentations and lecturing. Finally, part 8, the latter part of each unit, asked the participants to make full sentences based on the example which was modelled.

## The intervention

Course instruction lasted four weeks. Each week, the participants in the experimental groups (FFST and FFI) experienced treatment adopted and implemented especially for the purpose of the study, while the subjects in the control group (REG) received university's regular program. Instruction in this latter group was that of the commonly adopted strategy in English departments' ELT practices. The control group, thus, received instruction based on the university curriculum materials without receiving form-

focused instruction. As Lyster (2004) pointed out in his report of a study in the immersion program, the importance of including a group not exposed to the study treatment is to ensure whether or not exposing students to extensive input alone, through teaching instructional materials replete with target features, is sufficient to trigger any changes in the students' ability to use the target structure, both accurately and fluently.

Of the two experimental groups which received treatments based on ACT, one experimental group, designated as the *FFST group*, experienced form-focused skill training including all the phases of the awareness-practice-feedback sequence. The second experimental group, the *FFI group*, received instruction with merely the first two phases, i.e. awareness and practice. The rationale as to why the FFI group was included in the experimentation stemmed from Lyster's (2004) report of teachers who were enthusiastic about providing no feedback, justifying that not providing oral feedback on errors helps learners to focus on meaning, not forms, and thus improve fluency. In other words, the purpose was to examine whether form-focused instruction with extensive practice was effective enough in students' improvement in both accurate and fluent use of the target structure. Each session was divided into different, yet integrated, phases:

- (a) *awareness*: The purpose of the first phase was to draw learners' attention to the target feature. This took the initial sixty minutes of the class time and involved both implicit and explicit instruction of the target structure. Following Ellis, Basturkmen and Loewen (2001), this phase adopted proactive teacher-initiated focus-on-form which involved predetermining the grammatical feature (the passive voice) to be targeted. Instruction in this phase was realized by means of both linguistic and metalinguistic explanations through which the teacher either gave information about particular linguistic items explicitly or asked questions to implicitly draw learners' attention to the target feature. This typically consisted of information about the property of the target linguistic forms, received by the participants on the board as well as on the instructional booklet. As such, "noticing activities employing typographically enhanced texts and awareness activities employing inductive rule-discovery tasks" (Lyster, 2004, p. 413) were devised to suit the instructional purpose, which was to facilitate learners' cognitive processes and boost their awareness of the target structure (Mackey & Gass, 2005).

- (b) *practice*: As for the practice phase, the 4/3/2 technique was adopted. The technique, which was first described by Maurice (1983, cited in Nation, 1989) served to practice the target feature and involved the following steps. A learner spent a few minutes preparing a talk on a topic pertinent to their course material. Adopting topics on students' course materials provided a meaningful context for the form-focused intervention. During this time, the learner thought of what (s)he would talk about and did not make notes. Then the learner paired up with a classmate and talked on that topic for four minutes. The listener did not interrupt and did not ask questions. Then they changed partners. The speaker then talked again on the same topic to the new listener, this time in three minutes. The learners changed partners again. The speaker gave the same talk for the third time to her/his new partner, this time in two minutes. According to Nation (1989), the technique has three important features: (1) the speaker has a different audience each time she/he speaks, so her/his attention will be on communicating the message; (2) the speaker repeats the same talk, which means that she/he will develop confidence to deliver the talk and will have less difficulty in accessing the language she/he needs; (3) the time available to deliver the talk is reduced each time the talk is given. This means that as the speaker delivers the talk more fluently, there is no need to think of new material to fill the available time.
- (c) *feedback*: In the last phase, students were asked to rise one after another to give the best of their talk, while the teacher was listening to them and giving feedback on the errors they made in the form of prompts and recasts. A prompt, which is referred to interchangeably as the negotiation of form (Lyster & Ranta, 1997) and form-focused negotiation (Lyster, 2002), is a cognitively engaging feedback providing a response to Swain's (1985) call for teachers to push their learners to be more accurate in their output. Previous research has also shown that prompts, as a form of indirect feedback, bear constructive contributions in producing more accurate utterances (Aliakbari & Toni, 2009). Recasts, on the other hand, involve the teacher's reformulation of the student's utterance, devoid of the error (Lyster & Ranta, 1997). In explaining the contributory role of recasts, some researchers argue that "the

juxtaposition of the learner's ungrammatical utterance with the teacher's reformulation provides the learner with an opportunity to make a cognitive comparison ... because meaning is held constant and so the learner's processing resources are freed up to focus on form" (Lyster, 2004, p. 403).

## Gathering other data

In addition to the data obtained by administering the pre- and the post-test, three other data collection methods were used to collect triangulated data based upon different types of qualitative accounts to examine effective teaching.

### Observation

As the participants progressed in the context of the classroom, they were observed so as to collect qualitative data in a naturalistic setting. This enabled the researcher to see things that participants themselves were not aware of, or that they were probably unwilling to discuss (Patton, 1990). As for the sake of possibility, practicality and convenience, *field notes* were taken and class interactions were *audio-recorded*. The utilization of both of these methods helped the researchers run descriptions of settings, people, activities, and could aid as means of accurately capturing the setting as well.

### Interviews

In the last week of the study, i.e. week fourteen, an interview was conducted with the participants of the FFST group. In order to avoid causing anxiety for learners in expressing their opinion in English and that their English ability would not be judged by the interviewer, the interviews were conducted in Persian. There were nine questions to be answered. All the interviews were recorded for analysis with the interviewees' permission. Questions were about the participants' overall evaluation of and their preferences about this way of instruction. Participants were asked to explain their progress in oral performance. The interview also explored learners' gained strategies and their willingness to participate in such kinds of courses in the future.

## **Data Analysis**

### **Quantitative data**

To score learners' performance on the pre- and the post-test, Guerrero's (2004) suggested measures of accuracy and fluency were utilized. Based on this scale, accuracy is measured by calculating the percentage of error-free verb forms. As for measuring fluency, the average number of words per minute of the production of every participant was calculated. The scoring was carried out by two raters. The first one was one of the researchers of the present paper and the second rater was another professional teacher who had access only to the audio-recorded samples of the tests. Both raters were asked to transcribe the whole test sessions verbatim and score the performance of the participants based on the rubric. The scorings of the raters were then subjected to correlational analysis to check for interrater reliability. The estimate of interrater reliability was Kappa 0.91 and 0.98 for accuracy and fluency measures respectively.

### **Qualitative data**

The qualitative data were gathered through observations and semi-structured interviews. The procedures for content analysis in this study centered on the following stages: 1) transcribing the aural data of the interview, 2) translating the data into English, 3) coding the learners' ideas, 4) looking for the pattern, and 5) interpreting data and reaching a conclusion. The stages of the analyses were based on Dörnyei's (2007) framework.

## **Results**

### **Quantitative analysis**

The ANCOVA parametric test was chosen to determine the differences among the scores obtained from the pre- and the post-test. The analyses were conducted on both measurements (accuracy and fluency) to determine whether the improvement in the mean scores is high enough not to attribute to sampling error. Also, post-hoc analyses were regarded

suitable to evaluate the differences among the three groups of study before and after instruction.

Before running the tests, certain assumptions were needed to be checked. For the OPT scores and both datasets on tests of speaking proficiency, i.e. accuracy and fluency, as shown in Table I, the skewness and kurtosis of scores fell within the range from -1.0 to +1.0 and thus showed no violation of the normality assumption.

TABLE I. Descriptive Statistics for Test Scores

	Test		Statistics	Std. Error
Total Score of the Students on the Placement Test	OPT Test	Mean	141.41	2.442
		Std. Deviation	20.139	
		Skewness	-.288	.291
		Kurtosis	.228	.574
Total Score of the Students on the Pre-test of Accuracy	Pre-Test	Mean	63.204	1.096
		Std. Deviation	8.053	
		Skewness	.241	.325
		Kurtosis	-.049	.639
	Post-test	Mean	72.5	1.825
		Std. Deviation	13.409	
		Skewness	.207	.325
		Kurtosis	-.710	.639
Total Score of the Students on the Pre-test of Fluency	Pre-Test	Mean	8.5	.214
		Std. Deviation	1.575	
		Skewness	.647	.325
		Kurtosis	-.259	.639
	Post-test	Mean	12.91	.34
		Std. Deviation	2.497	
		Skewness	-.834	.325
		Kurtosis	-.331	.639

As for the assumption of covariate independency, a one-way ANOVA was run using the pre-test scores for both datasets. The main effect of the pre-test scores was not significant,  $F(2, 51)=1.959$ ,  $p=.152$  and  $F(2, 51)=6.110$ ,  $p=.054$  for accuracy and fluency scores respectively, which

showed that the initial average of scores was roughly the same in the three groups. As a result, it was appropriate to use learners' pretest accuracy and fluency scores as covariates in further analysis (Table II).

**TABLE II.** One-way ANOVA to Check the Independence of Groups and the Covariates

Source	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	245.148	2	122.574	1.959	.152
Within Groups	3191.611	51	62.581		
Total	3436.759	53			
Between Groups	25.418	2	12.709	6.110	.054
Within Groups	106.082	51	2.080		
Total	131.500	53			

To test the next assumption, the homogeneity of regression slopes, ANCOVA was run by using a customized model. The output obtained from the procedure,  $p=.132$  and  $p=.130$  for accuracy and fluency respectively, were greater than the significant value, which indicated that the assumption of homogeneity of regression slopes was not violated for either the post-test accuracy or fluency measures (Table III).

**TABLE III.** Homogeneity of the Regression Slopes for Post-test Scores

Source	Type III sum of squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	9278.146	5	1855.629	354.361	.000
Intercept	185.300	1	185.300	35.386	.000
Group	167.642	2	83.821	16.007	.000
Pretest	2490.838	1	2490.838	475.664	.000
Group*Pretest	22.170	2	11.085	2.117	.132
Error	251.354	48	5.237		
Total	293367.000	54			
Corrected Total	9529.500	53			



Corrected Model	302.939	5	60.588	105.377	.000
Intercept	65.219	1	65.219	113.432	.000
Group	21.180	2	10.590	18.419	.000
Pretest	48.376	1	48.376	84.137	.000
Group*Pretest	4.344	2	2.172	96.271	.130
Error	27.598	48	.575	3.778	
Total	9327.000	54			
Corrected Total	330.537	53			

The last assumption, the linearity of relationship between dependent variables and covariate for all groups was checked by the graph. As shown in Figures I and II, the associated relationships are clearly linear and there is no indication of curvilinear relationship. As a result, the assumption of linearity was not violated in either accuracy or fluency datasets.

CHART I. Linear relationship between accuracy and the covariate

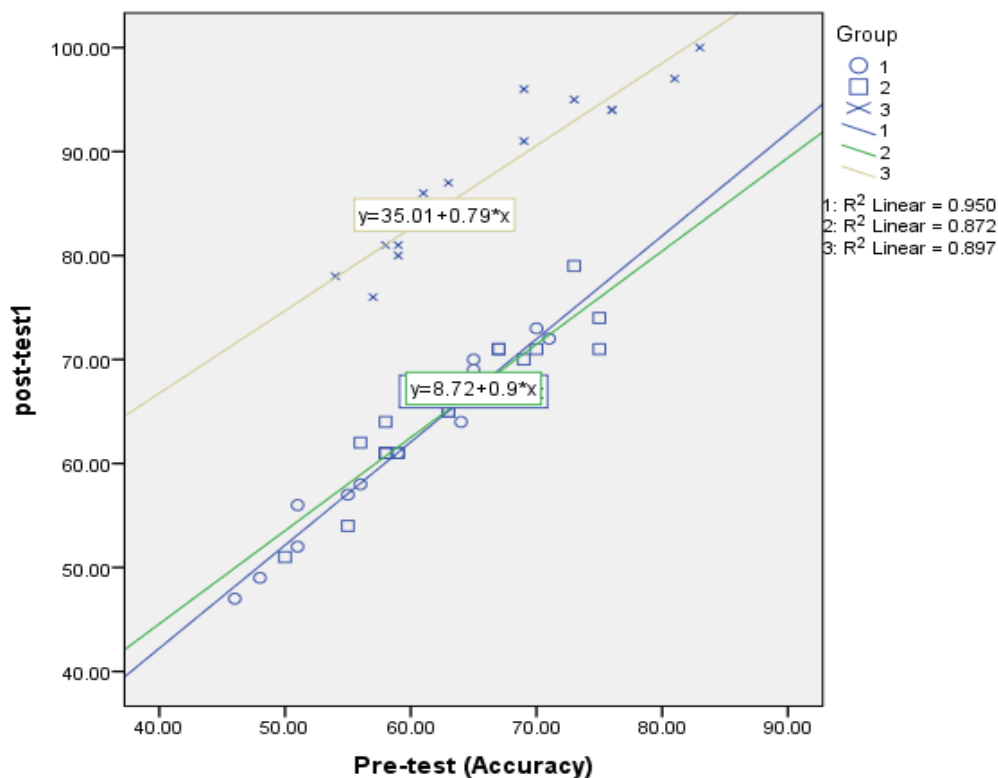
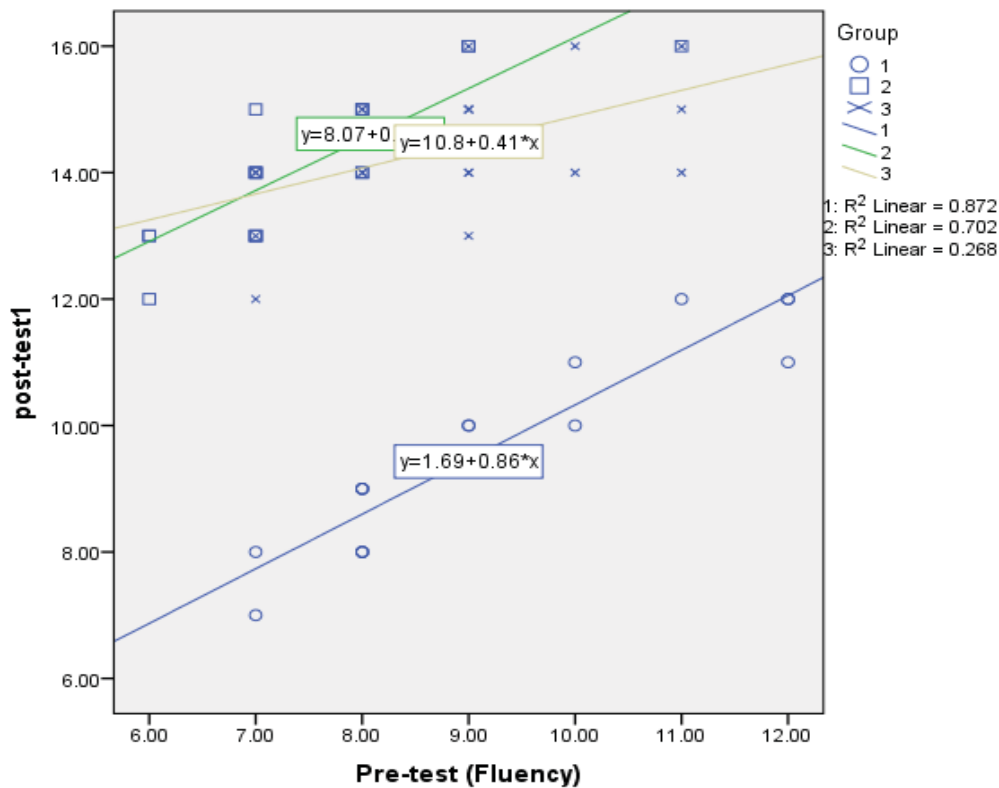


CHART II. Linear relationship between fluency and the covariate



### The first research question

ANCOVA was conducted to compare the effectiveness of the three different treatments on students' speaking in the post-test. The independent variable was the types of intervention (REG, FFI, FFST) and the dependent variable consisted of scores in the post-test speaking accuracy after the intervention. The participants' pre-test accuracy scores were used as the covariate. Tables IV and V show the results of Levene's test and the ANCOVA table respectively.

TABLE IV. Levene's Test for Speaking Accuracy

F	Df1	Df2	Sig.
.256	2	51	.775

The result indicated that the homogeneity of variances was not violated because the obtained value was greater than the alpha level of 0.05 ( $p=.775$ ).

**TABLE V.** ANCOVA Test Including Speaking Accuracy as Covariate

Source	Type III sum of squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	9255.976	3	3085.325	563.994	.000
Intercept	199.791	1	199.791	36.522	.000
Pretest (accuracy)	2494.357	1	2494.357	455.966	.000
Group	4694.224	2	2347.112	429.050	.000
Error	273.524	50	5.470		
Total	293367.000	54			
Corrected Total	9529.500	53			

The results of the ANCOVA test revealed that pre-test score was a significant covariate ( $p=.000$ ) meaning that the three groups significantly differed in speaking accuracy scores prior to the treatment. However, ANCOVA results still show a significant difference between the post-test result of the three groups ( $p=000$ ). It can be concluded that there is significant difference among the study groups regarding their performance on the posttest measuring students' accuracy in the production of the English passive voice. However, it was crucial to check the adjusted value of the groups to find the optimal way of intervention. The results are presented in Table VI.

**TABLE VI.** Parameters Estimate for Post-test Accuracy Scores

Group	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
REG	64.924	.597	63.724	66.124
FFI	65.379	.551	64.272	66.486
FFST	84.970	.532	83.902	86.038

Based on these estimates, it could be concluded that the FFST group significantly differed from the control group (REG) and the other experimental group (FFI). In other words, the mean of the group that received form-focused instruction with skill training was higher than the other two groups who received either a regular or merely form-focused instruction. In addition, form-focused instruction showed better performance in comparison to regular instruction, yet the performance was not significantly better. The result of Tukey's post hoc analysis, which was run to conduct pairwise comparisons among groups, is shown in Table VII.

**TABLE VII.** Tukey's Pairwise Comparisons of Post-test Accuracy Scores

(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean Differences (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
REG	FFI	-3.13194	2.53123	.437	-9.2423	2.9784
	FFST	-24.68750*	2.47096	.000	-30.6523	-18.7227
FFI	REG	3.13194	2.53123	.437	-2.9784	9.2423
	FFST	-21.55556*	2.39348	.000	-27.3334	-15.7778
FFST	REG	24.68750*	2.47096	.000	18.7227	30.6523
	FFI	21.55556*	2.39348	.000	15.7778	27.3334

The result of pairwise comparison shows that the speaking accuracy of the FFST group in the post-test was significantly better than the performance of the REG and FFI groups. In addition, there is no significant difference between the performance of REG and FFI groups. It can be concluded that form-focused instruction skill training procedures more significantly increased learners' speaking performance in terms of accuracy compared to learners who were only exposed to either regular or form-focused instruction.

## The second research question

Similar procedures were conducted on the fluency dataset. The independent variable was the type of intervention (REG, FFI, FFST)

and the dependent variable was the score in the post-test for speaking fluency. The participants' pre-test scores were used as the covariate. Tables VIII and IX show the results of the Levene's test and the ANCOVA table respectively.

**TABLE VIII.** Levene's Test for Speaking Fluency

<b>F</b>	<b>Df1</b>	<b>Df2</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
2.124	2	51	.130

The result indicated that the homogeneity of variances was not violated ( $p=.130>.05$ ).

**TABLE IX.** ANCOVA Test by Including Speaking Fluency as Covariate

<b>Source</b>	<b>Type III sum of squares</b>	<b>Df</b>	<b>Mean Square</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
Corrected Model	298.595	3	99.532	155.798	.000
Intercept	64.060	1	64.060	100.274	.000
Pretest (fluency)	53.108	1	53.108	83.130	.000
Group	293.254	2	146.627	229.518	.000
Error	31.942	50	.639		
Total	9327.000	54			
Corrected Total	330.537	53			

The results revealed that pre-test score was a significant covariate ( $p: .000<0.05$ ) meaning that the three groups significantly differed in speaking fluency scores prior to the treatment. However, ANCOVA still shows a significant difference between the post-test results of the three groups ( $p: .000< 0.05$ ). It can be concluded that the performance of the three groups was not the same after receiving intervention. However, it was crucial to check the adjusted value of the groups to find the optimal way of intervention. The results are presented in Table X below.

TABLE X. Parameters Estimate for Post-test Fluency Scores

Group	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
REG	9.139	.207	8.723	9.554
FFI	14.835	.202	14.429	15.241
FFST	14.188	.180	13.826	14.550

Based on these estimates, it is found that the performance of the FFST and FFI groups were roughly the same in the post-test with a mean of 14.188 and 14.835 respectively and both outperformed that of the REG group. Tukey's test shows analysis of one-on-one comparisons in each pair of groups (Table XI).

TABLE XI. Tukey's Pairwise Comparisons of Post-test Fluency Scores

(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean Differences (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
REG	FFI	-4.54167*	.44371	.000	-5.6128	-3.4706
	FFST	-4.77500*	.43314	.000	-5.8206	-3.7294
FFI	REG	4.54167*	.44371	.000	3.4706	5.6128
	FFST	-.23333	.41956	.844	-1.2461	.7795
FFST	REG	4.77500*	.43314	.000	3.7294	5.8206
	FFI	.23333	.41956	.844	-.7795	1.2461

The result of pairwise comparison shows that the speaking fluency of the FFST and FFI groups in the post-test was significantly better from the performance of the REG group. In addition, there is no significant difference between the performance of FFST and FFI groups, although the FFI group had a roughly higher mean of scores in speaking fluency in the post-test. It can be concluded that both form-focused skill training procedures and form-focused instruction had the same significant impact on the development of students' speaking fluency.

## Qualitative Analysis

### The third research question

Qualitative content analyses of the data collected from the interviews (see Appendix) and class observations helped address research question three. Based upon Dörnyei's (2007) framework, qualitative content analysis is mostly used to "characterize the collection of generic qualitative analytical moves that are applied to establish *patterns* [emphasis added] in the data" (p.245). It involves transcribing the data, coding, growing ideas, and interpreting the data and drawing conclusions.

In this respect, the pertinent data were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim and translated into English. The outcome was 172 minutes of oral interactions comprising a bank of 21567 words. The associated data were then interpreted, and conclusions were drawn. The results yielded evidence that almost all the learners acknowledged an improvement in their speaking after receiving the instruction. Having analyzed the data, the patterns in learners' responses were classified into five categories indicating the major findings as follows. (Quotations are labeled as *Ln*, where *L* stands for learner and *n* refers to subjects' ID.)

#### Linguistic contributions

Increased attention to grammar in general along with an awareness of the passive voice structure in particular were observed in the majority of learners' responses. The following excerpt highlights this issue:

*L63: The good point about this semester was the teacher's more and clarifying explanations of the grammatical points.*

Besides, some respondents (e.g. *L55*, *L58*, *L64*) believed that their fluency also improved as a result of the instruction:

*L55: The best point about this semester was the part in which we had pair work with three different partners.*

#### Cognitive improvement

Responses to the interview questions showed that the learners mostly identified recent changes in *how* they perceived and tended to solve linguistic problems. They commented that, by the end of the course, they could manage to create, modify and rearrange ideas. More interestingly,

some respondents (e.g. L50, L51) believed that the partnership among the peers in the second phase of the class led to better brainstorming so that one's ideas could be stimulants for another's, and some (e.g. L48, L50, L53, L65) noted that the process of getting prepared to give lectures helped them boost their memory.

*L48: I think the more different ideas between me and my partners led to sharing more ideas.*

### Affective change

Most of the interviewees' responses had to do with the affection they experienced during the course. Since the students were left free to report whatever they believed and however they perceived the class, the responses were of both positive and negative reflections of the class interactions. Confidence was the focus of most students' perceptions. Some interviewees (e.g. L59, L61) noted that they liked the group work and partnership, especially changing the partners. Some (e.g. L56, L63) admitted that the class interactions brought a gift of confidence, extroversion and stress management. Below an example excerpt is presented:

*L63: I tried to control my stress each time I was given a chance to talk.*

In contrast to the most positive impressions of the course, three students reported that they experienced anxiety during the sessions, a matter which needs to be cautiously taken into consideration. Two students (L49, L58) stated that the little time they were given was a big cause of stress and embarrassment so that it led to long hesitations. In addition, one learner (L62) noted that the teacher could have calmed the class down so that students' anxiety and fear of presenting in front of other class members would get as low as possible.

### Overall course benefits

The analysis yielded evidence of the learners' satisfaction with the class procedure employed during the semester. Respondents' most frequent admiration of the course was on the role of the teacher's feedback (either positive or negative feedback), presentations and pair work. The students also noted that, during the semester, they could facilitate their note-taking strategy to make faster preparations prior to giving lectures. Moreover, it was revealed that time management was one of the strategies that was



accomplished. In sum, it could be argued that the analysis showed that students' impression of the course was highly positive.

#### Preferences and comments

Analyses of students' responses to interview questions and the researchers' observations revealed that the role of the teacher's explanations was a welcomed part of the course. Likewise, the teacher's feedback was appreciated. In addition, the learners approved of the role of pair work and emphasized that it was stress-releasing and constructive in boosting their fluency. A thought-provoking comment was made by three learners (*L52, L59, L66*) purporting to have not completely done the exercises in the booklet as to the teacher's lack of sufficient supervision. They believed that monitoring students, asking and, at times, forcing them to do the exercises is a necessary part of instruction. Last but not least, some suggestions were posed by two participants (*L50, L65*). As a case in point, it was suggested that, prior to speaking on a topic, students search for related information to develop their general knowledge so that it helps them to get prepared to talk. It was also suggested that students try to prepare, in advance, related vocabulary so that probable lack of vocabulary knowledge does not hinder their performance.

## Discussion

The results of the analysis of the obtained accuracy scores from the post-test shows that accurate performance in group FFST, which was exposed to form-focused instruction within subsequent stages of skill training, was significantly better than the other two groups. The strategy in this group involved attention to form which occurred in interaction where the primary focus was on meaning. The approach was found successful probably because integrating form in this way helps L2 learners to, as Doughty and Williams (1998) assert, develop their form-meaning mappings. In addition, this teaching strategy approves of a proactive focus on form approach, predetermining the grammatical feature to be targeted. Equally importantly, the feedback draws the subjects' attention either explicitly or implicitly to the L2 aspects such as grammatical forms (Nassaji & Swain, 2000), which in turn pushes the learners to intentionally modify their output to produce more accurate utterances.

As for the results of the analysis of fluency scores, the findings approve of the role of repeated practice as the key factor in subsuming conscious knowledge into unconscious skill (Ellis, 2009a, 2009b). This finding can be justified on the grounds that the knowledge of '*what* the rules of a language are' can be converted to the skill of '*how* the rules could be applied in a given context'. In other words, the findings of the present study confirm the hypothetical theorems of the ACT theory which have seldom been empirically tested in previous research.

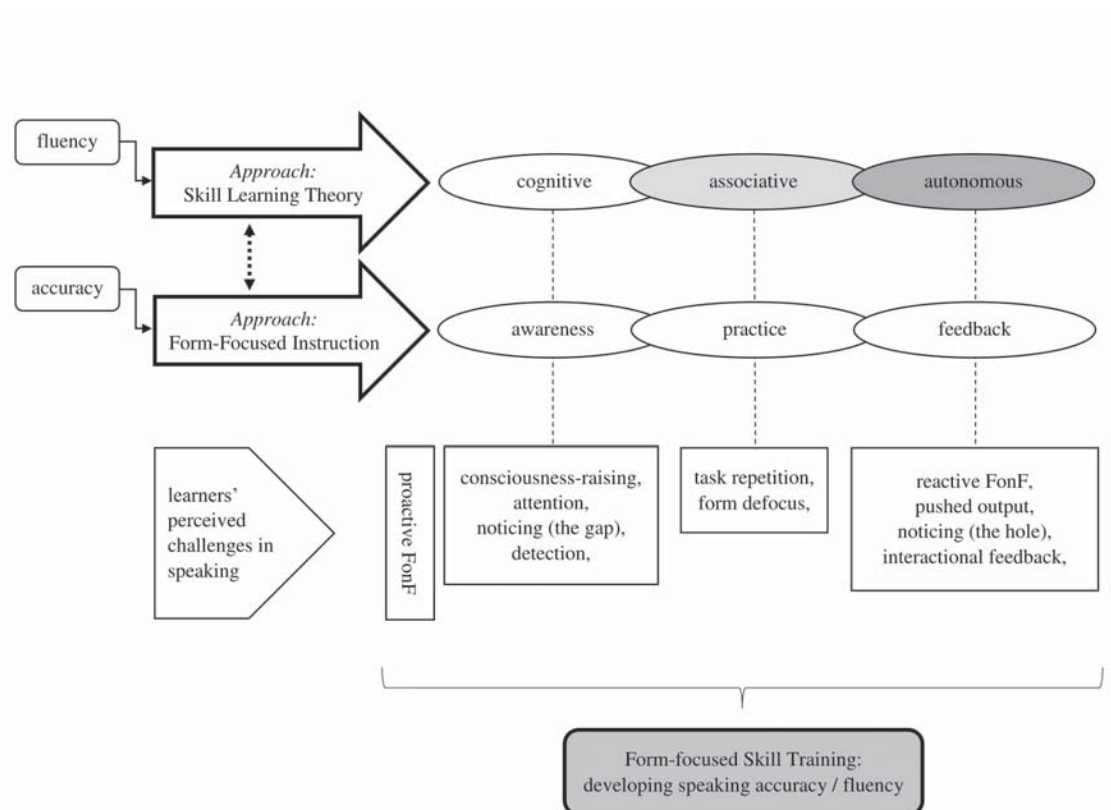
By juxtaposing the findings of the different conditions, the simultaneous development of accuracy and fluency in the FFST group can be justified from two perspectives. First, stimulating learners' rule-discovering skill with the aid of awareness-provoking lessons and explicit instruction, which was in line with Ranta and Lyster's (2007) suggested design of instructional lessons, served as didactic grammar input for learners. Second, thanks to the ACT model, it is evident that, at the associative stage, learners come to bridge their declarative knowledge to skillful communication. When it comes to learning linguistic elements in context, not only explanations, but also opportunities for practicing some communicative tasks are of concern. In this regard, the adopted topic-based course materials provided a meaningful context for the practice phase of the treatment, which is itself the heart of proceduralization. By means of repeated practice, the learner's attention would be on communicating the message (Nation, 1989), which would in turn free up their cognitive and memory resources and devote it to communication in order to convey the message.

The results of the analysis of the obtained qualitative data provided insight into the learners' impressions of the FFST-based course. Learners' comments which showed that they believed FFST boosted their attention to the target feature was quite an achievement of the course since, according to Larsen-Freeman (2001), it is rather burdensome for the EFL learner to transfer the accurate grammar to their speaking. In addition, the students' reports of satisfaction with their memory improvement in producing accurate and fluent speech at the same time could be regarded as a resolution to McLaughlin and Heredia (1996), Skehan and Foster (1999) and Hughes' (2002) concern of the existence of imbalance between accuracy and fluency. Moreover, students' comments were good indicators of the feasibility of the application of FFST in improving their confidence and extroversion. This finding is a response, in line with Brown

(2001), Shumin (2002) and Zhang and Jia (2006), to obstructive affective variables that lead to students' undesirable speaking performance.

All in all, the findings of this study suggest that form-focused instruction is more effective when skill training is encouraged as part of the class activity. Based on these, the following model for promoting a simultaneous accurate/fluent speaking performance is represented (Chart III).

CHART III. Schematic representation of form-focused skill training (FFST)



In line with Ranta and Lyster's (2007) contention that skill learning, in addition to its benefits in promoting fluency, might provide "a logical sequence for selecting activities that promote awareness of target language structures" (p. 150), the model postulates that the cognitive-associative-autonomous sequence in skill learning corresponds with the concepts of awareness, practice and feedback in form-focused instruction, respectively. Accordingly, the model suggests a three-phase instructional

procedure. The first phase employs proactive focus on form. This involves targeting predetermined grammatical features which are known to be the source of learning difficulty or viewed as the culprit of persistent errors in students (Doughty & Williams, 1998). Having conducted needs analyses to account for learners' perceived challenges in speaking, this stage is realized by means of focused tasks or communicative activities providing students with enriched input. The objectives of the second phase are achieved by employing repetitive, authentic and time-constrained tasks. In so doing and in line with Johnson (1996), who maintained that L2 teachers should help learners automatize their declarative knowledge by controlling the amount of attention a learner can give to a language form, form-defocused repetition tasks are to be employed in order to provide the opportunity to focus on the message, lead learners to gradual automatization and assist those who have difficulty in accessing grammatical and lexical items (Arevart & Nation, 1991). The final phase deals with providing learners with reactive focus on form and addresses their performance problems. This is achieved by providing learners with interactional feedback including negotiation, confirmation, clarification and modification, and is based on the hypothesis that such strategies highlight linguistic or pragmatic problems, leading learners to notice a *hole* in their interlanguage (Swain, 1998). There is evidence asserting that interactional feedback provides learners with opportunities to produce and modify output (Gass, 1997; McDonough, 2005; Mackey, 2007, among others), resulting in the learners' modification of what they have said and thereby attempting to make their output comprehensible for mutual understanding (Muranoi, 2007).

## Conclusion

Having reviewed earlier research and conducted an experiment on the impressibility of EFL learners' speaking performance, the present research could make readers aware of the plausibility of a form-focused skill training (FFST) approach in developing learners' accuracy and fluency. In particular, the results obtained from the present study led the researchers to recommend that integrating form-focused instruction with sequential skill training would have significant constructive impact on the simultaneous development of speaking accuracy and fluency.

The results pave the way to suggest that teachers and materials developers could take advantage of the experimented procedure in teaching speaking as well as related materials preparations. The findings of the study convince us to point out that it makes sense to attempt to adopt and prepare materials that include tasks, activities and exercises which provide opportunities for learners to promote speaking accuracy and fluency simultaneously. These activities should be developed in such a way that learners notice, comprehend and explain target features, and at the same time they should involve processes during which learners' motivation and autonomy are encouraged.

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## Appendix

### The Semi-structured Interview (English Version)

1. What do you think about this way of practicing speaking (FFST)? How would you describe it?
2. What did you like most about this way of instruction? In the instruction phase?
3. Which one the following activities did you prefer: teacher's explanation in class, doing the exercises from the booklet? Why?
4. Was there anything you did not like about this method?
5. Do you think, through this method, your speaking ability improved? How?

6. Which aspect of speaking (accuracy, fluency or both) do you think you developed most?
7. Which activities of this course were the most helpful for learning speaking?
8. Name some strategies you have gained from this class that could be useful for you in the future?
9. Would you like to attend another similar class in the future? Why?

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