ISSN: 2181-3906 2026

International scientific journal
«MODERN SCIENCE AND RESEARCH»
VOLUME 5 / ISSUE 11 / UIF:8.2 / MODERNSCIENCE.UZ

FORM-FOCUSED INSTRUCTION IN COMMUNICATIVE ENGLISH CLASSES: PEDAGOGICAL CHALLENGES IN THE UZBEK EFL CONTEXT

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https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.24071789

Abstract. *This article examines the limitations of form-focused instruction in communicative English lessons and the conditions under which it can be adapted to Uzbekistan's English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) setting. The study uses a qualitative documentary review of established second-language acquisition research and relevant Uzbek education policy. Findings distinguish instructional issues, including the timing of correction, attention to meaning, unequal learner participation and the assessment of grammar in use, from contextual questions requiring local evidence. A lesson sequence and an assessment matrix are proposed as methodological examples, not as experimentally validated interventions. The analysis argues for selective attention to form within meaningful tasks, combined with carefully planned support when the target structure is difficult.*

Keywords: *form-focused instruction; communicative language teaching; EFL; corrective feedback; grammar in context; Uzbekistan.*

KOMMUNIKATIV INGLIZ TILI DARSLARIDA TIL SHAKLIGA YO‘NALTIRILGAN O‘QITISH: O‘ZBEKISTON EFL MUHITIDAGI PEDAGOGIK MUAMMOLAR

Annotatsiya. *Maqolada kommunikativ ingliz tili darslarida til shakliga e'tibor qaratishning imkoniyatlari va cheklovlari, shuningdek, bu yondashuvni O‘zbekiston sharoitiga moslashtirish masalalari ko‘rib chiqiladi. Tadqiqot ikkinchi tilni o‘zlashtirishga oid tekshiriladigan ilmiy ishlar hamda mamlakatning ta'limga oid rasmiy hujjatlariga tayangan hujjatli-qiyosiy tahlildan iborat. Natijalarda tuzatish vaqtini tanlash, grammatik aniqlik va ravonlik muvozanati, talabalar ishtiroki va baholashga doir muammolar ajratiladi. Tavsiya qilingan dars ketma-ketligi amaliy sinov natijasi emas, metodik namuna hisoblanadi.*

Kalit so‘zlar: *til shakliga yo‘naltirilgan o‘qitish; kommunikativ yondashuv; ingliz tili; tuzatuvchi qayta aloqa; grammatika; O‘zbekiston.*

ОБУЧЕНИЕ С АКЦЕНТОМ НА ЯЗЫКОВУЮ ФОРМУ НА КОММУНИКАТИВНЫХ ЗАНЯТИЯХ ПО АНГЛИЙСКОМУ ЯЗЫКУ: ПЕДАГОГИЧЕСКИЕ ТРУДНОСТИ В УСЛОВИЯХ УЗБЕКИСТАНА

Аннотация. *В статье рассматриваются ограничения обучения с акцентом на языковую форму в коммуникативных занятиях по английскому языку и возможности адаптации данного подхода к условиям Узбекистана. Исследование основано на качественном анализе проверяемых работ по освоению второго языка и нормативных документов в сфере образования. Выделены вопросы своевременной коррекции ошибок, сочетания грамматической точности и речевой беглости, участия учащихся и оценивания*

грамматики в общении. Предложенная последовательность урока представляет собой методический образец, а не результат проведённого педагогического эксперимента.

Ключевые слова: *обучение с акцентом на форму; коммуникативный подход; английский язык; корректирующая обратная связь; грамматика; Узбекистан.*

INTRODUCTION

In communicative English lessons, a learner may complete a task successfully while still using an inaccurate grammatical structure. A pair can exchange information, agree on a plan or solve a problem even when verb forms or articles are inconsistent. The pedagogical difficulty is not whether grammar matters, but when teachers should direct attention to form without replacing communication with a sequence of isolated drills. The collection edited by Doughty and Williams established the practical value of investigating attention to linguistic features within meaning-oriented classroom activity [1].

Ellis distinguishes approaches to form-focused instruction according to whether meaning or language form is primary and whether the treatment is intensive or extensive [2]. His later review of grammar pedagogy shows why questions of timing, target selection, instructional explicitness and evaluation cannot be settled by a single universal procedure [3]. For EFL learners, knowledge gained from a rule explanation is not identical to the ability to retrieve that rule while speaking. Lightbown and Spada relate classroom development to the interaction of instruction, learner characteristics and opportunities to use the target language [4].

Loewen documented incidental focus-on-form episodes arising during otherwise meaning-centred lessons in a language school in New Zealand [5]. This study is relevant to classroom interaction, but its learners and institutional conditions should not be treated as a representative sample of Uzbek schools. Long originally framed focus on form as attention to linguistic elements that emerges within work primarily concerned with meaning [6]. The distinction matters because a teacher who interrupts every utterance for correction may unintentionally change the communicative purpose of the lesson.

Evidence on oral feedback adds an important qualification. Lyster compared prompts and recasts in a classroom investigation of French immersion pupils [7]. Lyster and Saito subsequently synthesized 15 classroom studies involving 827 learners and found that oral corrective feedback can support language development, with effects varying by feedback type and measurement [8].

Norris and Ortega reviewed studies published over an earlier period and found benefits of focused second-language instruction, while also stressing limits in operational definitions and research comparability [9]. These results support principled instruction, not a promise that any one technique will work in every group.

Uzbekistan’s Law on Education (O‘RQ-637, 23 September 2020) provides a national framework for organising teaching and educational quality; it does not prescribe one corrective-feedback technique for every English lesson [10]. Presidential Resolution PQ-5117 of 19 May 2021 addresses the improvement of foreign-language education, teaching resources and professional competences [11].

These acts establish the relevance of instructional improvement, but they do not by themselves measure the frequency of grammatical errors or determine the effectiveness of a particular method in Uzbek EFL classrooms.

Spada and Lightbown explain why isolated and integrated attention to grammar may both have a place, depending on the target feature and learning conditions [12]. In a meta-analysis, Spada and Tomita examined how explicit and implicit instructional approaches interact with the complexity of the language feature being taught [13]. Accordingly, the article asks: What recurring pedagogical constraints are reported in established research on form-focused instruction, and how can teachers translate these findings into cautious, observable procedures for communicative EFL lessons in Uzbekistan? The aim is to synthesize published evidence and outline an assessable teaching design, not to report newly collected classroom data.

METHODOLOGY

The article applies a qualitative, focused documentary review. The materials comprise peer-reviewed research on form-focused instruction, classroom feedback and second-language learning, together with two official documents defining Uzbekistan's broader educational and foreign-language teaching framework. Sources were selected because their bibliographic details and publication outlets could be verified and because they provide a clear analytical contribution to the central question. This is not a systematic review: no exhaustive database search, statistical meta-analysis or newly observed corpus is claimed.

For each source, the review identified the instructional setting, the form-focused procedure, the reported evidence and the principal limitation for transfer to a different context. Studies of French immersion learners, adult ESL students and multilingual cohorts were not combined as though they described the same population. Research findings were separated from the pedagogical implications proposed here. A national policy document was used to clarify institutional priorities, never as proof that a classroom intervention was successful.

The analytical unit was a recurring pedagogical decision rather than a count of studies: selecting a target form, deciding when to provide feedback, protecting time for interaction, choosing a task, and assessing language accuracy in meaningful performance. The review grouped these decisions into four linked dimensions: instructional alignment, feedback management, learner access to interaction and assessment validity. For the Uzbek context, each dimension was considered against plausible classroom conditions, but locally unmeasured conditions were formulated as questions for diagnostic assessment rather than as established nationwide facts.

RESULTS

1. Selecting a linguistic target without losing the communicative purpose

The first finding is that attention to form is most defensible when a teacher can name both the linguistic problem and the task in which that problem matters. For example, in an information-gap activity about a recent journey, the past-tense contrast may affect the sequence of events being reconstructed. The target then has an immediate communicative purpose. By contrast, asking learners to recite a long list of unrelated transformations during a role-play risks disconnecting practice from the reason for communicating.

This conclusion follows the distinction between form-focused and meaning-focused instructional options rather than from an observed Uzbek lesson [2].

A practical issue is the selection of a manageable target. Not all deviations need an immediate explanation. If an error repeatedly blocks the listener's understanding, it may justify prompt clarification. If it is frequent but does not interrupt the task, the teacher can record an example and return to it afterwards. The teacher should also consider whether learners have met the form before and whether an explanation would be comprehensible at their proficiency level.

These choices keep accuracy in view without turning all interaction into error correction [3].

2. Corrective feedback: timing, explicitness and learner response

During interaction, feedback may take the form of a recast, a clarification request, elicitation or a metalinguistic prompt. A recast provides a reformulated version; a prompt invites the learner to repair the expression. The research does not justify declaring one response universally superior. Lyster's classroom study showed how different feedback conditions can lead to different forms of learner response [7]. The wider meta-analysis by Lyster and Saito suggests that prompts can be particularly useful for eliciting production, while effects must still be interpreted in relation to task type and learning measure [8].

In a sample exchange, a learner says "She go to college every day", and a teacher asks "She …?" with a short pause. This is an illustration of elicitation, not an extract from field observation. Alternatively, the teacher may respond naturally with "She goes to college every day" and continue the discussion. The second response offers a model but may be interpreted as confirmation of meaning rather than corrective evidence. A teacher can choose between them by considering the task's purpose and the learner's ability to notice the correction [12].

3. The limits of transferring research to the Uzbek EFL context

Published work conducted in other countries provides mechanisms worth examining, not measured descriptions of every Uzbek classroom. A school with large groups, mixed proficiency levels or limited speaking time could face difficulties in giving individual feedback, but the prevalence of those conditions would require a local audit or observation study. Where English is mainly used in class, opportunities for spontaneous production may also need deliberate planning.

These are conditional pedagogical considerations; this review has not measured their distribution across Uzbekistan.

The national policy emphasis on improving foreign-language education supports the relevance of teacher development and better learning opportunities [11]. An actionable response is to begin each unit with a brief needs check: identify a recurring structure from actual learner work, note whether errors impede meaning, and choose a task that requires that form for a clear purpose.

The instructor can then use pair work, rotating roles or short recorded responses to collect evidence of participation. Each measure should be judged against actual resources rather than applied mechanically.

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VOLUME 5 / ISSUE 11 / UIF:8.2 / MODERNSCIENCE.UZ

Table 1. Evidence-informed challenges and cautious classroom responses

Teaching problem	Instructional option	Evidence to retain
Target form competes with meaning	Choose one form linked to the task outcome	Learner message plus target use
Correction interrupts fluency	Use brief prompts or delayed feedback	Audio/notes of repair opportunities
Unequal chances to speak	Assign rotating information-gap roles	Participation log by learner
Rule knowledge does not transfer	Revisit the form in a new communicative task	Independent task sample

4. A small, inspectable lesson sequence

A feasible application can be illustrated through a 45-minute lesson on recounting an event, with the simple past as its target. This time allocation is a planning example, not a prescribed national standard. The teacher first provides two short accounts with different information, and each student asks a partner about what happened, when and why. Next, the teacher notes a small number of recurrent errors that appear during interaction. In the middle of the lesson, pairs compare their completed timelines and negotiate differences. A three-minute focus on selected verbs follows, using errors that are anonymous or constructed. The final task asks learners to retell a new event without relying on the original model.

This design makes the learning objective observable. The first task reveals how learners communicate before targeted correction; the final task tests whether they can use the chosen form in a different message. Neither a single corrected sentence nor a completed worksheet demonstrates long-term acquisition. The teacher may repeat a comparable task later to check retention. A difficulty with this sequence is that a few vocal participants can dominate; rotating questioner and reporter roles creates a better opportunity for every learner to produce the target form.

Table 2. Illustrative lesson stages and their assessment purpose

Stage	Activity	What can be checked
Initial communication	Pairs reconstruct a recent event	Clarity of message and recurring errors
Focused feedback	Teacher prompts repair of selected verb forms	Whether learners recognise the target
New task	Learners retell a different short event	Independent use in connected speech
Delayed check	Short follow-up after another lesson	Retention, without claiming causality

5. Assessing grammatical development in communication

Assessment is a separate limitation because an intervention can improve performance on an exercise while leaving spontaneous communication uncertain.

A learner who selects a correct tense in a multiple-choice item has demonstrated recognition within that format. The same learner may still hesitate or simplify expressions in an unscripted exchange. Norris and Ortega found that the measurement instrument can influence the apparent size of an instructional effect [9]. The practical implication is to collect more than one kind of evidence when judging form-focused instruction.

A short analytic rubric can distinguish comprehensibility of the message, use of the target form and responsiveness to a partner. However, any numerical weights would require justification through the learning objectives and checking of rater agreement. This article therefore recommends descriptive criteria rather than a formula with arbitrary percentages. For the target of simple past, a teacher might note whether past events are ordered intelligibly and whether selected verbs are consistently marked in a later independent retelling. Both observations should be recorded without presenting them as scores from an experiment that did not occur.

DISCUSSION

The reviewed sources challenge two extreme positions. One treats explicit grammar explanation as the central activity of every English lesson; the other avoids attention to grammar out of concern that accuracy work will suppress communication. Neither position captures the classroom choices described by research on focus on form. The more defensible approach is conditional. If learners cannot recognise an important contrast, brief planned instruction may help.

If they already know a rule but fail to use it under time pressure, opportunities to notice the contrast within meaningful exchanges may be more suitable. Spada and Lightbown describe isolated and integrated instruction as alternatives with different strengths rather than mutually exclusive doctrines [12].

The Uzbek context makes this distinction relevant to teacher preparation. Language-policy priorities signal a demand for stronger foreign-language teaching, yet the legal framework cannot tell a teacher exactly when to recast a sentence or what to do after learners miss an article in pair work [10]. That decision requires professional judgement based on proficiency, task goals, available time and the instructional history of the class. Teacher development should therefore include the analysis of short classroom episodes, practice in drafting prompts, and discussion of what evidence would demonstrate improvement. It should not be reduced to memorising method names.

The literature also points to an evidence-transfer problem. Loewen’s observations concerned adults at a New Zealand language school; Lyster’s studies involved particular classroom populations, including French immersion learners [5]. The meta-analyses combine diverse research designs and outcome measures [8]. These contexts cannot stand in for a nationwide survey of Uzbek EFL classes. A future investigation could compare teacher-designed activities across several sites, retain the original student tasks, and examine changes in grammatical use while controlling for lesson time and initial proficiency. Without such data, claims about a preferred national method should remain tentative.

CONCLUSION

Form-focused instruction can support communicative English teaching when teachers select a meaningful linguistic target, manage correction without abandoning interaction and assess the form in connected learner performance. Research supports both planned and incidental forms of attention to grammar, but the choice should depend on the target feature, learner readiness and teaching conditions. Evidence from other educational settings should not be treated as direct evidence of outcomes in Uzbekistan.

For Uzbek EFL practice, the article proposes a modest sequence: diagnose an observable difficulty, design a communicative task, provide selective feedback, and check the same form in a new task. The tables provide a transparent basis for planning and later classroom inquiry. The study's limit is equally clear: it is a documentary synthesis, not an experiment. Its contribution is an evidence-informed set of decisions and assessment indicators that can be tested in a future local study.

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