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THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PLANNED AND INCIDENTAL FOCUS ON FORM IN
LEARNING GRAMMATICAL CONCEPTS IN TWO SPANISH AS L2
CLASSROOMS

REBECA MONASTERIO VELILLA

61 Pages

The present research study examines the effectiveness of two types of in two Spanish classrooms for beginner students: *planned focus on form* and *incidental focus on form*. *Focus on form* is understood as an instructional practice that creates a real-life context to let students practice some aspects of the language in a communicative environment based on both meaning and form. In this study, *planned focus on form* is operationalized as input enhancement in classroom materials and teacher talk. On the other hand, *incidental focus on form* involves teacher's spontaneous attention to form in teacher talk. Language learning was measured through pre- and post-tests in five grammar-focused lessons. Results indicate that each group of learners equally showed improved knowledge of the targeted grammatical concepts as evidenced by post-test scores. The lack of distinction between *planned* and *incidental focus on form* groups' performance may be due to limitations in test design and implementation. Nonetheless, this research showed that both types of instructional techniques are similarly effective in the learning of explicitly grammatical knowledge in Spanish L2 beginner classes.

KEYWORDS: planned focus on form, incidental focus on form, grammar, input enhancement, spontaneous attention to form

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures

ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

2022

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LEARNING GRAMMATICAL CONCEPTS IN TWO SPANISH AS L2
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

In today's society, due in part to globalization, learning a language has become part of what people do at school, during their free time, and so on. Languages have become part of people's lives, as well as a useful tool to communicate with people from other countries. Research on Second Language Acquisition (SLA) is mainly categorized between studies that focus on natural contexts of acquisition, studies in experimental settings and studies that look at instructed language acquisition in the classroom. In Instructed Second Language Acquisition (ISLA), second language (L2) learning is facilitated by teachers' instructional materials and procedures (Loewen, 2020). One instructional approach that has been proposed to develop learners' L2 fluency and accuracy is *Focus on Form* (Long 1991), which "occurs when learners briefly pay attention to linguistic items within a larger meaning-focused context" (Loewen, 2020; p. 64).

Focus on form is often contrasted with *focus on forms*, which involves exclusive attention to linguistic structures, introduced explicitly as grammar and vocabulary presentations, followed by highly controlled and decontextualized practice exercises such as the ones based on mechanical drills (Khodamoradi & Khaki, 2012). In *focus on forms* instruction, the language and language rules become the objects of instruction and thus, learners mainly manipulate linguistic items. This type of instruction is also based on traditional teaching (Ellis, Basturkmen, and Loewen, 2020). As for the *focus on form*, it is primarily based on meaning-focused interaction where there is also a conscious and/or subconscious attention to linguistic items and structures; that is, there is an engagement with meaning as well as form, paying attention to both explicit and implicit knowledge (Loewen, 2020).

Teacher and instructional materials are equally responsible for L2 learning. Therefore, *focus on form* can also be implemented explicitly through different teaching materials used in the classroom, for example, through input enhancement (when specific words are in bold, so that students can notice that specific linguistic feature). It can also be present during students' interaction implicitly in communicative tasks, such as when students engage in a conversation in order to complete a two-way gap, negotiating for meaning and exchanging information, where the focus may be directed to specific linguistic items or not (Loewen, 2020).

Research in *focus on form* in ISLA distinguishes between *planned* and *incidental focus on form* (Ellis, 2001). *Incidental focus on form* is based on spontaneous presence of attention to linguistic forms (Ellis, 2001), such as when in a task done in pairs, students correct themselves spontaneously and with no attention to a specific grammatical or lexical form. On the other hand, in regard to *planned focus on form*, since it is based on explicit knowledge, it is usually described as a focus on linguistic forms that is intentioned (Loewen, 2020). For instance, *planned focus on form* becomes present when teachers want their students to notice a specific grammar structure, making it more salient for the students.

While many studies have claimed that both *planned* and *incidental focus on form* result in having a positive effect in the learning process of a language (Alcón; 2007; Loewen, 2004; Farrokhi and Chehrazad, 2012), when analyzing both types of instruction in a same study, the findings show that *planned focus on form* tends to be more effective (Abdollahzadeh, 2015; De la Fuente, 2006). Very little research has been done in studying both types of *focus on form* in the area of Spanish learning, and therefore, the objective of this investigation is to examine and compare the results from the two different Spanish classrooms, where one used *planned focus on form*, and the other one, *incidental focus on form*.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, four different sections will be discussed. The first one will deal with some general information on the foundational *focus on form* approach, continuing with research done over *incidental focus on form*, and then, *planned focus on form*. Finally, this chapter also includes the type of research that has driven both *incidental* and *planned focus on form* in a language classroom, comparing the results from both groups.

The foundation of Focus on Form

As the founder of *Focus on Form*, Long (1988) was among the first to introduce the importance of form and meaning in the language classroom. A traditional language classroom has always been considered as one that involves explicit explanation of grammar, translation exercises, and several mechanical drills giving very little importance to communication and meaningful input. In an overview of research on language teaching, Long (1987) noticed that many of language teaching contexts he reviewed focused on language learning without recurring to *focus on form*, error correction and so on, and what he defended was that these aspects of SLA are important for the process of learning a language, bringing new methodologies and approaches to improve the way in which languages are taught. He was able to show that those studies that focused on form and meaning in their instruction were able to help learners improve their language learning and acquisition. The term form-focused was then introduced as an *umbrella* concept that refers to “any pedagogical effort to draw learners’ attention to language either implicitly or explicitly” (Spada, 1997, p. 73). However, how to help learners notice language forms in the classroom may lead to different instructional practices.

As mentioned, *Focus on Form* is defined as an instructional practice to make students aware of the grammatical forms they are learning at the same time they learn to use them in real-life contexts for true communicative purposes. It focuses not only on form but also on meaning. Long (1987) emphasized the importance of combining not only forms but also meaning while teaching a language, due to the independent problems presented in the learning environment. Loewen (2020) explains “how the attention to both meaning and form can be combined to create an optimal learning environment in which both implicit and explicit learning occur, and which implicit and explicit knowledge are developed” (p. 64-65). This *focus on form* is usually presented to the students through input enhancement, corrective feedback, and so on. That is, lexical items, grammar, writing skills and so on are taught in a meaningful and communicative context where students can produce the L2, creating a scenario of understanding and focus on specific linguistic forms. These contexts are also based on real-life activities, based on the idea that a language is used to communicate.

In the past, foreign language classes were primarily concerned with paying attention to grammatical and lexical aspects but disregarding communication and/or students’ learning styles (Long, 1998). These traditional language classes were mainly based on *Focus on FormS*. In this instructional context, the language becomes the object of study and thus, grammar is taught explicitly and intentionally (Ellis, Basturkmen, and Loewen, 2020). Examples of ways of introducing *focus on formS* could be by presenting mechanical drills or activities involving memorization; that is, activities where there is no meaning, and students do not practice with the language in a real-life context. Under this approach, student’s motivation tends to be outside the classroom, since the dynamics of the lessons are repetitive and always the same (Long, 1998). Moreover, Long (1998) explains that “A *focus on forms* produces many more false beginners

than finishers” (p. 38), that is, it is not clear whether students really master the language. De la Fuente (2006) explains that *focus on forms* is usually introduced in the classroom by the PPP approach (Presentation, Practice and Production), where the targeted linguistic forms are first introduced by the teacher, then the students practice those forms with the monitorization of the instructor, and finally, the learners produce the language they have learnt. This approach is focused on forms rather than form (forms + meaning), because of the fact that it is assumed that students will acquire the language explicitly, when they have been working with the language in a very controlled way. However, research has shown that while it is believed that learners learn the language in the classroom, once they leave that context, they cannot successfully communicate in real-life scenarios (Willis, 1996, as cited in De la Fuente, 2006).

A teaching approach that focuses only on the expression and interpretation of meaning without explicitly attending to language forms is called, *Focus on Meaning* (Long, 1998). Here, students’ attention is on communication, with lessons that are usually interesting, and grammar is learned implicitly and incidentally (Long, 1998). Learners are exposed to input, as well as a use of the language that results in being useful in a real-life context, leading to the implicit learning of the target language. A *Focus on Meaning* activity would be showing some sentences to the students and asking them if the images they see in each slide are associated with each sentence.

However, Ellis, Basturkmen & Loewen (2020) suggested that there could be a focus on some linguistic forms of the language. Therefore, *Focus on Meaning* also has some disadvantages. Long (1998) mentions that besides including output activities and raising students’ motivation while learning the language, the grammatical competence of the target language is left behind in this type of instruction since while communicating, students may not always focus on the target forms, as well as remain unaware of the mistakes they produce during

their speech. Focusing only on meaning creates an inefficient and insufficient learning environment where students become unaware of the adequate production of the language. Therefore, Long (1998) supported the idea that by combining meaning and form, each task has a context based on real-life situations where students are given the chance to negotiate for meaning in performing authentic language functions increasing students' motivation.

In focusing on form and meaning in the classroom (i.e. *focus on form* approach), the debate has been on how to get learners' to notice language forms in the input. Barbieri and Eckhardt (2007) proposed a distinction between *incidental* and *planned focus on form*., The former refers to an implicit type of instruction where students' language comprehension or production problems are addressed spontaneously by the instructor, triggering student's noticing of the language forms they are struggling with. This *focus on form* is also called a *reactive incidental focus on form* because instructors react to learners' errors in production and/or comprehension as they happen in the classroom. This spontaneous attention to form also takes place between students when they engage in interaction and communication breakdowns occur resulting in learners' attention to form when they ask for clarification or check for comprehension. On the other hand, in *planned focus on form*, instructors make a conscious and planned decision to attend to language forms in the input by making explicit changes in the teacher talk and/or instructional materials. Some of the techniques to *planned focus on form* include input enhancement, input flood and corrective feedback. Input enhancement involves an implicit way of showing the language to the students; for instance, when there is a specific form that wants to be shown to the learners, this form could appear highlighted, in a different color or in bold. In this way, learners' attention is driven to certain linguistic aspects (Szudarski & Carter, 2016). Input flood refers to the way in which certain aspects of the language are introduced to the

learners' multiple times; that is, they do not see the target form only once, but in various examples, so that they learn that linguistic item implicitly (Hernández, 2008). In addition, feedback can be positive or negative. In the case of positive feedback, it is based on the instructor verifying the content the student has produced. This content would include no linguistic mistake, and it is a way of offering affective support. On the contrary, negative feedback indicates that there has been a linguistic error in the learner's utterance, needing correction. Corrective feedback is one type of negative feedback, and it is based on offering the learners a response which would include their error, allowing learners to see that a mistake has been done and that it needs to be corrected (Ellis, 2009).

There has been quite amount of research on *focus on form* vs. *focus on forms* and while the consensus seems to be that *focus on form* is better for language acquisition, there are many instructors that prefer *focus on forms*. One of the main problems in researching form-focused instruction relies on how to operationalize *focus on form* and how to measure their effects in language learning (Shintani, 2013). While more research is still needed in order to see the effects of a form-focused instruction in language acquisition, some researchers have drawn their attention to the distinction between *incidental* and *planned focus on form*, which is the focus of the next section.

Incidental Focus on Form

As stated, an *incidental focus on form* instruction is one where there is a spontaneous attention to the linguistic forms of the target language in the classroom. The attention to the forms of the language could come from the teacher, the materials, the students, and so on, but it is mainly unplanned and spontaneous. Some of the research has looked at the presence of *incidental focus on form* in the classroom (Williams, 1999; Zyzik and Polio, 2008) while others

have examined how different types of *incidental focus on form* impacts language learning as evidenced by language test scores (Lowen, 2004), oral retelling and grammaticality judgement tests (Abdollahzadeh, 2015), vocabulary learning (Alcón; 2007), and so on. In all, studies indicate that *incidental focus on forms* has positive effects in language learning.

One of the earliest studies looking into the presence of *incidental focus on form* in the classroom was conducted by Williams (1999) where she studied how an instructor of ESL used *incidental focus on form* during learner-centered communicative tasks. These learners had different language proficient profiles, from beginning to advanced. The researcher recorded conversations between students as they engaged in several classroom activities based on real-life exercises. The researcher analyzed learners' spontaneous attention to form and she found that *incidental focus on form* was particularly more frequent in interactions between advanced language learners, and overall, also more prevalent in vocabulary than in grammar episodes. Williams (1999) offered the definition of *incidental focus on form* provided by Long and Robinson (1998) as the spontaneous attention to certain linguistic aspects (initiated by the instructor or the learners) when problems in comprehension or production are noticed. This occasional attention to form occurred when learners requested to each other language clarifications, as well as in the form of learner-generated requests to the teacher, requesting learners for clarification, or when providing feedback to each other, everything taking place among learners. However, negotiation for meaning is not that common according to the results from this study. From her analysis, she concluded that since there were students with different levels of language proficiency, it was important to include learners' attention to form also from the teacher, since in early stages of acquisition, this incidental and spontaneous attention to form

seemed to be less present. Williams (1999) suggests the importance of not only learner attention to form, but also teacher's intervention and attention to form.

Likewise, Alcón (2007) also looked at the presence of teachers' *incidental focus on form* in the classroom. She observed an ESL conversational class in Spain and examined the presence of *pre-emptive* and *reactive incidental focus on form* from teacher talk and the effect it had on learners, and its impact on vocabulary learning. A *pre-emptive incidental focus on form* was defined as attention to language forms *initiated* by the teacher or learner, as it can be appreciated in (1). On the other hand, *reactive focus on form* is based on the teacher *supplying* the correct information about the language (2), or by the learner thanks to the help of the teacher.

(1) S4. They do not have the car for the space

T. *Right. They do no not have any spaceship*

S4. And without spaceship they cannot go to the moon. (Alcón, 2007; p. 46)

(2) T. Today we are going to examine different brochures. *Do you know what a brochure is?*

S1. folleto?

T. Yes, that is a brochure. (Alcón, 2007; p. 46)

Her subjects were young adolescents taking English as a compulsory class in high school. In the collection of the data, this author used two sessions focusing on both meaning and form, and a third session where the main focus was on communicative tasks focusing on meaning instruction. All these conversational lessons were videorecorded, and after that, learners wrote diaries where they explained what they learnt in those lessons. In addition, students performed a post-test based on translations. Through these translations and diaries, the author measured and identified learners' noticing of lexical items during *focus on form* language-related episodes

(LRE) produced by the teachers. These LRE are usually considered as collaborative tasks in which learners focus their attention on formal aspects of language and consciously reflect on their own language use. These language-related episodes were incidental because the instructors initiated them, based on the presence of spontaneous attention to the lexical items the students needed to know in order to produce the language. Results revealed that teacher's *pre-emptive focus on form* was effective for learners' noticing and subsequent use of vocabulary items. Teacher's use of *reactive focus on form* did not seem to impact vocabulary noticing, as reported by learners in their diaries, but it facilitated vocabulary learning based on post-tests data. Finally, she concluded that this research has contributed to show the effectiveness of *incidental focus on form* in the learning of vocabulary items; however, she explains that it is fundamental to continue doing research on this type of instruction in language classrooms oriented to communication.

In the case of Spanish L2 learners, Zyzik & Polio's (2008) study with Spanish L2 graduate students in literature courses also revealed some results presenting the effectiveness of *incidental focus on form*. This *incidental focus on form* took place between students and the instructor, and it was present when the instructor created recasts, negotiation for meaning or explicit correction. Recasts occur when the learner produces an ungrammatical sentence, the teacher repeats that sentence corrected, and the learner autocorrects themselves, noticing the problem. Negotiation is based on the instructor emphasizing the learners mistake in a sentence until they understand their mistake and repeat their sentence correctly; moreover, there is no explicit explanation of the mistake, and they are also considered by the authors as time consuming. And then, explicit correction involves the teacher repeating the learner's problem and letting them correct it; however, after a couple of attempts trying to correct the mistake, the

teacher explicitly would tell the student that they made a mistake in the language, offering the correct answer.

In this study, Zyzik & Polio (2008) analyzed *incidental focus on form* in the classroom by videotaping lessons, completing observation charts, and interviewing instructors. This triangulation in data collection procedure allowed for the possibility of observing and analyzing specific moments in the classroom where *incidental focus on form* was present. These observations suggested that *incidental focus on form* was highly present during the lessons, especially through error correction episodes in the form of recasts and *pre-emptive focus on form* between learners and instructors. This helped learners produce the language (sometimes with errors) in a comfortable atmosphere, at the same time they received feedback through recast, negotiation or explicit feedback. However, according to the results in this study, they observed that when *incidental focus on form* occurs, the main focus was on lexical items. The authors concluded that even though their participants were mainly in literature classes where there is no need to pay attention to the form of the language, they encourage instructors to produce some incidental attention to form during class activities, to include “language break-out-sessions” (p. 65) focusing on problematic grammar and vocabulary, to help learners produce adequate language.

Similar to this study, Soler & Mayo (2008) conducted a descriptive study with no control group looking at the presence of *incidental focus on form* through corrective feedback in an EFL classroom with Spanish teenagers. This feedback was produced by the teacher and/or students when they worked in pairs or groups and a special emphasis was on *Focus on Form Episodes* (FFE) being incidental, and they could be episodes of grammar, vocabulary, spelling or pronunciation. Soler and Mayo (2008) defined *incidental focus on form* as the implicit attention

to form in the performance of tasks. Therefore, these episodes of *focus on form* occurred through negotiation sequences, based on the teacher offering the correct answer to the learner by recasts or by elicitation techniques (such as pausing or repetition of the word). They were also introducing *reactive* and *pre-emptive incidental focus on form*. Data was collected through a certain number of lessons that were videorecorded where students performed some communicative activities. The conversations created were led by the instructor, and the researchers were assessing the episodes where there was a *focus on form*. As in Alcon's (2007) study, the results showed that the *incidental focus on form* positively impacted learner's ability to learn lexical items in the TL, whereas the other linguistic aspects were not that present; the authors explain that it was mainly because of negotiation, since it is usually used as a mechanism focused on lexical meaning while there is a message that needs to be comprehended. Moreover, another aspect to be considered is that Spanish classes of foreign languages pay more attention to grammar and vocabulary.

Loewen (2004) observed that when teachers in various EFL classes with mixed proficiency levels made focus-on-form remarks salient and noticeable during form-focused language episodes, the student uptake was more successful. In these language episodes, students and/or instructor drew attention to one specific linguistic item resulting in student's uptake in the form of producing the correct form. Additionally, language tests were used to examine how learners were able to recall the linguistic information provided by the teacher during the *focus on form* episodes (Loewen, 2004). The author concluded that successful uptakes during *focus on form* episodes were a predictor of language tests scores, suggesting that *incidental focus on form* is particularly beneficial when learners incorporate the target linguistic forms noticed during the *focus on form* episodes. Similarly, in Abdollahzadeh's (2015) study, she focused on Iranian high

ESL school students divided in two groups. The experimental group received feedback in the form of recasting during the re-telling of a reading passage, while the control group did not. In this case, the experimental group outperformed the control group. Using a grammatical judgement test, the author was able to find that *incidental focus on form* was particularly beneficial in the learning of articles and with lesser extent in the learning of tenses and pronouns, but no effect was found for the learning of prepositions.

All in all, these studies have revealed the positive impact of *incidental focus on form* in a language classroom. In the case of Alcón (2007) and Soler and Mayo (2008), vocabulary items were learnt as a result of language episodes of *incidental focus on form* produced by not only the teacher but also the learner. Abdollahzadeh (2015), also observed language learning of grammatical concepts under the presence of *incidental focus on form*. Therefore, so far, the research seems to support the value of *incidental focus on form* in language learning; however, there is still limited research in this field and thus, more studies are needed to that look at a wider variety of language learners and contexts.

Planned Focus on Form

Ellis, Basturkmen & Loewen (2002) argue that “*Planned focus-on-form* is effective because it focuses learners repeatedly on the same form while they are communicating” (p. 422); that is, target forms are repeated several times in the lessons through lesson materials and/or teacher talk since teachers have planned and prepared the presence of *focus of form* in their lessons. Research on *planned focus on form* has also shown promising results. Some of the research has looked at specific aspects of the grammar in oral speech (Farrokhi and Chehrazad, 2012; Ortega, 1999), while others examined grammar performance in language tests (Arslan and Dogan, 2020; Estafandiari, 2021), vocabulary learning (De la Fuente, 2006) or writing skills

(Gholami & Gholizadeh, 2015). Although different aspects of the language are examined, studies show that *planned focus on form* results in being effective in language learning.

In a study of oral accuracy in an EFL class with low intermediate learners, Farrokhi & Chehrazad (2012) examined the impact of different types of feedback on oral production. Participants had to retell a story orally, paying special attention to the simple past tense use. These authors were looking at the different types of feedback learners received from the teacher and their impact on the oral skills of their learners during storytelling tasks. The control group received no feedback, whereas two experimental groups received two different types of feedback: recasts for the experimental group 1 and delayed explicit and metalinguistic feedback for the experimental group 2. This delayed explicit and metalinguistic feedback was provided to the students once they finished retelling their story, writing the mistakes on the blackboard and offering a metalinguistic explanation so that students could understand the correct way of writing it. The presence of corrective feedback was defined as *planned focus on form* because instructors in each group had to plan what type of feedback to give in their lessons. According to Farrokhi and Chehrazad (2012), the two corrective feedback groups significantly outperformed the control group, although no differences in terms of positive impact on oral skills were found between the teacher's use of recasts or metalinguistic feedback. Authors concluded that the effectiveness of *focus on form* can be beneficial for EFL students in order to improve their oral skills; also, recasts on specific linguistic structures result in producing a positive effect in students' learning process of the target language.

Gholami & Gholizadeh (2015) analyzed grammatical accuracy in the writing skills of forty-one elementary EFL students. Participants were divided into two groups. The experimental group worked through language play-oriented tasks focusing on different language-focused

topics (i.e., semantic plays, pragmatic plays, oral narratives, etc.). For example, an oral narrative play would include an activity where students created stories orally and playfully while focusing on certain linguistic aspects of the language. The control group did not participate in any playful tasks in their lesson because they were focusing on the same topics of grammar but with no playful tasks. The results from the pre- and post-tests made it clear that language play-oriented tasks with *planned focus on form* helped learners acquire a better knowledge of the language, mainly because of the fact that “language play helped the learners learn grammar better through fun and enjoyment” (p. 124). That is, it was easier for students to pay attention and learn the grammatical aspects of the language through games, under the influence of *planned focus on form* instruction. As a take-away from their study, playful tasks with *planned focus on form* help create an environment with no anxiety for students and a safe scenario where they can produce the language; therefore, Gholami & Gholizadeh (2015) concluded that playful tasks could be a profitable language teaching methodology which could improve learners’ knowledge of the language.

More recently, Arslan & Dogan’s (2020) fifth graders in an EFL class in Turkey also benefited from *planned focus on form*. There were two groups: the experimental group, receiving *planned focus on form*; and the control group, following the teaching model in the textbook. *Planned focus on form* was introduced through techniques such as input flood, input enhancement or corrective feedback. Input flood was manifested by including several examples of the linguistic target forms through input that is auditory and visual; then, input was enhanced by writing the target forms in bold or highlighting them in different colors. Moreover, corrective feedback was also provided to the participants implicitly (through recasts) or explicitly (indicating the mistake and providing knowledge of the language so that students can understand

the correction). There was a main focus on grammatical features within meaningful contexts and noticing activities. The lessons included handouts, PowerPoints, a unit plan, and so on. The control group, on the other hand, was exposed to explicit instruction in the form of Presentation-Practice-Production without any planned input enhancement or input flood and only based on the course textbook.

Pre- and post-tests were used to measure the correct use of grammar related to the unit of *Health*, which included the correct way of expressing an illness, or making suggestions. For instance, *imperatives* were one of the grammar topics that these tests were measuring. The results obtained showed that *planned focus on form* instruction had a much better effect on students' learning process in the experimental group and the progress made in this group from the pre-tests was more salient, outperforming the control group. These findings contributed to the encouragement to include mainly *planned focus on form* in EFL classrooms in order to help learners acquire grammar accuracy, leaving behind the traditional way of teaching.

Planned focus on form not only happens during instruction, but it can also be present before instruction. In Ortega's (1999) study, he defined this type of instruction as the one happening before the task, allowing students to *focus on form* while preplanning their oral performance. English learners of Spanish were asked in the experimental group to retell a story in the target language after having listened to it in English. This attention to linguistic form took place prior to conducting the task that was used for this analysis. There were dyads of students: in each pair, one was the speaker and the other one was the listener. In the experimental group, considering the role of the speaker, they listened to a story in their L1, through earphones and with 8 images in front of them; these images provided students with a visual representation of the story. Then, they had ten minutes to prepare the way in which they would retell the story to the

listener, and this would allow them to *focus on form* and perform in a better way. The control group, on the contrary, did not have ten minutes to prepare themselves and they needed to retell the story in Spanish right after having listened to it. The listeners in both groups also had those eight images in front of them, and their task was to put them in order according to the story they were listening from the speaker. However, the listener performance based on organizing the images was not part of her research.

Retelling of a story was chosen as the measuring instrument because this task was based on real-life activities (since retelling something heard is done in people's daily lives) and thus, it would be expected that learners would *focus on meaning* as they would need to understand the general idea of the story. Moreover, they were also focusing on form, owing to paying attention to the language used for retelling the story. In her analysis, Ortega (1999) was paying special attention to linguistic aspects such as the article system or noun-modifier agreement. Qualitative and quantitative findings from the study showed that the experimental group outperformed the control group. This means that students from the experimental group told stories with more details and elaboration as well as more accurate use of linguistic forms. Each session in which students participated was videorecorded and analyzed afterwards, paying attention to the way in which learners used their language adequately. Ortega (1999) showed that there was a special pre-planned attention to form in the experimental group owing to the ten minutes time they had to prepare, which improved learners' production, suggesting that this type of organization in the classroom and in the tests can be beneficial for students and their L2 accuracy.

Planned focus on form has also been examined comparing different teaching approaches. De la Fuente (2006) compared the use of *planned focus on form* in different lessons taught under a Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT) approach, with and without explicit *focus on form*,

and under a Presentation, Practice and Production (PPP) perspective. Participants were English elementary learners of Spanish, and the focus was on vocabulary learning. In the PPP lesson there was no special attention to vocabulary items from the unit, except in the Presentational stage, where there was an explicit planned attention to vocabulary by having words highlighted in bold or an image representing each word, as well as teacher-initiated *focus on form*. In the Practice and Production stages, there was no planned attention to any linguistic aspects and the teacher did not initiate any attention to form. The *planned focus on form* TBLT lesson, the one with no explicit *focus on form* (TB-NEF), had a pre-task where the instructor explained some words that were highlighted, but in the cycle tasks under study (such as role-play), there was still *planned focus on form*, with fundamental words for the dialogue highlighted. In the third stage of this type of instruction based mainly on output activities (explain orally to the class which menu they chose and why, for instance), there was no *planned focus on form*, nor no teacher-initiated *focus on form*. Finally, there was a repetition of the same task where students performed role-plays for ten minutes with no interruptions from the instructor. As for the TBLT with explicit *focus on form* (TB-EF), it included the first two same stages as the TB-NEF, although there was no task-repetition. Instead, students performed two of the PPP activities from the practice stage, while there was an explicit and planned explanation from the instructor on morphology, phonology, and spelling from lexical items.

They measured the results by doing an immediate test (Test 1) for all groups after all the activities, in order to measure immediate knowledge; then, there was a delayed test one week after Test 1, paying attention to the retention of the lexical words (Test 2). According to the results, Test 1 did not show significant differences among the three groups. Nevertheless, Test 2 revealed that the TBLT groups (TB-NEF and TB-EF) outperformed the PPP test results;

moreover, there is no significant difference between the TB-NEF and TB-EF groups, since both of them achieved similar results in the delayed test. This study helped to understand how focusing on both meaning and form helps learners attend to new vocabulary items and retain them for later production, showing that TBLT type of instructional approaches seem quite beneficial in the classrooms.

In Esfandiari's (2021) study, *planned focus on form* was operationalized by enhancing the presence of verbs with the third person singular in written stories. The author highlighted, capitalized, underlined, and italicized these forms in all written stories used in the lessons. While one group had written stories with input enhancement, the other group saw the same stories but without any enhanced elements. Experimental and control groups were tested one week after each treatment with a noticing test and a written production test. Results showed that input enhancement in the experimental group helped learners notice and learn the targeted linguistic form (English third person singular) more effectively.

Research on *planned focus on form* shows that when learners' attention is drawn to linguistic items as a result of instructor's manipulation of the input (i.e., input enhancement, corrective feedback), language learning seems to benefit. As with *incidental focus on form*, research is still limited and due to the great diversity of learner's profiles and instructional contexts, more empirical studies are needed.

Incidental and Planned Focus on Form

Based on the review of the research on *planned* or *incidental focus on form*, it is evident the positive impact of these instructional techniques on learners' noticing forms in the input but also on learning when they are used independently. In this section, we look at research that has aimed to compare *planned* and *incidental focus on form* within the same teaching context, which

is particularly important for the present study. To the author's knowledge, only three studies have looked at comparing *planned* and *incidental focus on form*.

In Grim's (2008) study, novice and intermediate French as L2 university learners in the United States were exposed to three different types of instruction: *planned focus on form*, *incidental focus on form* and *focus on meaning*. This author defined *planned focus on form* as the use of uninput flood or input enhancement to draw students' attention to certain forms of the language within meaningful communication in the classroom. The instructor highlighted, bolded and used colors to draw attention to specific lexical words, cultural information and grammatical elements in the written input. *Incidental focus on form* takes place in the classroom when there is a problem with a linguistic aspect and attention to form is spontaneous. During error correction episodes, there was *reactive incidental focus on form* as the teacher drew learner's attention to linguistic forms. As for *focus on meaning*, Grim (2008) defines it as meaningful and comprehensible input but without any enhancement nor explicit explanations of lexical or grammatical forms. Additionally, there was no correction of learners' errors. The data was collected through three different tests: a pre-test (close-ended) and two post-tests (one being open-ended). The results from these tests revealed that the group exposed to *planned focus on form* outperformed the other two groups in tests of grammar, vocabulary and cultural knowledge. He finally encouraged the implementation of *planned focus on form* instruction because of its effectiveness in low-intermediate French L2 learners.

In an analysis of oral skills, Parvaneh & Barzegar (2020) analyzed grammatical accuracy of low intermediate EFL learners in Iran. Under a similar task-based instructional context, one group of learners was exposed to *planned focus on form* where the teacher targeted some grammatical structures during the lessons while the other group simply was exposed to

incidental focus on form. The grammatical structures in the experimental group were underlined and highlighted for learners to notice; on the contrary, the control group did not have any targeted forms. In the recollection of data, these two authors used pre-tests for both groups where learners encountered some images and they needed to describe them with the grammatical structures they were asked to use. They needed to produce these sentences orally. In the case of the post-tests, the same pictures were shown, and both groups were asked to describe them using the necessary structures. Results revealed that even though both groups improved their oral skills in terms of grammatical accuracy, contrary to this study, the group using *planned focus on form* significantly outperformed the control group. The authors concluded that the effectiveness of both types of instruction remains clear as observed in the results from the pre- and post-tests; however, they support the outperformance of *planned focus on form*, and encourage instructors to include enhanced input to help learners acquire knowledge of grammar more efficiently.

Positive effects for *planned focus on form* were also found in the development of writing skills in Gholami & Aliyari's study (2015). The authors examined the written performance of advanced EFL students in Iran. The control group received *delayed reactive focus on form* from the teacher after they had completed a written essay, accompanied by unfocused written corrective feedback. That is, the students from this group received feedback on their writings, but they had no explanation on what the mistake was. The mistake was highlighted, circled or underlined, but no explanation accompanied that error. It was teacher-initiated feedback. As for the experimental group, they received *planned pre-emptive focus on form* prior to completing the writing task through focused written feedback, as well as *delayed reactive focus on form* after having done the writings. They received these two types of *focus on form* through handouts and practice with the grammatical structures. Statistical analyses revealed that the writing

performance of both groups improved significantly but at varying rates. When *delayed reactive focus on form* was also included together with *planned pre-emptive feedback*, students were able to create better essays. These authors suggest the implementation of *planned* and *incidental pre-emptive focus on form* together with writing corrective feedback, in order to help students improve their writing skills and craft better writings. Moreover, according to Gholami & Aliyari's study (2015), teachers should also include an incidental or planned pre-emptive scaffolding stages to help students compose better essays.

In all, the limited research also supports the preference for *planned focus on form* when both types of *focus on form* approaches are compared and tested.

Motivation for the present study and research questions

The need to compare the impact of *planned* and *incidental focus on form* is clear based on the scarcity of studies on this topic. Defining and implementing *focus on form* in the classroom varies from context to context as seen by the studies examined in this chapter. Therefore, more research on form-focused instruction is needed before we can all agree on the importance and benefits of drawing learners' attention to form within meaningful and communicative tasks in the classroom. In particular, the distinction between *planned* and *incidental focus on forms* needs to be further examined in order to establish whether one is better than another. Additionally, much of the existing research, as evidenced here, is with EFL learners with intermediate level of proficiency. To the writer's knowledge, there is little research that has looked at *focus on form* in non-English as L2 context (e.g. Grim, 2008), which is the focus on the present study.

The proposed study, therefore, differs from others in several ways. First, this research focuses on beginner Spanish as L2 university learners who are enrolled in Spanish classes

primarily because of a language requirement for their academic major. Our focus is on grammatical accuracy, as displayed in written pre-tests and post-tests. In addition, unlike other research, the proposed study takes place in a flipped instructional context where students learn about grammatical and vocabulary content prior to coming to class. In the classroom, the teacher uses a variety of meaning-focused instructional materials to help learners practice the new content. The proposed study aims to compare the impact of *focus on form* in two Spanish as L2 classrooms in the learners' linguistic performance in form-focused tasks. Specifically, this research wants to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent does *planned focus on form* impact learners' language performance in form-focused tasks?
2. To what extent does *incidental focus on form* impact learners' language performance in form-focused tasks?
3. Which type of instruction is the most effective one: *planned* or *incidental focus on form*?

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Participants and teaching context

The participants in this study were 39 second semester Spanish students from a mid-sized public university in the United States. The experimental group had 17 students and the control group had 22. However, due to numerous students' absences, participants from each pre- and post-quiz varied as shown in the different tables of results below. These participants have an average of 18 years old and consisted of a mix of male and female students, although gender of the students is not taken into account in the study. Participants are undergraduate university students with different majors who take this Spanish class to fulfill a language requirement for their degree, and they have English as their mother tongue.

Participants were all enrolled in a second semester Spanish college (SPA 112) at a mid-size public university in the Midwest in the United States. The course description of the targeted language classroom explains that students will develop their speaking, reading, listening, writing and cultural awareness towards the language. It is a course recommended for those students who have taken one or two years of Spanish study previously. This course is mainly oriented towards students' proficiency in the four language skills, as well as enhancing their communicative language abilities. In terms of the learners' background, some have taken the introductory first semester Spanish course at the university (known as SPA 111), or learned Spanish in high school; therefore, their level of Spanish is described as high beginner. Classes meet four times a week (e.g. 50 minutes each) Monday through Thursday.

This second semester Spanish class is instructed following a flipped learning approach which means, learners learn new content (i.e. grammar, vocabulary, language functions, cultural

knowledge) prior to coming to class by watching animated videos no longer than 10 minutes where new content is explicitly taught and completing input-based comprehension tasks prior to coming to class. In class, new content is reviewed and practiced using communicative tasks. All course materials come from the publisher of the book used in class and everything is stored and completed in the textbook's online platform.

For the purpose of this study, two different Spanish language groups enrolled in the same second semester Spanish course were selected to participate. The two instructors of both groups of learners are native speakers of Spanish pursuing a MA degree in Theoretical and Applied Linguistics in the university they teach. Both instructors had been teaching Spanish as L2 for less than a year as Teaching Assistants in the MA program at the time of the data collection. There is a female and a male teacher, and one of the teachers is also the researcher. The instructors who teach SPA 112 follow a schedule for each unit created by the supervisor. This schedule shows the teachers what they have to cover every day, following the textbook. Both the instructor from the experimental and the control classroom followed the same schedule.

At the beginning of the semester, students from both the experimental and the control groups were provided with a brief introduction to what they would do in order to contribute to the study. At the same time, all participants were given a Consent Form they signed as indicated by IRB protocol for the university where the research took place.

Planned vs. Incidental Focus on Form Lessons

The teacher and researcher (TR) in the experimental group followed a *planned focus on form* instruction on certain lessons. The teacher from the control group was asked to simply teach as normally hoping some *incidental focus on form* would appear in the lesson. Both teachers

knew the purpose of this study, but while the teacher from the experimental group made sure targeted forms were highlighted in the classroom materials, in teacher talk and in student feedback the instructor from the control group highlighted targeted forms in teacher talk or student feedback only spontaneously.

The *planned focus on form* (i.e. experimental group) was implemented in targeted group's lessons through input enhancement of the targeted content in the PowerPoint presentations and students' handouts. Specifically, all grammatical targets were visually enhanced by highlighting, bolding and using capital letters as seen in Figure 1 and 2 below. These are input exercises from Lesson 1 (*Gustar y verbos similares*) where students only needed to say whether those sentences were true or false according to what they believed or applied to them. The pronouns used for each verb of like and dislike are written in capital letters, red color and bold, as well as the ending of the verb.

Figure 1.

Sample of slide from an input exercise used in the Planned focus on form classroom

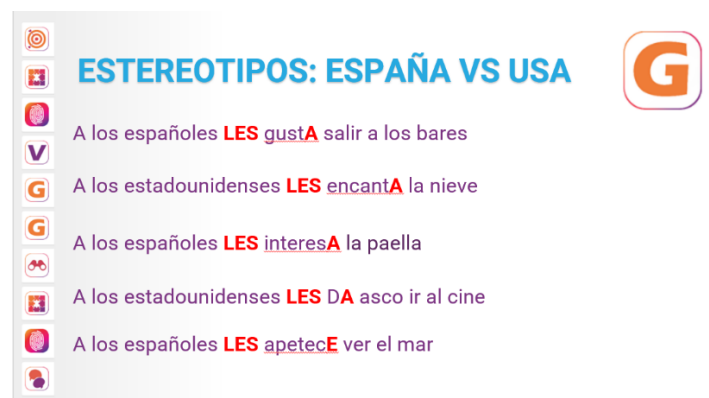


Figure 2.

Exercise from the experimental group - Planned focus on form

¿Se aplica o no se aplica?

PASO 1: complete the table with your own information

	SI	NO
1. ME gustAN los perros		
2. ME apeteceEN palomitas en el cine		
3. ME encantA la nieve en invierno		
4. ME DAN asco los tomates en la ensalada		
5. ME interesA aprender español		

The teacher-researcher (TR) also made an effort to orally highlight or repeat the target forms of the lesson using increased intonation in teacher talk during the entire lesson. On the other hand, the control group did not include any planned visual or oral input enhancement. The PowerPoints and handouts were the same as the ones used in the experimental group, but they did not have any target forms highlighted. The teacher in this group was aware of the study but was free to make any *incidental focus on form* in his teacher talk as well as in the feedback giving to students; but this attention to form would be unplanned and spontaneous, since he would only do it when he thought it would be necessary and convenient for students. Figures 3 and 4 are duplicates of the exercises in the experimental group (Figures 1 and 2) but without any input enhancement.

Figure 3.

Sample of slide from an input exercise used in the Incidental focus on form classroom

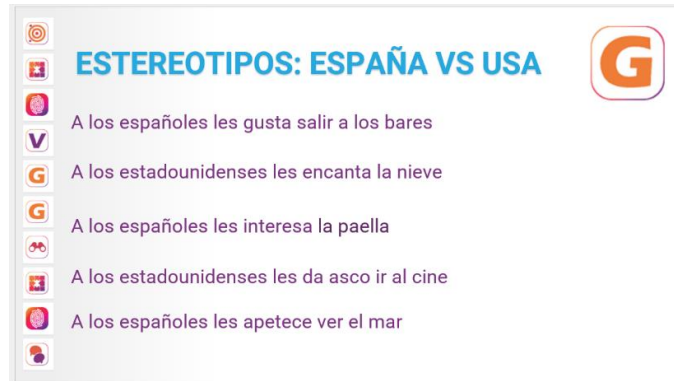


Figure 4.

Exercise from the control group -Incidental focus on form

¿Se aplica o no se aplica?

PASO 1: Complete the table with your own information

	SI	NO
1. Me gustan los perros		
2. Me apetecen palomitas en el cine		
3. Me encanta la nieve en invierno		
4. Me dan asco los tomates en la ensalada		
5. Me interesa aprender español		

Instruments

Grammar Lessons

The second semester of this Spanish course is based on five different units. Each unit covers two different grammatical points resulting in 12 grammar lessons total. For this study, from the twelve grammar aspects taught in SPA 112, five of them have been used for the collection and analysis of data. Each one of the lessons for this study was taught in two days. This course has a total of 16 weeks, and the lessons used for this analysis began after Week 5 for Unit 8, when the first pre-test was introduced to the students. As a result, the selected grammar lessons for the study lasted from Week 5 until Week 15. This can be observed in Table 1, together with the name of the grammatical aspects used for the collection and analysis of the data.

Table 1.

Short description of the Grammar Lessons

Number of Week(s)	Unit	Type of grammatical aspect
Week 5	Unit 8	<i>Gustar and similar verbs</i>
Week 10-11	Unit 10	<i>Present Progressive</i>
Week 12-13	Unit 11	<i>Indirect Object Nouns and Pronouns</i>
Week 14-15	Unit 12	<i>Imperfect Tense</i>
Week 15	Unit 12	<i>Comparisons</i>

Both teachers in the two groups (i.e., experimental or *planned focus on form* and control or *incidental focus on form*) agreed on the same lesson plan to be used in both language classes on the days data was collected. Therefore, both groups of learners received the same content and practice exercises.

Data Collection Instruments

Video Recordings

In order to ensure that both experimental and control groups represent two different contexts with regards to *focus on form*, the targeted lessons for the study were videorecorded. An analysis of teacher-talk through the video-recorded sessions revealed that the expected conditions for each group were accomplished. Table 2 shows the total number of times targeted language forms were orally highlighted by teachers through increased intonation for each of the grammatical lessons analyzed for this study.

Table 2.

Number of presences of input enhancement during teachers' speech

Lesson	Experimental Group	Control Group
<i>Gustar and similar verbs</i>	58	12
<i>Present Progressive</i>	43	18
<i>Indirect Object Nouns and Pronouns</i>	36	21
<i>Imperfect Tense</i>	36	21
<i>Comparisons</i>	36	12

Pre and Post-tests

Grammatical knowledge was measured through a total of ten pre- and post-tests (see Appendix A for all pre- and post-tests). Both types of tests were comparable in content, length, and format. All tests were done in class and in paper and lasted 10 minutes each approximately. Students were expected to produce the target form in short sentences or fill-in-the-blank tasks, or even match questions with their answers. Pre-tests were completed the day before the grammar lesson was supposed to take place in the classroom. Post-tests were completed in the last 10 minutes of the second grammar lesson for each grammatical content being targeted. While post-tests counted towards course final score, pre-tests did not count.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

In order to answer the research questions for this study, participants completed pre- and post- grammar focused tests. The data set of this study comprises the results of the pre- and post-tests from both the experimental and the control group. Presentation of the results is offered based on each of the research questions for the study:

1. To what extent does *planned focus on form* impact learners' language performance in form-focused tasks?
2. To what extent does *incidental focus on form* impact learners' language performance in form-focused tasks?
3. Which type of instruction is the most effective one: *planned* or *incidental focus on form*?

Planned Focus on Form Group

In order to answer to the first research question (*To what extent does planned focus on form impact learners' language performance in form-focused tasks?*), the results from the pre and post-tests from the experimental group have been considered. *Planned focus on form* was achieved by the presence of input enhancement in lesson materials and the high voice pitch (i.e. perceived highness of voice in grammatical target forms) of the TR.

Figure 5.

Average scores from Pre- and Post-tests from the experimental group (Number of participants in parenthesis)

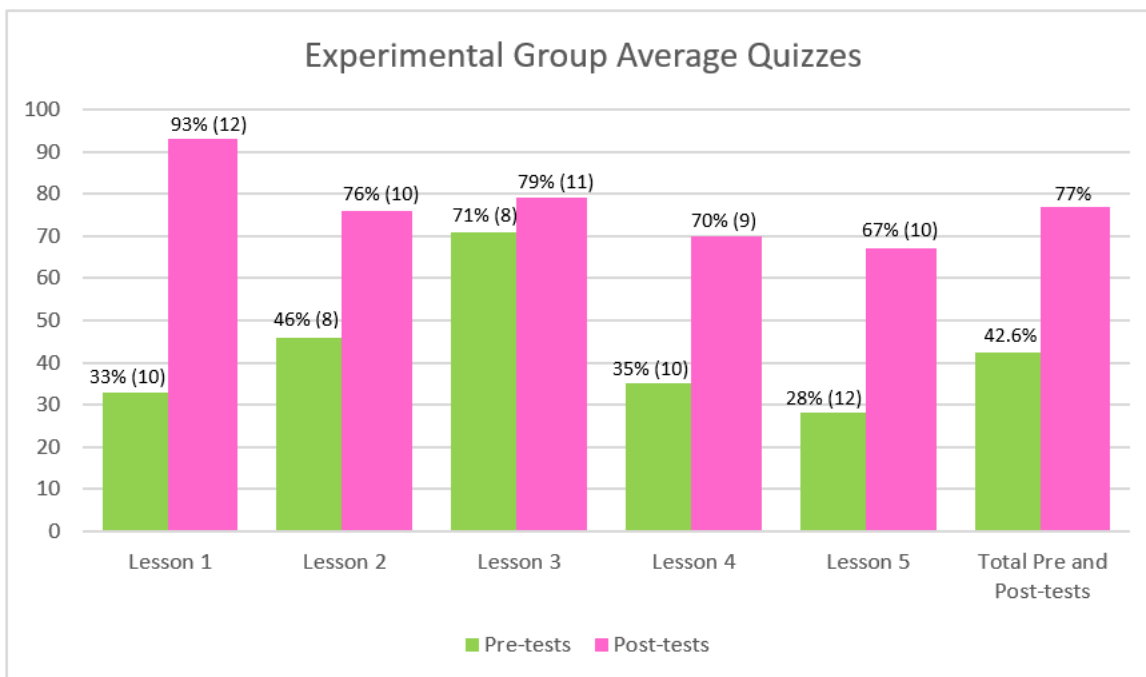


Figure 5 shows the percentages of scores in the pre- and post-tests for each of the five lessons included in the study. As expected, this group of learners showed an increase in the learning of grammatical forms targeted for the study. Many of students did not know the form and/or function of the grammatical forms targeted in the lessons which explains the low scores in the pre-tests and the higher scores in the post-tests after instruction and in-class practice. The average total score in the pre-test was 42.6%, while the average score in the post-tests was 77%, showing an increase of 34.4 percentage points. While this increase in learning is evident in all lessons, Lesson 3 showed a slightly different picture. This lesson targeted *Indirect Object Pronouns*, and we see that in the pre-test, students performed quite well with an average score of 71%. The post-test showed only a slight improvement with an average score of 79%. The format

of the pre- and post-tests may be responsible for these results. This was a matching quiz, which means students did not have to produce the target form but recognize their form and function by matching sentences. In all other quizzes, students were asked to produce the target language form. The difference between recognition and production of language forms may explain why in Lesson 3 students performed so well in the pre-test.

In all, after a two-day of practice in class with these five lessons that included the presence of input enhancement in the handouts and slides, as well as in the voice of the instructor, students in this group showed learning of all targeted structures since all post-tests reached a passing grade. Therefore, in answering the first research question, the *planned focus on form* approach used in these lessons became highly useful for learners in helping them to show learning of explicit knowledge in form-focused tasks as indicated by the results in the pre- and post- tests.

Incidental Focus on Form Group

Regarding the second research question from this study (*To what extent does incidental focus on form impact learners' language performance in form-focused tasks?*), the results from the pre and post-tests from the control group have been considered. *Incidental focus on form* was achieved by the presence of spontaneous attention to the linguistic forms of the study through lesson materials and the voice pitch, produced by the instructor from this class. As already discussed in the methodology section, the teacher in the *planned focus on form* group used more stressed intonation and higher voice pitch to highlight the grammatical forms targeted for the lesson than the teacher in the *incidental focus on form* group.

Figure 6.

Average scores from Pre- and Post-tests from the control group (Number of participants in parenthesis)

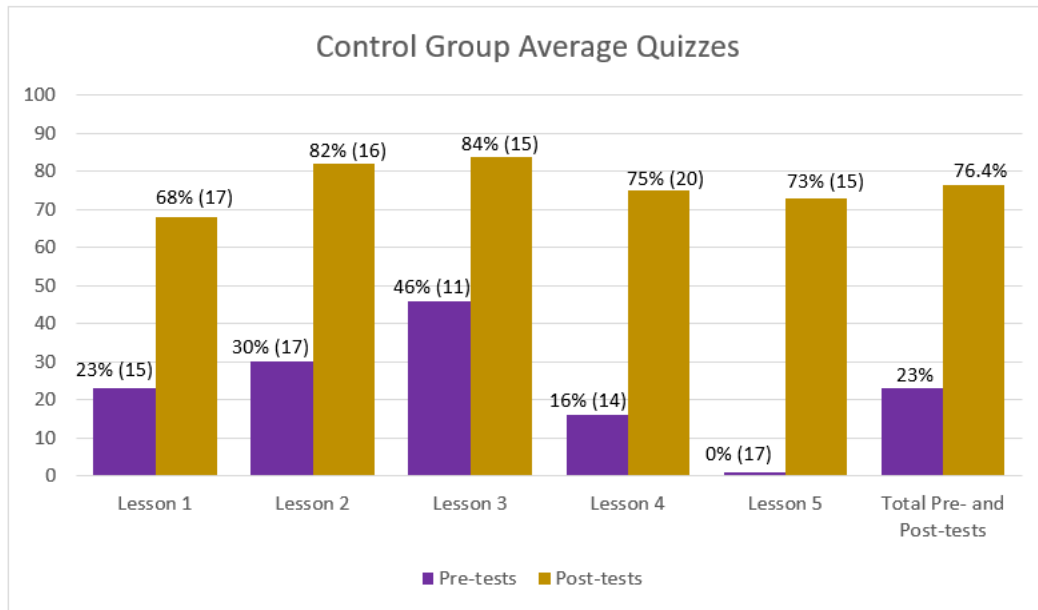


Figure 6 show participants' performance in the pre- and post- tests, including the total average from both types of tests in the control group. After a two day of lesson practice, it was expected an increase in the students' leaning of grammatical topics for the study. It can be appreciated that the average total score in the pre-tests is 23% which indicates learners did not possess the explicit knowledge of the targeted forms prior to the grammar lessons. The total average from the post-test in this group is 76.4%. There is an increase of 53.4%.

However, Lesson 3 shows different scores from the other quizzes. The type of grammar this lesson targeted was *Indirect Object Pronouns*. Students achieved a 46% total average in the pre-test, and the post-test showed an improvement in the results of 84%, becoming the post-test with the highest score. Again, the format of the pre- and post-test was based on a

matching exercise, and students may have recognized the target forms. In the rest of the quizzes, students needed to produce the target forms, and this difference between recognition and production may have affected the performance in Lesson 3. Moreover, the results from Lesson 5 are worth discussing. In this pre-test, students showed no knowledge of the grammar topic (*Imperfect tense*). In fact, not one single participant answered correctly any of the items in the quiz. The average score for the post-test was 73% showing a sharp increase in explicit knowledge of the *Imperfect tense*. One possible explanation for these results in Lesson 5 may be that while students had been working on the use and form of the *Preterit Tense* since week 1 in the semester, this is the first time they see the *Imperfect tense* and thus, it make sense that none of the students received any scores in the Pre-test.

To conclude this section, average scores from individual tests as well from the total average score across all tests, indicate students performed better after instruction and in-class practice. These results proved that this *incidental focus on form* class became highly useful in helping these students show explicit knowledge in form-focused tests.

Planned vs Incidental Focus on Form Groups

A comparison between experimental and control groups helps us answer the third research question: *Which type of instruction is most effective one: planned or incidental focus on form?* In order to answer these questions, a comparison of the total average scores from both language groups is offered in Figure 7.

Figure 7.

Average Total scores from Pre- and Post-tests from the Experimental and Control Groups

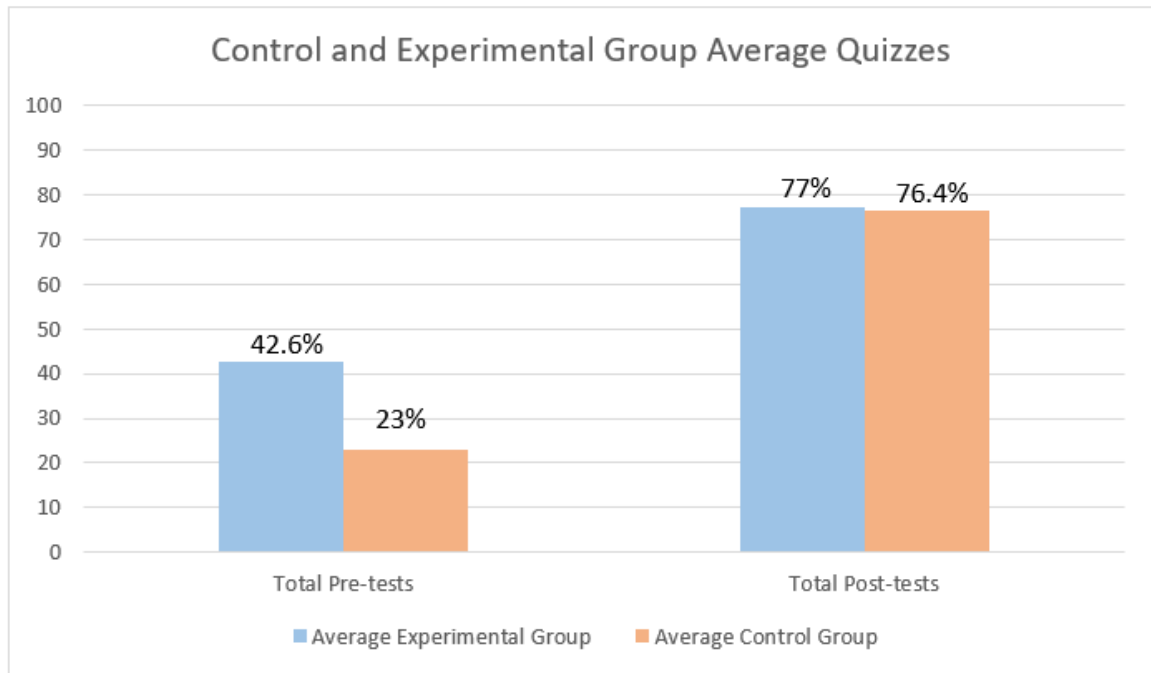


Figure 7 provides a general summary of the results from the pre- and post-tests part of both the experimental and control group. Regarding the pre-tests, the experimental group had a total average of 42.6%, while the control group achieved a lower average with a 23%. This may indicate that the experimental group might have had a higher Spanish proficiency level or higher knowledge of the targeted grammatical forms than the control group when they started the term. In terms of the post-tests, the total average of the experimental group was 77%, whereas the control group has a total average of 76.4%. Both language groups shared very similar post-test scores which means that regardless of what type of *focus on form* students were exposed to in the classroom, they were able to show learning of the grammatical forms as evidenced by their performance in the form-focused tasks. While the increase between pre- and post- tests scores is 34.4% in the experimental group, the control group showed an increase of 53.4%. Given that the

two language groups reached similar levels of performance in the post-tests, this increased difference between pre- and post- tests may again evidence the difference in proficiency levels between both groups.

In looking at performance in individual quizzes, as shown in Figures 5 and 6 above, an interesting pattern from the pre- and the post-tests seems evident. The control group achieved higher scores in all the post-tests, showing a better performance than the experimental group, except for the first test. The experimental group obtained 93% in the Post-test 1, while the control group only 68%. Therefore, even though the control group performed better in most of the post-tests, the score from the experimental group in Post-test 1 was enough to influence the average total score in such a way that it overpassed the control group. Nevertheless, as has been commented previously, this slight difference does not create a fundamental influence in the final results and both groups achieved similar final total scores in the post-tests.

In all, since there has been a sharp increase in both groups, these results show that not only *planned* but also the *incidental focus on form* seems helpful enough for learners to improve their scores from one test to another. Therefore, the input enhancement used in the *planned focus on form* classroom, and the spontaneous attention to the diverse grammatical structures in the control group, resulted in being effective.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

The present study compared two types of instruction (*planned* and *incidental*) focused on form to teach two different groups of high beginner students of Spanish at the university. The results obtained and analyzed in this research confirm some of the findings in previous studies about *incidental* and *planned focus on form* in the classroom; that is, both *planned focus on form* and *incidental focus on form* are effective for language learning (Alcón, 2007; Arslan & Dogan, 2020; Ortega, 1999; Parvaneh & Barzegar, 2020).

As seen in the results, through the input enhancement used in the PPTs and the handouts for the students, as well as the teacher's voice pitch, students in the experimental group were exposed to *planned focus on form*, and this type of instruction resulted in being effective. Arslan & Dogan (2020) also claimed that the experimental group using *planned focus on form* developed better grammar knowledge, which in their case was operationalized as input enhancement, input flood and corrective feedback used in the classroom. However, in their study, experimental and control groups followed different pedagogical approaches. While the experimental group focused on teaching grammatical features within meaningful contexts and noticing activities, the control group followed a Presentation-Practice-Production format based on course textbook. In the present study, both experimental and control group followed the same lesson plans and pedagogical approach for all the targeted grammar lessons. Therefore, the beneficial impact of *planned focus on form* in Arslan & Dogan (2020) may be due to more than *planned* or *incidental focus on form*. The difference in instructional approaches may also be responsible for the pronounced increase in average scores in the post-tests (60.86% experimental vs. 55.06% control). While in the present study, a difference in performance between

experimental and control group was apparent, the distinction is minimal (77% experimental vs. 76.4% control).

Arslan & Dogan's study (2020) also brings up the issue of what constitutes *planned focus on form*. In their study, participants in the *planned focus on form* were exposed to input enhancement, input flood and error correction. In Esfandiari's (2021) study, *planned focus on form* was also operationalized by enhancing the presence of verbs with the third person singular in written stories. The author highlighted, capitalized, underlined, and italicized these forms in all written stories used in the lessons. While one group had written stories with input enhancement, the other group saw the same stories but without any enhanced elements. Experimental and control groups were tested one week after each treatment with a noticing test and a written production test. Results showed that input enhancement in the experimental group helped learners notice and learn the targeted linguistic form (English third person singular) more effectively. In the present study, *planned focus on form* differed from the *incidental focus on form* in the presence of input enhancement in classroom materials and teacher's voice. As discussed in the Methodology section, input enhancement was present in both language groups, but it was more heavily present in the *planned focus on form* group, which was expected since the TR made an effort to highlight target forms in written and oral input. The author did not examine the video recordings of the grammar lessons to see whether the presence of input flood and/or error correction also differed between experimental and control group. However, the results obtained seem to indicate that input enhancement as displayed in the grammar lessons in the experimental group may have not been enough to help learners in the experimental group to pay more attention to language forms than participants in the *incidental focus on form* group,

and, therefore, the difference between two groups was not as silent as the one in Arslan & Dogan's study (2020).

The results from this study seem to be more in accordance with Parvaneh & Barzegar's (2020) research, where they suggested that both types of *focus on form* are equally effective in language learning. Trying to measure the oral accuracy in EFL learners, they had an experimental group under the influence of *planned focus on form* (through selecting and underlining the target forms), whereas the control group had no type of emphasis on the language. In their study, they focused on learners' oral accuracy with a focus on grammar, and measured language learning through pre- and post-tests where students had to describe a picture orally. This study also paid attention to the participants' grammar accuracy on certain topics, but the pre- and post- tests measured explicit knowledge through highly controlled tasks. Both studies claimed that all participants increased their knowledge of grammatical structures. Nevertheless, both studies differ in the total final average between the experimental and control groups. Even though both types of instruction resulted in language learning, Parvaneh & Barzegar's (2020) results indicate that students in the *planned focus on form* group outperformed the control group significantly, something that is not in accordance with the present study, since the final results from both groups are very similar.

Another element to consider is the explicit attention to form that all participants experienced through the video lessons and the explicit grammar explanations they encountered prior to coming to class. The video lessons consisted of detailed explanations of grammar points using animation and offering very clear and relevant examples. They also included self-checks for students to assess their own understanding of the concepts being explained. Additionally, each lesson included a PDF file with the grammar of the lesson. Students had access to both

resources, and they were required to do a number of input-based activities before coming to class. Hence, this explicit attention to forms before the instruction of the teachers in the classroom together with the language practice in class may have been enough to learn the grammatical concepts. It is possible that learners in the experimental group disregarded all cases of input enhancement in the classroom. This preplanned preparation of the lesson is similar to what Ortega (1999) did in her study. She only introduced a preplanned practice of an oral task in the experimental group, while the control group was not counting on this extra practice. However, in her study, the preplanned preparation included a communicative task where learners needed to retell a story while paying attention to form. Ortega (1999) measured development of oral skills, and the results showed that this preplanned practice of the language was enough to help learners improve their language production, overcoming the control group. In the present study, the pre-planned practice included both *focus on forms* (video and PDF grammar explanation) and *focus on form* (input-based activities) and therefore, this *planned focus on form* and *forms* may be the factor that resulted in not seeing major differences in language performance between the experimental and the control group.

In the results section, it was also mentioned that the difference between the experimental and the control group, based on the comparison of the pre-tests results, seems to suggest that the overall language proficiency of learners in the study may differ from one group to another. The experimental group outperformed the control group in the pre-tests indicating that the former has a starting overall language proficiency level superior to the control group. Unfortunately, with the current data it is not possible to determine if language proficiency is a variable that differentiates both groups of learners. However, one factor affecting results may have been instructors' grading behavior. While all language tests used in the study were short quizzes

where students simply had to fill in the blanks or produce short sentences, the lack of grading rubric shared between instructors of both groups may be a factor to consider. In the case of Abdollahzadeh's (2015) study, even though there were two groups, she was the only one correcting the tests, and maybe by doing this, the present study would have had different results. She was measuring the learning of students of English pronouns, tenses, propositions and articles through pre- and post-tests. Additionally, in order to test the validity of the results, not only did she correct them all, but also data was computed by t-test in order to compare the final total average of the results from both groups. This type of testing offers validity and reliability.

In this study, there was no t-test, and grading criteria may have varied from one group to another. It is possible that the instructor in the control group may have graded these tests more severely than the TR in the experimental group. However, when comparing post-test scores from individual quizzes, the scores for the control group were higher than the scores for the experimental group, excepting Post-test 1. This Post-test 1 reached an average score of 93% in the experimental group which may explain why the overall score was 76.4% and thus, it is so similar to the control's average score of 77%. Despite any possible grading differences between instructors, both the experimental and control group seemed to have achieved a good understanding of the grammatical concepts under study.

As seen in the tables in the Results section, not all students enrolled in this course participated in the study. This is particularly more noticeable in the experimental group where the average number of students taking the pre- and post-tests ranged from 8-12 at a given time in comparison with the control group that ranged from 14-17 students. This sample size directly influences research findings. Very small samples are likely to be influenced by chance variability. For example, Grim's (2008) study proved the positive effects of *planned focus on*

form, and this study had 152 participants who all completed all tests used for the research.

Therefore, these present results may be due to variability within the participants and not to the type of instructional technique learners were exposed to.

One final aspect worth commenting on is the fact that in this study, the pre- and post-tests used for the recollection of data were primarily based on mechanical drills. Students needed to fill in the gaps, match questions and answers, or answer questions only using the targeted grammatical forms adequately. These tests targeted learning of explicit knowledge, and therefore, results may have been different if the learners may have been involved in a test where they needed to produce the language and use the knowledge they have acquired, as Grim (2008) did. In his study, pre- and post-tests were divided in two parts: the first part consisted of answering seven questions, translating vocabulary words and filling in the gaps with certain grammar topics (looking at explicit knowledge). In the second part, students needed to produce a short paragraph with a given topic, and there, learners were producing the language with the adequate implicit knowledge of culture, vocabulary and grammar. Similarly, Fraroki and Chehrazad (2012) who also found beneficial effects for *planned focus on form*, by testing learning of the past tense in English through retelling a story learners had previously read and summarized. Consequently, the results from the present study need to be taken with caution since no generalizations about language proficiency gains can be made due to *planned or incidental focus on form*. The type of tests used to measure language performance limit the interpretation of the results to learning of some grammatical forms in a very controlled environment.

CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

Interest in learning a language has increased over the past few years. This process of learning often takes place in the classroom, and thus, it is important to examine how different teaching perspectives and techniques impact learning. *Focus on Form* (Long 1991) is an instructional approach that highlights the importance of directing learners' attention to linguistic forms as they engage in the performance of tasks. Meaning and form are equally important to help learners develop a sense of how the language works and become communicatively competent. The present study focused specifically on two types of *focus on form*: *planned* and *incidental* to assess their effectiveness in learning some grammatical concepts in two different Spanish classrooms with beginner students. The experimental group was exposed to *planned focus on form*, and the control group was under the influence of *incidental focus on form*. This research study revealed that both types of instructions have positive effects in the students' learning of explicit grammatical knowledge.

There are some pedagogical implications involved. This study reinforces mainly the idea that it is fundamental to avoid only focusing on *forms* in the classroom, but instead, language needs to be presented and practiced with a clear attention to both *meaning* and linguistic forms, and how that mapping of form and meaning takes place. The idea of including *form* in a classroom becomes beneficial for the students, and this study has found that not only *planned* but also *incidental focus on form* help students learn grammar together with some practice where they can produce the language before the tests. Nevertheless, there is the need to consider the presence of *planned focus on form* in the classroom. Only input enhancement is not enough to help learners notice the language completely; care should be taken that *planned focus on form* is

taken into account through other types of techniques to help learners notice more easily the input, such as input flood or corrective feedback together with enhanced input.

In addition, another pedagogical implication would be that students took advantage of the Flipped Approach and the practice through input and output activities, before coming to class; then, they were able to do a better performance in the post-tests, showing their knowledge after having gone through the two-day of lessons in the classroom. However, another factor influencing students' better performance in the post-test could have been the practice in the classroom in both groups after they have learnt about the grammar prior to coming to class. Therefore, the classroom *focus on form* favored the students in the sense that they were able to learn the different grammatical aspects and prove themselves in the post-tests, although *incidental* and *planned focus on form* did not make a difference in the end.

There are, however, several limitations in this study. One of the limitations is the fact that there are two groups in this study with two different teachers with different teaching styles and practice. As mentioned, the lack of grading rubric puts into question how tests in the study were scored, as well as the number of participants, which varied from test to test, and the control group had more than the experimental group. Additionally, while lessons in both groups were the same, classroom dynamics, instructor's rapport with students, and so on, were probably different, which may have impacted learners' engagement with the lesson materials and language practice. While the design of the study included input enhancement as the differentiating factor between *planned* and *incidental focus on form*, it is true that, as seen in previous research studies, *planned focus on form* should perhaps have included input flood and error correction. Therefore, the limited operationalization of *planned focus on form* in this study is a limitation. Also, it would have been interesting to create a questionnaire asking students if they were aware of that

enhanced input, and if they believed that it helped them in their language learning process. This would have helped the researcher be aware of the impact *planned focus on form* had on students.

Finally, language learning in this study was measured through grammar-focused tests that assessed learners' development of explicit knowledge of Spanish. Therefore, the results obtained are quite limited. Due to the instructional context where this study took place (i.e., the course requirements and content selection and assessment were determined by the supervisor of the TR), no other language assessments were included, which limits further the generalization of the results obtained. In addition, two parts in the tests would have been more profitable in the recollection of data. That is, open ended questions or oral assessments would have helped understand how the impact of *focus on form* influenced the language learning development overall, instead of only having used explicit and controlled tests.

To conclude, despite these restrictions, one takeaway from this research study is that it has been possible to observe the effectiveness of both *planned* and *incidental focus on form* in two different Spanish classrooms. Even though there is only a slight difference between the final results from both groups, it is clear that *focus on form* may be beneficial for language learning, regardless of whether or not instructors plan to explicitly draw learners' attention to form. Offering learners opportunities to focus on meaningful tasks in the classroom while getting their attention to linguistic forms is vital for successful language acquisition.

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APPENDIX: SUPPLEMENTAL DOCUMENTS

Pre- and post-tests

NOMBRE _____

PRE-TEST 1

Gramática I. Preguntas. Answer the questions with complete sentences.

1. ¿Te gustan las fresas?

2. ¿A tu madre le apetecen las ensaladas en invierno?

3. ¿A ti y a tus amigos les gusta cenar en restaurantes mexicanos?

4. ¿Y a Uds. les importa pedir pizza con piña?

5. A mí me encantan las aceitunas con anchoa. ¿Y a ti?

NOMBRE _____

_____/10

POST-TEST 1

Gramática I. Preguntas. Answer the questions with complete sentences.

1. ¿Te gustan los tomates?

2. ¿A tu mejor amigo le apetecen las sopas frías?

3. ¿A ti y a tus amigos les gusta cenar en restaurantes los fines de semana?

4. ¿Y a Uds. les importa pedir platos sanos?

5. A mí me encanta la comida picante. ¿Y a ti?

NOMBRE _____

PRE-TEST 2

Gramática I. En el trabajo. Complete the sentences with the correct form of the present progressive or the present simple. **¡OJO!** Use the contextual clues to determine which verb tense is more appropriate in each case.

Ahora son las 8:00 de la mañana, y el profesor (1) _____(dar) una clase particular a un alumno de trece años.

A las once de la mañana, mi hermana (2) _____ (tomar) un café en casa mientras (3) _____ (pensar) en el outfit que va a llevar a clase.

En este momento, mi hermana (4) _____(leer) un libro titulado *Dune*.

Generalmente, yo (5) _____ (escribir) mis trabajos finales por las manáanas.

Los policías han entrado a trabajar a las 8 de la mañana. Son las dos de la tarde y todavía (*still*) (6) _____ (entrevistar) a un testigo (*witness*).

La ejecutiva casi siempre (7) _____ (tener) que sacar a pasear a su perro por la mañana.

Son las 10:30 a.m. y ahora ella (8) _____(ducharse) en el gimnasio después de entrenar.

POST-TEST 2

Gramática I. En el trabajo. Complete the sentences with the correct form of the present progressive or the present simple. **¡OJO!** Use the contextual clues to determine which verb tense is more appropriate in each case.

En un día típico, la médica (1) _____ (ver) a pacientes en su consultorio, pero ahora (2) _____ (aconsejar) a sus estudiantes de medicina en el hospital.

Son las 8:15 de la mañana, y el profesor (3) _____ (dar) una clase porque su colega (*colleague*) está enferma. Está de mal humor porque no le gusta variar su rutina diaria en la que entre las ocho y las once de la mañana, (4) _____ (tomar) unos cafés en casa mientras (5) _____ (pensar) en lo que va a enseñar en sus propias (*own*) clases. Sin embargo, en este momento (6) _____ (leer) un artículo a un grupo de estudiantes que no conoce.

Generalmente, los periodistas (7) _____ (escribir) sus artículos entre las 9:00 a.m. y las 12:00 p.m., pero son las 11:15 y ellos todavía (*still*) (8) _____ (entrevistar) a un testigo (*witness*).

La ejecutiva casi siempre (9) _____ (tener) una reunión con su contadora por la mañana, pero son las 10:30 a.m. y ahora (10) _____ (ducharse) en el club deportivo porque acaba de jugar al tenis.

Appendix M

NOMBRE _____

PRE-TEST 3

Gramática II. Emparejar. Match each question with the appropriate answer.

- A) Estoy llevándotelos ahora mismo.**
- B) Lo siento, pero no puedo contártela porque me voy a dormir.**
- C) Mi mamá me la va a dar.**
- D) No, no me la pueden dar.**
- E) Sí, se lo estoy explicando.**
- F) Sí, se los preparo enseguida.**

1. ¿Le estás explicando español a tu primo?
2. ¿Quién te va a dar la entrada del cine?
3. ¿Nos preparas macarrones con queso a mi amiga y a mí?
4. ¿Me cuentas una historia de miedo?
5. ¿Cuándo me vas a devolver mis zapatos?
6. ¿Te pueden dar otra oportunidad?

NOMBRE _____

_____/12

POST-TEST 3

Gramática II. Emparejar. Match each question with the appropriate answer.

- A) Estoy preparándotelos ahora.
- B) Lo siento, pero no puedo contártela.
- C) Mi mamá me lo va a dar.
- D) No, no me la pueden dar.
- E) Sí, se la estoy contando.
- F) Sí, se la preparo ahorita.

1. ¿Le estás contando la historia a Celia y a Teresa?
2. ¿Quién te va a dar el dinero?
3. ¿Nos preparas una pizza a mí y a Mateo?
4. ¿Me cuentas toda la verdad?
5. ¿Cuándo me vas a preparar unos mariscos?
6. ¿Te pueden dar otra oportunidad?

PRE-TEST 4

NOMBRE _____

Gramática I. Preguntas personales. Answer the questions with complete sentences.

1. ¿Adónde ibas de vacaciones cuando eras niño/a?

2. ¿Dónde practicabas deportes en el 2019?

3. En la escuela secundaria, ¿qué hacías por las tardes, después de las clases?

4. Cuando eras niño/a, ¿qué hacías con tus amigos?

5. ¿Visitabas a tu familia en el verano?

POST-TEST 4

NOMBRE _____ **_____ / 12**

Gramática I. Preguntas personales. Answer the questions with complete sentences.

1. ¿Cuántos años tenías en 2018?

2. ¿Cómo era tu maestro/a en el primer grado?

3. ¿En qué calle vivían tú y tu familia cuando tenías 10 años?

4. En la escuela secundaria, ¿qué hacías por las tardes, después de las clases?

5. Cuando eras niño/a, ¿qué te gustaba hacer durante el verano?

6. ¿Tu familia iba de vacaciones a algún lugar?

PRE-TEST 5

NOMBRE _____

Gramática II. ¡A comparar!

Haz una comparación utilizando el adjetivo *soleado/a* Playa Maderas
Playa de Gorliz



2. Una comparación de desigualdad con *árboles*

Desierto del Sahara



El amazonas



3. Una comparación de igualdad con "gustar": *A nosotros nos gusta...*

Viajar en barco



Viajar en caravana



POST-TEST 5

NOMBRE _____

_____/20

Gramática II. ¡A comparar! Sara ended up taking an "ecotouristic" vacation but went to Nicaragua instead of Costa Rica. She's at a café with Christopher comparing photos. Look at each pair of pictures, and write comparative sentences as indicated.

1. Una comparación de igualdad con "bonito":



Playa Maderas



Playa Jaco

2. Una comparación de desigualdad con "flores" (sust. f.):



Parque Los Guatuzos



Parque Corcovado

3. Una comparación de igualdad con "peces" (sust. f.):



Laguna de Apoyo



Laguna Poco Sol

4. Una comparación de desigualdad con "gustar":



montar a caballo



andar en bicicleta

A nosotros nos gusta _____
