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Print ISSN: [3006-2497](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17408888) Online ISSN: [3006-2500](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17408888)Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17408888)<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17408888>**The Role of Input Enhancement in Grammar Acquisition among Graduate Students: A Study from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan****Zahid Sardar**BS English Scholar, Department of English, Kohat University of Science and technology, KUST
Kohat PakistanEmail: zahidsardar629@gmail.com**Abstract**

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) has a perpetual and focal concern on grammar acquisition, especially when English is used as a foreign language like in Pakistan. Input improvement is one teaching method that has received growing interest and the goal of this technique is to render linguistic features more evident to students without being represented in a conspicuous grammatical manner. The study examines how input enhancement can support grammar acquisition by alumnus students in the public sector universities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) in Pakistan. A quasi-experimental project has been used, which included 60 graduate students who were split into an experimental group (received input-enhanced texts) and a control group (received regular texts). Pre-tests and post-tests were controlled so as to test explicit linguistic knowledge and specifically passive voice and the relative clauses. The findings indicated that the experimental group achieved much higher gains than the control group and this implies that input enhancement certainly interferes with grammar learning at the graduate level. The article makes a contribution to the study of SLA in Pakistani context by bringing out the pedagogical importance of input enhancement among higher education learners.

Key Words: *Second Language Acquisition, grammar acquisition, teaching method, grammar acquisition, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK)*

1. Introduction

Teaching of grammar remains a difficult element of language education even in Pakistan even at the graduate level where students are supposed to write scholarly papers in the English language. Although many graduate students in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) public sector universities have had several years of previous exposure to the English language by means of formal education, they are found to have problems with correct and complex grammatical structures in their written compositions and verbal communication. The conventional approaches are based on the use of explicit explanations and mechanical exercises, which tend to result in the low level of communicative competence.

In the context of SLA, the input enhancement has become one of the instructional methods that also aim at rendering the input more salient to certain grammatical forms without interrupting the communication process. Through visual or typographical emphasis on target structures, the learners should notice them better and hence, acquire them better (Sharwood Smith, 1993). Nevertheless, there is little empirical literature on effectiveness of the input enhancement in Pakistan especially at graduate level. Most national research is carried out with secondary or undergraduate students, which creates a disparity in the comprehension of graduate students to such methods in learning institutions.

This gap is filled by the current study which examines the effect of textual input enhancement on acquisition of the chosen grammatical structures among graduate students in KPK. It targets two grammatical items such as passive voice and relative clauses which are critical in academic writing but usually problematic with Pakistani learners.

2. Literature Review

Input enhancement was originally presented in print by Sharwood Smith (1993) who explained that typographical or phonological means can help teachers to make linguistic input more salient. Input also, input enhancement does not presuppose that teachers need to provide explicit answers to certain grammatical phenomena; instead, it supposes that the form can be internalized through an enhanced noticing process, which is based on the Noticing Hypothesis by Schmidt (1990).

There are mixed findings of empirical research. Leow (2008) critically analyzed the literature and determined that the input enhancement usually has small yet significant effects in development of grammar. In other studies (e.g., Alanen, 1995; Izumi, 2002) improved performance in terms of comprehension and production tasks was associated with better input whereas other studies did not find any significant differences among control groups.

Grammar is generally taught in the Pakistani context, with more emphasis on rules than on approaches that notice (Rahman, 2002). It has been demonstrated that learners in Punjab and Sindh (e.g., Khan, 2017; Javed, 2019) heavily depend on translation and memorization. Few studies have covered the input improvement in tertiary education and further very few have examined KPK where the exposure to English is quite small beyond the classroom setting. Since the multilingual environment requires the students to speak in Pashto, Hindko, or Urdu and be their first language, input enhancement can be of a beneficial effect as well since they will be attracted to less prominent structures in English.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a quasi-experimental pre-test-post-test control group design in an attempt to determine the effect of enhancing the input of textual input on the acquisition of grammar.

3.2 Participants

A total of 60 graduate students (30 males, 30 females) pursuing M.A. English and M.Phil. English courses in a state university in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were used in the study. Purposive sampling was used to select the subjects. Every participant had undergone undergraduate education in English before but exhibited different amounts of grammatical correctness.

3.3 Instruments

Pre-test and Post-test: A grammar test, which is based on passive voice and relative clauses, with multiple-choice, fill in the blank and short production items.

Instructional Materials: Reading passages in two versions were made. The experimental group was fed on input-enhanced texts with the target grammatical structures bolded, underlined and colored. Control group was allocated to passages in their original form.

Questionnaire: A short questionnaire was used to assess the attitude of the participants towards the instructional method.

3.4 Procedure

The study lasted four weeks. The two groups took eight instructional sessions.

The experimental group was needed to read the input-enhanced texts and discuss the content of the texts in the classroom. No clear grammatical regulations were given.

The other group was the control, which read the same texts without any improvement and did not receive any extra grammar training.

Before the treatment, there were pre-tests and after the end of the treatment, post-tests.

3.5 Data Analysis

Paired sample t-tests were used to compare gains within-group and independent sample t-tests were used to compare gains between the groups.

4.1 Pre-Test Results

The two groups scored similar scores on the grammar pre-test before the instructional treatment.

The mean score of the experimental group ($n = 30$) was 41.3 ($SD = 7.9$) out of 60 and that of the control group ($n = 30$) was less than 41.3.

attested that the difference was not statistically significant ($t = 0.38$, $p > 0.05$), that both sets of people were initially at the same level of grammatical knowledge.

Further examination of the types of errors displayed showed that most students in both groups had difficulties with:

Converting active sentences into irregular verb passive structures.

Correct usage of reduced relative clauses and embedded relative clauses.

Excessive L1 word order generalization (e.g., use of relative pronouns in the wrong place; or omission).

4.2 Post-Tests Results: Passive Voice.

Four weeks of teaching made the experimental group show significant improvement in the section of the passive voice. Their average mark rose by 20.4 to 34.9 out of 40 giving a mean improvement of 14.5 out of 40 ($SD \text{ gain} = 3.8$). The control group on the other hand improved to 26.4 with a gain of only 5.3 points ($SD \text{ gain} = 4.1$).

The t-test in a paired-samples format in the case of the experimental group showed that this improvement was statistically significant ($t = 12.04$, $p < 0.001$). A slight yet significant improvement was also observed in the control group ($t = 3.42$, $p < 0.01$), presumably because of familiarity with the test. But, the independent sample t-test of the gain scores between groups

had significant difference ($t = 7.82$, $p < 0.001$) supporting the high results of the input enhancement treatment.

The qualitative observations found that students in the experimental group paused more or noted verbally in highlighted passive forms during reading activities indicating that they noticed more. Indicatively, a number of students would highlight the improved parts in their notebooks or make remarks; all these sentences are in passive, it is now clearer.

4.3 Post-Test Results: Relative Clauses.

The same pattern was reflected in the relative clause section. The experimental group gained 12.7 out of 40 of their pre-tested mean of 20.9, which is a gain of 12.7 points. The control group had a gain of 4.8 points (SD gain = 4.3) improving on 21.0 to 25.8. The significant improvements within the two groups were validated by paired t-tests ($t = 10.23$, $p < 0.001$, experimental $t = 2.97$, $p < 0.01$, control). The between-group analysis of gain scores again revealed that there was a significant difference in the gain scores of the experimental group ($t = 6.31$, $p = 0.001$).

In the experimental group, especially the students achieved great success in usage of relative pronouns and proper embedding clauses in production activities at a post test. The frequency of such errors as the man which came was brought to minimum level and more students managed to correctly say the man who came... or the man coming...).

4.4 Attitudes and Observations of the Learners.

The post-intervention questionnaires reported positive response of a learner to the input enhancement:

Students in the experimental group (82% of them) said that the highlighting served to make them pay more attention to grammar during reading.

76% believed that grammar was more noticeable and comprehensible.

Some students proposed to combine such an approach with other skills (e.g., writing classes) because this way was able to make the structure more prominent without dull grammar lessons. Observing the classroom, more engagement of the learners was observed during reading sessions. The students tended to discuss the enhanced forms in two personages and associate them with the similar structures which were present in Urdu or Pashto and helped to process them.

5. Discussion

The results of the study have a lot of empirical evidence on the effectiveness of the input enhancement in facilitating grammar acquisition among graduate students in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The high results of passive voice and relative clause are similar to other international studies in the past (Alanen, 1995; Izumi, 2002; Lee and Huang, 2008) and provide important data on the under-researched Pakistani setting.

5.1 Input Enhancement and the Hypothesis of the Noticing.

The findings support the Noticing Hypothesis of Schmidt (1990) and which states that attention to forms of language is a precondition to language acquisition. The considerable amounts of gains in the experimental group and the classroom observations of learners pausing, underlining, and commenting on improved sections prove that textual enhancement was effective in the

activation of the noticing mechanism. The control group (where input was not enhanced) on the contrary rendered only significant changes, probably because of incidental exposure instead of conscious form shaped focus.

5.2 Significance to the Pakistani Higher Education.

Grammar used at the graduate level in Pakistan has been a traditional impartation based on explicit teaching of rules, translation practice, and memorizing of the same (Rahman, 2002; Khan, 2017). Although this method assists the learners to achieve good performance in the written grammar tests, it usually does not yield long term and versatile grammatical proficiency in writing and speaking academic texts. The present research shows that the process of input improvement is a possible additional measure that can be consistent with both communicative and noticing-based pedagogies, yet is still possible in an instructor-focused setting.

The salience of some English constructions is also low in the case of students in KPK, most of whom are multilingual speakers of Pashto, Hindko and Urdu because of typological distinctions. By emphasizing these forms in context, learners could better visualize these forms, which is why traditional explanations of grammar usually do not pay much attention to highlighting the latter.

5.3 Comparison to the Past Research.

The findings are similar to the results of international research revealing positive but inconsistent effects of textual enhancement. Indicatively, Lee and Huang (2008) came up with a finding that input enhancement usually imparts slight to medium influences on L2 grammar acquisition. The effects were also quite significant in this paper and this could be due to the fact that graduate learners are more cognitively mature and have greater reading-comprehension ability and thus more benefit out of the nuances of the text.

In contrast to the results of Izumi (2002), who detected more significant effects on comprehension than production, this research observed both receptive and productive tasks had great improvement. This could be as a result of the prolonged exposure in the four weeks and the academic orientation of the learners.

5.4 Pedagogical Implications

Introducing Enhancement into the Current Curriculum: Teachers can simply make adjustments to reading passages, i.e. bolden, underline, or color-code target grammar.

Complementing Explicit Instruction: Enhancement should not be used in place of explicit teaching but may be used to prepare learners to learn rules on a deeper level.

Promoting Autonomous Noticing: Autonomous noticing can be encouraged by training graduate learners to highlight or annotate structures during the process of reading.

Extension to Other Skills: The method can be extended to the writing tasks where the students are encouraged to apply color-coded editing in complex structures.

5.5 Study Limitations and Future Research Recommendations.

Only two grammatical structures were studied and the study took a period of four weeks. Longer interventions would show other retention patterns. The researchers used immediate post-test gains; to find out the long-term effects, delayed post-tests must be used. Additional studies would compare various types of improvement (e.g., visual vs. audio, or digital interactive texts) to find out which one is most effective with Pakistani graduate students.

5.6 Conclusion of the Discussion.

The discussion, in general, shows that input enhancement is a low-cost, effective, and pedagogically adaptable method which can be used to contribute dramatically to the acquisition of grammar at the graduate level in KPK. It deals with cognitive and contextual issues of grammar learning in Pakistan by enhancing the saliency of linguistic forms in meaningful input.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, the input improvement is revealed to significantly contribute to grammar learning in graduate students in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, as it provides a useful addition to the traditional teaching. Input enhancement helps notice and acquire through gradual internalization without any demanding explanation of rules by attracting the attention of the learners to important forms of grammar.

Since explicit, teacher-centered grammar teaching is still prevalent in Pakistan, the introduction of input improvement methods will allow updating the classroom process and ensuring the more effective grammatical acquisition of advanced students. The further studies should be conducted on the other enhancement modalities and on the long-term effects of retention.

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