

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, a detailed analysis of data and findings of the study will be presented. For easy reference as well as not to confuse readers, I have divided the results / findings into three parts according to the order of the three cycles that I had conducted.

4.1 Results / findings of First Round

A comparison of the students' pre- and post-test results tells me that my intervention was fruitful to a certain extent. In fact the outcomes were very encouraging as every student did much better than before. Table I below shows the results of pre-test, post-test and gains of pre-posttest.

	Pre-test		Post-test		Gains
	Raw score	%	Raw score	%	%
Student 1	5/11	45.5	11/14	78.6	33.2
Student 2	6/11	54.5	10/14	71.4	16.9
Student 3	7/11	63.6	12/14	85.7	22.1
Student 4	8/11	72.7	12/14	85.7	13.0
Student 5	7/11	63.6	11/14	78.6	15.0
Student 6	8/11	72.7	12/14	85.7	13.0
Mean	6.8	62.1	11.3	80.0	18.9

Table I: Results of pre-test, post-test and gains of pre-posttest

From Table I, we can see clearly that all six students have improved significantly after form-focused instruction. Column two of Table I shows the pre-test results and column three shows the post-test results. When we compare the two sets of results, we will find that Student 1 has gained an improvement of 33.2%; Student 2 has gained 16.9%; Student 3 has gained 22.1%; Student 4 has gained 13%; Student 5 has gained 15% and Student 6 has gained 13%.

On average, each student has gained a mean of 18.9%. The marked difference between pre- and post-test shows that explicit grammar instruction is effective in improving students' understanding of the verb tense.

In addition, a lot of improvement was also found in the students' final written products. Table II below shows the results of students' final writing task.

	Final writing task		No. of verb tense errors made in final writing task
	Raw score	%	
Student 1	20/25	80	2
Student 2	15.5/25	62	Nil
Student 3	18/25	72	Nil
Student 4	17.5/25	70	1
Student 5	18/25	72	Nil
Student 6	14/25	56	2
Mean	17.2	68.7	

Table II: Results of students' final writing task

From Table II, we can see that majority of the students (four, to be precise) scored above 70% in the final writing task; one student scored 62% and one attained 56%. The mean score is 68.7%.

When I checked the students' sentences in their respective written texts of the final writing task, I found that they have truly grasped the simple present tense well because they made very few mistakes on the tense taught. They lost marks due to weaknesses in vocabulary and expression only. Verb tense errors were minimal. In fact, three students did not commit any verb tense error at all in their final writing task (please refer to column three of Table II). I have attached a sample of a student's final writing text on page 27 in Chapter Three. It was the product of Student 5.

It would have been better if I had given the students a pre-writing task similar to the post-writing task, because then I could compare their progress more convincingly (please refer to p.8-9 of my journal in Appendix VII).

Since it was effective for this class, surely it would be positive for another class? Upon further reflection and planning, I decided to try one more round on another class to confirm the findings.

4.2 Results / findings of Second Round

The findings of the second round of my study also show positive results. A comparison of the students' pre- and post-test results reveals that the instruction was useful as all six students performed better than before. Table III on the next page shows the results of pre-test 1, post-test 1 and gains of pre-posttest.

	Pre-test 1		Post-test 1		Gains
	Raw score	%	Raw score	%	%
Student 1	7/11	63.6	12/14	85.7	22.1
Student 2	5/11	45.4	10/14	71.4	26
Student 3	5/11	45.4	10/14	71.4	26
Student 4	7/11	63.6	10/14	71.4	7.8
Student 5	7/11	63.6	11/14	78.6	15
Student 6	6/11	54.5	9/14	64.2	9.7
Mean	6.2	56.0	10.3	73.8	17.8

Table III: Results of pre-test 1, post-test 1 and gains of pre-posttest 1

From Table III, we can see clearly that all six students have improved significantly after form-focused instruction. A comparison of column two and column three gives us a clear view of the gains students obtained after instruction. Column three shows that Student 1 has gained 22.1%; Student 2 and 3 have gained 26%; Student 4 has gained 7.8%; Student 5 has gained 15% and Student 6 has gained 9.7%.

On average, each student has gained a mean of 17.8%. That was quite a significant gain. The difference of scores between pre- and post-test shows that form-focused instruction was effective in improving students' understanding of the verb tense.

The students' final written products also reveal that they have improved significantly as far as simple present tense was concerned. Table IV on the next page shows the results of pre-test 2, post-test 2 and gains of pre-posttest 2.

	Pre-test 2		Post-test 2		Gains
	Raw score	%	Raw score	%	%
Student 1	10/25	40.0	14/25	56.0	16
Student 2	11.5/25	46.0	15/25	60.0	16
Student 3	10/25	40.0	12.5/25	50.0	10
Student 4	10/25	40.0	15.5/25	62.0	22
Student 5	11.5/25	46.0	14/25	56.0	10
Student 6	14/25	60.0	16.5/25	66.0	6
Mean	11.2	45.3	14.6	58.3	13.3

Table IV: Results of pre-test 2, post-test 2 and gains of pre-posttest 2

From Table IV, we can see that three students have scored 60% or above in post-test 2 compared to only one in pre-test 2 (both tests were of the same type, i.e. writing task). No one scored below 50% in the post-test but there were 5 students who obtained below 50% in the pre-test. The mean score is 58.3% for the post-test compared to only 45.3% for the pre-test. On average, the students have gained an improvement of 13.3% in their final writing task.

When I marked the students' post-writing scripts, I realised that students have generally improved in their use of verb tense (simple present tense in this case). A frequency count reveals that all six students have made fewer or very minimal verb tense errors in their writing. Table V on the next page shows the results of frequency count on verb tense errors committed by students in both pre- and post-tests 2.

	Pre-test 2	Post-test 2
Student 1	8	3
Student 2	8	2
Student 3	11	6
Student 4	7	3
Student 5	8	2
Student 6	7	1

Table V: Number of verb tense errors found in pre- and posttests 2

From Table V, it is obvious that all six students made fewer mistakes in terms of verb tense errors in post-test 2 compared to pre-test 2. This means they have grasped the simple present tense well after form-focused instruction. Tense errors were greatly reduced after intervention. In fact, 5 students were able to reduce verb tense errors by more than half in the post-test. I have attached the scripts of a student's pre-test 2 and post-test 2 as Appendix 5. They were the products of Student 1.

Since it was effective using form-focused instruction to teach simple present tense, it must be effective for other tenses as well. Since students were also weak in other tenses, for example, future tense, I decided to try it out on them in the next round upon further reflection and planning (please refer to p.15 of my journal in Appendix VII).

4.3 Results /findings of Third Round

The third round of my study again shows very positive results regarding improvement in student writing after form-focused instruction. Verb tense errors (future tense in this case) were reduced tremendously in students' final writing task (post-test). Table VI below shows the results of pre-test, post-test and gains of pre-posttest.

	Pre-test		Post-test		Gains
	Raw score	%	Raw score	%	%
Student 1	14/25	56	18/25	72	16
Student 2	16.5/25	66	20/25	80	14
Student 3	14/25	56	17/25	68	12
Student 4	14.5/25	58	17/25	68	10
Student 5	15/25	60	18/25	72	12
Student 6	14.5/25	58	18/25	72	14
Mean	14.8	59	18.0	72	13

Table VI: Comparison of pre-test, post-test and gains

From Table VI, we can see that all six students have improved significantly after form-focused instruction. If we compare column two with column three, we can see the gains very clearly as the mean score for pre-test was only 59% but the mean score for post-test was 72%. That means the students wrote better compositions in terms of language after form-focused instruction was given. Each student has improved quite significantly in their writing task because Student 1 has gained 16%, Student 2 and 6 have gained 14% each, Student 3 and 5 have gained 12% each, and Student 4 has gained 10%.

On average, each student has gained a mean of 13%. That means, on average each student has gained 13 more marks out of 100 in their composition task. That was quite a significant improvement indeed.

In order to discuss form-focused instruction in relation to students' actual success in using correct grammatical form, i.e. future tense, a comparison was made between the number of future tense errors committed by students in the pre-test and the number of future tense errors committed by them in the post-test. The results of the frequency count are shown in Table VII below.

	Pre-test	Post-test
Student 1	5	1
Student 2	4	0
Student 3	4	1
Student 4	3	0
Student 5	3	0
Student 6	3	0

Table VII: Number of future tense errors committed in pre-test and post-test

From Table VII, we can see that the form-focused instruction provided during the tutorial class has improved students' ability to use correct grammar form, that is, future tense. This is because after form-focused instruction, students made very few verb tense errors in the post-test. In fact, 4 students did not commit any verb tense error at all. I have attached one of the students' pre- and post-test scripts as Appendix 6. They were produced by Student 5.

4.4 Summary of results / findings

On the whole, I find this study rewarding as it has yielded some positive results. The statistical comparison of grammar errors on compositions supported the students' perception that, in general, the intervention on form was useful to them.

In all the three cycles where form-focused instruction was provided, the students were more accurate in their use of verb tenses (simple present tense and future tense) in their writing. Subject-verb agreement rules were also used more accurately in their writing after form-focused instruction. In short, the findings of the study reveal that students produced better-quality writing (in terms of grammar) after form-focused instruction.

4.5 Interpretations / Evaluations

I noticed that the results in the second round were not as good as those obtained in the first round. For example, in post-test 2, verb tense errors made by students in the second round were more than those made by students in the first round.

This could be attributed to the fact that firstly, students in the first round were already in their second semester of Business Studies but students in the

second round were only in the beginning of their first semester. That means students in the first round have been exposed to English across curriculum for a longer period than students in the second round. Secondly, when I referred back to the information gathered from questionnaires, I noticed that students in the first round were generally better in English as they had obtained better English results in SPM than students in the second round.

Although the results in the second round were not as good as those obtained in the first round, but the effectiveness of form-focused instruction could still be seen clearly.

After checking the students' post-test scripts, I noticed a marked difference in students' improvement in terms of verb tense used. Adjectives, too, seemed to have improved. Maybe it was due to the descriptive sample texts used during instruction. I dare not make any concrete conclusion here, but it was clear that students were influenced by reading / prior knowledge in their writing. I was pleased that they made fewer or minimal mistakes as far as verb tense is concerned.

During instruction time, grammar game proved to be useful to generate interest and provide meaningful practice for the students. Group work and pair work were also proven to be effective for students to have meaningful discussion and interaction.

The results of the third round have reconfirmed my belief that form-focused instruction is effective in helping students to produce better writing. Hence I have a positive answer to my research question, that is, form-focused instruction does result in better L2 writing.

Most importantly, I found that my teaching experience has been enriched. At least now I know that even in a communicative syllabus I still have to teach grammar in an explicit way and link it to writing meaningfully so that students can apply what they have learned in their writing.

Besides that, the study has helped me to be more aware of my own teaching practice: whether it is effective in helping students learn the language; if not, why not and how to improve it. I have learned to be a reflective teacher as a result of being a teacher researcher in my own class, and in my own small way.

In addition, as a result of reading many research findings in journals, theses, books, etc, I have gained some valuable insights myself regarding form-focused instruction, both theory as well as practice.

Furthermore, I was greatly encouraged by the improvement made in students' writing. I believe my small project was useful as I have made some progress in my teaching practice. I believe that 'the moment you recognise a

concern or issue in your teaching practice, and begin to act on it, you have already made progress. With continual efforts, reflection and support, regardless of any survey results, you've actually made progress' (Maria Vithoukas, 1988).

I also think that as an L2 teacher, I should re-assess the place of form-focused instruction in my communicative teaching besides imparting enthusiasm to students and providing them with appropriate materials.

One thing that I liked most about the research project was I could determine my own aims, objectives and methods. Whether the results were positive or negative did not matter so much as it was my choice to experiment in order to find out things. Conducting this project as well as writing out the report was one of the most valuable learning experiences in my life.