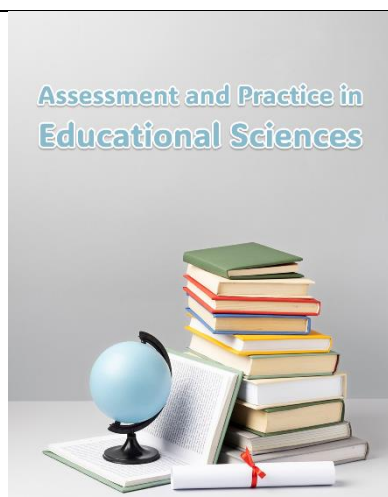




© 2027 the authors. This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) License.

1. Hamid Reza. Karim : Department of English Language Teaching, Farhangian University, Tehran, Iran (Email: hrkarin1@cfu.ac.ir)
2. Sarimah. Shamsudin : Language Academy, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, UTM International Campus, Jalan Semarak, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Article type:
Original Research

Article history:
Received 28 March 2026
Revised 15 July 2026
Accepted 19 July 2026
Initial Publish 28 August 2026
Published online 10 January 2027

How to cite this article:

Karim, H. R., & Shamsudin, S. (2027). Learner Uptake in Focus on Form Episodes: Evidence from an EFL Classroom Setting. *Assessment and Practice in Educational Sciences*, 5(1), 1-13.
<https://doi.org/10.61838/japes.298>

Learner Uptake in Focus on Form Episodes: Evidence from an EFL Classroom Setting

ABSTRACT

This study examines learner uptake within Focus on Form (FoF) episodes in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. Uptake — defined as students' observable responses to form-focused instruction — has been widely employed as an indicator of instructional effectiveness in second language research. Although uptake has been documented extensively in ESL settings, comparatively less attention has been directed toward EFL environments, and even less toward how learners at different proficiency levels respond differently to incidental attention to form. The present study addresses this gap by implementing a FoF instructional approach across eight sessions in four classes at a private English language school in Iran. Focus on Form Episodes (FFE) were identified and analysed to document the nature and frequency of uptake occurrences. A novel distinction between Immediate Uptake (IU) and Delayed Uptake (DU) is introduced and discussed in relation to preemptive and reactive FFE types. Findings reveal that uptake occurred in approximately 30% of all FFEs, with advanced learners demonstrating notably higher uptake rates than intermediate learners, suggesting the pedagogical relevance of learner proficiency in FoF implementation. The findings are discussed in light of recent research on incidental focus on form, corrective feedback timing, and computer-mediated instructional contexts, and implications for both classroom pedagogy and future research design are outlined.

Keywords: learner uptake; Focus on Form (FoF); Focus on Form Episodes (FFE); EFL; corrective feedback

Introduction

The development of communicative language teaching transformed second and foreign language pedagogy by shifting instructional attention from the mastery of isolated grammatical structures toward the ability to use language meaningfully. Yet, the communicative turn also exposed a persistent limitation: sustained exposure to comprehensible input and opportunities for communication do not necessarily ensure the development of accurate target-language forms. Learners may become fluent and strategically competent while continuing to produce stable grammatical, lexical, and phonological deviations. Swain's output-based account was especially influential in showing that comprehension alone does not oblige learners to process language with sufficient syntactic precision and that producing language can push them to test hypotheses, notice gaps, and modify their interlanguage. At the same time, communicative pedagogy has increasingly been understood not as the exclusion

of grammar but as the integration of formal attention into purposeful language use, with task demands and learners' limited attentional resources shaping how successfully meaning and form can be processed together (1-3).

This need to reconcile communicative meaning with linguistic accuracy provided the conceptual foundation for Focus on Form (FoF). Long introduced FoF as a design feature whereby learners' attention is briefly directed to linguistic elements that arise within lessons whose overriding orientation remains communication and meaning. Unlike Focus on FormS, which organizes instruction around a predetermined sequence of discrete grammatical items, FoF preserves the communicative purpose of classroom activity while creating short, contextually motivated shifts toward language form. Subsequent work clarified that such shifts may be triggered by learner difficulty, teacher intervention, task demands, or the communicative relevance of a particular feature. Thus, FoF does not represent a return to decontextualized grammar teaching; rather, it offers a pedagogical compromise in which formal accuracy is addressed at moments when learners are already engaged in interpreting or expressing meaning (4-7).

The theoretical plausibility of FoF is closely associated with attention, awareness, and noticing in second language acquisition. Schmidt argued that linguistic features must be consciously registered in the input before they can become available for further processing, although noticing alone does not guarantee acquisition. From this perspective, brief attention to form may increase the perceptual salience of features that learners would otherwise overlook while concentrating on message content. The effectiveness of such attention, however, depends on cognitive conditions. Because learners possess limited processing capacity, simultaneous attention to meaning, form, fluency, and accuracy can produce competition among task goals, particularly during real-time oral interaction. Input-based tasks, explicit cues, repetition, and carefully calibrated instructional support may reduce this burden, while the effectiveness of instruction may also vary according to the complexity and communicative function of the target feature (3, 8-11).

Within the broader domain of form-focused instruction, an important distinction is made between planned and incidental FoF. Planned FoF is designed in advance to elicit or highlight a selected linguistic feature, whereas incidental FoF emerges spontaneously during meaning-oriented interaction. Incidental episodes may be reactive, occurring after a learner produces a non-target-like form, or preemptive, occurring before an error when a teacher or learner anticipates a linguistic problem or requests information about a form. Reactive episodes are commonly associated with corrective feedback, while preemptive episodes may involve vocabulary questions, clarification requests, metalinguistic explanations, or anticipatory teacher comments. Research has shown that preemptive attention can occupy a substantial place in communicative classrooms and that learners themselves often initiate such episodes, indicating that attention to form is not solely imposed by teachers but may also reflect learners' immediate communicative needs and curiosity about the target language (12-14).

The Focus on Form Episode (FFE) has consequently become a central unit for examining how incidental attention to language unfolds in classroom discourse. An FFE begins when interaction shifts from meaning toward a linguistic feature and ends when the discourse returns to meaning or moves to another form. This analytical unit makes it possible to identify who initiates attention to form, what linguistic category is targeted, what type of feedback is provided, and how the learner responds. The learner's response is commonly described as uptake. Although Chaudron first used the concept in relation to responses following corrective treatment, Lyster and Ranta later operationalized uptake as a learner move occurring after teacher feedback, and subsequent research broadened it to include responses to both reactive and preemptive attention to form. Uptake may involve correct repair, partial repair, continued difficulty, acknowledgment, repetition, or another form of observable engagement with the targeted feature (13, 15-17).

Uptake is pedagogically important because it provides immediate evidence that a learner has attended to and interactionally processed a form-focused move. Nevertheless, it should not be equated automatically with acquisition. A correct repetition

may reflect short-term imitation, while the absence of an overt response does not prove that noticing or learning failed to occur. Uptake is therefore best interpreted as a proximal interactional indicator rather than a definitive measure of durable development. Even within this limited interpretation, however, uptake patterns reveal meaningful differences among feedback techniques. Studies have shown that recasts are often frequent but do not always produce high levels of overt repair, whereas elicitation, metalinguistic feedback, clarification requests, and explicit correction may generate more visible responses because they place stronger demands on learners to retrieve, reformulate, or articulate the target form. The success of uptake also varies according to feedback explicitness, learner readiness, error type, and the opportunities afforded for self-repair (17-22).

Interactionist perspectives help explain why certain FFEs are more likely than others to elicit uptake. Interaction can make problematic forms salient through negative evidence, confirmation checks, clarification, repetition, and modified output. When feedback is connected directly to a learner's own utterance, it may reveal a gap between intended meaning and available linguistic resources, creating an opportunity for hypothesis testing and repair. Yet, the relationship among interaction, uptake, and development is mediated by numerous factors, including the salience of the feedback move, the learner's developmental readiness, the complexity of the target form, the social organization of the classroom, and the methodological procedures used to identify learning. Accordingly, research on interaction has increasingly emphasized the need to distinguish immediate conversational responses from longer-term linguistic change and to employ designs capable of capturing both observable discourse and underlying cognitive processes (23-25).

Much of the foundational evidence on FoF and uptake emerged from English as a Second Language settings, where learners encounter the target language both inside and outside the classroom. English as a Foreign Language settings differ in consequential ways. Learners often have limited contact with English beyond scheduled lessons, teachers and students commonly share a first language, and classroom interaction may be the primary site in which communicative pressure and corrective feedback occur. These conditions can affect the frequency, salience, and perceived necessity of attention to form. Research in EFL classrooms has nevertheless shown that incidental FoF occurs regularly and can support learning across vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. It has also indicated that preemptive episodes frequently target lexical items, whereas reactive episodes are often associated with grammatical or phonological problems, and that uptake rates vary considerably across linguistic domains and classroom configurations (20, 22, 26, 27).

Learner proficiency is a particularly important but insufficiently resolved source of variation in uptake. During communicative interaction, lower-proficiency learners must allocate substantial cognitive resources to lexical retrieval, message formulation, comprehension, and turn management, leaving fewer resources available for noticing and repairing linguistic form. More proficient learners may possess greater automatization, broader linguistic repertoires, and stronger metalinguistic awareness, enabling them to divide attention more effectively between meaning and accuracy. However, higher proficiency does not guarantee uptake, because advanced learners may ignore feedback perceived as irrelevant, implicit, or interactionally disruptive, while intermediate learners may respond successfully when feedback is explicit and the target feature is developmentally accessible. Proficiency should therefore be examined in relation to episode type, feedback characteristics, task demands, and the linguistic feature targeted rather than treated as an isolated predictor (3, 10, 11, 14).

A further issue concerns the temporal organization of feedback and learner response. Most classroom studies identify uptake in the turn immediately following a corrective or form-focused move, which privileges visible, rapid responses and may underrepresent processing that becomes apparent later. Immediate uptake can indicate that the learner recognized the instructional cue while the relevant form remained active in working memory, but delayed uptake may reveal that the learner retained and subsequently reused the form after returning to the communicative topic. Experimental evidence suggests that immediate and delayed corrective feedback can produce different developmental effects depending on target structure, task

complexity, and learner characteristics. Computer-assisted writing research likewise demonstrates that synchronous and asynchronous feedback create different opportunities for reflection, revision, and linguistic performance. These findings support a more temporally differentiated account of uptake that distinguishes responses occurring directly after an FFE from those appearing later in the same interaction (28, 29).

The growing use of synchronous computer-mediated communication has further expanded the contexts in which feedback and uptake are studied. Digital platforms can make written corrections persistent, enable private or multimodal feedback, and provide learners with additional time to inspect a target form. At the same time, online interaction may reduce paralinguistic cues, alter turn-taking, and make oral correction easier to overlook. Teachers' beliefs about electronic corrective feedback do not always correspond with their actual practices, and the perceived effectiveness of feedback may vary according to platform affordances, immediacy, and learner engagement. Recent evidence also suggests that negotiation on form during synchronous interaction can promote learner uptake, particularly when learners participate actively in resolving linguistic problems rather than merely receiving corrections. Accordingly, findings obtained in face-to-face classrooms should not be generalized automatically to online environments, although computer-mediated research provides useful insights into feedback salience, timing, and response opportunities (29-32).

Despite extensive scholarship, several gaps remain. Reported uptake rates vary substantially across studies because researchers examine different learner populations, instructional settings, feedback types, linguistic targets, and coding criteria. Many studies concentrate on ESL classrooms, individual feedback moves, or immediate repair, while fewer investigate incidental FoF in ordinary EFL lessons across proficiency levels. Moreover, preemptive and reactive FFEs are often compared in terms of frequency without tracing whether learners respond immediately or reuse the targeted form later. This leaves uncertainty about whether different episode types generate distinct temporal patterns of uptake and whether learners at different proficiency levels are equally able to capitalize on brief, incidental attention to form. Addressing these issues is important both theoretically, because it refines the relationship among noticing, interaction, output, and uptake, and pedagogically, because it can help teachers determine when and for whom incidental FoF is most productive (16, 21, 26, 28, 32).

Therefore, this study aimed to examine the frequency and nature of learner uptake in incidental Focus on Form Episodes in an EFL classroom context, with particular attention to reactive and preemptive episodes, immediate and delayed uptake, and differences between intermediate and advanced learners.

Methods and Materials

The study was conducted at a private English language institute located in Semnan, Iran, approximately 200 kilometres east of Tehran. The institute operates on a communicative language teaching philosophy, providing an appropriate environment for the implementation and observation of FoF pedagogy. The choice of a private institute setting, rather than a public-school EFL classroom, was deliberate: private institutes in Iran typically employ smaller class sizes, place a stronger emphasis on oral communicative competence, and afford teachers greater latitude to deviate from a fixed syllabus in response to learners' emergent linguistic needs — conditions that are generally considered more conducive to the occurrence of incidental FoF than the often larger, more exam-oriented classes typical of the public education system.

Four EFL classes participated in the study: two advanced and two intermediate. The teaching staff comprised four EFL teachers — three male and one female — all of whom held postgraduate qualifications in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL), with teaching experience ranging from three to over twenty years. The teachers were oriented to the FoF approach prior to data collection and were asked to integrate it into their regular instructional practice, rather than adopting an artificial or scripted approach to error correction; this design choice was intended to maximise the ecological validity of the

data by capturing FoF as it naturally occurs within teachers' existing pedagogical repertoires, rather than as an experimentally imposed intervention.

Student participants were aged between 17 and 25 years, comprising senior high school and undergraduate university students who enrolled voluntarily to supplement their formal English education. Their voluntary participation reflects a relatively high intrinsic motivation for communicative English learning, a factor that should be borne in mind when interpreting the study's findings, as motivational differences between this sample and, for example, compulsory public-school EFL learners may limit the generalisability of the uptake rates reported here to less motivated learner populations.

Data were collected across eight instructional sessions per class through audio recording of classroom interactions. All recordings were fully transcribed, and FFEs were identified and tagged according to established criteria: an FFE was defined as extending from the initiation of attention to a linguistic form to the point at which the discourse returned to a meaning-focused or different-form-focused focus (Ellis et al., 2001a, p. 294). Two trained coders independently reviewed a 20% subsample of the transcripts to identify FFE boundaries and classify each episode as reactive or preemptive; inter-rater agreement was calculated and disagreements were resolved through discussion prior to the coding of the full dataset, following standard practice in classroom interaction research.

The following examples illustrate the two types of FFEs identified in the dataset:

Preemptive FFE (student-initiated):

Student: What is wealthy?

Teacher: Wealthy means rich.

Reactive FFE (teacher-initiated):

Student: Women must permitted to sing.

Teacher: Women must be permitted to sing.

Student: Yes.

Following the tagging of FFEs, uptake instances were identified within the transcripts. In addition to the established successful/unsuccessful distinction, uptake was categorised temporally as either Immediate Uptake (IU) — occurring directly after a corrective or preemptive move — or Delayed Uptake (DU), occurring minutes later following a return to the communicative topic or after engagement with a subsequent FFE. This temporal coding required coders to track each targeted form across the remainder of the session, rather than limiting analysis to the discourse immediately surrounding the originating FFE, in order to capture instances in which learners spontaneously reproduced a previously corrected or highlighted form at a later point in the lesson.

The following examples illustrate each uptake type:

Immediate Uptake (IU):

Student: When he reads his life /lib/.

Teacher: When he reads his life /laɪf/.

Student: He reads life /laɪf/.

Delayed Uptake (DU):

Student: Last night I slepted.

Teacher: [corrects to 'slept'; lesson continues on a different topic]

Student [later]: And then I slept in the bed.

Findings and Results

Overall Uptake Frequency

Across eight instructional sessions totalling approximately 600 minutes (75 minutes per session), a total of 95 uptake instances were identified. This corresponds to an average rate of one uptake occurrence every 6.5 minutes of instruction. By way of comparison, Pouresmaeil and Vali (2023), examining an upper-intermediate free-discussion EFL class, reported an even higher density of incidental FFEs (one every 1.5 minutes), though not all of these episodes resulted in uptake; the discrepancy between FFE frequency and uptake frequency observed across studies reinforces the point made above that raw episode counts should not be conflated with indices of instructional effectiveness. The distribution of Immediate Uptake (IU) and Delayed Uptake (DU) across advanced and intermediate classes, broken down by FFE type, is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Uptake Frequency by Class Level and FFE Type

FFE Type	Advanced Cl. I (IU,DU)	Advanced Cl. II (IU,DU)	Intermediate Cl. III (IU,DU)	Intermediate Cl. IV (IU,DU)	Total (IU,DU)	Total N
Preemptive	(8, 1)	(4, 0)	(11, 0)	(6, 0)	(29, 1)	30
Reactive	(22, 3)	(21, 2)	(11, 1)	(5, 0)	(59, 6)	65
Total	(30, 4)	(25, 2)	(22, 1)	(11, 0)	(88, 7)	95

FFE Frequency and Uptake Rate

The total number of FFEs recorded across all sessions is presented in Table 2. Of the 325 FFEs identified, 188 (approximately 58%) were preemptive and 137 (approximately 42%) were reactive.

Table 2. FFE Frequency by Class Level and Type

FFE Type	Advanced Cl. I	Advanced Cl. II	Intermediate Cl. III	Intermediate Cl. IV	Total
Preemptive	69	31	48	40	188
Reactive	35	57	18	27	137
Total	104	88	66	67	325

With 95 uptake instances recorded across 325 FFEs, the overall uptake rate in this study stands at approximately 30%. This figure aligns closely with that reported by Mackey and Philip (1998), while falling below the notably high rate documented by Ellis et al. (2001a) in an ESL classroom context. The lower rate observed here may reflect characteristic features of EFL learning environments, including reduced exposure to the target language outside the classroom and differences in interactional norms. It is also broadly consistent with more recent findings from EFL contexts: Zhang, Bowen, and Thomas (2025), for instance, similarly reported that the most frequent feedback type in their dataset (recasts) was associated with disproportionately low uptake, suggesting that a substantial share of FFEs — even in classrooms explicitly oriented toward communicative interaction — may fail to generate an observable learner response regardless of instructional setting.

Uptake by FFE Type

Of the total 95 uptake instances, 30 (approximately 32%) occurred within preemptive FFEs, while 65 (approximately 68%) occurred within reactive FFEs. This distribution reflects a pattern in which students were more likely to produce uptake when responding to explicit teacher corrections of actual errors than when responding to teacher or peer preemption of anticipated difficulties. This finding is noteworthy in light of the relative frequencies reported in Table 2: preemptive FFEs were considerably more common overall (188 vs. 137), yet reactive FFEs were more than twice as likely, proportionally, to result in an uptake response. One plausible explanation, consistent with interactionist accounts of feedback salience (Long, 1996), is that reactive FFEs are inherently more communicatively consequential to the learner — an error has occurred, and its correction

bears directly on the success of the learner's own immediately preceding utterance — whereas preemptive FFEs, particularly teacher-initiated ones, may be processed by learners as supplementary information rather than as feedback requiring an active response.

Qualitative analysis of the uptake instances further revealed differences in the linguistic domains targeted across FFE types. Preemptive FFEs predominantly involved lexical and morphological forms, whereas reactive FFEs were more commonly associated with syntactic and phonological targets. This pattern suggests that students tend to seek out vocabulary clarification proactively, while teachers are more likely to correct grammar and pronunciation reactively. This division of labour between preemptive and reactive attention to different linguistic domains echoes findings reported by Pouresmaeil and Gholami (2019), who likewise found that lexical items dominated the preemptive FFEs in their dataset, and it is broadly consistent with Gholami's (2024) more recent distinction between formulaic and non-formulaic uptake, which similarly found that lexically oriented feedback — including feedback on formulaic sequences — tended to be processed and taken up differently from feedback targeting more rule-governed grammatical structures.

Immediate vs. Delayed Uptake

More than 80% of all uptake instances were classified as Immediate Uptake (IU). Both IU and DU instances were treated as successful, given that in all observed cases the learner produced the targeted form correctly either immediately following correction or after a delay. The relatively small proportion of Delayed Uptake (7 out of 95 instances) suggests that while delayed processing of corrective input does occur, it is less frequent in short instructional sessions. This pattern is broadly consistent with the theoretical rationale advanced by Fu and Li (2022), who found that the relative effectiveness of immediate versus delayed corrective feedback depended substantially on task complexity and the cognitive demands placed on learners' working memory at the moment of correction; under conditions of high communicative demand — such as the free-flowing discussion-based lessons observed in the present study — learners may be more likely to act on corrective or preemptive input immediately, while it remains salient in working memory, rather than retaining it for delayed application. Studies involving larger participant groups or longer data collection periods, or employing more sensitive elicitation procedures such as stimulated recall, may uncover a higher incidence of DU than was captured through audio-recording and transcription alone in the present design.

Uptake by Proficiency Level

A notable pattern in the data is the relationship between learner proficiency and uptake frequency. Advanced classes (Classes I and II) accounted for 55 of the 95 uptake instances, representing over 57% of the total. This finding is consistent with theoretical accounts suggesting that learners with greater communicative competence possess the cognitive and linguistic resources necessary to process and act upon form-focused input more effectively during meaning-based interaction. It also resonates with the broader pattern observed by Pouresmaeil and Vali (2023), who found that the effectiveness of incidental FoF varied according to learners' capacity to notice and productively use targeted forms — a capacity plausibly related to overall proficiency level, given that higher-proficiency learners generally possess larger working-memory reserves for processing simultaneous form and meaning demands, in line with Skehan's (1998) limited-capacity model of attention.

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study examined learner uptake during incidental Focus on Form Episodes in four EFL classes and produced several findings relevant to the study of form-focused interaction. Across 325 identified FFEs, learners produced 95 instances of uptake, yielding an overall uptake rate of approximately 29.2%. Preemptive FFEs were more frequent than reactive FFEs,

accounting for 188 and 137 episodes, respectively. Nevertheless, reactive FFEs generated substantially more uptake: 65 of the 95 uptake instances occurred following reactive episodes, compared with 30 following preemptive episodes. Uptake was also predominantly immediate, with 88 instances classified as Immediate Uptake and only seven as Delayed Uptake. Finally, advanced classes produced 61 uptake instances, whereas intermediate classes produced 34, indicating that proficiency level was associated with learners' observable responses to incidental attention to form. Collectively, these findings demonstrate that incidental FoF can generate meaningful engagement with linguistic form in EFL classrooms, but its observable effectiveness varies according to episode type, response timing, and learner proficiency (13, 17, 26).

The overall uptake rate of approximately 29% is broadly compatible with some earlier interaction studies, although it is lower than the rates reported in several communicative ESL classrooms. Mackey and Philip observed learner responses in approximately one-third of the relevant interactional sequences, a proportion close to that obtained in the present study. In contrast, Ellis, Basturkmen, and Loewen documented considerably higher uptake in communicative ESL lessons, while Lyster and Ranta reported uptake in more than half of corrective feedback sequences. Such variation indicates that uptake rates are highly context-sensitive and should not be interpreted independently of instructional setting, learner population, feedback type, and coding procedures. The comparatively moderate rate in the present study may partly reflect the EFL environment, where learners have limited exposure to English outside the classroom and fewer opportunities to reinforce newly noticed forms through everyday communication (13, 16, 18, 19).

The finding that fewer than one-third of FFEs resulted in observable uptake does not imply that the remaining episodes were pedagogically ineffective. Uptake is an immediate discourse-based indicator showing that a learner has responded overtly to a form-focused move, but it is not synonymous with noticing, intake, or acquisition. Learners may attend to corrective information without producing an immediate verbal response, particularly when they are concentrating on message development or listening to another participant. Some learners may also demonstrate learning through more accurate production at a later time that falls outside the immediate interactional sequence. Therefore, the present uptake rate should be interpreted as a conservative measure of visible engagement rather than a complete representation of cognitive processing or language development. This interpretation is consistent with research distinguishing interactional responses from long-term acquisition and emphasizing the need to connect classroom discourse data with delayed measures of learning (8, 9, 24, 25).

One of the clearest findings was the contrast between the frequency of preemptive and reactive FFEs and their corresponding uptake rates. Although preemptive FFEs constituted approximately 58% of all episodes, only 30 of the 188 preemptive episodes, or about 16%, generated uptake. In comparison, 65 of the 137 reactive episodes produced uptake, representing approximately 47%. Thus, reactive FFEs were nearly three times as likely as preemptive FFEs to elicit an observable learner response. This result suggests that the instructional salience of an episode may be more important than its frequency. Reactive attention is tied directly to a learner's own non-target-like production and therefore creates an immediate communicative reason to reconsider, reformulate, or confirm the form. By contrast, preemptive information may be processed as explanation or supplementary input without requiring the learner to demonstrate an overt response (16, 17, 23).

The greater uptake following reactive FFEs can also be explained through the interaction hypothesis and the role of modified output. When teachers respond to a learner error, the feedback highlights a mismatch between the learner's interlanguage and the target-language form. This contrast may increase the perceptual salience of the form and encourage the learner to test a new hypothesis through repair. Producing the corrected form requires more active processing than simply hearing an explanation, because the learner must modify the preceding utterance while retaining its communicative meaning. In this respect, reactive FFEs bring together negative evidence, noticing, and pushed output, all of which are considered potentially beneficial to second language development. The finding therefore supports the view that feedback is especially productive when it prompts learners

to participate actively in resolving a linguistic problem rather than leaving them as passive recipients of correction (1, 18, 23, 25).

The predominance of preemptive FFEs nevertheless remains pedagogically significant. Their high frequency indicates that form-focused attention in communicative lessons does not arise only in response to error. Learners and teachers may anticipate linguistic difficulty, request vocabulary, clarify meanings, or discuss grammatical and morphological features before a communicative breakdown occurs. Previous research has similarly shown that preemptive episodes are common in meaning-focused classrooms and are frequently concerned with lexical items. Pouresmaeil and Gholami found a particularly strong presence of preemptive lexical FFEs in free-discussion EFL classes, suggesting that learners often initiate attention when they lack the vocabulary needed to express an intended meaning. The lower uptake rate following such episodes may consequently reflect the nature of the interaction rather than weak learning potential: a definition or explanation may enable the learner to understand subsequent discourse without creating an immediate need to repeat the form (12, 14, 26).

Differences among linguistic targets may also have contributed to the contrasting uptake rates. In the present study, preemptive FFEs were primarily associated with lexical and morphological forms, whereas reactive episodes more commonly targeted syntax and pronunciation. Lexical questions can often be resolved through brief definitions, translations, or examples, after which interaction continues without obligatory production. In contrast, syntactic and phonological corrections are often attached directly to an utterance and can be repeated or reformulated immediately. Previous studies have shown that uptake varies across vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, formulaic language, and non-formulaic errors because these targets impose different cognitive and productive demands. Incidental FoF can facilitate learning across linguistic domains, but the probability of observable uptake depends on whether the feedback naturally creates an opportunity for immediate use (20, 22, 27).

The distribution of feedback and uptake is also consistent with findings showing that highly frequent feedback types are not necessarily the most successful in eliciting learner repair. Recasts, for example, preserve conversational flow and provide a target-like model but may be interpreted as confirmation of meaning rather than correction of form. More explicit techniques, including elicitation, metalinguistic feedback, clarification requests, and direct correction, often produce higher uptake because their corrective function is easier to recognize. Zhang and colleagues similarly found that recasts dominated teachers' oral feedback practices but resulted in relatively limited uptake, whereas more form-salient feedback moves elicited stronger learner responses. Accordingly, the present reactive advantage may have emerged not simply because an error had occurred, but because reactive episodes provided clearer evidence that a response or reformulation was interactionally expected (16, 19, 21).

The temporal analysis revealed that 88 of the 95 uptake instances, or approximately 92.6%, occurred immediately after the form-focused move. Only seven instances were delayed. The dominance of immediate uptake is understandable in oral classroom interaction, where a corrected form is temporarily active in working memory and the turn-taking structure provides an immediate opportunity for repetition or repair. Once the discourse moves to another topic, the targeted form may lose salience, and learners must allocate their attention to new communicative content. Under such conditions, responding immediately is cognitively less demanding than retaining the corrective information and retrieving it later. This pattern aligns with limited-capacity accounts of language processing, which propose that learners have difficulty attending simultaneously to meaning, form, fluency, and accuracy during real-time communication (3, 9).

However, the seven instances of Delayed Uptake represent a theoretically important finding. These responses indicate that some learners retained a targeted form beyond the immediate corrective sequence and subsequently incorporated it into later discourse. Delayed Uptake may therefore reflect a different type of processing from direct repetition. Immediate uptake can sometimes be based on short-term imitation, whereas delayed reuse requires the learner to maintain or retrieve the corrected representation after attention has shifted elsewhere. Research on feedback timing has shown that immediate and delayed

correction can influence development differently depending on the linguistic target, task demands, and learner cognitive characteristics. The present distinction between Immediate and Delayed Uptake extends this temporal perspective from the delivery of feedback to the timing of learners' observable responses (28, 29).

The relatively small number of delayed responses should not be interpreted as evidence that delayed processing was generally absent. The data were derived from classroom transcripts, meaning that only forms reproduced overtly during the observed sessions could be classified as Delayed Uptake. Learners may have recalled and used corrected forms after the recording period, in later lessons, in written assignments, or during private language practice. In addition, some form-focused information may have influenced comprehension without appearing in subsequent production. Studies of synchronous and asynchronous electronic feedback indicate that the temporal structure of the instructional environment affects how learners inspect, revise, and reuse corrective information. Written and asynchronous contexts may be particularly conducive to delayed responses because feedback remains visually available and learners have more time to reflect before producing revisions (29-31).

Proficiency level was another important source of variation. Based on the class-level frequencies, advanced learners produced 61 of the 95 uptake instances, or approximately 64%, whereas intermediate learners produced 34, or approximately 36%. Advanced learners may have been better able to notice and process form-focused information while remaining engaged with communicative meaning. Their larger vocabulary, more developed grammatical system, and greater automaticity may have reduced the cognitive effort required for message construction, leaving additional attentional capacity for analyzing feedback and modifying output. They may also have possessed stronger metalinguistic knowledge, enabling them to interpret implicit correction and connect it with previously learned rules. This explanation is compatible with cognitive accounts of task performance and evidence that the effectiveness of form-focused instruction depends partly on learner readiness and the complexity of the targeted linguistic feature (3, 10, 11).

The lower uptake frequency among intermediate learners does not necessarily indicate weaker motivation or unwillingness to engage. Instead, these learners may have faced greater competition between meaning and form. When lexical retrieval and sentence construction already consume substantial processing resources, even useful corrective feedback may interrupt communication or exceed available working-memory capacity. Intermediate learners may therefore require clearer cues, slower pacing, repeated models, or opportunities to revisit the form after the communicative task. Research on teachers' beliefs and electronic feedback suggests that feedback effectiveness depends not only on whether correction is provided but also on its accessibility, explicitness, timing, and compatibility with learners' proficiency. Digital environments may offer useful supplementary opportunities because corrections can be displayed, stored, and reviewed after the pressure of oral interaction has passed (30-32).

The findings further demonstrate that face-to-face EFL classrooms remain productive environments for negotiating form, even when uptake does not occur after every episode. The overall rate indicates that learners responded visibly to a meaningful proportion of incidental interventions, while the reactive advantage shows that corrections connected to learners' immediate communicative production are especially likely to generate engagement. Research in synchronous computer-mediated communication similarly suggests that uptake increases when learners participate in negotiation on form and are encouraged to respond to feedback. Nevertheless, online and face-to-face environments may differ in feedback salience, turn organization, persistence of corrected forms, and the availability of nonverbal cues. The present results therefore provide a useful face-to-face baseline against which future computer-mediated and blended EFL studies can compare uptake patterns (29, 30, 32).

Overall, the results support the pedagogical value of incidental FoF while also showing that not all FFEs are equally likely to generate observable uptake. Reactive episodes were considerably more productive than preemptive episodes, immediate

responses predominated over delayed responses, and advanced learners displayed more uptake than intermediate learners. These patterns are consistent with theories emphasizing noticing, feedback salience, modified output, and limited attentional capacity. At the same time, the study extends previous research by introducing a temporal distinction between Immediate and Delayed Uptake and applying it across reactive and preemptive FFEs in an EFL classroom setting. Uptake should not be treated as direct proof of acquisition, but its distribution offers valuable evidence about the interactional conditions under which learners attend to and act upon linguistic form (4, 8, 25, 27).

This study has several limitations. The participants were drawn from only four classes in one private language institute, limiting the generalizability of the findings to other EFL contexts, including public schools, universities, intensive programs, and online courses. The relatively small number of classes also made it difficult to separate the effect of learner proficiency from possible teacher, class-size, motivation, and instructional-style differences. Because uptake was identified from audio-recorded classroom interaction, nonverbal responses and unspoken noticing could not be captured. Delayed Uptake was limited to forms reused within the recorded sessions and therefore did not include later use in subsequent lessons or outside the classroom. Finally, uptake was treated as evidence of immediate engagement, but the study did not employ posttests or longitudinal measures to determine whether the targeted forms were retained and incorporated into learners' developing linguistic systems.

Future studies should include larger and more diverse samples across different institutional settings, proficiency levels, age groups, and instructional media. Longitudinal designs could track targeted forms across multiple lessons and administer immediate and delayed posttests to determine whether Immediate and Delayed Uptake predict durable learning differently. Researchers should also examine the interaction among FFE type, feedback technique, linguistic target, task complexity, learner motivation, and working-memory capacity. Stimulated recall interviews, learner journals, eye-tracking, screen recordings, and written uptake sheets could supplement discourse analysis and identify instances of noticing that do not produce an immediate verbal response. Comparative studies involving face-to-face, synchronous online, asynchronous, and blended classrooms would further clarify how instructional medium affects feedback salience and the timing of learner uptake.

EFL teachers should integrate brief attention to form into meaningful classroom communication while avoiding excessive correction that disrupts fluency or learner confidence. Reactive feedback should provide learners with a clear opportunity to self-correct, reformulate, or repeat the target form rather than merely hear the correction. Preemptive explanations should be followed by a short production opportunity so learners can actively use newly introduced vocabulary or structures. Teachers working with intermediate learners should consider more explicit cues, slower pacing, repetition, visual support, and opportunities to revisit corrected forms after communicative activities. Recording frequently targeted errors, recycling them in later tasks, and using digital tools to preserve and review feedback may also increase the likelihood that immediate classroom attention develops into accurate and sustained language use.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our appreciation and gratitude to all those who helped us carrying out this study.

Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles were adhered in conducting and writing this article.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

Funding

This research was carried out independently with personal funding and without the financial support of any governmental or private institution or organization.

References

1. Swain M. Communicative competence: Some roles of comprehensible input and comprehensible output in its development. In: Gass SM, Madden CG, editors. *Input in Second Language Acquisition*: Newbury House; 1985. p. 235-53.
2. Nunan D, Carter R. *The Cambridge Guide to Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages*: Cambridge University Press; 2001.
3. Skehan P. *A Cognitive Approach to Language Learning*: Oxford University Press; 1998.
4. Long MH. Focus on form: A design feature in language teaching methodology. In: de Bot K, Ginsberg RB, Kramsch C, editors. *Foreign Language Research in Cross-Cultural Perspective*: John Benjamins; 1991. p. 39-52.
5. Doughty C, Williams J. *Focus on Form in Classroom Second Language Acquisition*: Cambridge University Press; 1998.
6. Long MH, Robinson P. Focus on form: Theory, research, and practice. In: Doughty CJ, Williams J, editors. *Focus on Form in Classroom Second Language Acquisition*: Cambridge University Press; 1998. p. 15-41.
7. Ellis R, Basturkmen H, Loewen S. Preemptive focus on form in the ESL classroom. *TESOL Quarterly*. 2001;35(3):407-32. doi: 10.2307/3588029.
8. Schmidt RW. The role of consciousness in second language learning. *Applied Linguistics*. 1990;11(2):129-58. doi: 10.1093/applin/11.2.129.
9. Schmidt RW. Consciousness and foreign language learning: A tutorial on the role of attention and awareness in learning. In: Schmidt R, editor. *Attention and Awareness in Foreign Language Learning*: University of Hawai'i Press; 1995. p. 1-65.
10. Shintani N. *Input-Based Tasks in Foreign Language Instruction for Young Learners*: John Benjamins; 2016.
11. Spada N, Tomita Y. Interactions between type of instruction and type of language feature: A meta-analysis. *Language Learning*. 2010;60(2):263-308. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-9922.2010.00562.x.
12. Ellis R. Introduction: Investigating form-focused instruction. *Language Learning*. 2001;51(Supplement 1):1-46. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-1770.2001.tb00013.x.
13. Ellis R, Basturkmen H, Loewen S. Learner uptake in communicative ESL lessons. *Language Learning*. 2001;51(2):281-318. doi: 10.1111/1467-9922.00156.
14. Nassaji H, Fotos S. *Teaching Grammar in Second Language Classrooms: Integrating Form-Focused Instruction in Communicative Context*: Routledge; 2011.
15. Chaudron C. A descriptive model of discourse in the corrective treatment of learners' errors. *Language Learning*. 1977;27(1):29-46. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-1770.1977.tb00290.x.
16. Lyster R, Ranta L. Corrective feedback and learner uptake: Negotiation of form in communicative classrooms. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*. 1997;19(1):37-66. doi: 10.1017/S0272263197001034.

17. Loewen S. Uptake in incidental focus on form in meaning-focused ESL lessons. *Language Learning*. 2004;54(1):153-88. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-9922.2004.00251.x.
18. Mackey A, Philip J. Conversational interaction and second language development: Recasts, responses, and red herrings? *The Modern Language Journal*. 1998;82(3):338-56. doi: 10.1111/j.1540-4781.1998.tb01211.x.
19. Panova I, Lyster R. Patterns of corrective feedback and uptake in an adult ESL classroom. *TESOL Quarterly*. 2002;36(4):573-95. doi: 10.2307/3588241.
20. Wilang JD, Teo A. Predictors of successful uptake following different corrective feedback types in EFL classrooms. *PASAA: Journal of Language Teaching and Learning in Thailand*. 2018;55:1-28.
21. Zhang C, Bowen NEJA, Thomas N. Oral corrective feedback and learner uptake: An analysis of Chinese high-school teachers' practices in a national teaching competition. *Classroom Discourse*. 2025;437-60. doi: 10.1080/19463014.2025.2474233.
22. Gholami L. Oral corrective feedback and learner uptake in L2 classrooms: Non-formulaic vs. formulaic errors. *Language Teaching Research*. 2024;28(3):860-89. doi: 10.1177/13621688211021560.
23. Long MH. The role of the linguistic environment in second language acquisition. In: Ritchie WC, Bhatia TK, editors. *Handbook of Second Language Acquisition*: Academic Press; 1996. p. 413-68.
24. Mackey A, Gass SM. Pushing the methodological boundaries in interaction research: An introduction to the special issue. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*. 2006;28(2):169-78. doi: 10.1017/S0272263106060086.
25. Nassaji H. *The Interactional Feedback Dimension in Instructed Second Language Learning: Linking Theory, Research, and Practice*: Bloomsbury Academic; 2015.
26. Pouresmaeil A, Gholami J. Incidental focus-on-form in a free discussion language class: Types, linguistic foci and uptake rate. *The Language Learning Journal*. 2019;47(5):653-65. doi: 10.1080/09571736.2017.1364783.
27. Pouresmaeil A, Vali M. The effects of incidental focus on form on learning vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. *Language Teaching Research*. 2023. doi: 10.1177/13621688231185419.
28. Fu M, Li S. The effects of immediate and delayed corrective feedback on L2 development. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*. 2022;44(1):2-34. doi: 10.1017/S0272263120000388.
29. Cheng X, Zhang LJ. Investigating synchronous and asynchronous written corrective feedback in a computer-assisted environment: EFL learners' linguistic performance and perspectives. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*. 2024;1-30. doi: 10.1080/09588221.2024.2315070.
30. Uludag O. Exploring the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices of oral corrective feedback in synchronous computer-mediated communication. *Heliyon*. 2024;10(4):e29507. doi: 10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e29507.
31. Asiri AS, Khadawardi HA. Teachers' perceptions of electronic corrective feedback and its impact on EFL learners' uptake. *Arab World English Journal*. 2024;10:204-18. doi: 10.24093/awej/call10.14.
32. Al-wossabi SAN. EFL learners' negotiation on form during synchronous computer-mediated communication: The role of corrective feedback in EFL learners' uptake. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*. 2026;16(4):1175-86. doi: 10.17507/tpls.1604.13.