





## **Enhancing EFL Learners' Reading Comprehension through Explicit Instruction of Formulaic Language – An Experimental Study**

Hassan El Garras<sup>1</sup> & Abdallah Ghaicha<sup>2</sup> & Youssef Oufela<sup>3</sup>


<sup>1</sup> Ph.D. in Applied Linguistics, English Department, Ibnou Zohr University, Agadir, Morocco

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8817-2939>

<sup>2</sup> Ph.D. in Sciences of Education, English Department, Ibnou Zohr University, Agadir, Morocco

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-7196-984X>

<sup>3</sup> Ph.D. in Applied Linguistics, English Department, Ibnou Zohr University, Agadir, Morocco

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-3601-1606>

Correspondence: Hassan El Garras, Ibnou Zohr University, Morocco

Email: [hassan.elgarras@edu.uiz.ac.ma](mailto:hassan.elgarras@edu.uiz.ac.ma)

DOI: 10.53103/cjlls.v5i3.213

### **Abstract**

The current quantitative study investigated effects of formulaic language (FcL) explicit instruction on Moroccan EFL learners' reading comprehension. It followed an experimental design with a pre-test, treatment, and posttest. The main body of participants in this study was composed of 84 intermediate EFL high school students. They were exposed to ten-week intervention sessions through which they received explicit instruction of 40 formulaic sequences. The treatment group was exposed to an explicit form of instruction, while the control group received more implicit communicative form of teaching. The results from the paired samples t-test showed that the learners in both study conditions made significant gains in reading comprehension; however, the independent samples t-test could not reveal any statistically significant difference between the two study conditions. The current study shed light on the effects of FcL explicit instruction on English language learning and its benefits, especially in EFL settings.

Keywords: EFL, Reading Comprehension, Vocabulary, Formulaic Language, Explicit Instruction

### **Introduction**

A great interest has evolved in applied linguistics on the value of conducting both empirical and pedagogical research on formulaic language instruction. Having a rich repertoire of FcL promotes reading comprehension (Kremmel, Brunfaut, & Alderson, 2015; Xu, 2016) since vocabulary is considered a critical element for successful reading (Nation, 2013; Schmitt, 2010; Susoy & Tanyer, 2019). Several studies reported positive effects of FcL knowledge on different language skills (Rafieyan, 2018; Wood, 2015, 2016).

On the other hand, presenting EFL learners with input that contains several formulaic sequences without helping them and drawing their attention to notice the complex nature of these phrases tends to cause breakdowns in comprehension. Literature includes different teaching approaches for targeting FcL. One fundamental approach in this regard is the form-focused instruction (Long, 1991), which attempts to expand and deepen language learners' repertoire of FcL.

Formulaic language occupies a large portion of English discourse (Conklin & Schmitt, 2012; Erman & Warren, 2000); it includes categories such as collocations (strong coffee), phrasal verbs (stand for), and lexical bundles (in terms of). The estimates that have been reported in recent years mention that most native speakers' speech could account as formulaic. According to Erman and Warren (2000), more than 58% of spoken English discourse and 52 % of written discourse is composed of FcL.

Research has reported that non-native language learners encounter different types of difficulties regarding FcL acquisition, mainly of recognition and retention. For example, Moroccan EFL learners were reported to face difficulties in their recognition and vocabulary retention skills (El garras et. al, 2025; Nouri & Zerhouni, 2016). Thus, it is important to help learners notice and be aware of the form and meaning of FcL. In fact, a growing research interest has targeted this category of lexicon due to its effects on pedagogy of second language acquisition, particularly that which concerns adult language learners. The question of how FcL impacts language skills has been attracting more and more research (Alhassan & Wood, 2015; Conklin & Schmitt, 2012; Wood, 2010).

The current study attempted to investigate how form-focused instruction of FcL affects reading skills of Moroccan EFL learners. Understanding this relationship is essential to better understand how to incorporate formulaic sequences in L2 pedagogy. The study adopted a quantitative experimental research design with pretest, treatment, and posttest.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Formulaic Language and Language Learning**

According to Schmidt (1994), learning happens after noticing takes place. Accordingly, learners first should pay attention to linguistic forms within the input. Attention is thought to be an "essential prerequisite" for noticing (Long, 2015, p. 51). The latter condition is vital in language acquisition, and without it very little can be achieved. Many L2 learners do not actually pay attention to formulaic sequences in text and pass unnoticed. Having learners develop a habit of noticing and recording instances of FcL can be an effective initial step.

Formulaic sequences are found to serve different purposes and are widespread in the English discourse. A major role that was discussed in the literature is the ease with which FcL is processed and retrieved, since they are cognitively treated as if they are single

words (Conklin & Schmitt, 2012; Vilkaite, 2016). This could be clarified by Sinclair's (1991) who mentioned these examples: "*strong tea, give up, kick the bucket, in front of, what's the matter, etc.*" (p. 110). Besides, formulaic sequences are thought to save time and energy that is usually invested in creating novel expressions (Willis & Willis, 2006). It has also been claimed that they enable non-native users to sound more like native speakers of English (Bybee, 2002).

Several studies have reported a positive correlation between FcL usage and learners' performance in writing skills (Dai & Ding, 2010; Lewis, 2017), in reading comprehension (Kremmel, Brunfaut, & Alderson, 2017; Martinez & Murphy, 2011; Boers & Lindstromberg, 2012), in speaking skills (Hsu & Chiu, 2008; McGuire & Larsen-Hall, 2017; Nguyen, 2014; Stengers et al., 2010, 2011). In recent research, Yeldham (2018) studied how FcL presence impacts language learners' lower-level processing of listening skills. The 126 intermediate-level participants listened and transcribed four different texts. The researcher hypothesized that learners would process formulaic sequences in an easier manner in comparison to texts that have less or no FcL. This rationale is based on the notion that FcL is processed faster and more holistically than surrounding non-formulaic or single words. After analyzing and comparing learners' productions, the researcher found that FcL was identified relatively in a successful manner and that FcL presence facilitated learners' lower level listening skills.

Most intervention research that has been conducted in hopes of developing L2 learners' FcL knowledge adopted incidental teaching methods (Cid, 2019; Karami & Bowles, 2019; Peters, 2012). These studies implemented teaching strategies, such as raising awareness and visual enhancement. The current study is going to experiment with more explicit teaching strategies recommended by scholars and researchers in applied linguistics, including Wood (2015) and Long (2015). This approach is a reaction to criticism that implicit or incidental practices received (McGuire & Larsen-Hall, 2017; Wood, 2010), since they have not led to considerable results in developing learners' knowledge of FcL (McGuire & Larsen-Hall, 2017; Nguyen, 2014). For example, Ellis (2016) argued that text enhancement could lead to positive results, but it should be supplemented with more effective and explicit techniques.

Explicit instruction is one of the teaching methods that has been suggested to increase L2 learners' uptake of FcL (Laufer, 2006). Using form-focused instruction (FFI) deserves more attention and research in language classes, mainly in teaching formulaic sequences. It is logical, therefore, to provide learning opportunities for L2 students to be aware of FcL and get engaged in more explicit learning. It seems plausible also to provide room for focus on FcL in language teaching materials. Youngblood (2014) added that explicit learning can include both inductive and deductive scenarios which draw attention to a rule and how it can be applied. Nation (2013) illustrated that in explicit instruction, learners engage in activities such as using translation, using dictionaries, flash cards, doing

exercises, etc.

In order to implement the FFI to language teaching, there are theoretically two methods that allow targeting FcL in EFL classes, either by using *focus on form* or *focus on forms*. It was Long (1991) who first coined these terms. According to Long, *focus on forms* refers to activities and lessons in which linguistic forms are targeted inside the classroom following a clear syllabus that often lays out what language teachers are to cover and in which order. This teaching approach attempts to directly target language forms in a systematic manner. In contrast, *focus on form* usually happens in learning situations that are meaning-oriented. Teachers applying this procedure avoid overtly targeting language forms since the emphasis is on communication.

Given this context, investigating how explicit instruction contributes to reading comprehension is worth studying. Second, being conscious of the importance of FcL in written and spoken discourse, a number of researchers called for the need to incorporate them in EFL classroom (Alhassan & Wood 2015; Hatami, 2015; Liou & Chen, 2018). Exposing learners to explicit forms of instruction can facilitate their acquisition, especially if we know that many EFL learners encounter learning difficulties regarding FcL acquisition because of their complex nature (Boers & Lindstromberg, 2009).

### **Empirical Studies on Reading Comprehension**

Reading skills have been allotted the least attention concerning the study of formulaic sequences. In 2010, Hsu conducted a short intervention study in which he asked students to engage in a group discussion revolving around a list of collocations along with their Chinese equivalents. Next, learners were required to write sentences using the given collocations. A different experimental group was engaged in a similar activity, but this time using single words. A control group was also included but it was not exposed to any instruction. The findings from the learners' reading comprehension and vocabulary retention tests indicated that the collocation teaching experimental group enhanced their performance.

In a different study, Tekingul (2013) conducted a similar study which aimed at learning about whether explicit collocation teaching had a significant impact on learners' reading comprehension compared to explicit teaching of single words. The researcher included two treatment groups and employed a quasi-experimental design with pretest and posttest. The participants were 50 third year pre-service teachers whose ages ranged from 20 to 25 years old, 12 of which were females and 38 were males. One group received explicit instruction of collocations while the other received single-item vocabulary teaching followed by reading comprehension questions. These questions were aimed at eliciting target collocations in the answers. The researcher made use of several tools including a vocabulary knowledge scale, vocabulary pretest, single-item vocabulary instruction, collocation instruction, and reading comprehension. The findings following the

two-tailed t-test significance showed that the values were higher than (0.05). The researcher added that the results did not produce significant differences between the two treatment groups.

In the same line of argument, Kremmel, Brunfaut, and Alderson (2017) investigated the role of FcL knowledge in EFL learners' reading ability. They used a mixed-methods design. The researchers recruited 418 learners from 6 different secondary schools in Austria whose average age was 16 years old. Most of the participants (86 %) had German L1 background. To answer the research questions, the researchers conducted two different studies. In the first one, they measured the impact of syntactic, vocabulary and formulaic competence on reading comprehension through running structural equation modeling. In the second study, they ran a more qualitative study in nature to investigate the use of FcL expressions via think-aloud protocols. To measure learners' FcL knowledge, the researchers made use of Martinez' (2011) test of formulaic sequences. After analyzing the results, it was observed that the FcL knowledge condition did better than the classical vocabulary and syntax measure as predictors of successful reading performance. Knowledge of FcL emerged as a key contributor of reading comprehension. They argued that formulaic sequences operate the same way as individual words.

A sizeable portion of SLA research has indicated that vocabulary knowledge, including that of FcL, is instrumental for reading comprehension. Several studies found that acquiring a wide vocabulary repertoire positively correlates with better reading comprehension (Ibrahim et al. 2016; Nouri & Zerhouni, 2016; Ocampo & McNeill, 2019), both in second and foreign language settings. Nation (2006) argued that learners should be equipped with 8000-word families to be able understand different types of texts. Nation (1990) made a distinction between receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge. Receptive vocabulary refers to a learner's ability to recall the meaning of words and phrases when reading or listening, while productive vocabulary involves the ability to produce and use language to express different meanings.

Most studies that were cited above concern higher language proficiency learners and implemented more implicit methods of FcL instruction. The study at hand attempts to investigate the impact that explicit FcL instruction could have on intermediate EFL learners' reading comprehension.

### **Research Objective**

The objective of this study is to investigate the effect of FcL explicit instruction on Moroccan EFL learners' reading comprehension.

### **Research Question**

This research is guided by the following question:

To what extent can explicit instruction of FcL affect Moroccan EFL learners' reading comprehension?

### **Methodology**

This study adopted an experimental research design with a pretest, treatment, and posttest. Two intact intermediate-level classes took part in this research: the experimental group (n=51), and the control group (n=33). The experimental group underwent an intervention through which they received an explicit form of focused instruction—*Focus on forms*, while the control group received an implicit form of focused instruction—*Focus on form*. The treatment period lasted for 10 weeks with a total of 15 hours of instruction, 1.5 hours per week.

### **Participants**

The main pool of participants included 84 EFL students following their studies in a high school level education, in a rural region of Marrakech, Morocco. The participants were selected based on convenience sampling belonging to two intact groups. These students receive the same number of hours of English, 3 hours per week. They all have the same English language background, in the sense that at the time of the treatment, they all were on their third year of studying English (level 3). The participants also share the same linguistic background (Amazigh language). Their age ranges from 16 to 18 years old.

### **Selection of Target FcL in the Study**

First, it is worth mentioning that all 40 expressions occur in the reading materials that are used during intervention sessions; that is to say, learners encounter them within context. Some of the target formulaic sequences have equivalents in well documented academic lists such as Martinez and Schmitt's (2012) PHRASE List, which is one of the most cited three-word phrases. Another popular corpus is the Academic Formulas List (AFL) which is compiled by Simpson-Vlach and Ellis (2010).

The selection process is based on multiple considerations. The main criterion is the degree of frequency. Nation (2001) and Hatami (2014) maintained that frequency is the major indicator of how useful a vocabulary item is. In this regard, a number of target FcL expressions were validated by their frequency degree in COCA. In addition, the selection method was conducted keeping in mind that the target formulaic sequences are pedagogically relevant to learners' needs and are recommended by L2 pedagogical syllabuses (Martinez & Schmitt, 2012).

### **Intervention Materials**

The reading comprehension texts used in the treatment sessions were adopted from two English language textbooks. The first one was Strategic Reading 1, by Jack C. Richard and Samuela Eckstut Didier, and published by Cambridge University Press, 2012, 2nd edition. The second textbook was Active Skills for Reading 1 and 2, which was written by Neil J. Anderson and published by the National Geographic Learning, Cengage Learning, 2013, 3rd edition. These textbooks focus on preparing language learners for academic studies. The texts used are of medium length (200-400 words). The reading materials are very compelling, include up-to-date authentic and diverse topics, and are rich with formulaic sequences which are the target of the treatment sessions.

### **The treatment**

The researcher followed explicit teaching techniques of noticing, generating and retrieving, as recommended by Nation (2001), Hatami (2015), and Liou and Chen (2018). Below is an illustration of the FFI mode followed in each condition.

#### **Focus on Form Condition**

During the first stage of noticing, learners were given hand-outs with texts with enhanced target FcL (Peters, 2012). Other activities included a few comprehension questions so that the learners could grasp the key points made in the text (Rafeiyan, 2018). During the retrieval stage, the participants were engaged in an activity called the disappearing text (Nation & Newton, 2009). A short text of approximately 60 words long was written on the board or projected on the screen containing five-to-seven formulaic sequences. The teacher invited a student to read it aloud. Next, the teacher randomly erased parts of the text. Then, a different student read the text again supplying the missing words. This process continued until there was no more FcL items on the board (Hatami, 2015; Rafeiyan, 2018). The generating stage gave learners opportunities to create meaningful products and engage in more cognitive engagement tasks (Laufer & Girsai, 2008), such as discussions, dialogues, or producing short paragraphs (Hatami, 2015; Liou & Chen, 2018; Tekingul, 2013).

#### **Focus on Forms Condition**

In the first stage of noticing, the teacher led learners to find and notice formulaic sequences in context. He helped them discover and notice their form, usage, and meaning. Other activities included a few comprehension questions to help students grasp the key points made in the text. Raising learners' awareness is regarded as "the most critical task for the language teacher" (Hatami, 2015, p. 119). During the retrieval stage, in addition to

the disappearing text technique, learners were engaged in vocabulary exercises, such as gap-fill tasks which allow to elicit FcL from learners (Jones & Haywood, 2004), blanking out key expressions in which the text is put away and learners are given a new one with blanks (Ahmad, 2019), and matching (Tekingul, 2013). In the generating stage, learners were given a list of 5 to 7 target formulaic sequences which they used to reconstruct the text that they had read at the beginning of the session or producing a new one.

### **Data Collection: Pretest and Posttest Design**

As part of the experimental design, the researcher administered the pretest, treatment, and posttest in their respective order. Learners' reading comprehension skills as well as receptive vocabulary skills are investigated. Assessment materials are adopted from well-established and documented evaluation tools. The tasks that measured learners' reading comprehension were adopted from IELTS sample reading tasks and were in line with recommendations of the official, national pedagogical guidelines for teaching English to high school students (English Language Guidelines, 2007). Therefore, all the tasks under this section targeted developing learners' reading comprehension competencies, such as reading for gist and details, identifying main ideas of each paragraph, and inferring word and phrase meanings from context (see Appendix A).

Three weeks before the treatment was initiated, the pretest was administered to both study groups. On the 11th week, and directly after the treatment sessions, the posttest was administered. In terms of assessing learners' ability to notice and understand FcL in context, learners were asked to complete reading comprehension and vocabulary tasks targeting certain formulaic sequences. This stage aimed at finding out the extent to which their ability to notice and comprehend FcL improved following the intervention sessions.

### **Data analysis**

To analyze and compare the findings of the pretest and posttest, the researcher employed both descriptive and inferential statistics. These statistical measures are the independent samples t-test and paired samples t-test. The first measure allows for comparing the means of two independent groups so as to determine if there is any evidence that would show a statistical difference between the means. The latter measure of the paired samples t-test meant to measure any development within each group of the study at different points in time. The researcher compared the scores of the groups to measure any change or improvement. According to Pallant (2013) this design allows for comparing different groups as well as subjects within the same group into one single analysis.

### Results

According to the descriptive data in Table 1, it was noticed that students in the experimental group (EG) improved their performance in reading after the intervention. The learners in the EG earned better scores after the treatment, which can be seen in the means below: ( $M$  pre-test=3.79;  $M$  post-test=10.30). In comparison to the pretest, the standard deviation shows that the variability among the scores in the posttest is higher than the pretest ( $SD= 4.92$ ), in the sense that the scores are highly dispersed.

Table 1: The summary of measures of central tendency of the reading test

		Reading Pretest	Reading Posttest
N	Valid	51	51
	Missing	0	0
Mean		3.79	10.30
Median		3.50	11.00
Mode		3.00 <sup>b</sup>	5.00 <sup>b</sup>
Std. Deviation		2.36	4.92

Table 2 includes information such as the number of participants in each condition, means achieved on each assessment stage, median, mode, and standard deviation for each test.

Table 2: A summary of measures of central tendency of the reading test

		Reading Pretest	Reading Posttest
N	Valid	33	33
	Missing	0	0
Mean		3.92	8.45
Median		3.00	8.00
Mode		3.00	8.00
Std. Deviation		1.98	4.52

Table 2 shows that there is a steady progress from the pretest to the posttest for the CG. The students in this condition have also improved their performance in reading. Their means were as follows: ( $M$  pre-test=3.92;  $M$  post-test=8.45).

Overall, the results in Tables 1 and 2 indicate that there is a clear development in the posttest stage. After the intervention, learners progressed in both experimental and

control conditions. In terms of the EG, their mean was ( $M= 10.30$ ); the mean difference between the pretest and posttest shows that the learners gained 6.51 points. For the control group, their mean was ( $M= 8.45$ ) and earned 4.53 more points after the treatment. The descriptive statistics show that the EG made more gains in the immediate posttest.

### The Comparison between the Experimental Group Scores in the Pretest and Posttest

Administering a paired samples t-test can provide an initial investigation of any effects of form-focused instruction on learners' reading achievement. After running a comparison between the two study groups at the descriptive statistics' level, it was decided to investigate how each group evolved via running a t-test to compare the means of the pretest to those of the posttest for the EG. Paired samples t-tests are usually run to measure within-group developments or differences of participants of the same condition. All the learners in this study sat for both stages of assessment, in the pretest and posttest. The EG, which received explicit form-focused instruction, has made clear improvement in the posttest. The reading comprehension posttest revealed that most participants earned better scores. Table 3 includes more details.

Table 3: Paired samples test for the experimental group

		Paired Differences				T	Df	Sig.(2-tailed)	
Pair	Reading Pretest Reading Posttest	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
1		-6.50	4.84	.67	-7.87	-5.14	-9.60	50	.001

A paired samples t-test was conducted to the experimental group, and the mean difference between the pretest and posttest for this group is 6.5 for reading comprehension. The results in Table 3 indicate a significant difference between learners' pretest and posttest. Learners' scores improved significantly in terms of reading comprehension. In the pretest ( $M= 3.79$ ,  $SD= 2.36$ ), and in the posttest ( $M= 10.30$ ,  $SD= 4.92$ )  $t(50) = -9.60$ ,  $p= 0.001$ . These findings indicate statistically significant improvements in reading, which reveals that explicit instruction of FcL can positively contribute to more gains in reading comprehension on the part of EFL learners.

### The Comparisons between the Control Group Scores in the Pretest and Posttest

The paired samples t-test has revealed that the participants in the control group

also made similar improvements in reading ability. In the pretest, the control group earned a mean of 3.92 in reading comprehension. After the treatment, they made considerable progress; their mean was 8.45. Table 4 indicates a significant difference between learners' pretest and posttest. Learners' scores improved significantly in terms of reading comprehension. In the pretest ( $M= 3.92, SD= 1.98$ ), and in the posttest ( $M= 8.45, SD= 4.52$ )  $t(32) = -6.74, p= 0.001$ . Hence, the  $p$ -value for reading is significant; it is less than 0.05. Accordingly, these results show statistically significant improvements in reading for students in the CG condition. By considering the standard deviation scores, it shows that students' scores are highly dispersed in the posttest in comparison to the pretest.

Table 4: Paired samples test for the control group

Paired Samples Test		Paired Differences				D	Sig. (2- T f tailed)	
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference			
					Lower	Upper		
Pair 1	Reading Pretest - Reading Posttest	-4.53	3.86	.67	-5.89	-3.16	-6.74	.001

The major research question aimed at investigating the extent to which form-focused instruction led to gains in learners' reading comprehension. Following the treatment, posttest stage, and paired samples t-test results, it was apparent that the participants earned significantly better scores in comparison to the pretest. As noted in Table 2, the learners in the CG were able to make important developments in reading, which can be seen in their mean scores ( $M$  pre-test=3.92;  $M$  post-test=8.45).

The paired samples t-test results for both the EG and CG show that the learners reached significantly better achievement scores in their reading performance. Being exposed to explicit instruction seems to have allowed the learners in both conditions to develop their reading ability.

### The Comparison between the Experimental and Control Groups in the Posttest

The first main research question in this study examined reading comprehension and how different treatments, either *focus on form* or *focus on forms*, impact learners' reading comprehension. Therefore, the same procedure was followed to measure group mean differences in learners' achievement in reading comprehension. In Table 5, an independent samples t-test was conducted to learn whether the difference between the study groups is significant or not.

Table 5: Independent samples test of the reading variable

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variance		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper	
Reading Posttest	Equal variances assumed	64	.42	1.73	2	.087	1.84	1.06	-.27	3.97

First, the Levene's test of equality of variance shows that there was not a significant difference ( $p = .42$ ), indicating equal variances, and therefore, the first line (equal variances assumed) of the results is relevant. This also suggests, along with the normality results, that we can proceed and assume that the independent t-test is an appropriate test for the current analysis. By looking at Table 5, it is concluded that the independent samples t-test output shows that the means of the two groups are not significantly different. The *EG* ( $n = 51$ ,  $M = 10.30$ ,  $SD = 4.92$ ), and the *CG* ( $n = 33$ ,  $M = 8.45$ ,  $SD = 4.52$ ),  $t(82) = 1.73$ ,  $p = 0.87$ , ( $p > 0.05$ ). Therefore, it is observed that although the *EG* made better gains in reading comprehension posttest in comparison to the *CG*, the difference between the two groups is not statistically significant ( $p = .87$ ).

The treatments that were applied to both groups in the study led to almost the same degree of improvement; both *focus on form* and *focus on forms* teaching of *FcL* led to progress in reading comprehension.

### Discussion

After the intervention, both the treatment group and the control group made progress in terms of their reading skills. There was not any statistically significant difference between the two study groups, though. The intervention has substantially improved the participants' reading achievement in the posttest stage. However, according to the t-test results, there were no statistically significant differences.

The different assessment stages provided interesting outcomes on the relationship between formulaic language instruction and reading comprehension. The posttest implied that the explicit instruction was effective in developing learners' reading comprehension skills. The learners' mean scores in both conditions were higher than the pretest; however, their difference was not statistically significant ( $p = 0.87$ ), i.e., the *p value* is ( $p > 0.05$ ). That is to say that both treatments, *focus on form* and *focus on forms*, were equally important in developing the learners' reading comprehension. This can be attributed to the

fact that the sample size is not large enough to yield substantial differences among the study groups. The recruited sample might lack adequate power in the sense that the size of the recruited sample could not help detect the real effect of the treatment on reading comprehension. A variable such as reading requires alternatively a larger size. Moreover, considering the context of the study, EFL learners have very limited venues to encounter and practice target language, and thus sometimes they misinterpret formulaic sequences.

In terms of the paired samples t-test, the results were largely different, and both groups made statistically significant improvements. The experimental group's mean difference between the pretest and posttest is 6.5 points for reading comprehension. The results indicate a significant difference ( $p= 0.001$ ). Likewise, the participants in the control group also made similar progress in the reading ability. Their performance prior to the treatment was quite low in comparison to that of the posttest. The participants' knowledge and repertoire of formulaic sequences has increased substantially. In the pretest, they earned a mean score of 3.92 in reading comprehension. After the treatment, they made a considerable improvement; their mean score was 8.45, which was also statistically significant ( $p= 0.001$ ). The learners in both conditions were able to make significant progress in the posttest stage. This could be due to the impact of the treatment, i.e., being exposed to explicit instruction techniques could have had positive effects on their performance.

It is important to note that very few research studies have been conducted and concerned with researching FcL explicit instruction's impact on reading comprehension. The positive effects of explicit instruction that are reported above are supported by a few previous studies. For example, these findings are in line with Tekingul (2013) who endorsed the fact that the explicit instructional approach can lead to positive improvements in helping L2 learners to acquire formulaic sequences. The study investigated the difference between explicit instruction of collocations versus that of single words and their impact on learners' reading comprehension. Tekingul (2013) reached similar findings. The results indicated that the collocation teaching condition made more gains in reading comprehension; nevertheless, after running two-tailed t-test significance, it was found that the treatments did not produce statistically significant differences. The study at hand also reached similar conclusions in the sense that the participants made better achievements after the treatment. However, there was not any statistical significance between the two conditions ( $p = .24$ ). In a very similar study, Hsu (2010) explored the difference between focused instruction of single words in comparison to collocations. The results from the vocabulary recall and reading comprehension tests revealed that the collocation teaching group made a better performance.

In the same line of argument, Kremmel, Brunfaut, and Alderson (2017) investigated the role of FcL knowledge in EFL learners' reading comprehension following a mixed-methods design. One essential finding in their research was that knowledge and

mastery of FcL emerged as a key contributor to reading comprehension. Similarly, Martinez and Murphy (2011) had previously reached conclusions that reinforce what Kremmel, Brunfaut, and Alderson (2017) reported. They made a comparison between two texts with similar vocabulary, but one of the texts included instances of formulaic sequences. The authors tried to investigate learners' understanding of both texts. It was found that the text that had instances of FcL raised more difficulty for the EFL Brazilian learners. For example, most students in this study were found to misinterpret the meaning of simple formulaic sequences and overestimated their understanding. Overall, it was reported that 98% of the students earned low scores and could not guess the meaning of formulaic sequences. Martinez and Murphy (2011) concluded that text comprehension hinges on largely on learners' knowledge of formulaic sequences. Similar findings were reported in Martinez and Schmitt (2012) who called "for a principled way to more systematically include formulaic sequences in L2 pedagogy" (p. 316).

All in all, this study showed evidence of the effectiveness of explicit instruction and that both groups made gains and fostered their reading skills as well as their vocabulary repertoire. As a result, this can have positive effects on all language skills and learners' language proficiency at large. The main conclusions that are drawn from the results chapter clearly highlight the importance of conscious-raising activities and explicit teaching of FcL in helping EFL learners notice, learn, and retain formulaic sequences. It was also found that more varied exposure to rich input through reading materials can enhance learners' intake and comprehension of formulaic sequences.

### Conclusion

The evidence showed that drawing learners' attention and raising their awareness of FcL and supporting that with focused instruction and multiple encounters has remarkable effects on EFL learners' reading comprehension. Schmidt (2010) stressed the fact that drawing learners' attention to FcL in context is a prerequisite for intake and acquisition. The two methods of *focus on form* and *focus on forms* that were followed in the treatment were effective in expanding learners' formulaic language knowledge even though the experimental group was superior in their performance. The main difference between these two conditions is that *focus on forms* method is based on *direct explicit teaching of language forms* both in context and in isolation, while the *focus on form* method is oriented towards more implicit communicative teaching. It was hypothesized that the explicit instruction sessions that the participants underwent could be beneficial in augmenting learners' vocabulary size of formulaic sequences and thus contributing to their reading comprehension. Following the assessment stages, the findings revealed that learners in both conditions made significant gains in comparison to the pretest, but the increase in their knowledge of target FcL could not lead to statistically significant achievement in their reading performance. However, the findings indicated that Moroccan EFL learners

benefited from explicit instruction sessions in terms of enhancing their vocabulary recognition skills and reading skills.

### Implications and recommendations

The findings have indicated that both *focus on form* and *focus on forms* can contribute to positive learning gains. Integrating explicit teaching of FcL in EFL classes, along with a communicative element can provide context and authentic language that is essential for augmenting learners' awareness and automatic use of target expressions, as opposed to focusing solely on isolated practice activities (Cid, 2019).

Another critical implication that can be taken away from the study at hand is that it has been proven that we need to include FcL acquisition in formal instruction and in different levels of language proficiency that can contribute to learners' development of language skills in EFL settings. Here are a few conclusions pertaining to the explicit teaching of formulaic language that are worth reiterating:

- More focus should be given to formulaic language in EFL classes.
- Formulaic sequences are as important as single words.
- Raising students' awareness of the frequency, use, and functions of the formulaic language is critical for increasing their saliency in the input.
- EFL teachers should be meticulous of the fact that the notion of awareness alone is not enough and that it should be supported with explicit teaching activities via employing focused techniques and targeting language forms in context and in isolation.
- Incorporating rich authentic input is critical for better long-term intake of FcL (El garras et al. 2024).

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