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**Language Teacher Candidates' Learning of the Simple Present Third Person Singular in
Writing Tasks: A Case Study**

Karol Hernández Gómez

Identificación: 115990566

Jean Núñez Jiménez

Identificación: 116790614

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Approval Form

Presentado por los estudiantes:

Karol Paola Hernández Gómez

Jean Carlo Núñez Jiménez

PhD. Christian Fallas Escobar

Docente tutor curso: LPB 735 Seminario II

M.A. Kevin Armando Brand Fonseca

Docente lector

M.A. Vivan Vargas Barquero

Coordinadora MPLA

Dedication

I want to dedicate this dissertation to my family and some people that supported me. I want to specially thank my parents, Elvira and Gerardo, for having provided me with all my values, strength, and encouragement. I appreciate all the supportive words that my brothers, Herald and Kenneth, told me during the process. I have a feeling of gratitude to Gabriel for having heard me and supported me during the whole program.

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Abstract

This case study explores English teacher candidates' (ETCs) learning and application of the Simple Present Third-Person Singular (SPTPS) in their writing tasks after receiving instruction on this target structure via Focus on Form (FoF) and Focus on Forms (FoFs). On the one hand, the study examines participants' perceptions about the implementations of FoF and FoFs instructional approaches for the learning of SPTPS. On the other, their writing performance is observed before and after intervention, examining how each type of instruction influenced their SPTPS grammatical application in their compositions. Findings show that a mixed approach of FoF and FoFs, including contextualized practice and explicit instruction, fosters improved understanding and use of the SPTPS. This research provides valuable insights into how combining FoF and FoFs teaching approaches can enhance linguistic competence, specifically by strengthening the learning and application of SPTPS in writing.

Keywords: grammar, instructional approaches, acquisition, writing, contextualized practice, explicit instruction

Resumen

Este estudio de caso explora el aprendizaje y la aplicación del Presente Simple en tercera persona del singular (SPTPS) en las tareas de escritura del estudiantado de la enseñanza del inglés después de recibir instrucción sobre esta estructura meta a través de los enfoques de enfoque en la forma (FoF) y enfoque en las formas (FoFs). Por un lado, el estudio examina las percepciones de los participantes sobre la implementación de los enfoques de instrucción FoF y FoFs para el aprendizaje del SPTPS. Por otro lado, se observa el desempeño en la escritura antes y después de la intervención, examinando cómo cada tipo de instrucción influyó en la aplicación gramatical del SPTPS en sus composiciones. Los hallazgos muestran que un enfoque mixto de FoF y FoFs, que incluye práctica contextualizada e instrucción explícita, fomenta una mejor comprensión y uso del SPTPS. Esta investigación proporciona valiosos conocimientos sobre cómo la combinación de los enfoques de enseñanza FoF y FoFs puede mejorar la competencia lingüística, específicamente al fortalecer el aprendizaje y la aplicación del SPTPS en la escritura.

Keywords: gramática, enfoques de enseñanza, adquisición, escritura, práctica auténtica, instrucción explícita

I. Introduction

Learning foreign language grammar structures is a crucial component of non-native speakers' development of writing. In the Costa Rican education system, students take English lessons from elementary school (and in some cases preschool) to high school; and even at college level, learners may be required to enroll in English courses that are part of the syllabi of certain majors. Given the spread of English in the country, public universities have created programs to fulfill the need for English speakers in the job market. Zúñiga and Barrantes (2021) point out that “public universities in Costa Rica have sound English language programs with strong pedagogical components” (p. 1). All these programs include speaking, listening, reading, writing, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, literature, and other fields related to the language.

The present study focuses on English teacher candidates (ETCs) who are studying English teaching. As professors of ETCs, we have noticed that they have difficulties concerning the learning of the simple present, third-person singular (SPTPS) grammatical structure in written tasks. Even though ETCs are taught this structure repeatedly throughout the English teaching major, they still struggle using it in writing, even in their fourth and final year of the program. As language professionals committed to teaching ETCs how to use the English language, we feel a great sense of responsibility toward ETCs' language proficiency primarily because this population will have to teach this same structure with which they still have problems.

Our concern has also been a topic of interest in applied linguistics. Basterrechea and García (2014) argue that “research on the acquisition of morphosyntax has been of utmost importance in the field of second language acquisition (SLA)” (p. 79). In this sense, Fitria (2019) highlights that the SPTPS grammatical form is essential for effective communication as it is used

to describe, define, and state general truths (p. 49). Additionally, the SPTPS is a relevant rule to express and understand ideas in daily life communication (Fitria, 2019, p. 49). The ability to use this structure can greatly enhance one's language proficiency, and it is a predominant skill to acquire for academic and professional purposes.

The SPTPS grammatical structure is commonly taught at the beginning of instructional processes in courses and books. However, Krashen (1982) states that:

While some individual variation exists among second language acquirers, we have a good idea of what is acquired "early" and what is acquired "late" for some structures. We can be fairly certain that beginners in ESL will not have acquired the third person singular /s/ or the possessive /s/, for example. I think that a very worthy goal of applied linguistics is to attempt to describe this set of what are typically late-acquired, but learnable rules, beyond the few morphemes and structures we know about now. (p. 116)

Even though the SPTPS grammatical structure is included into beginner courses as one of the first grammar contents that needs to be taught, it may not be one of the first acquired; therefore, it will be categorized into a "late-acquired" grammatical structure.

Moreover, many non-native speakers of English frequently struggle with the acquisition of this grammatical structure, leading to errors and ineffective communication in writing. However, as Fitria (2019) emphasizes, "the students' error in learning a foreign language is part of their learning process" (p. 49). In fact, it is claimed that the TPS (third person singular) morpheme -s has been problematic for Spanish learners (Dulay & Burt, 1974, as cited in Bastarrechea & García, 2014). The fact that Spanish-speaking, English learners have been shown

to struggle with the SPTPS structure suggests that they need to be corrected and instructed in effective order to improve their SPTPS use.

Acquiring the SPTPS grammatical structure may be a challenge for EFL learners. Sari et al. (2015) express that the SPTPS -s is one of the most challenging morphemes for ESL learners of English. However, despite this difficulty, learners constantly encounter and study this morpheme in the earliest stages of learning English, regardless of their native language (p. 807). Another assumption in research is that the fact that there is an established acquisition order does not guarantee that every learner will go through the same acquisition order; L1 and L2 learners struggle with acquiring the SPTPS -s morpheme (Sari et al., 2015, p. 810).

Several researchers have explored English learners' use of SPTPS. For example, Kelly (2017) investigated how language-minority children acquire the third person singular [-s] in English (p. 1). Kelly found that the students' ability to use the third person singular [-s] improves over time, and that there are various factors that impact its acquisition, such as age, length of exposure to English, and language background. In addition, Hamamci and Hamamci (2018) examined EFL learners' use of the third person singular "-s" in English written registers. They pointed out that it is essential to distinguish between two types of challenges learners face regarding SPTPS: the difficulty learners encounter when internalizing a grammatical feature, and the challenge they experience in accurately applying that characteristic in real communication (p. 91). Furthermore, Ulgu et al. (2012) explored the acquisition of the third person singular -s in English by sixth-grade students in a primary state school in Turkey. The study concludes that teachers should provide students with sufficient and appropriate instructional materials and activities that enable them to learn and use the SPTPS correctly in English.

Drawing on this literature, the present research explored the experiences and perspectives of a group of English teacher candidates' (ETCs) regarding their learning of SPTPS via two instructional approaches: focus on form (FoF) and focus on forms (FoFs). The study's goal was to examine whether one approach or the other was the most suitable one for these students to acquire the SPTPS grammatical structure. FoF is understood as an instruction that emphasizes more on meaning than the linguistic form. Conversely, FoFs instruction entails the explicit practice and presentation of specific linguistic elements. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the students' perceptions of/reactions to the implementations of FoF and FoFs instructional approaches for the learning of SPTPS?
2. What changes are observed in the students' use of SPTPS in their compositions over time?

By exploring student perceptions and challenges faced by learners in grammar classes where FoF and FoFs instructions are implemented, we hoped to provide insights into effective strategies for teaching and learning the target grammatical structure in a composition course.

II. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

This section encompasses the theoretical framework and literature review selected for this study. The theoretical framework that guided this research relates to two key theories: *the Noticing Hypothesis* and the theory of *individual differences*. Additionally, the literature review presents extant research on SPTPS acquisition, the writing skill, SPTPS errors, and FoF and FoFs instructions.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The present study draws on *the Noticing Hypothesis* and *individual differences* theory to interpret the data collected via focus groups and classroom artifacts. Each one of these theoretical lenses is described below.

2.1.1 *The Noticing Hypothesis*

The Noticing Hypothesis (NH), used in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and proposed by Schmidt, argues that the language learner must be mindful of and focused on the linguistic input to process it and transform input into intake or learning (Truscott, 1998, p. 103; Ünlü, 2015, p. 262). Truscott (1998) states that the NH “claims that conscious awareness (noticing) of grammar plays an important role in the process [of learning]” (p. 103). In foreign language classrooms, noticing is a crucial cognitive process that integrates input with output and facilitates the connection between implicit and explicit learning. Through noticing, language learners choose and process input, enabling them to respond and store it in long-term memory (Nhung, 2020; Zhang, 2022). However, for noticing to occur, teaching must involve students actively and make them aware of the importance of monitoring their own actions (Zhang, 2022, p. 188). Therefore, this previous idea demonstrates the fact that learners play a central role in the teaching-learning process.

Considering the above, integrating the NH to examine data of this research helps understand participating English Teacher Candidates' (ETCs) cognitive engagement with the Simple Present Third-Person Singular (SPTPS) or -s inflectional morpheme in English. This study is based on the premise that connecting implicit and explicit approaches to the learning and teaching of grammar, as well as input and output, fosters noticing and therefore facilitates ETCs' uptake of SPTPS (Ahadi, 2023, p. 1215).

2.1.2 Individual Differences

Learners are not homogenous, so their learning processes are different. Research has demonstrated that, while some second language learners advance quickly and seem not to have trouble with learning, others face difficulties. For the purpose of this study, we focus on the individual aspects that may have effects on ETCs' learning of SPTPS structure (Kubat, 2018; Zafar & Meenakshi, 2012). The two individual differences used to examine data are *attitudes* and *investment* in language learning.

2.1.2.1 Attitudes. Attitude is a crucial individual difference in English as a Second Language (ESL) learning. Yuliani et al. (2023) claim that attitude is thought to be a crucial factor that influences linguistic ability (p. 82). Dehbozorgi (2012) argues that language attitude is thought to be the key factor distinguishing between underachievement and success (p. 41). Attitudes determine the extent to which students engage with their learning process. For example, learners whose beliefs are respected in a learning setting will have a positive mindset. Conversely, learners who feel that their beliefs are not important in the learning context will have a negative attitude (Dehbozorgi, 2012; Yuliani et al., 2023). In general, there is a belief that the attitudes, abilities, and tactics employed by learners are mediating factors in their ability to comprehend the nuances of language (Dehbozorgi, 2012, p. 41).

2.1.2.2 Investment in Language Learning. Even though learners might have strong motivation, they may not fully engage with the language practices of a classroom or community. Darwin and Norton (2023) highlight that “investment is primarily sociological and focuses on how histories, lived experiences and social practices shape language learning” (p. 29). Darwin and Norton (2018) define investment as the learners’ commitment to the objectives, behaviors, and identities that are constantly negotiated in various social contexts and power structures. According to these authors, students may have a strong desire to learn a language but may not be engaged in the language used in a particular classroom if those practices are, for instance, sexist or racist (p. 1). That is, lack of learner investment could be due to discriminatory attitudes within the classroom environment or a misalignment in expectations between the learner and the teacher regarding effective language teaching methods.

Recognizing individual differences among learners acknowledges that not all students progress at the same pace or through identical methods (Kubat, 2018; Zafar & Meenakshi, 2012). Attention to these individual differences may enable the researchers to understand the ways that ETCs’ negative attitudes and lack of investment may hinder their ability to notice linguistic forms disregarding educators’ teaching methods (i.e., FoF and FoFs). By acknowledging and addressing any negative attitudes or challenges students could face, teachers may help students develop a sense of willingness to learn with effort and dedication to overcome obstacles more effectively. Collaboratively setting clear, achievable goals with students enhances their sense of ownership and investment in the learning process. These perspectives on attitudes and investment in language learning enhanced our comprehension, as researchers, of how ETCs navigate through the process of learning the SPTPS grammatical structure.

2.2 Literature Review

This section includes an overview of the SPTPS acquisition process, its application in the writing skill, and its connection to FoF and FoFs instructions. First, we present elemental aspects about the SPTPS morpheme acquisition process. Then, we situate this process within the productive writing skill and the most common errors found in students' compositions. Finally, we evaluate the role of FoF and FoFs in the acquisition of the SPTPS.

2.2.1 *Simple Present Third-Person Singular (SPTPS) Acquisition*

Research indicates that learners frequently incorporate native-like elements into their L2 usage at different paces and in different sequential order; a pattern that persists even as they progress to highly advanced stages of acquisition (Ayoun, 2015, p. 57). Ayoun (2015) contends that these variations do not appear consistently across all linguistic characteristics; instead, L2 speakers often continue to struggle with specific grammar aspects, such as marking tense (p. 57). That is, while learners often integrate native-like elements into their second language as they advance, persistent challenges in specific areas of grammar, such as tense marking, suggest ongoing complexities in achieving complete linguistic proficiency.

The acquisition of the SPTPS is an important aspect of SLA. Scholars argue that the SPTPS grammatical structure in English is regarded by curriculum developers and teachers as an introductory topic for second/foreign language learners. It is not uncommon for the SPTPS to be one of the first grammatical rules taught by teachers to L2 English learners at the elementary level (Hamamci & Hamamci, 2018; Picón Jara, 2015). In SLA, the acquisition of the SPTPS in writing typically follows a predictable developmental sequence. At first, learners may make errors such as omitting the “-s” ending or adding it incorrectly to verbs that do not take this form.

Over time, with exposure to the target language and focused instruction, learners begin to internalize the grammatical rule and apply it more consistently in their writing.

The SPTPS morpheme “-s” is seen as one of the most challenging for second language learners to acquire. Ulgu et al. (2013) express that this morpheme is acquired significantly later than others, even among native speakers. They explain that the SPTPS -s morpheme is complex due to its nature and phonological and semantic differences (p. 1353). Consequently, it is essential to recognize that, for L2 learners, a similar pattern of delayed acquisition may emerge. Despite this situation, students have continued learning this morpheme in the very beginning stages of learning English (Budiharto et al, 2021; Sari et al., 2015).

Budiharto et al. (2021) pinpoint that when acquiring the SPTPS structure, learners confront two types of difficulties: internalizing grammatical features and developing the skill to employ them correctly in communication (p. 76). Given the difficulty in acquiring such a fundamental structure, there is a need for effective grammar instructional approaches. Hence, the acquisition of the SPTPS requires extensive research attention, particularly concerning the efficacy of instructional approaches.

2.2.2 The Writing Skill in EFL Classrooms

Instruction on the writing skill in the EFL classroom is essential. Thaqui and Dagarin (2019) argued that “writing is considered one of the essential language skills that needs to be developed for successful communication” (p. 78). Nonetheless, writing tends to be one of the last aspects students acquire. Due to the fact that writing is a productive skill that allows students to express their ideas, thoughts, and feelings on paper, written production helps them develop critical thinking, as well as analytical and problem-solving skills. Hence, writing is a skill that requires learners’ active development and involvement.

In addition, it is crucial to recognize that the capacity to create written language relies on the support of receptive abilities. Receptive skills like listening and reading are the basis for applying grammar rules, vocabulary, and pronunciation in a foreign language (Golkova & Hubackova, 2014, p. 479). Typically, as Masduqi (2016) expound, “in the process of learning a new language, learners begin with receptive understanding of the new items, then later move on to productive use” (p. 507). Magyar et al. (2022) point out that reading and listening are considered fundamental receptive skills, as they provide sources of input for language learners (p. 2). This means that students obtain information through oral and written interaction and exposure. Over time, the two skills complement each other and play a crucial role in strengthening other language abilities (Magyar et al., 2022, p. 2).

2.2.3 SPTPS Grammatical Errors in Writing

Acquiring SPTPS in writing can be a challenging task for students, especially for those who are learning English as a second language. One of the main reasons this grammatical structure becomes defiant is because, regardless of the mastery of grammar rules, language learners still “make what they consider to be ‘careless’ errors on rules that are linguistically quite straightforward. This occurs when the performer has learned a rule, but has not acquired it” (Krashen, 1982, p. 86). While learning requires the conscious effort to understand and memorize grammar rules, acquiring the language involves the subconscious process of internalizing the rules through exposure and practice.

Regarding the SPTPS, a challenge students face is irregular verb forms. Many verbs do not follow the regular rule of adding an -s or -es to the base form of the verb. For example, the affirmative form of the verb “to be” does not change in the SPTPS, and it is always “is”. Therefore, what is especially intriguing is that language learners may have been aware of the

grammar rule and have practiced it extensively for many years. Despite having a deep comprehension of the rule and repeating it correctly thousands of times, students still make what they consider to be “careless” mistakes. The reason why learning has not fully turned into acquisition in these cases is due to the fact that the learned rule is still beyond the learner’s current level of proficiency, which is referred to as $i + 1$ (Krashen, 1982, p. 86).

2.2.4 FoF Instruction Vs. FoFs Instruction

One of the main concerns about language acquisition has been how to teach grammar efficiently and effectively. Azizpour and Alavinia (2021) argue that “grammar instruction is a long-lasting topic of debate and plays an essential role in developing EFL learners’ listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills” (p. 216). As a result, form-focused instruction arose (Azizpour & Alavinia, 2021, p. 217). In this type of instruction, there are two sub-categories that correspond to focus on form (FoF) and focus on forms (FoFs) (Long, 1998, p. 35).

Long (1998) states that “focus on form refers to how attentional resources are allocated and involves briefly drawing students’ attention to linguistic elements (words, collocations, grammatical structures, pragmatic patterns, and so on)” (p. 40). That is, in FoF, the emphasis is on meaning rather than linguistic form. In contrast to conventional teaching approaches that often present language structures without context, such as grammar-translation and audio-lingual methods, FoF enhances the connection between form and meaning. This approach is believed to promote the integration of declarative knowledge into practical use within meaningful settings. FoF instruction has the potential to facilitate the transfer of learning to real-world communicative situations beyond the classroom, while also targeting specific linguistic difficulties encountered by individual learners and fostering the kind of noticing believed to support language acquisition (Ellis et al., 2001; Saito & Wu, 2014).

Ellis (2001) divides FoF into two types: incidental and planned FoF (p. 3). Incidental FoF instruction occurs unintentionally during communication, without anyone consciously selecting specific language forms to focus on. Conversely, planned FoF instruction occurs when there is a predetermined linguistic goal that remains part of the context centered around conveying meaning (Azizpour & Alavinia, 2021, p. 221). Ranjbar et al. (2015) argue that FoF must be incorporated into the teacher's grammatical instruction in a syllabus, so that it reminds teachers to use FoF as a productive grammatical instructional technique (p. 96).

Focus on Forms (FoFs) is characterized, on the other hand, as an instructional approach where language is taught in an additive linear manner, meaning that each grammar component is taught separately (Azizpour & Alavinia, 2021, p. 222). FoFs instruction centers primarily on purposeful learning of grammatical structures. Long (1998) points out that it categorizes the L2 into diverse aspects (e.g., phonemes, words, collocations, morphemes, sentence structures, concepts, functions, tone, stress, and intonation patterns, etc.) and presents these to the student in exemplars (p. 36). Ellis (2016) clarifies that FoFs instruction “involves the explicit presentation and controlled practice of discrete linguistic features” (p. 406).

Even though research has been conducted on the learning of the SPTPS by EFL learners, there is a notable gap in the literature regarding the comparative use of FoF and FoFs instructions to address this grammar structure, specifically in writing. Existing studies tend to explore the learning of the SPTPS primarily through oral proficiency and comprehension (Budiharto et al., 2021; Ulgu et al., 2013), leaving a gap of information on how these instructional methods impact the students' application of grammar in their writing. There is also limited understanding on how individual differences such as attitudes and investment in language learning interact with FoF and FoFs instructions to influence the learning of SPTPS in writing among EFLs.

III. Methodology

The following section includes the research design selected for this study which includes research design, research context, research participants, ethical considerations, positionality and statement data collection and analysis, and trustworthiness.

3.1 Research Design: Qualitative Case Study

This study adopts a constructivist paradigm to interpret the meanings that the research participants have about the world, specifically the world of language teaching and learning. Constructivist researchers often focus on the interactions among individuals, highlighting the contexts in which they live to understand the historical and cultural backgrounds of their subjects. The researcher's aim is to interpret the meanings participants attribute to the world (Adom et al., 2016; Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). We chose qualitative research because it "begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (Creswell, 2006, p. 37).

McKay (2006) states that "for teachers, a primary reason for doing research is to become more effective teachers" (as cited in Dörnyei, 2007, p. 16). As teachers invested in becoming better educators, we surmise that the most appropriate research approach to use in our exploration of ETCs' learning of SPTPS is the case study because it "explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information" (Cresswell, 2006, p. 73). Marshall and Rossman (2016) mention that an advantage of the use of a case study approach is its methodological eclecticism (p. 69). As such, a qualitative case study approach allowed the present study more flexibility at the time the information was collected and analyzed. Hancock and Algozzine

(2006) state that case studies “are intensive analyses and descriptions of a single unit or system bounded by space and time” (pp. 9-11).

Regarding the purpose of our research, it is a descriptive case study given that it is employed to portray a phenomenon as well as the actual context in which it takes place (Yin, 2003). Additionally, through this case study, we expect to deeply understand situations and meaning for participants involved (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006, p. 11). Hence, the focus is on understanding and characterizing the meanings of individuals and the complexities of the research topic.

3.2 Research Context

This study was carried out at a rural satellite campus of a public university. The university is located in a new campus in terms of infrastructure, with its building inaugurated in 2004. Despite this, the campus has experienced notable growth in enrollment and academic offering (Campos & Carrillo, 2015, p. 28), including English teaching, systems engineering, surveying engineering, and business administration. The population of this institution is around 600 students many of whom come from Laurel, Naranjo, La Cuesta, Paso Canoas, Golfito, Puerto Jiménez, Palmar Norte, Palmar Sur, San Vito, Ciudad Neily, and even other regions from all over the country. Another relevant aspect is that the main economic activities of this area encompass commerce, agriculture, livestock, and industry.

3.3 Research Participants

The participants for this case study consisted of 16 freshmen (13 women and three men) completing a Bachelor of Arts program in English Teaching, whose ages range from 17 to 34 years old. These students come from Corredores, Coto Brus, Golfito, Puerto Jiménez, Buenos Aires, Osa, Paso Canoas, and Buenos Aires. During the first semester of the major, these

students took the first English course, “Integrated English” which incorporated all the macro-skills and micro-skills in the classes; and in the second term and by the time this study was being conducted, they were taking the course “Grammar I” that promotes the development and use of English grammar into the writing and speaking skills.

It is important to clarify that the participants of this study were enrolled in a major whose curriculum suggests the use of the Action Oriented Approach. Since one of the researchers was the professor of the “Inglés Integrado” course and is the instructor of the “Grammar I” course, he had already established a certain level of rapport, which helped the students be more open and willing to participate.

These participants were selected with the purpose of researching how beginners start learning the SPTPS structure; hence, we as the researchers could give them some teaching and learning guidance to improve the use of the SPTPS structure in their writing.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Taking into account ethical considerations “is a critically important aspect of ensuring that the research process and a researcher’s findings are trustworthy and valid” (Hesse–Biber, 2017, p. 108). For this study, approval from the institution was sought before starting data collection procedures. Prior to the application of the instruments, the objectives, processes, and steps of the research were explained to the participants. This is of utmost importance as Hesse-Bieber (2017) stated that “participants in a study must be informed about the nature of the research project, and one must obtain their consent prior to their participation in a study” (p. 117). Learners signed a written consent to be part of this research.

Emphasis was placed on the voluntary nature of participation. Even though one of the researchers was serving as the teacher of the participants, we let them know that their

participation was voluntary and consented and that there would be no consequences of non-participation. The consent was administered by the researcher that is not the participants' instructor. In terms of rapport, it was necessary to create a confident, respectful, and genuine environment. Bell et al. (2016) define rapport "as a feeling of connection, mutual comfort, and conversational ease" (p. 195). One of the researchers was part of the classroom environment as a teacher; hence, some rapport had been built previously. Therefore, learners were in a safe environment where they could feel comfortable to act as they normally did since the application of the instruments did not interfere with their learning process.

Another ethical element was confidentiality. Confidentiality "means that research participants are protected by remaining unidentifiable" (Hesse-Bieber, 2017, p. 149). This means that participants' names were not mentioned in any form, and all data collected was securely stored, accessible only to the researchers (Hesse-Bieber, 2017, p. 149). The significance of confidentiality was highlighted in the consent form to ensure that learners felt confident in the research process. Finally, reciprocity was also considered in the research. Sofaer (2014) suggests that reciprocity's primary aim is to reward participants who have facilitated benefits for others (p. 456). We made sure all participants are ethically rewarded for their contributions in the research process by means of a thank-you note and a certificate of participation.

3.5 Positionality Statement

Núñez-Jiménez and Hernández-Gómez have grown up in the southern region of the country in middle-class families. They are both Spanish-English speakers who graduated from Universidad Nacional (UNA), Brunca Regional Branch as English Teachers. In the case of Hernández-Gómez, she completed her undergraduate education in the same campus where the study was conducted. They both have experience as professors of English in the public higher

education system and are currently professors at UNA and UCR. Both have been interested in researching applied linguistics. For the purpose of this research, Núñez-Jiménez had a direct relationship with the students, serving in his capacity as professor of the course. As an insider, at the moment of developing a focus group, the participants did not fully express their thoughts as the focus groups that were interviewed by the other researcher. Hernández-Gómez was a relative insider because even though she is not teaching the class, she is a faculty member on campus. Finally, the researchers' motivation to conduct this case study came from the experience that they had had in teaching grammar and writing because they had noticed that even advanced English users make mistakes on the SPTPS grammatical structure in writing.

3.6 Data Collection and Analysis

The study used a mixed methods approach to collect data on language teacher candidates' learning of the SPTPS in writing tasks. The data collection methods included artifact collection and focus groups.

3.6.1 Artifact Collection

Artifact collection refers to the gathering of and analysis of objects relevant to the research. For the present study, we collected learners' written compositions prior to the FoF and FoFs instructions and after their application to analyze the impact of FoF and FoFs instruction methods on their written production. Marshall and Rossman (2016) highlight that one of "the greatest advantages of using documents and other artifacts is that it does not disrupt ongoing events: These materials can be gathered without disturbing the setting" (p. 315). For this study, learners were asked to write one short paragraph where the use of the SPTPS was prompted after the application of each of the instruction methods, FoF and FoFs. In terms of the interventions taking into account FoF and FoFs, the researchers implemented some lessons based on each of

these types of instruction. For some lessons, the SPTPS structure was taught implicitly, and, then, we collected the participants' paragraphs. In other lessons, the structure was instructed explicitly; after that, the students wrote a paragraph that we used as artifacts. The collection of these artifacts provided evidence that showed the influence of FoF and FoFs instruction methods on ETCs' use of the SPTPS in their writing. Students' compositions were classified into categories depending on the number of mistakes participants made when using the SPTPS structure. These categories included substantial evidence of accurate use (0-2 mistakes), some evidence (3-4 mistakes), little evidence (5-8 mistakes), and no evidence (no use or no application).

3.6.2 Focus Groups

Three focus groups were carried out for this study. In this sense, “focus groups are an extended way of the interview method, a more specific in-depth group interview with discussion” (Gundumogula & Gundumogula, 2020, p. 299). Focus groups gave the participants the opportunity to discuss and feel confident because there were other classmates agreeing or disagreeing with their insights at the same moment. Focus groups were developed by using one in-person meeting and two online meetings. Focus groups encourage spontaneous interaction between members, which sets them apart from other techniques where data can be gathered individually. Compared to one-on-one interviews, the kind and variety of data produced by group social interaction is frequently deeper and richer (Gundumogula, 2020, p. 301).

3.7 Trustworthiness

Ahmed (2024) states that “the diverse methods employed to improve trustworthiness collectively aid in reducing bias and strengthening the reliability of research findings” (p. 3). Then, providing that we were a research team, we implemented peer debriefing during the

analysis and discussion of data. This process involved regular meetings where we critically evaluated each other's interpretations and discussed emerging themes. We held two peer-debriefing sessions monthly throughout the analysis and discussion of data. In addition, external editing was one of the techniques employed for trustworthiness. This research was being overseen by the main advisor, the master's program committee, and a selected reader to ensure its trustworthiness. Finally, we also had intercoder checks, in which we were coding separately and then compared the findings to find common patterns. When discrepancies arose when comparing the findings, we analyzed the data together to agree on a common finding. Overall, member checking and external editing proved the trustworthiness of this research.

IV. Findings

In this section, we present the analysis of data collected via focus groups and artifacts. First, the focus groups revealed two predominant themes related to the implementation of Focus on Form (FoF) and Focus on Forms (FoFs) instructional approaches for the learning of the Simple Present Third Person Singular (SPTPS). On the one hand, students expressed a preference for a combined instructional approach to grammar, with instruction being FoFs-oriented but practice being FoF-oriented. On the other hand, our analysis also revealed that, regardless of the instructional approach employed in the classroom, there are non-teaching factors that influence students' learning of grammar. Second, analysis of students' artifacts (compositions) revealed that there were positive changes over time regarding their use of SPTPS with the implementation of FoF and FoFs instructional approaches.

4.1 Students' Preference for a Combined Instructional Approach to Grammar

Participants of this study were taking the course "Grammar I", the first grammar course in a sequence of five in their program. In this course, students went over grammar structures and their application in writing and speaking. A recurring theme that emerged from focus groups was that, while students appreciated the benefits of each instructional approach to grammar, they expressed an inclination for a pedagogy that combines the affordances of both FoF and FoFs grammar teaching. We discuss this theme in this subsection.

4.1.1 Students' Need for FoFs Instruction

Students expressed that FoFs is essential for their grammar understanding. They felt that explicit explanations and materials supported the clarification of concepts, enhancing their retention of rules. In order to know the participants' opinions about FoFs, they were asked about their perspective about explicit instruction (FoFs) during focus groups. One student pointed out:

“a la hora del profesor explicar y ver el material que está presentando, se nos hace más fácil, al menos en mi caso, entender el tema y así memorizarlo tal vez” [When the teacher explains and shows the material he is presenting, it gets easier for us, at least in my case, to understand the topic and possibly memorize it.] (Focus Group). This student’s statement shows that the teacher’s explicit explanation of grammar facilitates his understanding.

Similarly, another student agreed on this preference by expressing: “siento que es mejor el hecho de la interacción con las estructuras, la explicación, porque el simple hecho de aprender mediante hablar o sin explicar es muy difícil” [I feel that the interaction with the structures and the explanation is better because simply learning by speaking or without explaining is very difficult.] (Focus Group). This student’s sentiment denotes that learning grammar rules requires direct explanation and interaction with such rules. Conversely, his comment also suggests that applying grammar rules without prior explanation is challenging for him.

Both excerpts show students’ necessity for explicit instruction that allows them to comprehend grammatical structures more easily, which can build their understanding. This aligns with the idea that language should be taught in a structured way where distinct components, such as vocabulary, grammar, and functions can be introduced step by step in a linear process (Azizpour & Alavinia, 2021, p. 222). This theory supports participants’ view of the positive outcomes explicit instruction has in grammar learning.

4.1.2 Students’ Need for FoF Practice

While FoFs instruction was recognized as a need, learners also referenced the relevance of practicing grammar through FoF tasks, where they apply the structures studied in authentic contexts in writing effective exercises. With the objective of understanding students’ opinion

about FoF instruction, they were asked about the activities they needed to become more aware of the SPTPS structure and better learn it. One participant highlighted: “*parte de escribir párrafos principalmente... me ha ayudado más a poder practicar este tema y prestar atención a las estructuras*” [Writing paragraphs, mainly... has helped me more to practice this topic and pay attention to the structures.] (Focus Group). The student’s use of the terms “*poder practicar*” [to be able to practice] and “*prestar atención*” [to be able to pay attention] emphasizes the importance of authentic writing tasks in practicing grammatical structures. Engaging in paragraph writing tasks relevant to the students’ life experiences allows them not only to practice these structures in context but also to become more conscious of the application rules of the forms they use.

Another student supported the same idea saying: “*realizar párrafos... siento que me sirvió bastante porque pude escribir un poquito más y ponerle un poquito más de atención a las estructuras*” [About writing paragraphs... I feel it helped me a lot because I was able to write a little more and pay a bit more attention to the structures.] (Focus Group). This comment highlights the relevance of writing to notice and become aware of grammar structures. Consistent with the participant’s answer, Golkova and Hubackova (2014) emphasized that writing is a skill that demands learners’ engagement and continuous development (p. 479). A key point regarding FoF is that it aims to strengthen the connection between form and meaning, particularly when using grammar structures in writing (Ellis et. al, 2001; Saito & Wu, 2014).

These perceptions pinpoint that when students write paragraphs, they apply grammatical structures in real-life scenarios, changing their focus from memorizing grammar rules to understanding how grammar works in actual language use. FoF is thought to facilitate the transformation of declarative knowledge into practical application in meaningful contexts (Ellis

et al., 2001; Saito & Wu, 2014). These students' reflections suggest that using the SPTPS structure in a real context is helpful for learners.

4.1.3 Students' Need for a Combined Approach to Grammar Teaching

As mentioned before, the students have a predominant preference for explicit instruction, but they also expressed their interest in contextualized tasks. In light of this finding, the students were asked to answer a question about what approach, FoF or FoFs, they preferred that teachers use to teach them grammar. One student mentioned:

Bueno, para mí, profe, siento que tiene que ser como mixto. Primero, puede ser indirectamente, como en un warm-up, y ver, para él ver cuánto conocimiento tienen los estudiantes. Entonces, él un día se hizo esa, que primero dijo unas oraciones para ver qué conocimiento tiene uno sobre el tema y después enseñó ya directamente lo del tema con las reglas y las estructuras. [Well, for me, teacher, I feel it should be a combination. First, it can be indirect, like in a warm-up, so he can see how much knowledge the students have. One day, he did just that, where he first gave some sentences to see how much knowledge one has on the topic, and then he directly taught the topic with the rules and structures.] (Focus Group)

This comment suggests potential benefits from a sequential application of the approaches in the classroom to better students' understanding. This participant recommended starting with a FoF activity and, then, have a FoFs instruction of the grammatical structure. Another student supported the same idea by saying:

O sea, ambos deberían mantenerse pero deberían funcionar más simbióticamente, más, digamos. La explicación debería funcionar para que los estudiantes tengan en claro cuáles son las fórmulas que se utilizan, cuáles son las estructuras, cuál es el asunto,

cómo hacer el asunto. Y el otro, el de las actividades, de andar viendo, qué sé yo, películas o ver un texto o escuchar una canción incluso. Podrían servir para poner en práctica esos conocimientos, esas estructuras, esas fórmulas, esas gramáticas. Eso es lo que yo opino, eso es lo que yo opino. [I mean, both should be kept, but they should work more symbiotically, let's say. The explanation should work to make sure students clearly understand which formulas are used, what the structures are, what the issue is, how to address the issue. And the other, the activities like watching, I don't know, movies, or reading a text, or even listening to a song, could help to put that knowledge, those structures, those formulas, those grammars into practice. That's what I think, that's my opinion.] (Focus Group)

This insight shows that explicit instruction is needed in the classroom, and that FoF activities can complement the explanation and help the recognition and practice of the explained structure.

These participants' perspectives echoed what Azizpour and Alavinia (2021) mention that in FoF instruction, the teacher shifts students' focus from meaning to form while keeping the message as the main focus and in FoFs language is divided into individual elements that are taught sequentially in a step-by-step process (pp. 221-222). Hence, considering a mixed instructional approach that includes the strongest features of FoF and FoFs may foster student's understanding and application of the SPTPS in writing.

4.2 Factors Unrelated to Grammar Instruction Approach Affecting Grammar Learning

As stated earlier, regardless of the instructional approach to grammar employed by instructors, an array of non-teaching factors helps or hinders students' learning of grammar rules. These factors are discussed in this subsection.

4.2.1 Students' Need for Active Participation and Focused Attention

Students' grammar learning is influenced by different factors. For instance, participants expressed that active participation, focused attention in class, and the teacher's support largely influence their understanding and use of grammatical structures. As part of the research, the participants answered a question about how often the way educators teach grammar aligns with the way they learn best. In response to this query, one student mentioned: "*yo pienso que se debería fomentar un poco más la participación... pidiéndoles que hablen o participen más activamente en clase*" [I think participation should be encouraged a bit more... by asking them to speak or participate more actively in class.] (Focus Group). By using terms like "*fomentar*" [to promote] and "*pedirles*" [to ask them], the student implies that active involvement is a necessary feature of the grammar class; one that must be fostered by and falls within the responsibility of the instructor.

In response to the same question, another student answered: "*bueno, en mi caso yo siento que poner atención es una de las claves porque si no lo haces, te llevas más cosas que estudiar a casa*" [Well, in my case, I feel that paying attention is one of the keys because if you don't, you end up with more things to study at home.] (Focus Group). This comment shows that students' attention in grammar classes works as a support for students to save study time at home, for they can clarify their questions, take notes, interact with the content, and analyze their comprehension. Darwin and Norton (2018) refer to this as the relevance of learners' commitment to their learning process as they need to be actively involved in language learning; otherwise, their process may be negatively affected (p. 1). Overall, students implied learners are required to take an active role in their learning and engage in focused attention in the grammar class in order to reach a meaningful learning process.

4.2.2 Students' Need for Motivation for Learning

Self-motivation and the motivation provided by others are key elements that influence students' success in the learning of grammar. Participants believed that motivation supports them in the challenges faced in the learning process. In relation to the question about what specific factors contributed to their success or difficulty in learning SPTPS, one participant noted: “*muchos le ayudan a uno, verdad, y le dicen, bueno, siga adelante, verdad, con palabras positivas también*” [Many people help you, right, and they say keep going with positive words too.] (Focus Group). In this comment, the idea of students' motivation is of utmost importance in their learning process as the positive environment where they learn can optimistically impact their learning process given that students are influenced by what other people tell them. If learners have negative attitudes, they can limit their ability to learn regardless of the approach used by the professor (Kubat, 2018; Zafar & Meenakshi, 2012). That is, an instructional approach itself does not fully work if learners are not motivated or willing to learn.

In response to the same question, another participant also expressed: “*intento siempre estar motivado, aunque a veces es difícil; uno tiene que obligarse a estar feliz y concentrado*” [I always try to stay motivated even though it is sometimes difficult; you have to force yourself to be happy and focused.] (Focus Group). From Focus Group, we were able to analyze that the statement “*uno tiene que obligarse a estar feliz y concentrado*” [You must force yourself to be happy and concentrated.] implies that the learner regards staying motivated as a conscious, intentional action rather than an unconscious response to external factors. It also demonstrates an awareness that keeping motivated is relevant to success, but the student acknowledged that it requires much effort. Dehbozorgi (2012) argued that learners' mindset, capabilities, and learning approaches act as influencing factors in their ability to grasp language (p. 41). As negative

attitudes are used to being barriers, there should be motivation to foster students' positive attitudes towards learning.

4.2.3 External Factors and Emotional Barriers Affecting Grammar Learning

Besides internal elements, students believed that external factors, such as social influences and emotional well-being, impact on their ability to concentrate, grasp, and retain grammatical rules. The students pointed out that distractions outside the classroom and self-confidence are influential aspects in the effectiveness of their learning. The participants answered the question about what specific factors that they believed had contributed to their success or difficulty in learning SPTPS. A student said the following: *“Las redes sociales influyen mucho en el estado emocional... no es lo mismo irse a dormir a la una estudiando que viendo Tik Toks hasta las dos de la mañana”* [Social networks have a strong influence on emotional states... it is not the same to go to bed at 1:00 a.m. after studying as it is to stay up watching Tik Toks until 2:00 a.m..] (Focus Group). The expression *“no es lo mismo”* [it is not the same] indicates that the student understands the importance of productive study habits, which can be affected by the temptation of using social media. This demonstrates an understanding that distraction may hinder their comprehension of grammar structures. In fact, Alamer et al. (2023) state that autonomous motivation contributes to learning experiences with reduced psychological stress because learners experience greater enjoyment during classroom activities. Self-motivation also increases students' interest in completing tasks and enhances positive emotional states (p. 418).

Relatedly, another student commented on one question about how or what they do to actively participate in lessons where grammar is used or taught in real-life contexts. He mentioned *“a la gente a veces le da vergüenza, le da miedo preguntar... por miedo a que se*

burlen de uno por no saber algo tan básico” [People are sometimes embarrassed, they are afraid to ask... out of fear that they will be made fun of for not knowing something so basic.] (Focus Group). When students do not feel safe in the learning environment in which they are immersed, they tend to avoid asking questions or making comments about the explanations given. Hence, this shows that there are individual differences among learners that may affect students’ development (Kubat, 2018; Zafar & Meenakshi, 2012). That is, if learners experience negative emotions such as fear and shame, they will restrict themselves from learning and will continue facing difficulties in their process.

4.3 Proficiency Changes over Time after the Application of FoF and FoFs Instructions

As part of this research, we collected students’ compositions for their corresponding qualitative analysis. First, we requested students to write a paragraph before any type of grammar instruction. Then, the teacher gave a class using FoFs, and the students wrote a paragraph about a relative’s routine where they had to use the SPTPS. Finally, they were exposed to the SPTPS by means of FoF instruction, and they wrote a composition about a friend’s daily routine. Analysis of these compositions revealed that there were changes of the use of SPTPS in writing over time. For each of the interventions, we classified students’ composition into categories depending on the number of mistakes participants made when using the SPTPS structure. These categories included substantial evidence of accurate use (0-2 mistakes), some evidence (3-4 mistakes), little evidence (5-8 mistakes), and no evidence (no use or no application).

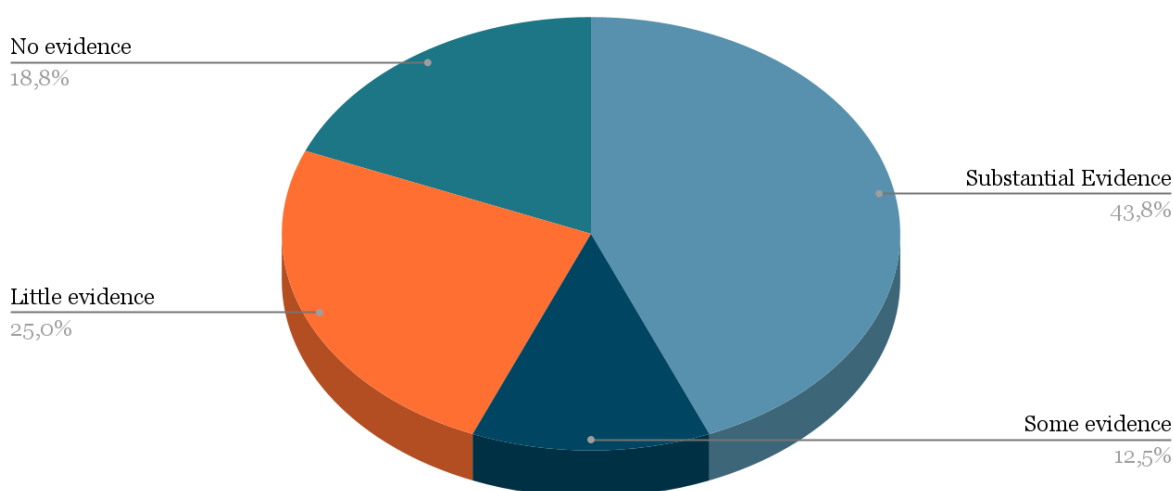
4.3.1 Before Intervention

With the objective of knowing the students’ knowledge of the SPTPS grammatical structure, they wrote a composition before any of the instructions. Analysis of these compositions revealed that less than half of the students (43,8%) demonstrated substantial

evidence of accurate use of the SPTPS. The second largest group of students (25%) showed little evidence of accurate use of the grammatical structure. The third largest group (18,8 %) showcased no evidence of SPTPS. Finally, the smallest group (12,5%) showed some evidence of accurate use (see Figure 1). These results show that nearly 60% of the total population still faced challenges applying the target structure in writing before FoFs and FoF instruction.

Figure 1

Use of the SPTPS in Writing before Intervention



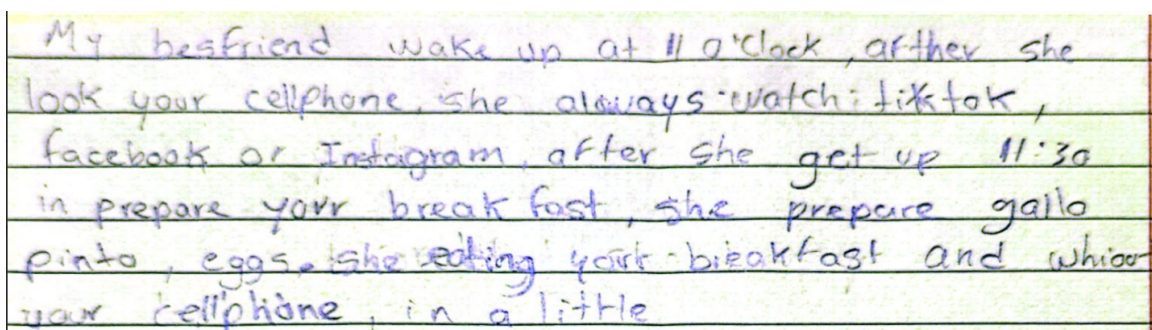
Note. This figure shows the students' proficiency of the SPTPS in writing before being taught with FoF or FoFs instructional approaches.

One of the participants who did not apply the SPTPS in writing did not use this structure in the entire composition even though the subjects used were third person singular (see Figure 2). In this case, for instance, the student wrote “my best friend” as the subject and the verb “wake” without the corresponding conjugation. This same pattern occurs throughout the composition where “she” is used along the paragraph. we infer that the student had no awareness of the structure; therefore, the learner was not able to apply the rule. Even though the participants had

been exposed to the structure in the previous semester in a course called “Inglés Integrado,” many made frequent mistakes as the ones shown in Figure 2 and Figure 3. We surmise that this may occur because the students make what they believe to be ‘careless’ errors on rules that are linguistically very simple. This happens when a student has learnt a rule but not mastered it (Krashen, 1982, p. 86).

Figure 2

A Participant’s Composition before Intervention Categorized into No evidence



Note. This figure shows a student’s written production collected as an artifact before intervention of any type of instruction.

Figure 3 illustrates mistakes students made regarding the SPTPS structure. In line five, the student writes “when he finishes, take a bath and wears his clothes.” In this sentence, the student applies the target structure inconsistently. While the student uses the target structure when the verb comes after the third person singular pronoun, the student fails to use the corresponding conjugation when the subject pronoun “he” is omitted. Failure to conjugate the verb properly may be due to L1 interference (Muftah, 2023).

Figure 3. *Another Participant’s Composition before Intervention Categorized into Little Evidence*

Andrey's routine.
 His daily routine starts waking up around ten o'clock
 brush his teeth and wash his face. After that, take
 breakfast but well, is almost lunch time. Then, he helps
 at his mom with the house chores like vacuum,
 mop the floor, do ironing, etc. When he finishes, take a
 bath and wears his clothes. Normally, he watches a
 serie with his mom, in the afternoon. And always
 drinks coffee with his family, while drink coffee. And
 check his social media and then study.

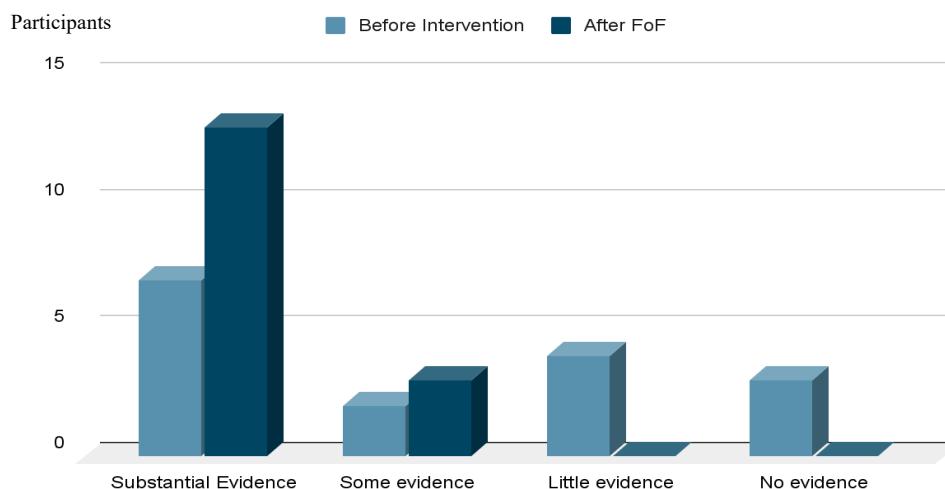
Note. This figure shows a student's written production collected as an artifact before intervention of any type of instruction.

4.3.2 After the FoF Instruction

The results presented in this section correspond to the compositions participants wrote after the professor taught the SPTPS grammar structure using the FoF instruction. Analysis of these compositions showed that while there was a high percentage of participants who showed no evidence of accurate use of SPTPS (18,8%), this number decreased after the application of FoF. Upon implementing the FoF instructional approach, participants made fewer mistakes and thus their compositions were categorized into substantial evidence and some evidence (Figure 4). In addition, after the FoF intervention, no learners were classified into little or no evidence. These results suggest that FoF instruction promoted the kind of noticing thought to help language acquisition (Ellis et. al., 2001; Saito & Wu, 2014). More specifically, they indicate that FoF instruction helped some students move toward a better grasp and use of the SPTPS in writing.

Figure 4

A Comparison of the use of SPTPS in Writing before Intervention and after FoF Intervention



Note. This figure presents students' management of the SPTPS structure in writing before intervention and after FoF instruction.

One student who showed significant improvement was the participant whose paragraph was analyzed in Figure 2. In this second composition (see Figure 5), the student shows an increased understanding of the application of the SPTPS structure in writing. In Figure 5, we can observe in one of the sentences that the student used “my mom” as the subject and “wake” as the verb without the corresponding conjugation. Nonetheless, in another sentence the participant wrote “she” and the verb “makes,” which corresponds to the correct form of the SPTPS structure. These examples demonstrate some improvement in the participant's written production, for out of the five sentences, there are only two mistakes regarding the use of the grammar structure.

Figure 5

A Participant's Composition after FoF Intervention

My mom wake up every morning. she prepare breakfast and she makes gallo pinto, eggs and coffee. Then, start cleaning the kitchen, living room, bathroom and also the bedrooms. she takes a shower and gets dressed and watch television. she always makes lunch at 2 p.m but she always makes something delicious.

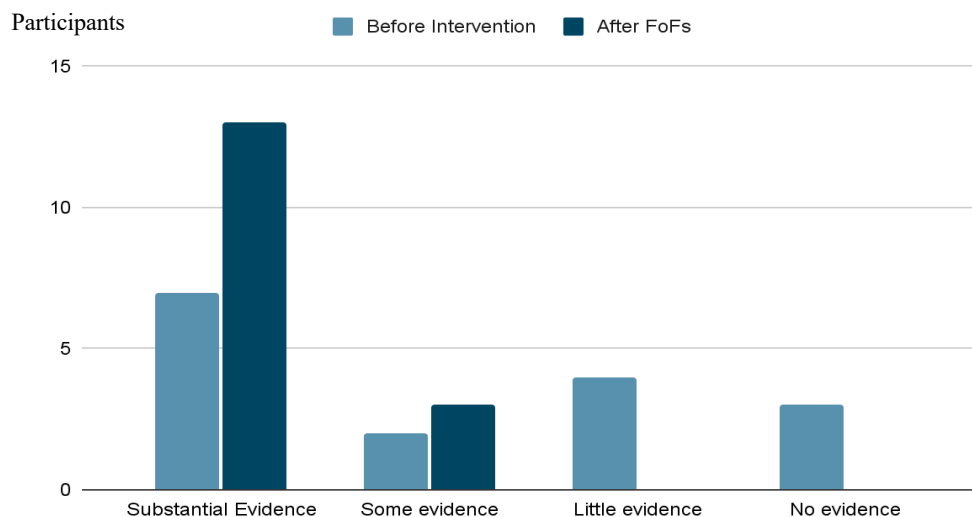
Note. This figure shows a student's written production collected as an artifact after FoF instruction.

4.3.3 After the FoFs Instruction

These outcomes discussed here are the results of the FoFs instruction. The application of FoFs instruction further increased the number of students who improved the use of SPTPS structure in writing. Figure 6 shows that there were 13 students who made less than two mistakes in the use of the structure in their compositions: an excellent result after the implementation of FoFs instruction. There were also three students who made fewer than four mistakes, which increased the number of students who improved in comparison to their compositions before intervention. Figure 6 shows that there were no students who made more than four mistakes in the use of the SPTPS, which denotes a great improvement. These results highlight that FoFs instruction, which is when language is divided into discrete elements that are taught one by one in an additive linear fashion (Azizpour & Alavinia, 2021, p. 222), helps learners understand and apply the SPTPS grammatical structure in their compositions better.

Figure 6

A Comparison of the use of SPTPS in Writing before Intervention and after FoFs Intervention

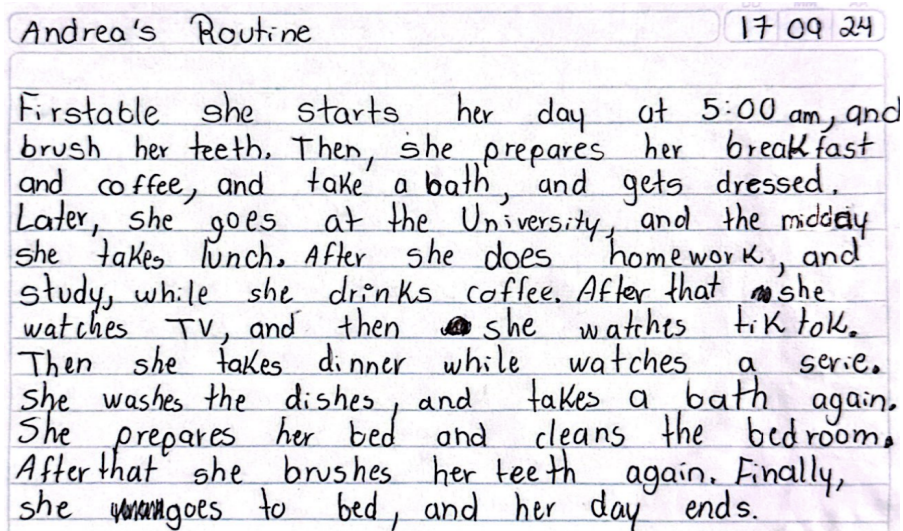


Note. This figure illustrates participants' development before intervention and after FoFs instruction.

Figure 7 shows an example of the improvement achieved after FoFs instruction of the SPTPS. This paragraph was composed after FoFs instruction by the same student that wrote the composition shown in Figure 3. This learner progressed from little evidence to some evidence. The student writes: “she starts her day at 5:00 am, and brush her teeth” and “she prepares her breakfast and coffee, and take a bath” (Artifact Collection). We may infer that the participant used the SPTPS structure appropriately when the sentence structure was subject + verb + complement; however, when the structure was subject + verb 1 + complement + and + verb 2 + and + verb 3, the student did not apply the SPTPS grammatical structure in the second verb. Besides these errors, we highlight the positive change in the use of the SPTPS in writing of this participant if we compare Figure 3 to Figure 7.

Figure 7

A Participant's Composition after FoF Intervention

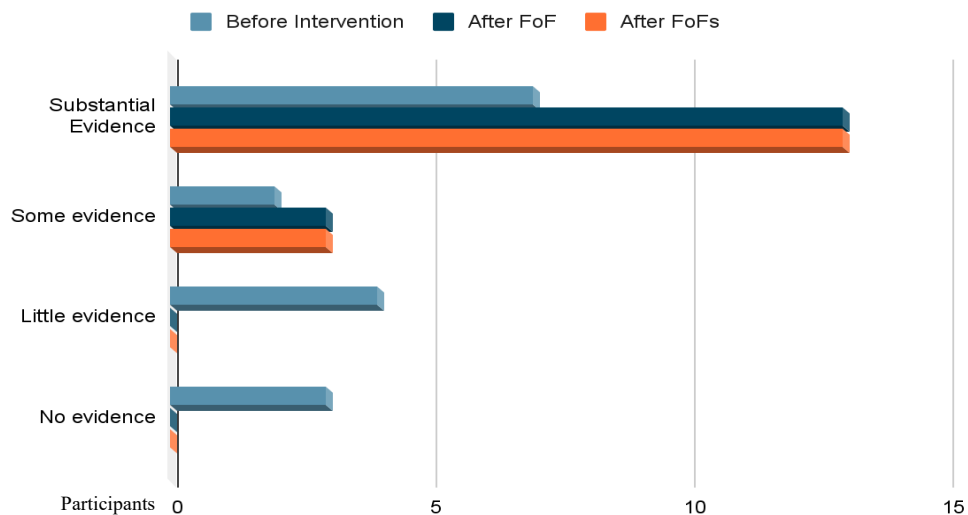


Note. This figure shows a student's written production collected as an artifact after FoFs instruction.

4.3.4 A Comparison of Results before Intervention and After FoF and FoFs Instructions

The results included in Figure 8 contrast the three artifacts collected. The first one is composition written before the intervention of any instructional approach. In this case, less than half of the learners (43,8%) showed substantial evidence of the use of the SPTPS, followed right after by little evidence, no evidence, and lastly some evidence. Pertaining to the implementation of FoF and FoFs instructions, we obtained similar results. In both cases, more than half of the participants (86,6%) used the SPTPS structure correctly. Moreover, the same number of students (86,6%) had some evidence in the use of the grammatical instruction after FoF and FoFs. Finally, no participants showed little evidence and no evidence of the use of the SPTPS.

Figure 8. *A Comparison of the use of SPTPS in Writing before Intervention, after FoF, and FoFs Intervention*



Note. This figure compares learners' development before intervention, after FoF and FoFs instructions.

These findings demonstrate that learners benefit from a combined instructional approach including both FoF and FoFs instructions for learning grammar structures, which coincides with the students' reported preference for a combined approach to grammar. Participants expressed preference for explicit or direct instruction to learn grammar rules. They also highlighted that teaching should be supported by implicit or indirect instruction. Practical application of rules through contextualized and authentic tasks is a great principle to apply in the teaching of grammar.

V. Discussion and Conclusions

This section encompasses a comprehensive discussion and conclusion to the study, synthesizing, analyzing, and grasping the main findings and their implications for grammar teaching and learning, specifically the simple present, third-person singular (SPTPS) grammatical structure. First, we begin with a restatement of the main focus of the research. Then, this section summarizes key findings, discussing how these outcomes answer the research questions. Moreover, it addresses the study's contribution to the field of English teaching by referring to its strengths and limitations. Finally, suggestions for future research in the teaching context are provided before we provide some conclusions and final thoughts.

The aim of this study was to analyze the impact of FoF and FoFs teaching instructions on student's learning of the SPTPS grammatical structure in writing in a Grammar I course of the English Teaching Major. The need for this study emerged from our experience with the limitation we identified on students that faced significant drawbacks in the accurate use of the SPTPS grammatical structure in their written production. Before starting this research, we analyzed that although this structure has been taught since elementary school and high school levels, not only freshmen face difficulties with this structure, but also senior students continue struggling with it.

Due to the previous problem, we examined which approach, FoF or FoFs, was more effective for English teaching candidates (ETCs) to acquire the SPTPS grammatical structure in writing. This case study aimed to collect participants' perceptions about the impact FoF and FoFs had on their learning of this morpheme. Furthermore, it also aimed to identify the changes in students' compositions after the implementation of both instructional approaches.

Regarding the first research question related to the students' perceptions and reactions toward the implementations of FoF and FoFs instructional approaches for the learning of the SPTPS, the findings show that participants prefer a combination of both instructional methods. FoFs provided the clarity needed for comprehending the SPTPS structure. The participants' perceptions show a clear preference towards explicit instruction to understand and acquire grammar. After their experience with FoF and FoFs in their grammar classes, they expressed that, without the prescriptive grammar instruction, they may feel lost; thus, even though some research indicates that explicit instruction should be replaced, we think that it keeps being of relevance for students' language proficiency improvement.

Furthermore, the participants shared their inclination towards the contextualized practice of the SPTPS structure. FoF permitted students to practice and internalize this structure in authentic and meaningful contexts. FoF gives them the opportunity of applying this morpheme in useful and purposeful scenarios; consequently, they not only memorize the rules but also comprehend when and where they should use the structure to express their ideas. We also identified some non-teaching factors, such as classroom participation, motivation, and investment, which also played a pivotal role in grammar acquisition. We found that other aspects not related to the instructional approach may influence the students' learning process, and therefore, educators should pay more attention to aspects such as the level of participation, motivation, and investment the learners have to achieve better learning outcomes.

Because students were exposed to the FoF and FoFs instructional approaches, they were asked to write a composition before any instructional intervention and one after their exposure to FoF and FoFs. This collection of paragraphs was intended to compare the changes regarding the use of the SPTPS morpheme. Initially, less than half of the students demonstrated that they

encountered substantial evidence of the use of the SPTPS; however, most of them showed some limitation and no evidence of the use of this structure. These results revealed that many students struggled with the application of the SPTPS in writing although they had been exposed and explained the structure in previous courses. After the implementation of FoF and FoFs classes, students showed marked improvement. The number of participants who made fewer errors increased significantly, with many moving from no evidence or little evidence to categories of some or substantial evidence. These results suggest that a combination of FoF and FoFs is beneficial for students as their written production improved after each intervention.

5.1 Contribution to the Field

This study provides further evidence that expands existing literature of language teaching by emphasizing the effectiveness and preference of learners for a mixed teaching approach to grammar instruction. Our study indicate that a combination of explicit teaching and authentic and contextualized practice can lead to better language outcomes. As the literature suggests, there should be a connection between form and meaning; as a result, this combination of FoF and FoFs may be effective for language learning. Furthermore, this study opens a door to analyze how an eclectic approach to grammar teaching could benefit students' learning instead of looking to find which approach works best. Regardless of the teaching approach being used, there are other factors that may affect the effectiveness of any method used.

The SPTPS is one of the most commonly used morphemes in English and one of the first structures that are taught in a language classroom; hence, its application for appropriate language use is essential. Thus, this study can provide learners and teachers with a perspective of the importance of this structure and, at least, two types of grammar instructions that may be used depending on the learners' learning outcomes. Moreover, EFL teachers may combine the

strengths of the FoF and FoFs to have more efficient outcomes in their students because this study contributes to the idea that an appropriate instruction of the SPTPS grammatical structure should consist of the FoFs instruction and FoF practice.

5.2 Limitation of the study

While this research provides significant insights into the learning of the SPTPS grammatical structure in light of FoF and FoFs instructions, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, we focused on the SPTPS structure and one single group taking the Grammar I course which limited the applicability of the findings to broader areas of grammar or different linguistic contexts. To counteract this challenge, we encourage replication studies and follow-up research that extend the findings to other grammatical areas and contexts. The collection of the data was affected by the willingness of the participants to be fully engaged and objective when writing the compositions. During the first artifact collection, all students completed the requested paragraph, but during the second and third artifact collection sets, only some of the learners did it. As a result, we had to delete data from some participants who did not complete the three assignments.

The study was carried out during a limited time period(two months), so we faced time constraints to administer and analyze the instruments which hindered the data gathering process. Also, relating the data to the theoretical framework was a challenge because there is lack of prior research studies on the SPTPS structure acquisition in writing. During the development of this study, we found plenty of information regarding grammar, grammar instructional approaches, and the use of the SPTPS in speaking. However, none of the theories was solely based on the SPTPS structure acquisition and its application in writing. Thus, we analyzed the data and made use of external editing of a reader to guarantee data validity.

5.3 Suggestions for Future Research

There are some areas of interest that emerged from this study which may expand the findings of this research. Furthermore, the impact of each instructional approach, FoF and FoFs, independently could be analyzed to examine their distinct contributions to language learning. This would allow a clearer understanding of how each approach supports specific skills or learning outcomes. Another area of study may be the effectiveness of FoF and FoFs exercises as assessment tools for the use of grammar in writing. Moreover, research into the relevance of contextualized writing for the acquisition and application of grammatical structures could be of importance to gain insights of more effective instructional practices. These suggestions for future studies may provide valuable outcomes on instructional design, assessment, and curriculum development in language education.

5.4 Conclusion

The findings show that combining explicit instruction (FoFs) with contextualized practice (FoF) fosters students' grammar acquisition, as it aligns with their preference for a clear structural understanding together with authentic usage opportunities. Thus, each type of instruction offers specific advantages that can be contemplated depending on the learning goals. As educators, in our teaching practice, we will constantly face the teaching of diverse grammar structures for different populations. Hence, we need to be aware of the teaching approaches to be implemented in diverse contexts depending on students' needs. After analyzing FoF and FoFs instructions, we can have a clearer understanding of the uses, benefits, and drawbacks of each approach. Thus, it is our responsibility to deeply analyze and consider the appropriateness of the use of one approach or a combination of approaches to cover our students' learning expectations.

There were also non-teaching factors that influenced participants' learning of grammar, which included motivation, investment, participation, and attitudes. When students are highly motivated, their language performance increases and their learning boosts as they invest more in their own learning process. One highlighted individual difference was participation because the students perceived that it is limited and unequal in the classroom; thus, it should be promoted and balanced by the professor. Learners' attitudes towards the language and the learning process also play an important role because they need to have positive reactions to better involve themselves in their language acquisition. Being aware of these individual differences helps teachers improve the students' learning since there is an understanding of learners' needs.

After the interventions of FoF and FoFs instructional approaches, similar findings were discovered. We conclude that there is an observable improvement in participants' compositions which highlights that there should be a dual approach, explicit instruction and contextualized practice. This combination is advantageous for teaching fundamental grammar structures, such as the SPTPS, since students find them challenging even though they have had repeated exposure over the different stages of their learning process.

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VII. Appendices

Appendix A: Consent Form

**UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL DE COSTA RICA
MAESTRÍA PROFESIONAL EN LINGÜÍSTICA APLICADA
DECLARACIÓN DE CONSENTIMIENTO INFORMADO**

El aprendizaje de la tercera persona singular en presente simple como estructura gramatical de Inglés en composición de párrafos.

Se le extiende una invitación para formar parte de un proyecto de investigación cuyo objetivo es investigar sobre el aprendizaje de la tercera persona singular en presente simple como estructura gramatical de Inglés en composición de párrafos.

INFORMACIÓN

Para el desarrollo de este trabajo de investigación usted será parte de la aplicación de diversos instrumentos de recolección de datos. Las actividades incluyen dos cuestionarios, observaciones, y recolección de párrafos. Su participación será aproximadamente los meses de julio, agosto y septiembre durante las lecciones del curso de composición. En otras palabras, el tiempo de su participación será el mismo al requerido por horario. El objetivo de las actividades de esta investigación es poder brindar información sobre el aprendizaje de la tercera persona singular en presente simple como estructura gramatical de Inglés en composición de párrafos.

RIESGOS

Este proyecto no presenta ningún riesgo ni para los investigadores ni para los participantes.

CONFIDENCIALIDAD

Toda información obtenida será utilizada de forma confidencial para la elaboración de la investigación. Se mantendrá el anonimato de los participantes de este estudio.

CONTACTO

Cualquier duda, comentario o sugerencia, puede contactarnos a los correos electrónicos: karol.hernandez.gomez@est.una.ac.cr o jean.nunez.jimenez@est.una.ac.cr

PARTICIPACIÓN

Su inclusión en este estudio es opcional, por lo tanto, tiene la libertad de declinar sin ninguna repercusión. En caso de que decida formar parte del estudio, tiene la opción de retirarse en cualquier momento. Si decide retirarse antes de que se recolecte toda la información, su información será utilizada únicamente con fines investigativos. Es completamente válido negar el permiso para el uso de su información, y se le asegura que su elección no tendrá impacto en su desempeño en la clase.

CONSENTIMIENTO

He leído y comprendido el contenido de este documento, y se me ha entregado una copia para su revisión. Todas las preguntas que he formulado han sido respondidas de manera satisfactoria. Por lo tanto, estoy dispuesto(a) a participar en este proyecto de investigación.

Firma del participante _____	Fecha _____
Firma del investigador _____	Fecha _____
Firma del investigador _____	Fecha _____

Appendix B: Focus Group Protocol

Universidad Nacional

Maestría Profesional en Lingüística Aplicada con Énfasis en la Enseñanza del Inglés como Lengua Extranjera

Seminario II

Professor: Christian Fallas Escobar, Ph.D.

Researchers: Jean Carlo Núñez Jiménez and Karol Hernández Gómez

II Term 2024

Research Topic: Language Teacher Candidates' Learning of the Simple Present Third Person Singular in Writing Tasks: A Case Study

Information:

Date: _____

Schedule: _____

Our names are Jean Carlo Núñez Jiménez and Karol Hernández Gómez. We are currently students on the Master's Degree in Applied Linguistics.

- This research focuses on English teacher candidates and their experiences in the learning of the simple present third-person grammatical structure in writing.
- We just want to remind you that your participation in this study is strictly voluntary, and the information you provide will be confidential and anonymous.

Parte 1: Diferencias Individuales

1. ¿De qué manera cree usted que aprende mejor las estructuras gramaticales?
2. ¿Cuál es su opinión de la enseñanza implícita o indirecta de la gramática?
3. ¿Cuál es su opinión de la enseñanza explícita o directa de la gramática?
4. ¿Con qué frecuencia coincide la forma en que los profesores enseñan gramática con la forma en que usted aprende mejor?
5. ¿Cuánto se esfuerza por participar activamente en las lecciones donde la gramática se enseña de forma contextualizada, por medio de la práctica en contextos reales; por ejemplo, escribir una carta, un correo, un facebook post, etc.?
6. ¿Cuánto esfuerzo dedica a entender y practicar las reglas gramaticales cuando se enseñan de manera explícita, donde el docente explica las reglas sin práctica en contextos reales; por ejemplo, ejercicios de complete, selección múltiple, respuesta corta, etc.?
7. ¿Qué factores específicos (actitudes, inversión de tiempo y esfuerzo) cree que han contribuido más a su éxito o dificultad en el aprendizaje de la tercera persona del singular?

Parte 2: Percepción de los métodos de enseñanza de la gramática

8. ¿Qué opinas de las actividades que se implementaron en la enseñanza de la estructura gramatical del presente simple en tercera persona singular?
9. ¿Qué actividad te ayudó más a comprender mejor la estructura gramatical del presente simple en tercera persona singular de manera más consciente?

10. ¿Cuáles de las actividades le ayudaron a volverse más consciente de la necesidad de aplicar la tercera persona singular en sus trabajos escritos?
11. ¿Cuál de estos dos métodos de la enseñanza de la gramática le gustaría que los profesores continúen implementando?