Impact of Post-Task Explicit Instruction on the Interaction among Child EFL Learners in Online Task-Based Reading Lessons

Abstract: L2 researchers increasingly agree that task-based teaching, combined with timely form-focused instruction, offers an ideal environment for L2 learning. However, the timing of form-focused instruction is debated, with concerns that pre-task interventions may distract learners from focusing on meaning. While some studies address this issue for adults, little is known about children. Hence, this study examined the impact of pre-task explicit instruction on children's task-based interactions in an online EFL setting.

Thirty-three Korean EFL children aged 7-11 participated in seven online lessons using Zoom and Padlet. They read a storybook and completed a collaborative post-reading task. One group received a three-minute grammar explanation before the task (+EI group), while the other did not (-EI group). The children's interaction was analysed for language-related episodes (LREs). Although the number of LREs was small, the -EI group generated significantly more and more elaborate LREs than the +EI group. Regardless of group, the participants attempted to address the majority of linguistic issues raised, but importantly, LREs related to the target form hardly ever occurred. Overall, the analyses of task-based interactions revealed that participants' primary attention remained on meaning, regardless of whether or not they received explicit instruction.

Keywords*:* task-based language teaching, computer-assisted language learning, reading tasks, young learners, language-related episodes

1. Introduction

Numerous studies have shown learner interaction to have a positive impact on second language (L2) learning (e.g., García Mayo and Ibarrola 2015; Mackey and Goo 2007; Philp et al. 2014). From a psycholinguistic theoretical perspective, Long (1996) argued that interaction provides opportunities for learners to negotiate meaning and form and to notice gaps in their L2 knowledge. Researchers informed by Vygotskian sociocultural theory also contend that interaction creates opportunities for learners to deliberate about the L2 and, in doing so, co-construct new knowledge or consolidate prior L2 knowledge (Storch 2013; Swain 2000). As such, there appears to be a strong theoretical rationale for engaging learners in tasks that require pair or small group work, where learners are given opportunities to interact in the target language. However, the majority of studies on learner interaction have focused on adults (Collins and Muñoz 2016). Given that foreign language programs are increasingly being introduced at elementary or even pre-school levels, it is crucial to examine whether peer interaction affords similar learning opportunities for children.

Moreover, there is a lack of research examining the nature of collaborative interaction that takes place while children complete communicative tasks (García Mayo 2018). Research on task-based language teaching (TBLT) has garnered increasing evidence that engaging in tasks, along with timely focus on form (Long and Robinson 1998), can create a conducive environment for L2 development to unfold (Ellis et al. 2020). Most previous research, however, has focused on speaking and writing tasks; little research has explored the pedagogic potential of L2 reading tasks. This is a key research gap as reading tasks can expose learners to plentiful input, a prerequisite for L2 learning, while also providing a venue for facilitating learner attention to L2 constructions.

To promote the likelihood of learners paying attention to language while engaged in reading tasks, a number of focus-on-form techniques can be utilized, ranging from implicit

types such as textual enhancement to more obtrusive interventions such as explicit explanation. While providing explicit instruction is generally considered to be an effective way to make learners aware of L2 constructions (Spada and Tomita 2010), integrating explicit instruction before performing a task has been controversial in TBLT, due to its potential to compromise the primacy of meaning during task performance (Ellis 2003; Willis and Willis 2007). Also, some studies have shown pre-task explicit instruction to have an adverse effect on task performance in terms of complexity, accuracy, and fluency (e.g., Ellis et al. 2019; Van de Guchte et al. 2019). Given these conflicting views and the prevalence of explicit instruction in language classrooms, there is a need to investigate further whether pre-task explicit instruction indeed negatively affects task-based learning and/or it can facilitate it.

Another critical gap regarding task-based interaction is whether learning opportunities are the same across different modes of learning (i.e., face to face vs. synchronous computer-mediated communication). Previous research examining the nature of learners' interaction in computer-mediated collaborative tasks has yielded ample empirical evidence that learners collaborate differently in synchronous computer-mediated communication compared to face-to-face situations (e.g., Baralt 2014; Roushad and Storch 2016). However, the majority of previous studies have been conducted in written text-chat environments, relatively little research has explored L2 interaction in video synchronous computer-mediated communication (e.g., Lee 2007; Sydorenko et al. 2019; Yanguas 2010; Yanguas and Bergin 2018). Given the documented benefits of interaction in L2 learning and the continued technological advancements informing L2 teaching in classroom settings, it seems essential to examine peer interaction in video synchronous computer-mediated contexts.

Against this background, the current study set out to examine patterns of peer interaction among EFL children while receiving task-based reading instruction, in the presence or absence of explicit instruction.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Tasks and Language-Related Episodes

Ellis (2003: 10) defined tasks as activities that (1) serve as a workplan, (2) are primarily focused on meaning, (3) involve processes of language use that occur in real-world communication, (4) involve the use of any of the four language skills, (5) require learners to engage in cognitive processes such as classifying and reasoning, and (6) have a clearly defined outcome other than the use of language. Research has shown that tasks can provide an ideal platform for focus on form as well as encourage learners to produce language and reflect upon its form, especially tasks that require the production of collaborative output between learners (e.g., Nassaji and Tian 2010; Swain 2005; Swain and Lapkin 2001). Much of this research has been theoretically motivated by Swain's (1995) output hypothesis, which emphasizes that output can push learners to move from semantic to syntactic processing of the L2, which can lead learners to notice gaps in their knowledge and reflect upon language.

Most previous studies exploring output-based tasks have examined the incidence and nature of so-called language-related episodes (LREs). Swain and Lapkin (1998: 326) defined LREs as "any part of a dialogue where the students talk about the language they are producing, question their language use, or correct themselves or others". Additionally, LREs may involve the use of metalinguistic terminology or explanation of rules (Williams 1999). Swain and Lapkin (1998, 2001) argued that LREs could serve the function of assisting learners to make L2 form-meaning connections in meaning-based communicative contexts.

Also, the dialogue that surfaces when students work together to solve linguistic problems while performing communicative tasks are said to represent second language learning in progress.

The potential developmental benefits of engaging in LREs have been examined across different contexts, including laboratory-type settings where participants engage in pair or small group tasks (e.g., Gass et al. 2005; Swain and Lapkin 1998), interaction in foreign language contexts (e.g., García Mayo 2022; Philp et al. 2010), and computer-mediated interaction (e.g., Sydorenko et al. 2019; Yanguas and Bergin 2018). A wide array of factors have been found to influence the incidence, nature, and resolution of LREs such as (a) task features (García Mayo 2022; Gass et al. 2005; Swain and Lapkin 2001); (b) L2 proficiency (Kim and McDonough 2008; Leeser 2004); (c) pairing method (Storch and Aldosari 2013); (d) number of participants (Edstrom 2015); and (e) task-modality (García Mayo and Azkarai 2016; Martínez-Adrián and Gallardo-del-Puerto 2021).

However, children's use of LREs has not received much attention, and even fewer studies investigating LREs were conducted in EFL settings. An exception is a study by Calzada and García Mayo (2021) that observed 62 sixth grade EFL children as they were completing a collaborative dictogloss task. The third person singular *-s* morpheme was embedded into the task to examine whether the children paid attention to this form. The analyses of LREs showed that the children focused significantly more on form compared to meaning, demonstrating that even children with low proficiency level are able to discuss grammar to a considerable extent. However, the learners focused more on other grammatical forms than the target construction. It was also found that the participants managed to correctly resolve most of the linguistic problems encountered while performing the task with peer assistance alone. Another study by Martínez-Adrián and Gallardo-del-Puerto (2021) investigated the effects of task modality on the production of LREs among 10- to 12-year-old

schoolchildren. The study found that, like most previous studies, oral and writing tasks combined generated more instances of LREs, more form-focused LREs, and more correctly resolved LREs, compared to tasks that only required oral production. However, the LREs produced by the children were not elaborate and lacked the use of metalanguage, which was attributed by the authors to the age and low proficiency of the participants.

Given that EFL programs for children are growing worldwide and are increasingly introduced during primary school years (Collins and Muñoz 2016; Pinter 2011), more research is needed to explore contexts in which children voluntarily discuss language during pair and group work. In addition, considering that advancements in technology are rapidly transforming teaching and learning practices, it seems essential to examine how learning opportunities afforded by interaction can be best achieved in computer-mediated learning contexts.

2.2. Task-Based Computer-Mediated Communication and Language Related Episodes

Although research on computer-assisted language learning (CALL) is not new, researchers have stressed the importance of grounding CALL design and application in reliable and empirically supported approaches to language learning and teaching (González-Loret and Ortega 2014; Ziegler 2016). To achieve this, several scholars have suggested the use of TBLT as a framework for developing technological designs for language learning (e.g., Chapelle 2003; Doughty and Long 2003; González-Lloret and Ortega 2014). Chapelle (2003: 39) claims that using the "classroom task" as a unit of analysis would benefit the field of CALL since "tasks direct methodologists to look toward how learners are expected to learn through their interactions with the materials and other learners". Similarly, proponents of TBLT have recognized the value of integrating technology into task-based instructional

designs (Doughty and Long 2003; Motteram and Thomas 2010). For example, Motteram and Thomas (2010) pointed out that, given the importance of technology in mediating communication in the classroom, and the digital competence and expectations learners bring to the class, TBLT needs to devote greater attention to technology-mediated tasks to advance.

Although not always within the framework of TBLT, tasks have been used extensively in the Synchronous Computer-Mediated Communication (SCMC) literature. Research has provided convincing evidence that similar to FTF contexts, SCMC-based interaction can create opportunities for learners to focus on form by encouraging negotiation of meaning and modified output (e.g., González-Lloret and Ziegler 2021; Pellettieri 2000; Smith 2003; Ziegler 2016). However, most previous research has focused on performing tasks in a written text-chat environment and how it can facilitate L2 development (see Ortega 2009, for a review). Nowadays, however, laptops and mobile devices are well equipped with cameras and microphones. Also, internet connection is becoming more accessible, stable, and fast. Such technological advances have made it more favorable for implementing audio and video SCMC in the L2 classroom. There has also been a sudden growth in using video-chat programs such as Skype and Zoom for education ever since the pandemic. According to L. Lee (2007), video SCMC shares many similarities with FTF interaction such as visual and situational cues, which are inevitably absent in written SCMC. Nevertheless, research conducted using video SCMC to develop L2 proficiency remains relatively unexplored.

Among the handful of studies that have investigated task-based video SCMC, Yanguas (2010) compared 15 dyads completing a jigsaw task embedded with unknown vocabulary items in three different modes: audio SCMC, video SCMC, and FTF. The researchers observed more negotiation in the audio than video group and contributed the lack of visual cues in the audio group for generating more attention to language. However, no differences were found between the video and FTF group. Additionally, contrary to what has been

reported for written SCMC, similar patterns of turn-taking were found between the oral SCMC and FTF groups. Hence, Yanguas argued that both audio and video SCMC were closer to FTF interaction compared to written SCMC, which often involves short time delays between the initiation of an utterance and the interlocutor's response to it (Smith 2003). Also, Lee (2007) explored L1-L2 dyads carrying out two-way information gap tasks using video SCMC. The researcher conducted interviews and gathered reflection logs from the participants to examine their experiences in using video-conferencing as a tool to develop L2 oral skills. The study found that, like many previous SCMC studies, L2 vocabulary triggered the most negotiation of meaning. Also, it suggested that using well-designed tasks, carefully selecting the linguistic context, and providing students with sufficient training in video-conferencing are essential for enhancing the benefits of video SCMC for language learning.

While benefits may differ across technologies and modalities, research is increasingly showing a positive impact of using technology in task-based learning environments. However, there is still much to explore in relation to the implementation of video-based SCMC in the EFL classroom and its effects on L2 development, a gap the present study seeks to help address.

2.3. Attention to Form during Reading Tasks

Another key gap in TBLT literature is the lack of studies on task-based reading instruction. Reading tasks, however, seem to hold key acquisitional benefits. For example, they can provide opportunities to expose learners to rich input (R. Ellis 2018; Krashen 2004), which is generally agreed to be essential for L2 acquisition to occur. Additionally, L2 reading has been reported to facilitate, besides the development of reading skills, the learning of various target language features including L2 vocabulary and grammar (e.g., Grabe & Stoller, 2011; Hafiz & Tudor, 1990; Krashen, 2004; Lee et al., 2015; Mermelstein, 2015; Pellicer-Sánchez,

2016, 2017; Webb & Chang, 2015). Further, an increasing body of L2 research informs us that L2 reading and general L2 proficiency are closely related. That is, having greater vocabulary and grammatical knowledge facilitates effective text processing for L2 reading comprehension, and better reading comprehension can lead to further development in L2 proficiency. In this respect, L2 reading research and pedagogic intervention should aim to find effective ways to teach both reading and L2 competence.

Following the communicative approach, L2 reading instruction has largely focused on comprehension emphasizing development in reading rate, reading skills, and reading strategies. However, taking such an exclusively meaning-based approach to reading instruction has been criticized for giving learners little opportunity to process reading materials for grammar (Han & D' Angelo, 2009). Celce-Murcia (2002) states that "languages take place in context and at the level of discourse rather than the abstract sentence level" (p.119), hence why grammar should be taught within context. Reading can provide models of how to use the language at the phrase, clause, and sentence level, from which learners can derive grammar rules. Therefore, it is equally important to train learners to process texts to build an understanding of how meaning is encoded linguistically, besides processing texts for comprehension. Another concern with exclusively meaning-based L2 reading instruction is that it mainly encourages learners to use top-down processing strategies relying on non-linguistic (e.g., background knowledge, contextual clues) as opposed to linguistic resources when processing texts. Although this may aid general understanding of texts, it has minimal benefits for learners in developing grammatical or lexical knowledge. In order to foster a more balanced development in L2 ability, Han and D'Angelo (2009) suggest that L2 reading instruction should promote reading for communicative and for acquisitional purposes.

In this respect, reading tasks, accompanied by carefully planned pre- and post-task activities, may provide a platform for timely focus on form. Among the potential pre-task and post-task activities, the focus of the present study is explicit instruction.

Although explicit grammar instruction is widely used in L2 instruction, isolated grammar instruction has received much criticism since the emergence of communicative language teaching practice (Doughty and Williams 1998). Nonetheless, some L2 researchers maintain that there are advantages to providing explicit grammar instruction before learners move on to more communicative activities since establishing declarative knowledge is a pre-requisite for proceduralization and automatization to occur (DeKeyser 2015). Teachers also prefer to integrate explicit instruction prior to communicative practice especially when the L2 is a foreign language (Littlewood 2007; Van de Guchte et al. 2019). In TLBT literature, however, providing explicit grammar instruction at the pre-task stage has been discouraged by some scholars due to the possibility that it may detract learners' focus on meaning, a primary principle of TBLT (Long 2015; R. Ellis 2003; Willis and Willis 2007). Little empirical research, however, has been conducted to substantiate this assumption. In light of this, it may be worthy to explore whether pre-task explicit grammar instruction does indeed interfere with a focus on meaning during task performance.

2.4. Aims and Research Question

Against this background, the current study aimed to investigate the extent to which explicit instruction preceding a post-reading task influenced learners' focus on meaning versus form during task performance. Learners' focus was explored through the incidence and content of LREs that occurred during the post-reading task performance. The participants were child EFL learners, a much-neglected population in TBLT research and SLA in general (Plonsky

and Kim 2016). The target construction for explicit grammar instruction was the third person singular *-s* morpheme. The following question guided our research:

To what extent does explicit instruction prior to post-reading tasks affect the number, linguistic focus, outcome, and level of engagement of LREs among child EFL learners?

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

40 Korean EFL children (ages ranging from 7 to 10) were initially recruited for the study from a local primary school in Seoul, South Korea. From this initial pool, those who were considered beginner level learners of English based on reports by each students' homeroom teacher and school exam records were selected to participate in the study. Participants who missed any sessions were excluded from analysis. As a result, 33 learners were included in the final participant pool (20 male and 13 female), of which 17 participants were assigned to the Explicit Instruction Group (+EI) and 16 to the no Explicit Instruction group (-EI). In order to determine whether there were differences in general reading ability among the two groups at the outset of the study, the reading section of the TOEFL Primary test was administered. A Mann-Whitney *U* test confirmed that there was no difference between the two groups $U = 119.50$, $z = -.60$, $p = .56$.

3.2. Procedure

Data were collected over 6 weeks and treatment sessions were held two times a week, on Tuesdays and Thursdays as part of the school's extracurricular English class. First, the participants took the TOEFL Primary test, and the following week they engaged in seven

treatment sessions with each session lasting 50 minutes. During each session, the participants received individual links to the pre-reading activity and were given five minutes to complete it. Then, the storybook was read to the participants. Immediately after reading, the students were given a link to the reading comprehension questions and were asked to complete it in five minutes. Next, the participants engaged in their respective post-reading task with the +EI group receiving explicit explanation about the target form before performing the task, and the -EI group completing the task without any explicit grammar instruction. The post-reading task took approximately 20 minutes and were video-recorded.

3.3. Target Linguistic Construction

The third person singular *-s* was embedded in the post-reading tasks to examine whether this combined with explicit instruction affects learners' language-related episodes. The target form was boldfaced and underlined as well. The third person singular *-s* was chosen for several reasons. First, acquiring the form can be challenging for learners whose first language, like Korean, does not conjugate verbs using agreement with the subject. Second, the third person *-s* is a communicatively redundant linguistic feature with low saliency. This makes the linguistic construction susceptible to blocking (N. Ellis 2006), which occurs when two linguistic cues jointly predict an outcome, and the more salient cue becomes more strongly linked to the outcome thereby overshadowing the less salient one. Applying this notion to the third person *-s*, the subject of the verb and the inflection together signal the meaning of 'person,' but the pronoun or noun used as the subject is perceptually more salient. As the learner starts to pay less attention to the *-s* morpheme, it can become blocked from further subsequent learning. In addition, the multifunctionality of the morpheme *-s*, for example to denote plurality and possession, can create confusion or difficulty among learners

(N. Ellis 2006). Due to these characteristics, the third person -*s* has been argued to be more prone to fossilization in adulthood (Han 2013).

3.4. Reading Materials for Treatment Sessions

Seven graded readers targeted for beginner level young EFL learners (band A1 according to the Common European Framework for Reference) were selected for this study. These books were chosen based on whether they had sufficient amounts of the target construction in the text. As shown in Table 1, the word count of the graded readers ranged between approximately 500-600 words, with the majority including about 40 instances of the target form.

Table 1. Description of the Graded Readers

No.	Title	Word Count	Frequency of target form
1	Three Billy Goats	544	38
2	The Shoemaker and the Elves	527	30
3	The Gingerbread Man	550	40
4	The Magic Pot	562	42
5	Rumpelstiltskin	629	44
6	Lownu Mends the Sky	611	39
7	The Princess and the Pea	584	39

3.5. Experimental Treatment

The tasks used in this study were all created using Padlet, a collaborative web platform, and the treatment sessions were delivered using Zoom. This enabled the students to complete the tasks using their own devices and collaborate with their partners on the same screen during pair work. The treatment sessions followed the design of a task-based lesson and consisted of three phases: a pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading phase. At the

beginning of each session, the participants engaged in the same pre-reading activity individually. Each student was given a personal link (URL) to a Padlet page with four pictures extracted from a storybook that the students would read that session (Appendix A-1). The students were asked to predict and sequence the pictures in the order they think the story would happen. There were three different sets of these pictures (set A, B, and C) with each set containing four pictures. Then, the storybook was read to the students by the researcher using the screen sharing function in Zoom. Afterwards, the participants were told to read the story again on their own. While they were reading, the students also checked whether they had guessed the order of the four pictures correctly. Immediately after reading, the students completed an online true/false reading comprehension quiz.

Next, the participants engaged in a post-reading task (Appendix A-2). They were instructed that they would find eight sentences in the bottom area of their Padlet page. Using the four pictures from the pre-reading activity, the participants were asked to find the sentence that best described each picture, then drag and place the sentence under each of the four pictures. As mentioned earlier, all the sentences were textually enhanced with the verbs boldfaced and the morpheme *-s* underlined for all groups.

Once the students finished, they were paired so that one student was working with set A of the pictures and the other set B and in the case of triads one student with set C. Then, each pair or triad was sent to a separate breakout room and received a different Padlet link containing all set A and B sentences (and C sentences for triads). The pair/triads had to collaborate and sequence all the sentences in the correct order together. This was a two-way information gap task in that it involved students working together to reconstruct the story based on the pictures they each had from the pre-reading activity. (Appendix A-3). After sequencing all the sentences, the participants were asked to write a new ending for the story. So, the final outcome for all groups was a storyboard on Padlet containing eight sentences

sequenced in order, an ending of the story, and a drawing if the students had time left. Lastly, the new story endings and pictures created by each pair or triad were uploaded onto the class Padlet wall. Here, the students were asked to leave comments or click 'like' buttons under other students' postings (Appendix A-4).

The post-reading task differed in terms of the two conditions: the presence versus absence of explicit instruction (EI). For the + EI conditions, explicit instruction about the target form was provided before performing the post-reading task. The researcher provided a short grammar lesson about the third person *-s* using a power point slide with an explanation written in the participants' L1 followed by some examples. To ensure that no additional tokens of the target construction were given to the +EI groups in the input, the word 'verb' was written in Korean instead of an actual verb alongside the subject pronouns (e.g., She/He 동사-*s*) in all the examples given (see Appendix B). The explicit instruction was delivered in the participants' L1 and typically lasted two to three minutes. For the -EI condition, participants completed the post-reading task without any explicit instruction. While the +EI group was receiving explicit instruction, the -EI group were asked to wait in their respective breakout rooms until further notice by the teacher.

3.6. Assessment Tasks

3.6.1. Reading Proficiency Test

The reading section of the TOEFL Primary test Step 2 was used to determine whether there were any initial differences in reading ability among the two groups. The test was chosen because it is designed for beginner level young learners of English. It assesses students' reading skills such as understanding a story of about 250 words, finding and interpreting information in menus or schedules, and understanding a sequence of instructions. The test required students to read a paragraph or a short passage and answer three to four

comprehension questions and the entire test consisted of 37 multiple-choice questions. The participants were given 30 minutes to complete the test. Following the TOEFL Primary scoring guidelines, the test was scored dichotomously by giving one point for each correct answer, resulting in a maximum score of 37. The reliability of the test was measured using Cronbach's alpha and it was found to be highly reliable $\alpha = .83$.

3.6.2. Reading Comprehension Questions

In order to examine the participants' understanding of the texts, True or False reading comprehension questions were designed by the researcher using Microsoft Forms. Six questions were constructed for each book. The students had to decide whether statements were true or false based on the story they had read. Immediately after each reading, a link to the questions was given to the students and they had five minutes to complete them. The students did not receive any feedback on their responses. Finally, the reliability of the reading comprehension questions was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha. The tests were found to have low reliability possibly due to ceiling effects (Book 1: $\alpha = .55$; Book 2: $\alpha = .63$; Book 3: $\alpha = .72$; Book 4: $\alpha = .56$; Book 5: $\alpha = .75$; Book 6: $\alpha = .70$; Book 7: $\alpha = .59$). As the descriptive statistics for the tests will show in the Results section (see Table 2), the mean scores for the tests were high, almost reaching the maximum score, which indicates that the participants comprehended the content of the stories without difficulty. For the purposes of the present study, this created a favourable condition for the participants, as it suggested that the students were likely to have attentional resources left to process linguistic forms (Skehan 1998; VanPatten 1996).

3.7. Data Analysis

The participants' conversational interactions during the collaborative part of the post-reading task were transcribed verbatim, and the total number of LREs that occurred for each group was tallied. Specifically, 35 hours of talk were transcribed and coded for LREs. An LRE started when a participant raised a question about language and ended when they either continued with the task at hand or moved on to a new discussion topic. Then, once the LREs had been identified, they were coded according to three main categories: the linguistic focus and the outcome of LREs and the level of engagement in LREs. Drawing upon the work of Storch (2008) and García Mayo and Azkarai (2016), the linguistic focus of LREs was subdivided into three types: (1) lexical LREs, which included instances where the learners dealt with word meaning and/or word choice; (2) morphosyntactic LREs, which involved episodes concerning morphology, and/or syntax; and (3) mechanical LREs, which dealt with spelling. Next, the outcome of LREs was coded based on whether they were resolved or unresolved. Finally, a further distinction was made between LREs that showed elaborate engagement and those showing limited or no engagement. More specifically, LREs were coded according to three types of level of engagement: (1) elaborate engagement if all members of the group were engaged in resolving the linguistic issue, (2) limited engagement if only the participant who initiated the LRE was engaged in addressing the issue and others were not joining in, and (3) limited + limited engagement if no one in the group discussed the linguistic issue raised and moved on with the task. Each LRE dealt with only one linguistic item. If the same LRE was deliberated in several turns throughout a single conversation, the linguistic focus and outcome of that LRE was coded only once.

The following examples illustrate how LREs were coded according to linguistic focus, outcome, and level of engagement. In example (1), students A and B are writing a new ending for the story they read that day. After student B writes a sentence, student A tells student B that he has spelt the word 'dumpling' incorrectly (turn 1). However, student B

disagrees with student A (turn 2). In turn 3, student A types in the correct spelling on the Padlet page they are working on, and the issue is resolved correctly. This conversation was coded as a mechanical LRE since it dealt with spelling, and as showing elaborate engagement since both participants were actively engaged.

(1) A: *이거* *덤플링이야.* *너* *덤핑이라고* *썼어.*
iego dumpling-iya Neo dumping-ilago sseoss-eo.
'This is a dumpling. You wrote dumping'
B: *이렇게* *쓰는거* *맞는거* *같은데?*
ileohge sseuneungeo majneungeo gat-eunde?
'I think this is how you spell it.'
A: *아니야.* *덤플링이라고* *써야지.* *내가* *써줄게.*
aniya dumpling-ilago sseoyaji naega Sseojulge.
'No, you need to write dumpling. Let me type it in for you.'
B: (nods)

Example (2) shows a lexical LRE, specifically focusing on word choice. While writing the story ending, student A asks student B how to write something in English (turn 1). Student B tries to form a sentence (turn 2) when student A joins in by providing the verb 'sell' (turn 3). This LRE was coded as an incorrectly resolved LRE and as showing elaborate engagement.

(2) A: *장사가* *잘 안됐다를* *어떻게* *쓰지?*
jangsaga jal andwaeda-leul eotteohge sseuji?
'How do you say the business didn't do well?'
B: *They don't…*
A: *Sell?*
B: *응.* *끝났다* *이제!*
eung. kkeutnassda ije!
'Yes (B writes They don't sell). Finished now!'

In example (3) student A asks for the spelling of ‘change’ (turn 1), student B ignores the question and talks about what he wants to write next (turn 2). In turn 3, student A guesses the spelling of ‘change’ and writes down the two words ‘star’ and ‘moon’ suggested by student B. Then, Student A asks his partner if his sentence is correct, but student B does not respond. Student A waits very briefly and then continues with the task (turn 5). This LRE was classified as an unresolved mechanical LRE, and coded as limited engagement since only the participant who raised the linguistic issue actively engaged in trying to resolve it.

(3)
A: *Change* *어떻게* *써?*
Change eotteohge sseo?
‘How do you spell ‘change?’
B: Star and moon…
A: *Star, moon.* *이거* *맞아?*
A: igeo maja?
(After incorrectly spelling change) ‘Star, moon. Is this right?’
B: (silence)
A: *Night. Last night…* (continues to write on his own)

Lastly, example (4) shows a conversation with two LREs. According to Swain and Lapkin (1998), one larger LRE can have smaller ones embedded in it. These smaller LREs were coded separately. Hence, turns 1 to 2 were coded as correctly resolved lexical LREs with elaborate engagement, and turns 3 to 5 were coded as unresolved mechanical LREs with limited engagement. After all the LREs were identified and classified according to their linguistic focus, outcome, and level of engagement, the data were tallied.

(4)
A: *Little man and the queen… Is friends now* *라고* *쓰면 되?*
Little man and the queen… Is friends now lago sseumyeon doe?)
‘Do I write, Is friends now?’
B: *Became friends?*

A: 아 그래! 그게 낫겠다. Became *어떻게 써?*
ah geulae! geuge nasgessda. Became eotteohge sseo?
'Oh, yes! That sounds better. How do you spell became?'

B: *몰라. 그걸 내가 어떻게 아니?*
molla geugeol naega eotteohge ani?
'I don't know. How should I know?'

A: *알았어.*
al-ass-eo
'Okay.' (A writes become instead of became)

4. Results

4.1. Reading Comprehension Questions

The descriptive statistics for the reading comprehension questions data appear in Table 2. As the overall scores indicate, the participants displayed a good understanding of the graded readers regardless of whether they received explicit instruction or not before the post-reading tasks. A Mann-Whitney *U* test confirmed that there was no significant difference between the two groups in terms of reading comprehension throughout the experiment, $U = 172.50$, $z = 1.32$, $p = .19$, $r = 0.23$. The effect size was in the small range. In other words, the presence or absence of explicit instruction had no significant impact on the participants' overall reading comprehension scores.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Reading Comprehension Questions by Group

Group	*n*	Mean	Median	SD	95% CI	
					Lower	Upper
+EI	17	31.18	29.00	8.38	26.87	35.48
-EI	16	34.38	37.00	8.39	29.90	38.85

* Maximum score 42

4.2. Language Related Episodes

The research question of this study aimed at examining the number, linguistic focus, outcome, and level of engagement of LREs. The transcribed data of the video-recordings from the interaction that took place while participants completed the post-reading task revealed that indeed learners engaged in LREs. Table 3 shows the overall number and linguistic focus of LREs produced by the 15 pairs/triads. Their interaction contained a total of 51 LREs. Although the overall number of LREs was low, mechanical LREs occurred the most (*n* = 24; 47%), followed by lexical (*n* = 16, 31%) and morphosyntactic LREs (*n* = 11, 22%).

Table 3. LREs by Linguistic Focus

LRE Type	*n* (%)	Mean
Lexical	16 (31%)	1.07
Morphosyntactic	11 (22%)	0.73
Mechanical	24 (47%)	1.60
Total	51	3.40

Table 4 provides the number, linguistic focus, and outcome of LREs produced by the pairs/triads in the two conditions: +EI (*n* = 8) and -EI (*n* = 7). In order to account for the unequal number of participants in each condition, the percentage of LREs by condition is provided in brackets.

Table 4. Number, Linguistic Focus, and Outcome of LREs by Group

LRE Type	Correct		Incorrect		Unresolved		Total	
	+EI	-EI	+EI	-EI	+EI	-EI	+EI	-EI
Lexical	0	7	1	4	2	2	3 (17%)	13 (83%)
Morphosyntax	2	3	3	1	0	2	5 (42%)	6 (58%)
Mechanical	4	12	1	2	3	2	8 (30%)	16 (70%)
Total	6	22	5	7	5	6	16	35

Overall, the -EI group produced more LREs than those in the +EI group across all categories. In terms of the target structure, only a small number of LREs occurred for both

groups. The +EI group produced three LREs involving the third person singular, of which two were resolved correctly and one incorrectly. In the -EI group, two LREs were produced of which one was resolved correctly and one left unresolved. The findings so far seem to suggest that both +EI and -EI groups do focus on form but largely on spelling.

The majority of LREs in this study were initiated while the participants were writing a new ending for the story. For example, if participants did not know the spelling of a specific word, they either looked for a different word (example 5) or left it unresolved. But in most cases, they attempted to resolve the issue even though they might not have settled on the target-like form (example 6). Also, the participants may have been unable to address some of the spelling-related problems due to their low proficiency and decided to avoid using them. (example 7).

(5) A: *Scicers* *라고* *썼는데?*
scicers lago sseossneumdae?
'You wrote scicers.'
B: *너가* *써봐.*
neoga Sseobwa.
(laughs) 'You try writing it.'
A: *내가* ***scissors*** *를* *너무* *안써서…*
naega scissors-leul neomu ansseoseo
'I haven't spelt scissors for a long time…'(laughs)
B: *잠깐만…*
jamkkanman
'Wait.'
A: *그냥* ***fork*** *에* *찔려서* *죽었다고* *할까?*
geunyang fork -eue jjillyeoseo jug-eossdago halkka?
'Shall we just say he was stabbed with a fork?'
B: *여기서* ***fork*** *가* *나와?* *그래* *그러자.*
yeogiseo fork -ga nawa? geulae Geuleoja.
'Was there a fork in the story? Okay, let's write that.'

(6) A: *배를 영어로 뭐라고 하지?*
baeleul yeong-eolo mwolag haji?
'How do you say stomach in English?'

B: *배가 뭐지? 갑자기 생각이 안나. Stomach?*
baega mwoji? gabjagi saeng-gag-i anna. Stomach?
'What's stomach? I suddenly can't remember. Stomach?'

A: *스펠링이 뭐야?*
spelling-i mwoya?
'How do you spell that?'

B: *S-T-O-M-A-C*

(7) A: *Actually 어떻게 써?*
actually eotteohge-sseo?
'How do you spell actually?'

B: *Actually?*

A: *어, 나 쓸줄 몰라.*
eo na sseuljul molla.
'Yeah, I don't know how to write it.'

B: *A-C...*

A: *잠깐만*
jamkkanman.
'Wait.' (starts typing)

B: *C...C 쓴 다음에... 아, 나도 모르겠어!*
C…C-sseun da-eum-e… ah, nado moleugess-eo!
'C…C. Then… Ah, I don't know either!'

A: *그냥 쓰지말자 그럼.*
geunyang sseujimalja geuleom.
'Let's just not use it then.'

Table 5 presents the level of engagement in LREs for both groups. In general, the LREs produced by both groups were elaborate. However, the -EI group produced a higher percentage of elaborate LREs compared to the +EI group.

Table 5. Level of Engagement by Group

Group	Elaborate LREs	Limited LREs	Limited-Limited LREs
+EI	9 (56.26%)	4 (25%)	3 (18.75%)
-EI	27 (79.41%)	3 (8.82%)	4 (11.76%)

5. Discussion

The results of the study revealed that child EFL learners provide opportunities for each other to negotiate and reflect on language. The transcripts of participants' interaction during the post-reading task revealed that mechanical LREs (spelling) were generated the most regardless of group. Most of the LREs occurred during the writing component of the post-reading tasks (i.e. writing a new ending to the story) rather than the story sequencing part of the task. This is in line with previous studies that have reported that tasks with a writing component have a tendency to generate more form-focused LREs (e.g., García Mayo 2002; García Mayo and Azkarai 2016). A reason for why most LREs were produced while writing new endings to the story may be that since the participants had to post their final written product on the class Padlet wall at the end of each session, they may have felt more pressure to correct errors. Also, writing an alternative ending may have pushed learners to reflect upon their linguistic output, moving from semantic processing to more syntactic processing (Swain 1995). That is, in producing language, the participants may have discovered a gap in

their knowledge, which could have triggered a more thorough analysis of the input (i.e., syntactic analysis) and generate more LREs in order to fill this gap (Kowal and Swain 1994).

For both groups, however, only a small number of LREs were related to the target form. One reason for this may be the nature of the task, which encouraged the students to focus primarily on meaning. Participants were told that the goal of the task was to sequence the pictures in the correct order and to come up with a novel ending to the story. This is an important finding as providing explicit instruction did not disturb the interaction or compromise the primacy of meaning, which is a concern that has been raised by several researchers regarding the incorporation of focus on form in the pre-task stage (e.g., Ellis et al. 2019; Van de Guchte et al. 2019).

An interesting finding of the current study is that the -EI group generated significantly more LREs across all categories compared to the +EI group. It is possible that providing explicit instruction to the +EI group resulted in a trade-off between focusing on form and the functional aspects of task performance. This may have led the +EI group to engage in fewer LREs compared to the -EI group. Nevertheless, given the minimal number of LREs related to the target form and no observed instances of participants discussing the explicit instruction given, it seems that providing explicit instruction did not compromise the meaning-primary principle of TBLT.

An explanation for the overall low incidence of LREs may be due to the participants' low proficiency level. Previous research has demonstrated that the frequency of LREs increases with proficiency in the L2 (e.g., Kim and McDonough 2008; Leeser 2004). It is also possible that performing tasks online via Zoom and Padlet was cognitively demanding for the participants. The online procedure of the treatment sessions and the design of the post-reading tasks are not typically seen in Korean elementary schools. Also, the students had only started receiving online lessons after the pandemic, making it a relatively new way to learn.

Hence, students might have had few attentional resources left to direct their attention to linguistic forms and engage in LREs during task performance (Skehan 1996, 1998). This was also evident in the transcribed data of the video recordings. A large proportion of the conversation between pairs/triads were related to completing the task at hand, such as how to move pictures on the screen and how to use the English keyboard. As suggested by Lee (2007), to ensure the benefits of language learning through video-conferencing, it seems necessary to provide learners with sufficient training in using the technological tools required by the task.

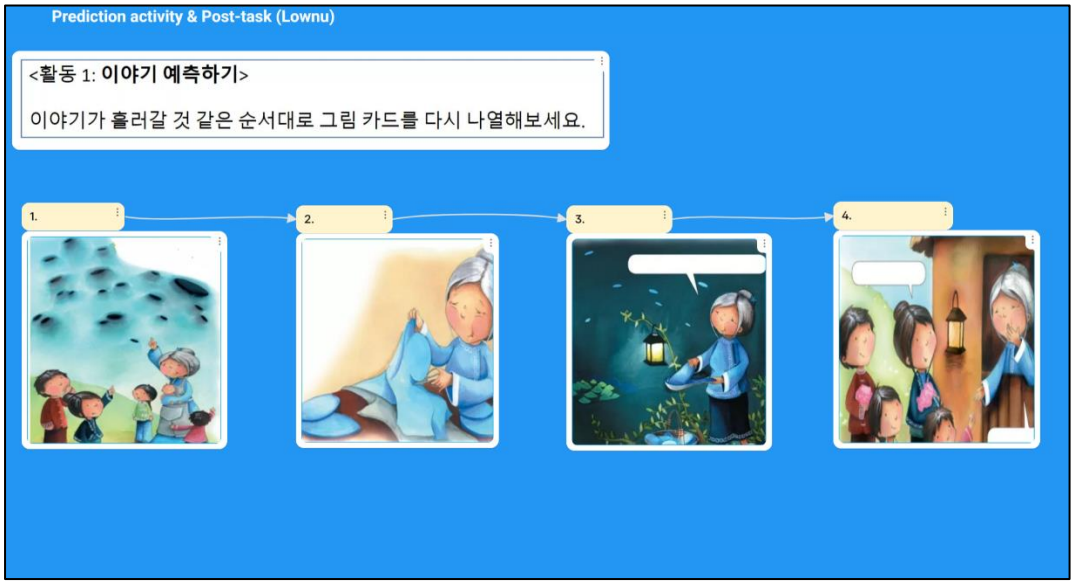
The present study is not without limitations, and these should be considered in interpreting the findings. First, the study was carried out with a small number of EFL children and would have benefited from having a larger sample size. Also, only one linguistic item and one level of language proficiency was examined. Hence, the findings cannot be extended to other types of linguistic features or proficiency levels. The present study used a three-minute grammar lesson, but it would be interesting for future studies to examine whether length or type of explicit instruction would have differing effects on LREs. Lastly, replication studies are also needed involving older/adult participants with different proficiency levels, L1 backgrounds, and instructional contexts.

6. Conclusion and Implications

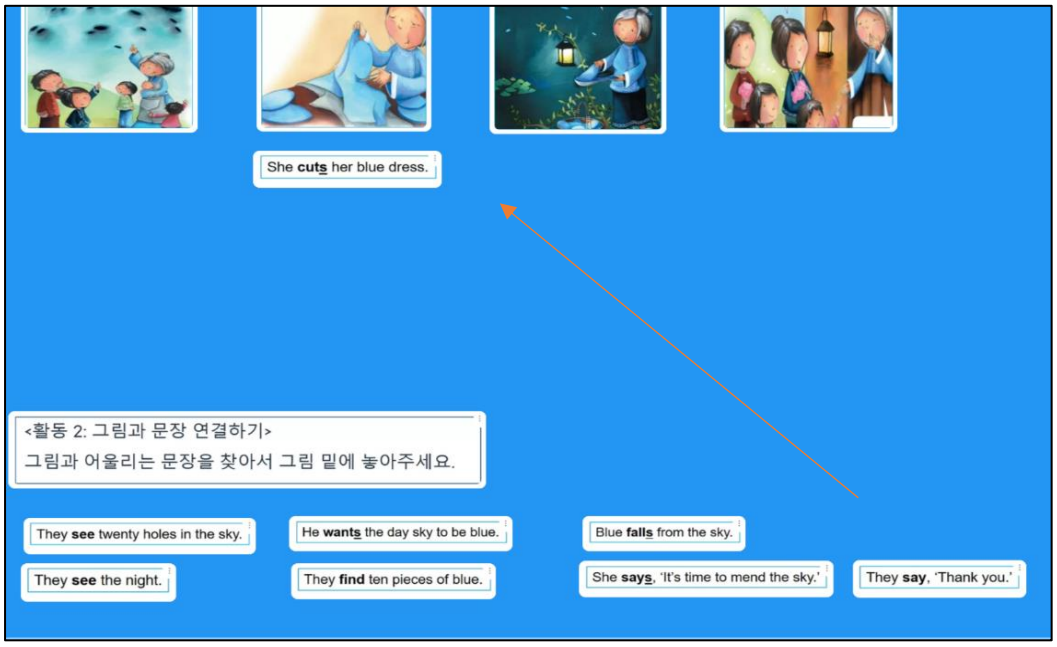
The main aim of this study was to examine whether providing explicit instruction before performing a post-reading task would affect the language-related episodes produced by EFL children in an online learning environment. The findings showed that allowing EFL children to collaborate in pairs or groups seems to provide valuable opportunities for them to learn from each other's L2 knowledge and co-construct meaning. Also, the presence versus absence of explicit instruction did not influence the incidence of LREs.

Despite this null finding for explicit instruction, the study yielded some useful pedagogical implications for designing and implementing L2 tasks in video SCMC instructional settings. First and foremost, in most East Asian countries such as South Korea, explicit grammar instruction still plays a large role in foreign language classrooms. Hence, excluding grammar teaching from classroom practice may not resonate with classroom teachers. An important implication of this study is that preserving a focus on meaning does not require the abandonment of explicit instruction. Second, to encourage child learners to engage in LREs and to help them perceive the online context as a platform appropriate for discussion related to language (e.g., Baralt 2014), training learners with collaborative strategies such as asking for clarification or help may improve the effectiveness of collaborative interaction during communicative tasks (Sato and Dussuel Lam 2021). Lastly, to encourage more talk about language form, a collaborative writing task may be more suitable for generating instances of form-related LREs (e.g., García Mayo 2002; García Mayo and Azkarai 2016).

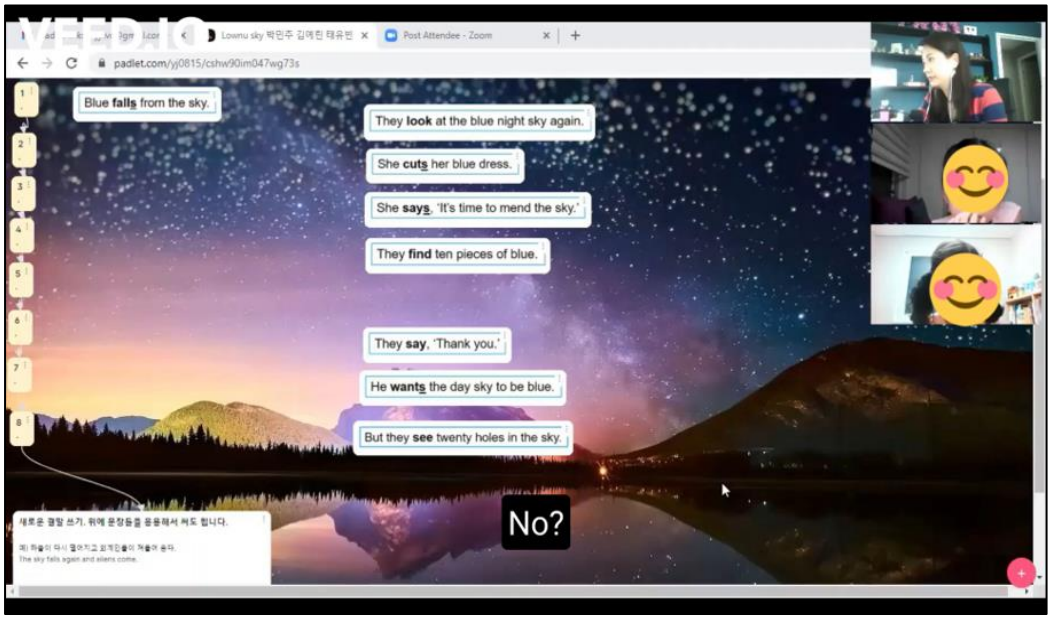
Appendix A-1. Pre-reading Activity



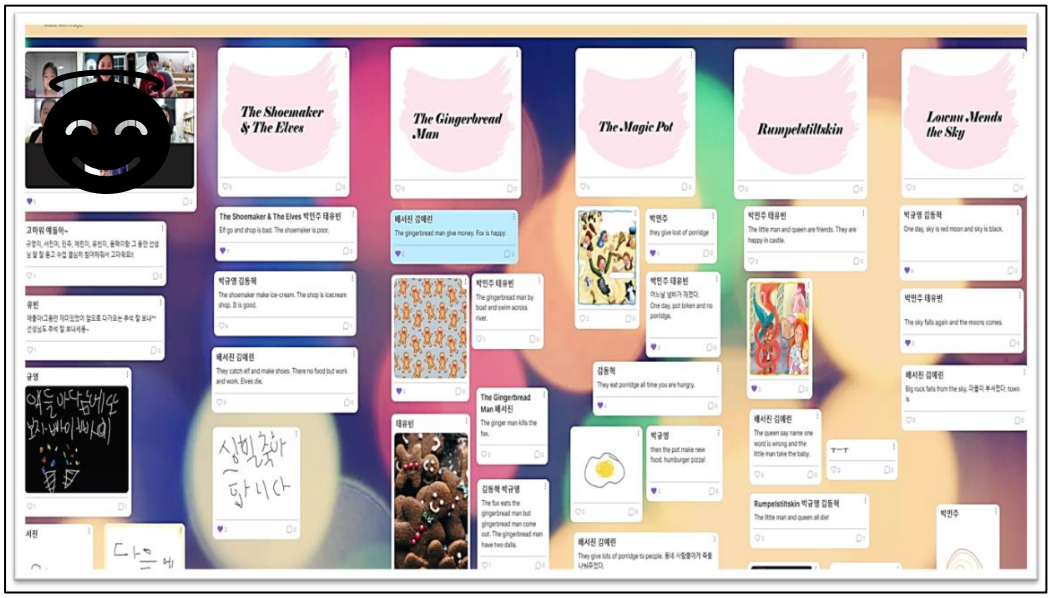
Appendix A-2. Post-reading Activity



Appendix A-3. Post-reading Activity



Appendix A-4. Class Padlet Wall



Appendix B. Explicit Instruction Slide

문장이 he, she, it, 사물, 이름으로 시작할 경우 동사 끝에 -s를 붙인다.
(After he, she, it, objects or names we add -s to the verb)

He/She/It/Name + 동사 + s

예시 (Examples):
He 동사s to the park.
She 동사s to the park.
It 동사s to the park.
Jennie 동사s to the park.

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