Explicit or Implicit Grammar Instruction in EFL? Teachers' and Learners' Perceptions

¿Instrucción explicita o implícita en la enseñanza de gramática en ILE? Percepciones de profesores y alumnos

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ABSTRACT: This study investigated the perceptions that teachers and learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) have regarding explicit and implicit grammar instruction (GI). Both types of GI are described as taking place in meaning-based communicative classrooms. They differ in that explicit GI involves conscious awareness of the form of the language learners need to know to understand grammar in context. However, implicit instruction occurs during communicative activities without any previous explanation of the language's form. The research problem concerns a grammar gap related to EFL teachers´ and learners´ perceptions of English grammar instruction not being considered in EFL classrooms. A quantitative method structured this study, which focused on 45 teachers and 355 students randomly selected from a language center at a university in northern Mexico. Previously designed questionnaires (Valeo & Spada, 2016) were translated, adapted, and used for data collection. Factor analysis was conducted throughout the research, and the results support the validity of the questionnaires.

This study structured a quantitative analysis; however, the survey included an open question where participants expressed their perceptions. The results indicate that teachers and learners prefer implicit GI across groups and EFL courses. Nevertheless, some participants also acknowledge the value of explicit GI. The perceptions about these two types of instruction are consistent with views discussed in the literature regarding instruction in second language acquisition. For future research, interviews and observations are suggested to supplement the data obtained from teachers and learners in this study.

KEYWORDS: teachers' and learners' perceptions, explicit and implicit grammar instruction, EFL courses

RESUMEN: Este estudio investigó las percepciones que tienen los profesores y estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera (ILE) acerca de la instrucción gramatical

(IG) explícita e implícita. Ambos tipos de IG se llevan a cabo en aulas comunicativas basadas en el significado. Se diferencian en que la IG explícita implica la reflexión sobre la forma del lenguaje que los alumnos necesitan saber para comprender la gramática en contexto. Por otro lado, la instrucción implícita ocurre durante las actividades comunicativas sin ninguna explicación previa de la forma del lenguaje. El problema de esta investigación consiste en una laguna relacionada a la instrucción gramatical en donde no se consideran las percepciones de los maestros y estudiantes del inglés como lengua extranjera. Este estudio utilizó el método cuantitativo en el cual participaron 45 profesores y 355 estudiantes quienes fueron seleccionados al azar de un centro de idiomas de una universidad en el norte de México. Para la recolección de datos se utilizaron cuestionarios previamente diseñados (Valeo & Spada, 2016), los cuales a su vez fueron traducidos, adaptados y aplicados. El análisis factorial reflejó la confiabilidad y validez de los cuestionarios en los resultados de esta investigación. En este estudio se llevó a cabo un análisis cuantitativo, sin embargo, la encuesta incluyó una pregunta abierta en donde los participantes expresaron sus percepciones. Los resultados indican que los profesores y los alumnos tienen preferencia por la IG implícita en todos los grupos y cursos de inglés como lengua extranjera. Sin embargo, algunos participantes también reconocen el valor de la IG explícita. Las percepciones sobre estos dos tipos de instrucción son consistentes con los puntos de vista discutidos en la literatura relacionada a la instrucción en la adquisición de un segundo idioma. Para investigaciones futuras, se sugieren entrevistas y observaciones para complementar los datos obtenidos de profesores y alumnos en este estudio.

PALABRAS CLAVE: percepciones de profesores y alumnos, instrucción gramatical explícita e implícita, cursos de inglés como lengua extranjera

1. Introduction

The central focus of this study was to find out about EFL teachers' and learners' perceptions of explicit and implicit grammar instruction as the primary objective. However, these two types of instruction were considered from the perspective of their effects on the development of linguistic aspects. The above considering that there has been a great deal of research abroad on the effect of such types of instruction on aspects of language and scarcely on the perceptions EFL teachers and learners have about those types of teaching, specifically of grammar, in the social context of the study. The research questions that were considered are the following:

1. What are the EFL teachers´ and adult EFL learners´ perceptions about implicit and explicit grammar instruction?

2. What impact does the EFL language level course have on EFL teachers´ and adult EFL learners´ perceptions of implicit and explicit grammar instruction?

2. Theoretical Framework

The main objective of this study was to find out about teachers' and adult learners' perceptions of implicit and explicit grammar instruction. Therefore, it was also essential to consider teachers' and learners' cognition as correlated to perceptions about those two types of grammar teaching. Notions of cognition and perception are relevant and have been the center of attention not only in linguistics but also in some other disciplines, such as psychology, among others. Seeing and hearing are among the means of acquiring knowledge

in social contexts. Storch (2013) states that "a study of perception and cognition in any language would be incomplete without at least a glimpse into the ways of talking about perception and the ways of knowing things" (p. 3).

The knowledge one has acquired about something and what one thinks about it differs from language to language. Even if expressions of cognition and perception share some features, when talking about what people see, hear, smell, taste, and touch, meaning may vary from culture to culture grammatically and lexically (Storch, 2013). In other words, Storch (2013) notes that "the expression of perception and cognition—thinking, understanding and 'knowing' things—spans grammar and lexicon" (p. 1). Borg (2006) states that "there is…a significant body of work which has examined language teacher cognition about specific curricular domains" (p. 109). Even though there has been limited attention to specific areas, such as vocabulary instruction, grammar teaching is one of the curricular domains that, in contrast, has attracted significant research attention (Storch, 2013, p. 109). The above supports the importance of carrying out this study.

One of the fields that framed this study was Cognitive Psychology, which is defined as the science that studies the mind derived from psychology (Gellatly, 2012). Also, it refers to "the study of how people perceive, learn, remember, and think about information. A cognitive psychologist might study how people…learn language" (Sternberg, 2012, p. 3). Therefore, considering the relationship between perception and language learning, in this study, Cognitive

Psychology referred to activities related to linguistics as a subfield of such a discipline (Gellatly, 2012).

According to Gellatly (2012), cognitive psychologists typically study language, perception, attention, reasoning categorization, problem-solving, and memory, which are central to studying cognition. The above supported the interest in this research to find out about perceptions EFL teachers and adult learners had about explicit and implicit instruction. Also, Gellatly (2012) states that it

> *does* make sense to ask what mental or cognitive processes are about. One way of expressing the aboutness of mental processes is to say that they involve representations – our thoughts *represent* possible states of affairs, and our perceptions *represent* our immediate environment generally, though not always, accurately (p. 20).

At this point, it was essential to highlight that in the literature revised to support this research, perceptions, beliefs, and views, among other similar concepts, had been used interchangeably. Pajares (1992) states that "it will not be possible for researchers to come to grips with teachers' beliefs, however, without first deciding what they wish *belief* to mean and how this meaning will differ from that of similar constructs" (p. 308).

Apart from perceptions and views as the aliases for beliefs, some others were mentioned above when defining the concept of perception. However, for this research, because beliefs influence perceptions and

perceptions influence teachers' behavior in the classroom, it was essential to find out teachers' and students' perceptions to improve their teaching and learning, respectively. The above considers that "beliefs cannot be directly observed or measured but must be inferred from what people say, intend, and do –fundamental prerequisites that educational researchers have seldom followed" (Pajares, 1992, p. 314).

Stated beliefs about teaching grammar are one of the three groups that Borg (2006) discusses based on studies of language teacher cognition in grammar instruction. From his research on teachers' beliefs about grammar, he concluded that language instruction is still prevalent in language classrooms. L2 and FL teachers, in general terms, reported that they value and promote attention to grammar in their language instruction. Also, the author mentioned that teachers' views of their language learning experiences impacted their beliefs about grammar teaching.

2.1 Perceptions for Grammatical Instruction

Learners' and teachers' beliefs and perceptions about grammar and explicit and implicit instruction of such a linguistic aspect have been objects of study. Pazaver and Wang (2009), who researched Asian students' perceptions of Grammar teaching in the ESL Classroom, stated that "studies that do look at learners' beliefs typically focus on language learning in general and not on the role of grammar instruction in particular, although it has been the topic of many debates in the field" (p. 2).

2.2 Teachers' Perceptions of Grammar

Kaçar and Zengin (2013) studied Turkish pre-service English teachers' perceptions and classroom practices. They express that grammar instruction has been controversial due to contextual differences between English as a second language (ESL) and EFL. Bouziane (2014) notes that the study's results confirm that grammar instruction has been accepted positively; however, the controversy has not ended, considering explicit grammar instruction. Thus, more research has been done to explore how English teachers perceive and practice grammar instruction in diverse contexts.

The findings of Kaçar and Zengin (2013) revealed that pre-service teachers adopted a holistic approach to grammar teaching. They embraced explicit and implicit approaches to grammar instruction, reinforcing previous research about grammar teaching. Their work could be considered a good start to enhancing their professional development.

According to Fayyaz (2014), there is a gap in the research agenda since there are few investigations about teachers' beliefs about grammar teaching and learning and the importance of such an aspect. It is necessary to investigate teachers' beliefs about grammar teaching since it is a vital issue to consider in language teaching (Uysal & Bardakci, 2014). Regarding language teachers' perspective, Alhaysony and Alhaisoni (2017) stated that it is "usually ignored or only marginally represented in traditional second language acquisition" (p.190).

Teachers' beliefs should not be ignored since they influence their practices in SLA

regarding grammar teaching (Assalahi, 2013; Hos & Kekec, 2014). According to Borg (2011), teachers' practices in the classroom can be improved through articulation and discussion of beliefs they have about an object of study. However, it is essential to consider that teachers' and learners' beliefs are fluid and constantly changing (Bailey, 2017). Thus, learners' and teachers' voices should be considered to understand their perceptions of explicit grammar instruction.

In developing countries, only a few studies have been conducted, for example, in form-focused grammar instruction mainly, where teachers who have not received sufficient training for teaching are working in settings with limited resources and limited access to SLA theories (Fayyaz, 2014). Navidinia, Beidokhti, and Hekmati (2017) stated that "studying language teachers' preferences and underlying factors influencing their perceptions are other areas in need of further studies" (p. 82).

For this research, grammar instruction was described as students learning grammatical rules meaningfully, that is, through meaning-focused tasks. Hos and Kekec's study supported this: "the majority of participant teachers were in favor of teaching grammar in a context rather than in isolation" (2014, p. 85). A complementary model between form-focused instruction and meaning-focused instruction to teach grammar in a meaningful, communicative way has been paid substantial attention (Ming-Chu & Hung-Chun, 2009, & Nešić Ivana, 2015). According to Al-Mekhlafi (2011, p. 3), grammar is seen as "one of many resources that we have in language which helps us to communicate. We should see how grammar relates to what we want to say or write, and how we expect others to interpret our language use and its focus".

2.3 Learners' Perceptions of Grammar

According to Yu (2016), some theorists repetitively point out that for effective communication or language use, it is necessary to develop grammatical competence. The research reconstructed Junior High School students' perceptions of English by integrating grammar and communication in the MEISEI Summer School project (MSSP). The study analyzed how English teachers can teach EFL with a focus on communication and grammar and how such learners' perceptions of English could be reconstructed through taking the grammar and communicative English classes in the MSSP, where the instruction is done in Japanese and English, respectively.

The teaching of grammar has been a topic of debate in Second language acquisition (Cruz Corzo, 2013; Graus & Coppen, 2016; Graus, 2017; Hos & Kekec, 2014; Martinez Agudo, 2015; Pazaver & Wang, 2009; Polat, 2017; Shamsudin & Karim, 2013; Uysal & Bardakci, 2014). Regarding teaching grammar explicitly, Ming-Chu and Hung-Chun (2009) state that "foreign and second language pedagogy has witnessed a debate over the past 30 years about the effectiveness of explicit grammar teaching" (p. 102).

Grammar has been considered problematic for EFL adult learners. Students and teachers face many difficulties in learning and teaching grammar instruction in an ESL/EFL context. Once teachers iden-

tify and know those difficulties, they can find ways to overcome them and provide effective grammar teaching (Al-Mekhlafi, 2011). Regarding grammar instruction, Cruz Corzo (2013) states that "decisions on whether to use an implicit or explicit focus have been a controversial issue" (p. 8).

The perceptions about which grammatical structures are more complicated than others to learn vary from individual to individual. The above idea is supported by Li-Ju Shiu1 (2011), who investigated Chinese EFL learners' perceptions of grammatical difficulty. The author states that "grammar features are considered more difficult to learn if many students have difficulty using them correctly" (p. 4). Also, "the observation about whether a feature is 'early' or 'late' acquired has also been used to define grammatical difficulty" (Li-Ju Shiu1, 2011, p. 5). However, such a perception of grammar difficulty is influenced by the role of L1 knowledge individuals have about certain grammatical aspects.

2.4 The Impact of Teachers' Language Learning Experience in Their Perceptions of Grammar Instruction
Explicit grammar instruction may contribute to developing linguistic competence, favoring EFL learners' communicative competence. The above is supported by Pazaver and Wang (2009), who stated that some teachers "have taught with a focus on communicative competence and have been confronted with students who demand explicit grammar instruction" (p. 2). As teachers and students, we all have been exposed to the theory of language acquisition and learning and theories about the place of explicit grammar instruction in classrooms. Therefore, our perceptions of grammar instruction have depended on the approach used to teach us the target language. Our perceptions may differ from the ones our students have about such instruction. For this reason, there has been an interest in exploring learners' perceptions about grammar instruction, too (Pazaver & Wang, 2009).

According to Graus and Coppen (2016), who investigated student-teacher beliefs on grammar instruction, since the 1980s, there has been much research on how students' beliefs about grammar teaching develop and mature by investigating several aspects of language (student) teacher beliefs. However, there is a gap regarding the limited number of large-scale studies that use instruments that have been rigorously validated to investigate the beliefs of students who are being trained to teach secondary school. Van Vooren, Casteleyn, and Mottart (2012) state that "due to the outdated data and the insufficient scientific research in the area of grammar instruction and teacher beliefs, more research is required to understand this particular part of language acquisition and instruction" (p. 642).

Graus and Coppen (2016) developed and validated a questionnaire to explore (student) teachers' beliefs on grammar teaching to fill such a lacuna. Specifically, four construct pairs have recently received attention in language pedagogy and SLA research. These pairs are known as "meaning-focused versus form-focused instruction, focus on form versus focus on forms, implicit versus explicit grammar instruction, and inductive versus deductive in-

struction" (Graus & Coppen, 2016, p. 573). As it is known, communication in a foreign language is one of the main objectives of language teaching. In their study, one can observe that learners' level and grammatical difficulty played an essential role in (student) teacher preference for one type of grammar instruction over another.

2.5 The Importance of Developing Teachers' Awareness in Language Teaching to Adjust their Instruction to their Learners

Some language practitioners favor implicit and unconscious approaches to language acquisition. Many others have employed form-focused instruction contrasted with a focus on meaning favorably. Therefore, a determining factor in the success of the language teaching process involves considering not only teachers' perspectives about the role of grammar instruction but also language learners' attitudes and beliefs about teaching this aspect of language. In Ganajbi's (2011) study, Iranian students perceive that accuracy is one of the many advantages of instruction.

Navidinia, Beidokhti, and Hekmati (2017) researched EFL students' personalities and preferences for grammar teaching, concluding that their study can also assist teachers in knowing how students view different approaches to grammar instruction and the influence of personality traits on their preference for implicit or explicit teaching or learning. Therefore, teachers should know several instructional approaches to adjust instruction to learners' preferences and styles.

Ming-Chu and Hung-Chun (2009) investigated the differences between teach-

ers' and students´ perceptions concerning grammar and error correction. This issue has received little attention, particularly in EFL settings. Most studies have focused on teachers' or students' perceptions separately. Any mismatches between teacher and student perceptions about learning may negatively influence instructional performance and learning outcomes.

Martinez (2015) investigated how Spanish EFL learners perceived grammar instruction and corrective feedback as particular areas of language teaching. Also, learners' opinions and the way they preferred to be taught grammar were part of the research. According to this investigator, more studies on learners' beliefs on L2 learning are needed since it is unclear how and to what extent their beliefs impact L2 learning. This study found positive and negative attitudes about grammar instruction in the quantitative and qualitative results. However, there was no evidence of negative attitudes about corrective feedback.

In a study carried out by C.P. et al. (2018), it was found that most of the "students preferred deductive grammar teaching method because it is easy for them to learn complex grammar and gives them confidence while practicing grammar" (p. 7). It is essential to remember that this method is related to explicit grammar instruction, where grammar is taught directly. The deductive method saves students' time and helps them "to remember grammar rules and enable them to apply the learned rules in new situations. Furthermore, the deductive method can be an effective method for learning new grammar items" (p. 7). However, in their study, only

"17 students preferred inductive teaching method because it helps them to understand grammar well, promotes critical thinking skill and independent learning, develops long-term memory and encourages active learning" (p.12).

2.6 The Importance of Considering Teachers' and Learners' Perceptions about Grammar

The interest of this study was to find out about teachers' and learners' perceptions of explicit and implicit grammar instruction. Regardless of the method students perceive to work better for them, some grammatical rules take more work to learn. Kyung-Im (2017) conducted a study where students' awareness of major grammatical features and their perception of grammatical difficulty were analyzed depending on their linguistic proficiency level. The same author states that "although many theoretical accounts of the issues of grammatical difficulty have been proposed by researchers, empirical works from the learners' perspectives are still thin on the ground" (pp. 118-119).

The literature shared in this study showed the importance of finding better ways to develop grammatical knowledge in ESL/EFL learners. Some studies have been done on the effect of explicit and implicit grammar instruction, and a few on the perceptions language teachers and learners have about these two types of grammar teaching (Kyung-Im, 2017). Dongho (2017) states that "learner and teacher beliefs about specific types of grammar instructions have seldom been studied in foreign language learning contexts in L2 literature" (p. 52).

The same happens with deductive and inductive methods of grammar teaching where analysis of attitudes about one or the other method has not been very present (Nešić Ivana, 2015). However, over the last few decades, plenty of studies have been mainly on learners' perceptions of the effectiveness of foreign language teaching in general terms (Kourieos, 2013; Pinar, 2016).

The relevance of carrying out this study was supported by Garland (2016), who states that "grammar is a controversial and anxiety-inducting topic, yet it is making a comeback. Why has it suddenly reappeared; and what do teachers need to know to help students?" (p. 391). One of the objectives in teaching EFL or any other foreign language should be to make students competent, communicatively speaking, in that language. Karakas (2017) investigated students' perceptions of 'Good English' and the underlying beliefs behind their perceptions. Concerning this study, one of the opinions of teachers and learners in the ELT sector, influenced by what people understand of Standard English, is that "grammatical correctness ensures success in international communication and understanding" (p. 489).

The purpose of learning EFL or any other language should be considered and respected. For example, some students might only be interested in learning basic English or common phrases to find their way around when traveling in an English-speaking country. However, for learners to become competent, communicatively speaking, that is, to develop good English, we should consider Karakas's (2017) con-

clusion from previous research on, and the discussion scholars have about, good English, "that the basic building block of (speaking and writing) good English is correctness in different sides of language, e.g. spelling, punctuation, vocabulary choice and grammar" (p. 491). However, there is still a debate between what good English and correct English refer to.

2.7 Learners' Perceptions of Corrective Feedback in Different Contexts

These previous studies have shown the importance of discovering the effect and perceptions of corrective feedback, grammar instruction, and grammar teaching and learning types in specific contexts. However, it is essential to note that research on the beliefs teachers and learners have about grammar teaching and learning has been done in different contexts. Lee (2016) studied how advanced ESL students' previous EFL education influenced their perceptions of oral CF. This author states, "given the differences between ESL and EFL learning processes, purposes, and circumstances, the effectiveness of oral CF might differ as well" (p. 800).

For example, Kartchava (2016) compared learners' beliefs about corrective feedback in the language classroom to discover their perspectives. Her study considered two international contexts: English as a second language in Canada and English as a foreign language in Russia. The findings of her study confirm that in ESL and EFL language learning contexts, "learners prefer to have their errors corrected rather than ignored" (p. 31).

Rassaei (2013) conducted a study to determine the effects of corrective feedback on L2 development and how learners' perceptions of CF assist such a development. Sixty-eight Persian EFL learners participated in this study, where teachers used recasts and explicit corrections for errors students made in meaning-focused tasks. The findings of this research "indicated that explicit correction was more effective than recasts. This observation suggests that more explicit and obtrusive types of corrective feedback are more effective than the implicit ones such as recasts" (Rassaei, 2013, p. 481).

3. Methodology

This study structured a quantitative research design based on the perceptions of male and female EFL teachers and learners about implicit and explicit grammar instruction. Survey research uses a questionnaire, usually a paper-and-pencil instrument. In applied social studies, this type of research is one of the most important types of data measurement (Trochim, 2006).

According to Creswell (2014), a survey is a form of research design used in quantitative research. In this type of research, a survey, as a non-experimental design, "provides a quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population" (p. 41).

3.1 Research Context and Participants

As part of this study, the participants randomly selected as a sample were Spanish-speaking male and female EFL teachers and adult learners. They were participants in seven different EFL language level cours-

es (beginners, intermediate, and advanced) from a language department at a university in northern Mexico. The technique to select participants was stratified random sampling, also known as proportional or quota random sampling (Trochim, 2006). Thus, the sample for this study was n=355 male and female students considering the seven EFL courses. Also, n=45 male and female teachers teaching at the beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels were selected through the stratified random sample technique.

The existing survey used in this study to obtain data from learners included two sections. The first section, represented in Table 1, consisted of 26 items regarding learners' perceptions of grammar learning and additional space for any comments they had. The second section required the following demographic information, represented graphically in Table 2: level, age, sex, country of origin, and home language (s).

Table 1 below graphically presents the first section of the following demographic information required in section number two when teachers completed the survey: years teaching EFL, students' characteristics, grade taught, students' proficiency level, teachers' age, gender, degrees, teaching qualifications, and methodology training to teach ESL or EFL. For this study, students' proficiency level and gender were mainly considered to analyze male and female teachers' data and answer research questions in this study regarding teachers' perceptions of explicit and implicit grammar instruction and the impact the language level had on their perceptions. Thus, thirty-three female and twelve male

teachers taught EFL at the beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels. Regarding the students' proficiency level variable, the number of teachers teaching English at different levels was specified for this study when it took place.

Table 1

Demographic Variables of Teachers Who Participated in the Final Survey		
Variables	N	%
Years teaching EFL		
0-2	2	4.44
3-5	0	0.00
6-10	10	22.22
11-15	7	15.56
16-20	12	26.67
21-25	7	15.56
Over 25	7	15.56
Total	45	100.00
Students' characteristics		
Children	10	22.22
Teenagers (in secondary school)	7	15.56
Adults	28	62.22
Total	45	100.00
Grade taught		
College	3	6.67
University	31	68.89
Private language institute	11	0.00
Total	45	100.00

Students' proficiency level		
Beginner	16	24.62
Low intermediate	21	32.31
High intermediate	22	33.85
Advanced	6	9.23
Total	65	100.00
Teacher's age		
20-29	7	15.56
30-39	13	28.89
40-49	16	35.56
50-59	8	17.78
60 or over	1	2.22
Total	45	100.00
Gender		
Female teacher	33	73.33
Male teacher	12	26.22
Total	45	100.00

Table 1. Continued

Variables	N	%
Degree		
Bachelor's degree (Canada/U.S)	1	1.54
Bachelor's degree (other countries	32	49.23
Master's degree (Canada/U.S)	3	4.62
Master's degree (other countries)	25	38.46
Ph.D/Ed.D (Canada/U.S)	2	3.08
Ph.D/Ed.D (other countries)	2	3.08
Total	65	100.00
Teaching qualifications		

Bachelor of Education or equivalent (Canada/U.S)	1	2.27
Bachelor of Education or equivalent (other countries)	23	52.27
Teacher education or certification specific to the language you are teaching	20	45.45
Total	44	100.00
Methodology training to teach ESL or EFL		
Grammar translation	3	6.67
Audiolingual method	0	0.00
Communicative language teaching	40	88.89
Other	2	4.44
Total	45	100.00

The participants' demographic information required in the second section of the survey can be found in Table 2: level, age, sex, country of origin, and home language (s) were graphically represented. For this study, level and sex were mainly considered to analyze male and female learners' data and answer research questions regarding learners' perceptions of explicit and implicit grammar learning and the language level's impact on their perceptions. Thus, two hundred and forty-six females (69.30%) and one hundred and nine male learners (30.70%) were learning EFL at the beginning, intermediate and advanced levels. Also, the number of learners who were learning English at seven levels was specified when the study took place according to the following percentages: in level one,

22.25%; level two, 23.38%; level three, 7.89%; level four, 7.32%, level five 14.93%, level six 10.42% and level seven 13.80%.

Table 2

Demographic Variables of Learners Who Participated in the Final Survey.		
Variables	N	%
Level		
1	79	22.25
2	83	23.38
3	28	7.89
4	26	7.32
5	53	14.93
6	37	10.42
7	49	13.80
Total	355	100.00
Age		
18-25	344	96.90
26-35	5	1.41
36-50	4	1.13
Over 50	2	0.56
Total	355	100.00
Sex		
Male	109	30.70
Female	246	69.30
Total	355	100.00
Country of origin		
Mexico	352	99.15
USA	2	0.56
Brazil	1	0.28
Total	355	100.00
Home languages(s)		
Spanish	354	99.72
Portuguese	1	0.28
Total	355	100.00

3.2 Questionnaire Development and Validation

Selecting a survey research design with a cross-sectional survey type was the first step in conducting this study. Existing surveys used in this research were translated and adapted to collect data once the author granted permission. The target population was identified and located once consent from the school where the research occurred had been approved. The existing and adapted instruments were applied as a pilot for reliability and validity. This pilot should be done to determine if problems, inconsistencies, or misinterpretations in the questionnaires need to be changed on time (Hult, 2015). Data were analyzed and reported in the Methods section of the study.

Teachers and students contacted in their classrooms within the first sessions of each course were informed of the study's primary purpose and that they would be surveyed. The surveys were individual, so no other teacher or student could see the responses of any of the other participants, so privacy was protected when each sample was taken.

Regarding data gathering, two different questionnaires for surveying EFL teachers and adult learners were used as the only instruments to collect data. Various research instruments are used for research purposes. According to Habib (2014), "the Likert scale is the most commonly used due to its acceptability and convenience with the respondents" (p. 56). Thus, the typical five-point Likert scale was used for participants to select options that range from strongly disagree to strongly agree (Hult, 2015).

3.3 Validity and Reliability

Concerning validity, according to Creswell (2014), this survey used the standards of validity and reliability, whose scores on instruments led to meaningful interpretation of data. This type of research considers sampling methods that favor the randomized selection of the participants; the validity and reliability of the scales for integrated and isolated form-focused instruction were assured since the instruments that were used to collect data were questionnaires that had already been developed and validated by Valeo and Spada (2016).

The reliability analysis was calculated to ensure that EFL teachers and learners consistently responded to isolated FFI (explicit grammar instruction) and integrated FFI (implicit grammar instruction) items. Cronbach's Alpha was calculated through SPSS version 21, providing reliability analysis for every survey questionnaire item.

Reliability analysis for the teachers' survey was for explicit items $\alpha=.754$, whereas for the implicit ones $\alpha= .787$. On the other hand, learners' explicit items received the result $\alpha= .856$, whereas for the implicit ones $\alpha= .908$.

Interpretation of teachers' and learners' survey results after the reliability analysis was done, considering the number of participants. The number of participants for reliability analysis was higher in the survey's final application. In the former, reliability for both teachers' and learners' surveys indicated that participants consistently responded to the explicit and implicit items. This is supported by factor analysis used to determine if both types of items were valid measures of explicit and implicit constructs.

However, the fact that α for implicit items was higher than the one for explicit items in both surveys' reliability analysis shows that some implicit items must be revised to balance better implicit and explicit constructs concerning reliability.

4. Results

This research aimed to determine the language level's impact on teachers and learners' perceptions of implicit and explicit grammar instruction. Thus, after analyzing the results, it can be concluded that the overarching objective of this study was fulfilled satisfactorily. The main resulting findings from this analysis are described below.

Since there is a difference between explicit and implicit grammar instruction, it was relevant to discuss how these two types of teaching may contribute to grammar learning in EFL students whose learning styles and age, among other aspects, vary. The findings and results of this study, considering teachers' and learners' perceptions about the types of instruction, were expected to contribute to the field of EFL.

The findings showed that teachers and learners preferred implicit instruction. Their preference for this type of instruction suggested that teachers and learners feel comfortable with teaching where attention to grammar is drawn within meaning. However, teachers and educators should reflect on their beliefs regarding teaching English based on Communicative Language Teaching. They should be aware that there are two versions, one where grammar instruction has no role and one where this aspect of language is drawn within focused-meaning activities (Valeo & Spada, 2016).

Teachers and learners had a preference for implicit grammar instruction. The reason for their preference could have been that existing surveys were developed to deal with explicit and implicit grammar instruction from a different perspective. Isolated Form-Focused Instruction dealt with grammar explicitly before or after communicative activities, whereas Integrated Form-Focused Instruction dealt with this linguistic aspect during activities focused on meaning. However, as mentioned above, regardless of the timing of grammatical instruction, the latter students need to know that they are expected to infer or deduce language features themselves during communicative activities, that is, implicitly.

The results obtained from both teachers' and learners' answers to surveys showed a preference for integrated FFI (implicit instruction), with isolated FFI (explicit instruction) as an option mainly for learners to understand input not noticed during communicative practice. It was suggested that because grammar is drawn within meaning, teachers should be aware that students expect to receive explicit instruction of grammar even during communicative activities and not necessarily learn it implicitly. There was no intention to generalize that this is what all learners expect, but teachers should consider learners' needs and perceptions in specific situations (Ansarin et al., 2015).

4.1 Teacher Data Results

The collected data reflected in Table 3, forty-five (N=45) teachers and three hundred and fifty-five (N=355) learners were considered to obtain α of teachers' and learners' instruments, respectively. Explicit items of the teachers' survey received α= .754, and the implicit ones α= .787. On the other hand, explicit items of the learners' survey received α= .856, and the implicit ones α= .908.

Table 3

Questionnaire Reliability Analysis of Explicit and Implicit Items of Teachers' and Learners' Instruments Based on Final Results.			
Questionnaire	Type	Item	Reliability
EFL teacher	EXP	11	.754
(N=45)	IMP	11	.787
EFL learner	EXP	13	.856
(N= 355)	IMP	13	.908

Table 4 shows the results that answered the first research question of this study, which intended to find out EFL teachers' and adult learners' perceptions of implicit and explicit grammar instruction. The results regarding teachers' and learners' perceptions of implicit grammar instruction are in the corresponding percentages: 3.11% and 3.89%, respectively. On the other hand, their perceptions about explicit grammar teaching are in the following percentages: 2.15% and 3.52%, respectively.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics about Male and Female Teachers' and Learners' Perceptions of Implicit and Explicit Grammar Instruction					
		Implicit		Explicit	
Samples	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Teachers in general	45	3.11	0.50	2.12	0.45
Male	12	3.11	0.51	2.02	0.55
Female	33	3.12	0.51	2.20	0.41
Learners in general	355	3.89	0.67	3.52	0.62
Male	109	3.67	0.57	3.54	0.66
Female	246	3.56	0.64	3.51	0.61

The questionnaires used in this study included an open-ended question for those teachers and learners who wanted to add any comments regarding grammar instruction or other comments. In the pilot test, 7 (29%) EFL teachers provided comments, whereas on the final test, only 8 (17%) teacher participants made some comments. Some of the comments teachers made in the pilot test regarding explicit grammar instruction were, for example: "In muy [*sic*] experiences, adult students older than 25 prefer explicit grammar, ir [*sic*] is harder to implement meaningful activities with them" (Participant A, personal communication, December 2018); "Some students do need the explanation on grammar to really understand it and then be able to use it. not [*sic*] everybody is [*sic*] can infer it from the communicative or meaning-based situations or tasks." (Participant B, personal communication,

December 2018); "Adult students prefer explicit grammar and it Is [*sic*] more challenging to teach them wit [*sic*]" (Participant C, personal communication, December 2018), and "I just want to mention that sometimes to correct grammar, structure drill exercises are necessary" (Participant D, personal communication, December 2018).

On the other hand, based on the survey's final results, only two teachers supported implicit instruction: "In my opinion, it is indispensable for grammar to be taught in a communicative context. That makes it more real to students. Otherwise, it seems merely theoretical and it's harder for students to see a real-life application for it" (Participant E, personal communication, February 2018). One teacher stated that

> *I feel that meaning-based activities allow students to consolidate the language they have already been taught or are in the process of learning. Activating their prior knowledge related to a topic makes sense to them; in such a way, it is easier for students to communicate more freely and accurately in and outside the classroom* (Participant F, personal communication, February 2018).

On the other hand, another teacher stated that:

> *I think that even when I try to use only communicative activities to teach grammar in context, some students don't infer the grammatical rule easily so I need to explain them the rule explicitly and that is the way they can apply it correctly. On the other hand, some students*

don't need that and they understand how to apply the rule and when to use it without saying it explicitly (Participant G, personal communication, February 2018).

This last comment a teacher made is evidence that some students do need explicit grammar instruction, whereas others do not. Some other comments from teachers elaborated on considering learners' needs, learning styles, and other personal interests, for example: "There is not a perfect teaching ESL method; teachers need to identify their students needs the first days of class. Students learn differently, it might be important to take those differences into account to get better learning results" (Participant H, personal communication, December 2018); "I found the survey a little bit difficult because I believe that even we can have some preferences while teaching, we have to take into account our students' learning styles and their necessities" (Participant I, personal communication, February 2018). Some other comments suggested making use of an eclectic methodology and cooperative learning.

4.2 Learner Data Results

The learner data results in this study described male and female learners' perceptions about implicit and explicit grammar instruction separately, considering the EFL language level course. The results in Table 5 demonstrated that it was found, according to language levels 1 and 2, that most male and female learners perceived explicit grammar instruction as the preferred strategy stated in their perceptions for learning through this type of teaching. However,

the difference was very slight between their perceptions of explicit and implicit grammar instruction at those two levels. In the rest of the levels, male and female learners' perceptions about implicit grammar instruction were stronger than their perceptions about explicit grammar instruction.

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics Regarding Male and Female Learners' Perceptions of Implicit and Explicit Grammar Instruction

Language Level	Sex	N	Item type	*M*	*SD*
1	Male	14	IMP	3.62	0.50
			EXP	3.73	0.54
	Female	65	IMP	3.44	0.80
			EXP	3.45	0.71
2	Male	20	IMP	3.49	0.79
			EXP	3.55	0.83
	Female	56	IMP	3.59	0.69
			EXP	3.50	0.68
3	Male	13	IMP	3.64	0.24
			EXP	3.61	0.54
	Female	22	IMP	3.64	0.66
			EXP	3.55	0.56
4	Male	5	IMP	3.74	0.29
			EXP	3.37	0.63
	Female	22	IMP	3.65	0.48
			EXP	3.59	0.42
5	Male	14	IMP	3.68	0.88
			EXP	3.46	0.91
	Female	9	IMP	3.44	0.44
			EXP	3.59	0.31

6	Male	24	IMP	3.81	0.43
			EXP	3.39	0.57
	Female	41	IMP	3.63	0.50
			EXP	3.50	0.49
7	Male	19	IMP	3.72	0.43
			EXP	3.62	0.55
	Female	31	IMP	3.59	0.51
			EXP	3.60	0.62
Total	Male	109	IMP	3.67	0.57
			EXP	3.54	0.66
	Female	246	IMP	3.56	0.64
			EXP	3.51	0.61

Also, some comments learners provided regarding grammar instruction and some other topics were in English or Spanish. Spanish comments were translated into English to understand what they commented on the open question of the survey. In the pilot test, 9 (27%) EFL learners provided comments, whereas in the final survey, only 102 (29%) learner participants from different language levels made some comments. Seventy-three 73 (71%) regarding perceptions of explicit grammar instruction: 48 (65%) and the implicit one: 14 (19%) or a combination of both: 11 (15%). For learners' comments about these two types of grammar instruction, see appendices W, X, and Y of this study. In the pilot test learners' comments about explicit instructions were, for example: "Suelo realizar un tipo de listado despues de ver sobre el grammar [*sic*] visto en clase" ["I use to write a sort of listing after dealing with grammar seen in class"] (Participant A, personal communication, February 2018); "En lo personal me gusta más que me expliquen las reglas gramaticales antes de hacer cualquier actividad, ya que esto me permite saber con exactitud que es lo que estoy haciendo y como debo de hacerlo" ["Personally I like grammatical rules to be explained to me before doing any activity, because this allows me to know with accuracy what I am doing and how I should do it"] (Participant B, personal communication, February 2018). Concerning implicit grammar instruction, one student stated that

> *I think the best way to learn grammar is having a lot of conversations of daily life and practice it every day to [sic] not forget it, because there are a lot of students that study grammar and rules so much for the tests like an obligation to have good grades, and after that they forget them or don't know how to use it with other examples. For me is better having another [sic] examples from a lot of web pages or by my own, and not only focus on the book's examples and exercises, I learned that from Mr. J H from Languages Center, UANL, because he used to send us links to practice and there were many examples I didn't understand and I asked him for help after I read them. Also, I think communicative skills are an [sic] important to think quickly and apply grammar without need [sic] to try to remind the rules. So, in my opinion, those are very important things for learning grammar in a [sic] easy way* (Participant C, personal communication, February 2018).

Some other students commented, suggesting using the native language in the English class. However, they mainly preferred English since that is the language they were

interested in learning. Learners' comments about explicit and implicit grammar instruction were added to the Appendices section of the study. The fact that teachers and learners preferred integrated FFI (implicit instruction) was positive news. However, the mismatch between the two groups regarding isolated FFI (explicit instruction) confirms what was stated in this study before, that in the case of adult EFL learners' perceptions are rarely considered by English teachers. Thus, the type of instruction to develop the grammar aspect of such a language might not favor such learners since their individual needs and perceptions are not being considered (Ansarin et al., 2015).

5. Discussion

The results of this study indicated that teachers and learners' perceptions of implicit instruction in communicative classrooms were similar both within and across EFL teachers and learners. The finding that most teachers and learners preferred implicit grammar instruction might lead us to the argument that EFL teachers should be encouraged to adopt implicit grammar instruction as their instructional approach to develop this aspect of language. This finding supports Valeo and Spada's (2016) conclusion that most learners and teachers preferred integrated FFI.

This study found that most teachers and learners preferred implicit grammar instruction, but they also recognized the usefulness of explicit grammar instruction, but mainly learners did. The original existing instruments used in this study were created to determine the timing of grammar instruction in communicative classrooms. The findings in this study are compatible with Valeo and Spada's (2016) research, demonstrating that most participants who preferred integrated FFI also considered isolated FFI beneficial in language teaching.

In this study, Spada's (2009) existing surveys were used to explore, from a different perspective, the reasons behind teachers' and learners' choices for isolated FFI and integrated FFI. For this reason, explicit and implicit grammar instruction was considered and used as equivalent to those two concepts correspondingly. In their findings, Valeo and Spada (2016) discussed the possibility of encouraging L2 teachers to adopt integrated FFI as their instructional strategy. They believed that it would be premature to do so mainly for the reason that even if many teachers and learners expressed a preference for integrated FFI, as participants did with implicit instruction in the study this article was based on, they also recognized the benefits of isolated FFI; as teachers and mainly learners did with explicit grammar instruction in this study.

It was expected to determine if, based on teachers' and learners' survey results, explicit grammar instruction focused on meaning could be considered an effective approach in L2 teaching and learning in the social context to which participants belong. Valeo and Spada (2016) mention that even if there are positive contributions from integrated and isolated FFI in L2 learning, we can affirm that both approaches should be equally effective. Therefore, they advised that teachers should consider their learners' needs as well as pedagogical and contextual factors. Also, L2 instructors

should incorporate both integrated FFI and isolated FFI into their teaching practices since both instructional strategies are valuable for L2 learning.

6. Conclusions and Implications

This study described explicit grammar instruction in which isolated FFI was supported in activities focused on meaning. Concerning isolated and integrated FFI, Valeo and Spada (2016) stated that "both types of FFI were described as taking place in primarily meaning-based communicative classrooms. They differ in that isolated FFI occurs separately from communicative activities, whereas integrated FFI occurs during communicative activities" (p. 314).

Also, Valeo and Spada (2016) stated that "isolated instruction may be instrumental in promoting the acquisition of language features that are difficult to notice in the input…" (p. 329). For this study, teachers must teach grammatical structures explicitly during input provided through communicative activities. Therefore, isolated instruction does not necessarily "occur separately from communicative activities" (p.314).

On the other hand, the same author states that "integrated FFI may be of particular benefit in the development of fluency and the automatization of language features for effective communication" (Valeo & Spada, 2016, p.117). Based on these two statements above, it was deduced that isolated FFI involves explicit instruction of language features related to grammar and that integrated FFI involves implicit instruction of language features. To conclude, after the previous discussion and implications in this study, the results support the expectation that explicit grammar instruction (isolated FFI) focused on meaning (integrated FFI) should mainly occur before or after communicative activities/ meaning-focused activities. However, if it occurs during activities focused on meaning (integrated FFI), explicit instruction (isolated FFI) should be used for learners to be aware of what they are learning; we should not misunderstand or expect that all learners want to learn implicitly.

From this perspective, it was concluded that explicit grammar instruction (isolated FFI) in meaning-based communicative classrooms supports implicit grammar instruction (integrated FFI). In other words, noticing language features mainly before, during, or after communicative activities would contribute to the "development of fluency and the automatization of language features for effective communication" (Valeo & Spada, 2016, p.117). Therefore, from this perspective, explicit grammar instruction (isolated FFI) effectively supports implicit grammar instruction (integrated FFI) in communicative classrooms focused on meaning.

According to Long (2015), implicit learning is less effective in adult learners than children. Therefore, implicit grammar learning in EFL may be supported by explicit instruction focused on meaning, which is beneficial for fluency development and the automatized linguistic aspects that lead to effective communication (Valeo & Spada, 2016). The findings and results of this study, considering teachers' and learners´ perceptions about the types of instruction mentioned above, are expected

to contribute to the field of EFL. In EFL teaching, it is essential to consider learners' diversity in acquiring an L2, either through the implicit or explicit instruction of language aspects, such as grammar (Gartland, 2016; Nassaji, 2004).

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