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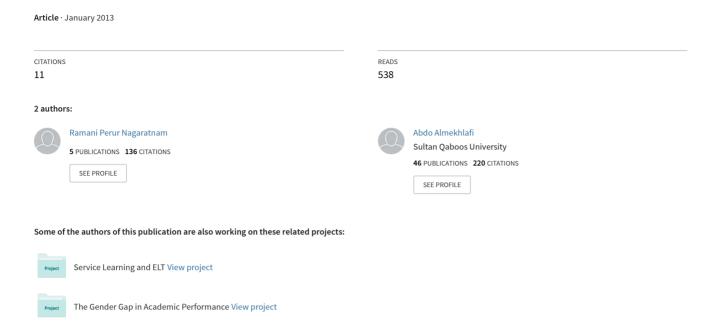
Attitudes towards EFL Grammar Instruction: Inductive or Deductive?

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Abstract

The teaching of grammar plays a central role in every EFL/ESL teacher's classroom. This paper attempts to examine the role grammar plays in foreign or second language learning from the point of view of pre-service student teachers. The paper reports a study undertaken to investigate pre-service student teachers' attitudes towards the mode of grammar instruction (i.e., explicit or implicit) in the context of teaching English as a foreign language. The study aimed to find out whether there were significant differences among the pre-service student teachers in their attitudes in relation to their gender and the level they teach in school. Fifty-eight pre-service student EFL teachers completed a questionnaire on a five-point scale of agreement. About 20 of them also responded to an open-ended questionnaire. The main findings of the study showed a positive attitude of the pre-service student teachers towards grammar instruction in general and a more favourable attitude towards the implicit approach than the explicit. These findings have implications for teacher education, pre-service student and in-service training, and curriculum review.

Key words: Inductive and deductive grammar instruction; Implicit and explicit grammar instruction; EFL grammar instruction; English language teaching.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The role and type of grammar instruction in foreign language learning with particular reference to EFL has been the subject of SLA research and discussion for decades (Ellis 2001). In recent times, however, grammar instruction has been recognized as an essential and unavoidable component of language learning and use (Doughty & Williams 1998; Thornbury 1997, 1998). It is seen as valuable, if not indispensable, within the context of EFL teaching and learning.

Previous studies on students' and teachers' attitudes and perceptions of grammar instruction in the context of language learning suggest a disparity between students and teachers (e.g., Brindley 1984; Kumaravadivelu 1991; Leki 1995; Schultz 1996, 2001; Spratt 1999). While students favour formal and explicit grammar instruction and error correction, teachers favour communicative activities with less conscious focus on grammar.

Fox (1995) showed how the attitudes teachers take into their classroom can affect instruction and, in his two case studies of ESL teachers, Borg (2001) found that teachers' perceptions of their own knowledge of grammar affected their teaching practices (both cited in McClure, 2006).

There has, however, been little investigation of the attitudes and beliefs of pre-service student EFL teachers with regard to grammar instruction within the overall context of the gulf countries and the specific context of Oman. Since the decisions made by teachers regarding teaching and learning play a major role in affecting the kind of teaching that takes place in their classrooms, the attitudes and beliefs that influence their decisions become important areas of study. The study reported here aims to address this need by presenting the attitudes and beliefs of a cross section of school EFL teachers in Oman.

1.2 Grammar and grammar instruction

The term 'grammar' has been defined in a number of ways by language teachers and grammarians which have influenced and been influenced by different approaches to teaching grammar (Ellis, 2006; Purpura, 2004). For many L2 learners, learning grammar often means learning the rules of grammar and having an intellectual knowledge of grammar. Teachers often believe that this will provide the generative basis on which learners can build their knowledge and will be able to use the language eventually. For them, prescribed rules give a kind of security.

Different approaches to looking at language, from syntactic descriptions to attempts to show the semantic and pragmatic dimensions of grammar, are reflected in the different ways grammar has been taught. In EFL/ESL teaching, grammar has been viewed in three different ways: grammar as rules, grammar as form, and grammar as resource. In some cases, grammar instruction has meant learning the rules; in others, practising the form; and in others understanding how grammar helps to convey the meaning and intention of the message. The best approach is perhaps to see grammar 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.

The teaching of second-language grammar in higher education is a topic of widespread concern to both teachers and students alike. Sometimes, very strong positions are taken, for example, "At any time, at any stage and in any circumstances, grammar teaching cannot be diluted. It ought to be an important part in foreign language teaching in China" (Wang, 1999, p. 80).

Many students and teachers tend to view grammar as a set of restrictions on what is allowed and disallowed in language use – 'a linguistic straitjacket' in Larsen-Freeman's words (2002, p. 103), but some consider grammar as something that liberates rather than represses: " ... grammar is not a constraining imposition but a liberating force: it frees us from a dependency on context and a purely lexical categorization of reality" (Widdowson, 1990, p. 86). The implications of this statement for our understanding of the nature of grammar and the role it

plays in communication are explored, and how this understanding might inform approaches to teaching grammar in second language classrooms is discussed (Cullen, 2008).

Besides the place/role of grammar in language teaching (Hinkel & Fotos, 2002; Ur, 1988), the factors involved in the teaching and learning of grammar (Ur, 1988) and specific practices in the grammar classroom and some current research on grammar structures (Hinkel & Fotos, 2002) have added to the discussion on how best to teach grammar in ESL/EFL contexts. Many books claim that they carry/include cognitive, affective and drama activities and games for EFL students that are directed towards stimulating their imagination and creativity (e.g., Gerngross, Puchta & Thornbury 2007; Rinvolucri, 1984).

The hard fact that most teachers face is that learners often find it difficult to make flexible use of the rules of grammar taught in the classroom. They may know the rules perfectly but are incapable of applying them during language use.

1.3 Grammar and communicative competence

The importance of grammar within the FL/SL syllabus has been under discussion for many years. Until the Communicative Approach in the 1970s, it was at the core of learning and teaching. The syllabus, a structural syllabus, was organized around the grammar to be taught. "The theoretical model that underlies the [cognitive] approach is that a language consists of a "set of rules" with an associated lexicon. It follows logically from the model that foreign language students must learn rules of grammar. The suggested sequence is: study a rule (usually with instructor explanation), practice a rule (in grammar exercises), and then apply the rule in meaningful interactions in the target language" (Terrell, 1991).

Since the 1970s, however, attention has shifted from ways of teaching grammar to ways of getting learners to communicate, and grammar has been seen to be a powerful undermining and demotivating force among L2 learners. In terms of motivation and learner success with languages, grammar has been seen to be a problem and to stand in the way of helping learners to communicate fluently. As a result, teaching grammar has become unfashionable.

Statements such as ". . . the study of grammar as such is neither necessary nor sufficient for learning to use a language" (Newmark, 1963) and definitions of communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980; Hymes, 1971; van Ek, 1986) became widely quoted and accepted. Newmark, however, was only talking of grammar rules rather than grammar in language use. What was being questioned was the content of 'grammar' teaching based on certain behaviorist approaches (Newmark & Reibel, 1968). The need for a shift in focus in teaching from language form to language in use was expressed, placing grammar within context and with content. It was felt that by concentrating on communication and communicative language practice, students would naturally 'acquire' the language.

Models of communicative competence, with particular reference to FL/SL speakers (Canale & Swain, 1980; van Ek, 1986), include grammatical competence as one of the core dimensions of communicative competence. Such proposals led to the questioning of the importance of the role of grammar in a language learning syllabus. The syllabus must guide the learner in moving from knowledge of form to grammatical competence within the total communicative competence. It was suggested that "communication can generally be achieved most efficiently by means of a grammatical sentence or by a series of such sentences logically related" (Close, 1981, p. 14) and that grammar was an essential resource in using language communicatively (Littlewood, 1981; Nunan, 1989).

The discussion of learning and acquisition was led by Krashen, who proposed a model of second language acquisition in which the processing of input, rather than grammar instruction, plays the pivotal role. Krashen and Terrell (1983) claim that if language input is provided over a wide variety of topics with communicative goals, the input would automatically include the necessary grammatical structures. Carter (1993) points out that 'acquisition' is a natural and unconscious process that takes place as the result of meaningful exposure to language that occurs naturally and using it for the purpose of meaningful communication. This natural process of 'acquisition' is in contrast to the conscious process of language learning, which occurs when explicit knowledge about language forms is provided

regularly. An explicit knowledge of grammar by adults is said to be useful in only one way – as a "monitor" for self-correction under certain circumstances.

In relation to FL/SL learners, a grammar pie was suggested showing the proportion of form, meaning and use (Larsen-Freeman, 1991). Teachers could alter the portions of the pie as appropriate for the lesson and for the students. A syllabus attempting to move beyond form to grammar in use in communication was proposed by Yalden (1983).

It was, however, observed that, despite the impact of the communicative approach on language teaching methodology (i.e., adopting learner-centred and task-based teaching methods), the majority of ESL and EFL learners had continued to learn from materials organized and presented in terms of grammatical items (Richards, 1985). The approach continued to be mostly one of presenting and explaining grammar points followed by controlled production practice.

Grammar instruction has thus been on the pendulum of language teaching methodologies swinging back and forth one extreme of grammar-driven methods to the other one of communicative methodologies (Yip, 1994). The thinking seems to be that learners' attention should be focused on form within content-based curricula (Williams, 1995). These changes in methodologies are thus summed up: "The research on teaching methodology was focused on the relationship between language knowledge and practice and went through a U-shaped course – [it] first stressed, then unstressed, and finally re-stressed the language knowledge" (Liao, 1996, p. 6).

1.4 Explicit versus implicit grammar instruction

Two methods have been suggested for teaching grammar within an EFL/ESL context: Implicit/Inductive and Explicit/Deductive. 'Inductive' suggests a 'bottom up' approach, in which students discover grammar rules while working through exercises/tasks, while 'Deductive' suggests a 'top down' approach, which is the standard teaching approach that has

a teacher explaining rules to the students. There is still, however, controversy over the relative effectiveness of explicit and implicit grammar teaching (Thornbury, 2006). The complex relationship between teaching and learning, and the fact that how something is taught is not directly related to how it is learned could be the reasons for this controversy.

On the one hand, there are researchers like Krashen (1993) who have persistently denied the importance of any explicit grammar instruction in second language acquisition. Other researchers have objected to traditional grammar teaching methodology in which the teacher presents grammatical structures explicitly in a de-contextualized manner. In traditional methodology, the assumption has been that learners will develop the knowledge they need for communicative language use through conscious presentation and manipulation of forms through drills and practice. An inductive approach to grammatical rules and principles is encouraged rather than an exclusive reliance on the presentation-practice-production approach of many traditional grammar books (Carter, Hughes & McCarthy, 2000).

Explicit (or deductive) grammar instruction, which draws learners' attention to linguistic form and structure, is characterized by two conflicting approaches: interventionist and non-interventionist (Terrell 1991, p. 58). Supporters of the interventionist approach state that "given the low number of input/interaction hours in a typical foreign language college (70-150 hours) or high school (100-300 hours) instruction, explicit grammar instruction can serve to speed up parts of the acquisition process" (Terrell 1991, p. 58). The non-interventionist approach supports the idea that explicit grammar instruction need not be given if enough comprehensible input is provided in a low anxiety environment (Krashen 1981). It is also argued that "the ability to demonstrate grammatical knowledge on a discrete-point grammar exam does not guarantee the ability to use that knowledge in ordinary conversation, be it spontaneous or monitored" (Terrell, 1991, p. 54).

The language acquisition process can be affected by explicit grammar instruction in three ways (Terrell, 1991, p. 58):

1. "as an 'advanced organiser' to aid in comprehending and segmenting the input;
2. as a meaning-form focuser that aids the learner in establishing a meaning-form relationship for morphologically complex forms; and
3. as a means for monitoring, which in turn, will be available for acquisition in the output."

Grammatical knowledge is viewed by many researchers (e.g., DeKeyser, 1998; Doughty, 1991; Harley, 1998; Long, 1983, 1988; Long & Robinson, 1998; Schneider, 1993; Terrell, 1991) as a significant component in second language acquisition. Most agree that a certain degree of grammar instruction is necessary to develop learners' language proficiency. No current research or theory, however, seems to advocate a return to traditional methods of teaching grammar or to a focus on grammatical features for their own sake (Lightbown, 1998).

Based on the results of an empirical study focusing on the ways in which explicit grammar teaching can facilitate L2 acquisition, Scheffler and Cinciata (2011) recommend that EFL/ESL teachers "should invest some classroom time in explicit grammar instruction", as "at least some grammatical phenomena can be successfully taught as simple rules" (ibid., p.22). They refer to two kinds of benefit. First, simple descriptions of rules may lead to learners noticing the input structures exemplified by the rules, which may in turn lead to increased comprehension. Such conscious noticing of L2 features is necessary for implicit language development, according to many SLA researchers (e.g., Schmidt, 1990). Simple grammar rules help learners understand their own output and contribute to the learning process in general by increasing the learners' sense of confidence, security and achievement. Thus the implicit-versus-explicit debate has been raging for over a century (Garrett, 1986; Doughty & Williams, 1998), the positions varying from an outright rejection of grammar instruction in a strongly communicative approach to a return to explicit, discrete-point grammar along a continuum. Many materials meant for classroom use encourage an inductive approach, probably because teachers are there to guide the learning process, while those meant for self-study usually adopt a deductive approach (Thornbury, 2006).

1.5 Some previous studies on grammar instruction

Several studies have been conducted on explicit and implicit grammar instruction, and teachers' and students' preferences in relation to the two approaches. For instance, Doughty's study (1991, cited in Ellis, 1995) provides empirical evidence of the positive effect of grammar instruction. The value of meaning-based instruction with explicit grammatical explanation was also evidenced by Ellis (1993) and DeKeyser (1995). Scarcella (1996) emphasizes the role of form-focused instruction and corrective feedback in order to provide students with a structured setting of Standard English instruction.

According to a study by Ebsworth and Schweers (1997, p. 252), one of the teachers interviewed in the study observed, "It would seem that many practitioners have come to believe that individuals whose goal is to develop excellent English for use in academic or business environments can achieve greater accuracy and control though some measure of grammar instruction." Schneider (1993) and Hunter (1996) showed that learners who received explicit grammar instruction performed well on both discrete-point grammar tests and tasks which draw learners' attention to grammatical features.

Wang (1999), in his research into student and teacher attitudes towards grammar instruction in Taiwan, found that students preferred the explicit method of instruction and that most participating teachers also favoured and used the explicit method in their classes. Borg and Burns (2008) investigated the beliefs and practices of 176 English language teachers from 18 countries about the integration of grammar and skills teaching. The teachers expressed strong views about the value of inductive grammar learning and strong beliefs in the need to avoid teaching grammar in isolation.

In a study surveying the perceptions of preparatory and secondary school EFL teachers (about 220) and students (about 1,050) from three different geographical regions in Oman, Al-Kalbani (2004) found that students showed a more favourable attitude towards grammar instruction than teachers and that students favoured explicit instruction, while teachers favoured implicit instruction.

In a qualitative research project investigating six middle school English language arts teachers' beliefs and practices related to grammar and grammar teaching (McClure, 2006), the participants believed that grammar instruction is necessary to increase students' performance on standardized tests and both traditional and innovative methods of grammar instruction are valuable. In a study on teachers' opinions and attitudes towards grammar teaching and their current practices, Petraki and Hill (2010) have reported that teachers use a combination of grammatical theories in giving explanations of grammar rules, because they believe that a variety of grammatical theories should be part of teachers' 'pedagogical content knowledge'.

1.6 Statement of the problem

The review of literature shows that practising teachers are faced with a range of options for grammar instruction in their classrooms. In such a situation, the views of pre-service student teachers, who have just been introduced to courses in language teaching methodologies and have ideas about teaching and learning still fresh in their minds, have done some practice teaching in schools as part of graduation requirements, and are about to embark on their own teaching career, will provide valuable insights into how they would translate their theoretical knowledge about grammar instruction into practical terms in the classrooms taking into consideration the ground realities. The present study, therefore, is an attempt to capture these insights systematically.

1.7 Purpose of the study

The study was aimed at investigating pre-service student teachers' general attitudes towards EFL grammar instruction and their attitudes towards explicit and implicit methods of teaching grammar in an EFL context.

1.8 Research questions

The study aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What are the pre-service student teachers' general attitudes towards the teaching of grammar in an EFL context?

2. (a) What are the pre-service student teachers' attitudes towards explicit and implicit grammar instruction?
   (b) What are the pre-service student teachers' reasons for their preference for either explicit or implicit instruction?
   (c) Which of the two methods, explicit or implicit grammar instruction, is more suitable for the pre-service student teachers focusing on students' grammatical errors?
   (d) Which learner characteristics help the pre-service student teachers decide on the kind of grammar teaching most appropriate for their students?

3. Do the pre-service student teachers' attitudes differ according to their gender and the level of the students they teach?

1.9 Significance of the study

The findings of the present study will help bring in valuable information from the practical classrooms for improving the relevant pre-service student courses, thus bridging the gap between theory and practice. They would also help the Ministry of Education in planning in-service training programmes for novice teachers in a pragmatic way. Moreover, pre-service student teachers' insights will add value to the literature on EFL grammar instruction, which largely reports only EFL teachers' and students' views.

2. Methodology and Procedures

2.1 Method

The study was mainly quantitative in design, using a questionnaire. The subjects responded to each statement on a five-point Likert-type attitude scale (from 5 for 'strongly agree' to 1 for 'strongly disagree'). The respondents also provided background information on gender and the level they teach, for creating their profile in terms of variables. The study was also qualitative, using an open-ended questionnaire.

2.2 Population and sample

The subjects selected for the present study were pre-service student EFL teachers who have done teaching practice at different levels in Omani schools. The sample size was 58, higher than the one described by Cohen and Manion (1994, p. 77) as the minimum number required for making useful statistical analyses. Table 1 shows the profile of the respondents to this questionnaire. The study is limited to pre-service student EFL teachers from the only public university in Oman. The responses are valuable in themselves, indicating a probable trend in pre-service student teachers' attitudes and beliefs towards grammar instruction in an EFL context.

Table 1. Profile of Pre-service Student Teacher Respondents to the Attitude Scale Questionnaire

Variable	Category	N	Total
Gender	Female	39	**58**
	Male	19	
Level	Cycle 1	14	**58**
	Cycle 2	29	
	Post Cycle 2	15	

The open-ended questionnaire was administered to 20 of the sample.

2.3 The research instruments

Two research instruments were used in the present study. The Likert-type attitude scale questionnaire used in the study was adopted from Al-Kalbani (2004), who had designed the instrument based on Burgess and Etherington (2002); Schultz (2001); and Wang (1999). The questionnaire used for the present study comprised 29 statements grouped into three sections, viz. Explicit instruction (Statements 1-11), Implicit instruction (Statements 12-17), and General attitudes to the teaching of grammar (Statements 18-29).

The study also used an open-ended questionnaire comprising four questions. The first question asked the respondents which of the two methods, explicit or implicit, they prefer to use for grammar instruction (*Which method of grammar instruction – explicit or implicit – would you consider more appropriate in the context of teaching English as a foreign language in Oman?*)

While the second question required them to state the reasons for their preferred method (*Give at least two reasons why you think so*), the fourth asked them to state which learner characteristics influenced their choice of the method (*Which learner characteristics help you decide what kind of grammar teaching is most appropriate for your students?*). The third question asked the respondents to state which of the two methods would be suitable for focusing on their students' grammatical errors (*Which method – explicit or implicit – do you think would be more suitable for correcting students' grammatical errors? Why?*).

2.4 Validity and reliability

The study instruments were checked for validity by a panel of practitioners and specialists in EFL teaching and education. The Cronbach Alpha Reliability Coefficient of the Likert-type attitude scale questionnaire was found to be .83 for teachers and .89 for students (Al-Kalbani 2004).

2.5 Statistical analysis

The pre-service student teachers' responses to the 29-item close-ended questionnaire were analysed statistically (t-test and ANOVA). Their responses to the open-ended questionnaire were analysed qualitatively.

3. Results and Discussion

Table 2. Pre-service Student Teachers' Perceptions of Grammar Instruction (N=58)

Dimension	Mean	SD
General Attitudes	**3.1646**	.48028
Explicit Instruction	**3.6364**	.36244
Implicit Instruction	**3.9167**	.54634

With reference to *research question* 1, the results reveal, as shown in Table 2, that the pre-service student teachers rated the importance of teaching grammar as high with a mean of 3.165. This suggests that the student teachers' general attitude towards grammar instruction is quite positive. That is, the student teachers generally see teaching grammar as being quite important, a finding which is also supported by other studies (e.g., Borg, 2003; Burgess & Etherington, 2002; Ellis, 2006; Petraki & Hill, 2010).

Table 3. Pre-service Student Teachers' General Attitudes towards English Grammar Instruction (N=58)

Items	Mean	SD
18. I believe that students' language improves quickly if they study and practice English grammar.	3.7759	1.02672
19. Students generally like the study of grammar.	2.8276	.93917
20. Grammar study is the basis of fluent English.	2.8103	1.09955
21. There should be more formal study of grammar in the English language class.	3.0517	1.01605
22. Grammar study is effective for fostering students' English writing ability.	4.1034	.71793
23. Grammar study is effective for fostering students reading ability.	3.0000	1.09224
24. Grammar study helps students to get high scores on the English examination.	3.5000	1.08012
25. Grammar study slows down students' English communicative competence.	2.5345	1.11159
26. Grammar study is the basis of students' listening ability.	2.7241	.93270
27. Grammar study is the basis of speaking ability.	3.6207	.95196
28. Learning grammar is not very beneficial as students can't apply grammar knowledge to spontaneous conversations with others.	2.8621	1.17650
29. Giving students more opportunities for communication practice leads them to naturally understand English grammar.	4.1034	.80980
Overall	**3.1646**	**.48028**

Table 3 shows that, in general, the pre-service student teachers surveyed had a moderately favourable attitude towards grammar instruction. Two statements, however, produced a mean of more than 4 – Statement 22 (*Grammar study is effective for fostering students' English writing ability*) and Statement 29 (*Giving students more opportunities for communication practice leads them to naturally understand English grammar*). This suggests that, in the perception of the pre-service student teachers, there is a strong link between one's writing ability and grammatical knowledge. The high mean for Statement 29 (4.103) suggests the responding teachers' strong belief that communication practice would naturally lead to an understanding of grammar. It is also interesting to note that Statement 25 (*Grammar study slows down students' English communicative competence*) produced the lowest mean (2.535) for the statements about the general attitudes. The mean scores for these two complementary statements, i.e. 25 and 29, suggest that, in the pre-service student teachers' view, communication practice should precede grammar instruction. Likewise, in the study by Borg and Burns (2008), respondents from 18 countries reported a high degree of integration of grammar and skills teaching and did not agree with the idea of teaching grammar in isolation.

Table 4. Paired Sample t-test for the Comparison between Pre-service Student Teachers' Perceptions of Explicit and Implicit Grammar Instruction

Dimension	Mean	SD	T	Sig.(2-tailed)
Explicit Instruction	**3.6364**	.36244	-16.691	**.000**
Implicit Instruction	**3.9167**	.54634		

With reference to *research question* 2(a), Tables 2 and 4 show that a relative degree of importance was cited according to the type of grammar instruction. When it comes to the emphasis on the type of instruction, the findings show that implicit grammar instruction received the highest rating with a mean of 3.917, whereas the mean for explicit grammar instruction was 3.636. It is found that the pre-service student prospective teachers place more importance on teaching grammar implicitly than explicitly.

Table 4 shows a significant difference in student teachers' opinions in relation to the type of grammar instruction. They have a very strong preference towards implicit/inductive grammar instruction over explicit/deductive grammar instruction on .01 level. This finding is in contrast to that of Al-Kalbani (2004) with school teachers.

Table 5. Pre-service student Teachers' Attitudes towards Explicit Grammar Instruction (N=58)

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. Through my explanations students are more able to understand English grammar.	3.7759	.85928
2. Students learn English grammar better when I give them explanations of grammatical rules before they do the exercises.	4.0690	.83481
3. Giving students grammar explanations is not helpful.	3.1897	1.06716
4. I believe when I give students explicit grammar explanations they will not forget the learnt grammar easily.	2.5862	1.07662
5. My explicit teaching helps students to understand	3.4828	.84275
6. Students can improve their grammatical accuracy through frequent practice of structures in the classroom.	3.9310	.61735
7. Students need conscious knowledge of grammar in order to improve their language.	3.8621	.90705
8. Explicit discussion of grammar rules by students is helpful for them.	3.8103	.66112
9. Comparison and contrast of individual structures is helpful for students to learn grammar.	3.7069	.67561
10. Teaching grammar produces language knowledge which students can use in natural communication.	3.6379	.87255
11. Students need to be consciously aware of a structure's form and its function before they can use it proficiently.	3.9483	.86699
Overall	**3.6364**	**.36244**

Table 5 shows that eleven items were constructed to tap/probe English pre-service student teachers' preferences of the type of grammar instruction. The fact that the overall mean of this dimension is 3.636 indicates that the pre-service student teachers are moderately but not very strongly in favour of teaching grammar explicitly. Only one item received the highest means (X= 4.0 and above), namely Statement 2 (*Students learn English grammar better when I give them explanations of grammatical rules before they do the exercises*); only one item

(Statement 4) obtained a mean of 2.586 (*I believe when I give students explicit grammar explanations, they will not forget the learnt grammar easily*). The discrepancy between these two mean scores is surprising, as the two statements essentially convey the same approach or belief. The results suggest that explanation of rules, conscious grammar teaching and emphasizing grammar practice are techniques favoured by most pre-service student teachers. They also suggest a tension between this deeply "entrenched habit" and belief that "explicit grammar teaching is necessary and effective" (Murphy & Hastings, 2006, p. 9) on the one hand and on the other the need to adopt a more implicit approach as learnt from the methodology courses on the pre-service education programme.

Table 6. Pre-service Teachers' Attitudes towards Implicit Grammar Instruction (N=58)

Implicit Grammar Instruction	Mean	Std. Deviation
12. I am confident that students can figure out the grammatical rules by themselves, without my explanation.	3.7241	1.03945
13. I prefer asking students to figure out the rules from a discussion with classmates.	3.8276	1.09445
14. I believe when my students figure out the grammatical rules by themselves they can remember these rules for a long time.	4.0517	.80399
15. Students learn grammar successfully if it is presented within a complete text.	3.6724	.96223
16. Students can learn grammar through exposure to language in natural use.	4.0000	.72548
17. Participating in real-life tasks with language is the best way for students to develop their grammatical knowledge.	4.2241	.62248
Overall	**3.9167**	**.54634**

Table 6 shows that this dimension obtained a very high overall mean (X=3.917). This was in turn reflected in the individual items where the mean ranges from 3.672 to 4.224. The item that reflects a more authentic way of teaching the language received the highest mean of 4.224 (*Participating in real-life tasks with language is the best way for students to develop their grammatical knowledge*). This suggests that student teachers strongly believe that teaching the language should take the form of real-life oriented tasks and not superficial practice exercises that are consciously designed for the purpose of teaching grammar.

Statement 15 (*Students learn grammar successfully if it is presented within a complete text*) received the lowest mean score (3.672) of all the items in this dimension. Varying degrees of implicit teaching can be found among the items in this dimension, from a strong emphasis on more implicit type or natural language learning to less systematic implicit grammar teaching.

Generally, Tables 5 and 6 together give a clear picture of the pre-service student teachers' preferences in teaching grammar. It can be concluded that, besides their overall positive attitudes towards grammar instruction, the pre-service student teachers have a strong preference for teaching grammar implicitly over explicit grammar instruction. They think that it is better for the students either to figure out the rules by themselves or from their discussion with their classmates, as this would lead to their remembering the rules and retaining them for a long time. They also believe that presenting grammar within a context would lead to more successful learning by students. The findings also indicate that the more natural the context, the stronger the pre-service student teachers' preference, which in turn would lead to more and better learning due to the natural exposure this situation allows for language learning. In addition, they have the strongest preference towards the idea of getting students to participate in real-life tasks. Such tasks are the best means of developing students' grammatical knowledge.

One of the reasons for this could be that the pre-service student teachers may still be influenced by the theoretical courses they have attended. That is, the ideas are still fresh in their minds. The pre-service student teachers are still active and enthusiastic to teach using the methods they studied not long ago. In fact, teaching grammar implicitly requires more effort and time. Teachers need to choose the best context that allows exposure and would give away the meaning of the structure. They also need to be as creative as possible to demonstrate and provide life examples and situations in order for the students to grasp the meaning of the structure and recognize the form as well as be able to use it. However, teaching grammar deductively is easier in the sense that the teacher simply states the rules and gives examples and practice exercises. In their response to the open-ended question, the pre-service student teachers agreed that the explicit method "is less time consuming" and "is [a] very easy and direct way (common way) to teach grammar."

With regard to *research question* 2(b), interestingly, when some of the subjects of the study were asked to respond to an open-ended question about the reasons for their preferred method of grammar instruction, those who preferred the explicit method gave the following reasons:

- "It [insures] ensures that students understand the rule. Then mere applications are needed."
- "Students will understand more if they know the rule before."
- "Students can focus more and understand well."
- "The students will learn more if I give them the rule."
- "It's helped students to answer the exercise."
- "Most students will not response [respond] to the activities without explanation [of] the rule first."

Those responding pre-service student teachers who preferred the implicit method said it would help students to learn grammar naturally through class participation, thinking and discovering for themselves, which would in turn facilitate long-term retention:

- "The implicit method makes students discover rules by themselves which help them to understand much more."
- "Self-discovery of grammar instruction helps students not to forget them easily."
- "It encourages the students to think and infer the rules."
- "It's going to be more natural."
- "They will not forget it if they discover it by themselves."
- "It helps students to think and use their mind and be participants in the class."

The teachers also said that "Students can learn better and acquire the language smoothly" and "It will develop their English more and faster." One of the respondents clearly said that she would use both the methods because of the level of the students.

In relation to the research question 2(c) regarding the choice of the method for focusing on students' grammatical errors, the explicit method was preferred by most of the subjects as being more suitable for correcting students' grammatical errors, as it is "more simple", "direct", "more clear" to students, and helps students to avoid such mistakes/errors in future. One of the respondents even said, "The explicit way is better because I think it should only have this job of correcting."

In response to the open-ended question about which learner characteristics help the subjects decide on the kind of grammar teaching most appropriate for their students (*research question* 2(d)), the respondents said that learners' age and background would determine which of the two approaches would be more suitable. Besides, teachers' decisions will also be influenced by their learners' level of understanding the grammatical areas presented. Finally, such decisions will also be affected by the students' level of motivation, self-confidence, and willingness to participate in classroom activities relating to grammar.

Table 7. T-Results of the Comparison between Male and Female Pre-service student Teachers

	Gender	N	Mean	SD	F	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
General attitudes	Female	39	3.1608	.49463	.267	-.085	.933
	Male	19	3.1722	.46245			
Explicit instruction	Female	39	3.6830	.32968	.437	1.416	.162
	Male	19	3.5407	.41491			
Implicit instruction	Female	39	3.9658	.56218	1.552	.981	.331
	Male	19	3.8158	.51188			

In regard to the *research question* 3, Table 7 shows that there are no significant differences between male and female pre-service student teachers' general attitudes towards grammar instruction and explicit and implicit grammar instruction. Generally, the findings show that both male and female pre-service student teachers hold similar degree of positive attitudes towards teaching grammar (Males X=3.17; Female X= 3.16). This is also true in the case of their views on explicit grammar instruction (Males X=3.54; Females X=3.68) and implicit grammar instruction (Males X=3.82; Females X=3.97), where the differences in means are similar and show no significant difference between male and female groups.

Table 8. One Way ANOVA for Comparing Pre-service student Teachers' Attitudes according to the Level Taught

Dimension	Level	N	Mean	SD	F	Sig.
Explicit instruction	Cycle 1	14	3.7727	.28693		
	Cycle 2	29	3.5266	.40025	2.914	.063
	Post Cycle 2	15	3.7212	.29451		
	Overall	**58**	**3.6364**	**.36244**		
Implicit instruction	Cycle 1	14	3.7500	.46570		
	Cycle 2	29	3.8276	.56604	4.149	**.021**
	Post Cycle 2	15	4.2444	.46234		
	Overall	**58**	**3.9167**	**.54634**		
General attitudes	Cycle 1	14	3.2857	.61540		
	Cycle 2	29	3.1223	.40676	.581	.563
	Post Cycle 2	15	3.1333	.48698		
	Overall	**58**	**3.1646**	**.48028**		

As Table 8 shows, there are no significant differences in the pre-service student teachers' perceptions attributed to the level they teach with regard to their general attitudes towards grammar instruction. There are, however, significant differences with regard to their attitudes towards implicit grammar instruction at the level 0.05 between Post Cycle 2 and Cycles 1 and 2 in favour of Post Cycle 2.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

The pre-service student teachers' general attitude towards grammar instruction is positive, suggesting they perceive it to be important and useful. With regard to the method of teaching grammar, however, they seem to favour the implicit / inductive method over the explicit / deductive. The difference in their attitudes towards these two methods is significant. They also believe that presenting grammar through real-life tasks would lead to more successful learning of grammar by students. However, some explanation of rules and emphasis on grammar practice is felt to be necessary by the pre-service student teachers. There is no significant difference in the pre-service student teachers' general attitudes towards grammar

instruction as well as implicit and explicit methods of instruction based on their gender or the level they taught in their practicum, despite what they have learnt in the methods courses.

Although the findings suggest a significant difference in the pre-service student teachers' attitudes towards explicit and implicit methods of grammar instruction, the fact that the overall mean scores for both the methods are still high is a matter of some concern for teacher educators. It implies that methodology courses should draw a distinction between the two methods more sharply so that the underlying theoretical assumptions and principles are foregrounded. Some of the responses to the open-ended questions also suggest the need for such clarification.

This has implications for curriculum designers as well in that specific ideas and practical suggestions need to be provided to teachers, especially when the teachers are required to use the implicit method for teaching grammar, as it calls for creativity and resourcefulness on the part of teachers to devise classroom techniques and activities that would enable students to derive grammatical understanding from communicative use of English.

Although the present study is limited to pre-service student teachers in one university, which is the only public institution offering the pre-service education programme in Oman, the findings can be reasonably generalized to a wider context, as evidenced by their conformity with the findings of other studies cited. The study also suggests the need for further research in this area to investigate whether practising teachers in schools and colleges responsible for teaching Arab learners have such an ambivalent attitude towards the two methods. Perhaps there is some confusion between planned focus on form within a communicative approach to teaching English as a foreign or second language (as opposed to incidental focus) *and* an explicit method of grammar instruction.

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