"*Grammar Scares Me*": An Exploration of American Students' Perceptions of Grammar Learning

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ARTICLE INFORMATION	ABSTRACT
	Grammar instruction in SLA contexts has received much scholarly attention ranging from competence levels, teaching methods, learners' and teachers' attitudes and perceptions, cross-linguistic transfer, among others. However, research that focuses on American students' perceptions regarding learning grammar, especially those enrolled in teacher training programs, is still limited. While it is argued that first language learners/users (L1) have the authority of the grammar of their language, it is still important to examine how their antecedent knowledge -naturalistic and/or instructional- of grammar influence their current perceptions and future teaching of grammar. These meanings may leave students with some ambivalent and, at times, misinformed views about grammar. Therefore, in this paper, we report on American students' perceptions of grammar learning and the extent to which these perceptions are (dis)associated with their grammar performance. Twenty-three American students enrolled in a grammar class in a Midwestern university were given a pre-and post-test divided into three sections, two of which report on their perceptions and one section covers their grammar knowledge. The results of the pre-test suggest that most participants perceived grammar learning as unimportant or irrelevant and such findings correlate with their low performance on the grammar section of the test. However, such perception has been reversed in their post-test responses as they performed higher in the grammar section. The findings suggest that understanding students' perceptions and using explicit grammar teaching is beneficial in building their scientific knowledge of the world, enhancing their analytic skills, and reducing their fear of grammar.

1. Introduction

Grammar teaching has been not only a controversial topic in second and/or foreign language settings, but also a highly debated question in first language instruction. To tackle this issue, philosophers, psychologists, applied linguists and educationalists have stepped in with their theories and approaches to facilitate and accommodate grammar teaching in both second and/or foreign language and first language instruction. In the meantime, many linguists and scholars have worked on describing grammar theories (Chomsky, 1969 & 1986; Bybee, 2006 & 2007; Biber et al., 1999; among others), and grammar instructions (Quirk et al., 1985; Crystal, 2003; Halliday and Hasan, 1976; and Huddleston and Pullum, 2002) to help learners in both environments. However, no ubiquitous instruction has ever been agreed upon, and teachers and learners are surrounded by an ocean of options from which they need to select a theory and approach that works for them. One of the results of this labyrinth has been teachers' reluctance and unwillingness to teach grammar (Gartland & Smolkin, 2015), especially in first language instruction, and learners' frustration with and withdrawal from grammar classes in that they either seek an easy way to pass their tests or simply avoid taking up grammar classes. This situation can be worse in first language learning instruction in which L1 speakers are assumed to have the mastery of their own grammar. In the same vein, Davis (2003, p.12) claims that L1 learners/users have better intuitions of their grammar, while second language learners (L2) have better theoretical knowledge of the grammar. Following Krashen's acquisition and learning dichotomy (1981), it seems

essential to meticulously discuss if L1 users "learn" or "know" their language. In order for this discussion to happen, these two terms should be comprehensively defined from psychological and linguistic perspectives.

In the meantime, language and grammar instructors encounter a plethora of methods and techniques of teaching among which "explicit and implicit" approaches to instruction are the most general that teachers might adopt for their classes. While explicit teaching is characterized by direct explanation of grammatical features with emphasis on accuracy and conscious learning (Ellis, 2010; Norris & Ortega, 2000; and Krashen, 2003), implicit teaching emphasizes natural and informal communicative settings focusing on fluency and intuitive learning (Chastain, 1996; Ellis, 2009; Ellis, 2010; and Dekeyser, 2008). In addition to these teaching schemes, grammar instructors need to apply one theory of linguistics out of many (e.g. generativist, usage-based, functionalism, structuralism, etc.) to deliver their grammar teaching materials. This choice heavily depends on how they define language learning in terms of knowledge (competence) and use (performance). These two terms can be examined from two perspectives of generative theory linguists and usage-based grammar approach advocates.

In addition, a speaker of English comes to be able to use the language either through naturalistic acquisition or classroom exposure. The latter case is more typical of second language learners (which particularly happens in academic settings), and the former is usually used for so-called "native speakers". Thus, L2 learners have likely had explicit exposure to grammar instruction, while most L1 learners may have very little. Therefore, L1 learners judge grammaticality due to their experience with and exposure to the actual usage of language.

Along with exploring psychological and linguistic domains of language learning and instructional theories and methodologies, and also investigating grammar teaching in the US schools, this paper intends to examine L1 learners' perception of grammar and whether a change in the perception can affect grammar performance. In addition, most grammar teaching studies have targeted second and/or foreign language learners, and not enough empirical studies have been conducted on grammar teaching to English L1 learners/users. This paper is also designed to fill some parts of this gap.

2. Literature Review
2.1 Psychological perspectives of language learning
Plato thought that humans were born with all knowledge and they had to be reminded of what they know (Clabaugh et al., 2010, p.5). However, Vygotsky viewed knowledge as an attribute that we learn through social interactions (Fosnot,1996). For him, past experiences, social situations and general surroundings and environments are the building blocks of knowledge. Consequently, knowledge is a continual process which is constructed and reconstructed as individuals have social and cultural interactions, and this dialectical relationship between individuals can form their knowledge. In other words, Vygotsky perceived acquiring knowledge as a dynamic and ever-changing activity which starts from birth. This phase can lead to human's development known as "incoherent coherence" (Wellings, 2003, p.3-4). At this phase, individuals make mistakes, but these mistakes can lead to their future developments i.e. knowledge is gained when mistakes are made. For Dewey, education is not a preparation for life, it is life itself and language plays an indispensable role in that education (for him language refers to all means of communication such as monuments, rituals, and formalized arts) (Black, 1962, p.505). Like Vygotsky, Dewey believed that social interaction is the key to learning experiences, so schools should be considered a social institution (Flinders & Thornton, 2013) in which students experience real-life situations and participate in learning activities. When students interact in these social institutions, they learn from each other's past experiences. Therefore, this interactive situation can result in students' learning which encompasses not only their intellectual, social, physical growth but also their academic growth (Schiro, 2013).

Learning has also been a provocative topic among psychologists. Piaget thought of learning as the result of both physical and mental maturation along with experience (Moll, 1990, p.50) while Vygotsky believed that learning leads to development: "learning is a necessary and universal aspect of the process of developing culturally organized, specifically human, psychological functions" (Vygotsky, 1978, p.90). In fact, Vygotsky looked at learning as the means of making people truly human (discussed in Clabaugh et al., 2010, p.6). In Dewey's perspective, learning happens when teachers plan class activities for their classes because they will take students' interests into consideration, and students perform those activities through hands-on-approaches (Schiro, 2013). In order for learning to happen, individuals require language and social interaction.

An important pedagogical concept in learning theory is Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development. Vygotsky introduced the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) in which he described how learning takes place. He defined this zone as "the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential

development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p.86). In his scheme, learning can happen one level above the current students' level of competence. Vygotsky emphasizes that when students collaborate with each other and their teacher, they will have better performance. Therefore, teachers will find a prominent role since they provide learning materials which should be meticulously designed to meet students' current level and also one level above to make the learning process happen.

Vygotsky also introduced the concept of "More Knowledgeable Others (MKO)" (discussed in Rieber, 1998, p.207-241) to define teachers as the ones equipped with knowledge, ability and professionality above the level of learners especially in one task, skill or concept. The key consideration in MKO is that the person should have better knowledge and ability about the subject matter than the learner, so the learners' competence can be developed provided that the learning process happens within ZPD. However, it should be remembered that since Vygotsky emphasized social interaction as a means of learning, teaching tasks also require collaboration, and therefore, he used the term scaffolding-introduced by Bruner in the late 1950s-as "a six-step approach to assisting learning and development of individuals within their zone of proximal development" (Clabaugh, 2010, p.8). These six steps include building interest and engaging the learners; breaking the task into smaller subtasks; concentrating on the most important ideas; keeping the learners motivated; teacher's modeling possible ways to complete the task; and students' imitating the model to show the task is internalized. This model encourages social interactions in which teacher-student(s) and student-student (s) collaborative dialogues and learnings are highly recommended while assuming the teacher to have the responsibility to do the "task of guiding and directing the child's activity [1]" (Vygotsky, 1991, p.118). In this way, the teacher's role gradually changes from a director to a problem solver and then a collaborator.

2.2 Theoretical frameworks of implicit and explicit grammar teaching
Considering the paradigms drawn by Vygotsky and Dewey, it is essential to decide on a teaching methodology which meets their criteria. In this way, two general teaching methodologies-implicit and explicit instruction- can be discussed. One of the pivotal controversies in language instruction is to mirror child language learning for adult learners. It is debated whether child language learning is unvaryingly accomplished through implicit instruction and whether such an implicit approach can work among adult language learners. In implicit instruction, the instructor presents the materials to students without explicitly or overtly stating the goal of that instruction in a decontextualized manner. Students should make their own conclusion and create their own conceptual structure. Implicit instruction is viewed as learning without conscious attention or awareness (Ellis, 2009) and students should infer the rules without awareness. Krashen's natural language acquisition hypothesis (Krashen, 1981, p.97-8) also emphasizes implicit and unconscious learning instruction because he believed that conscious learning functions as a monitor which checks what is uttered. Implicit instruction aims at giving students autonomy and making them independent learners. However, explicit instruction "involves the direct explanation of grammatical features followed by practice activities" (Ellis, 2010, p.19). In this kind of instruction, deliberate explanation of the rules is emphasized, and students are provided with structural practices and corrective feedback. Ellis (2005) believes that explicit instruction leads to explicit knowledge which is superior to implicit knowledge since it is more practical and learners can generalize this knowledge for new situations.

One of the most controversial concerns in Applied Linguistics is centered on teaching grammar. In addition to applying implicit and explicit teaching approaches, grammar teaching has been introduced to two different approaches namely Focus on Form and Focus on Forms. The former refers to "drawing students' attention to linguistic elements as they arise incidentally in lessons" (Long,1991, p.45-6) and it is learner-centered because it aims at responding to students' spontaneous needs (Ellis, 2008, p.962). Moreover, Ellis (2002, p.420) adds that this approach can be used implicitly or explicitly, and in both cases, the primary focus should be meaning instead of linguistic structure. However, the latter refers to traditional grammar teaching in which discrete grammar points are taught separately in each lesson (Dekeyser, 1998) and it is teacher-centered. In this approach, the teacher pre-selects some structures and they are taught explicitly to the students. Then students are required to produce the same structures in controlled exercises (Ellis, 2002, p.420).

2.3 Theories behind grammar teaching in the United States
Teaching grammar was an indispensable part of American schools until the 1960s. At this time, students were presented grammar lessons mostly in isolation and they had to do a lot of practice just like math classes in both public and private schools. However, a declining trend started at that time by asking why we should learn grammar. This growing current of skepticism culminated in 1963 with a report titled *Research in Written Comprehension* published by National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). Looking at studies that had been done up to that point, the report concluded that "the teaching of formal grammar has a negligible or, because it usually displaces some instruction and practice in actual composition, even

a harmful effect on the improvement of writing" (NCTE). Through the support of this organization, many schools started to abandon teaching grammar and then in 1985, in Philadelphia, NCTE published the result of their conference based on a report known as Braddock Report "that NCTE urge the discontinuance of testing practices that encourage the teaching of grammar rather than English language arts instruction." However, we need to examine whether grammar instruction is really harmful to students.

The "Braddock Report" had involved 485 studies on composition, with the acknowledged goal to create a "review [of] what is known and what is not known about the teaching of composition and the conditions under which it is taught" (1962, p.1). From all the research, the team selected five studies which examined English composition from different perspectives, among which was grammar and its relation to writing. Braddock and his colleagues deemed Harris' (1962, in Braddock) unpublished Ph.D. dissertation as providing the most reliable evidence that grammar instruction was not beneficial to students. The conclusion drawn at the end of Harris' research had been that "it seems safe to infer that the study of English grammar had a negligible or even harmful effect upon the correctness of children's writing in the early part of the five secondary schools" (1962, p.35). Since no opposing evidence seemed to exist in the reviewed studies, Braddock and the other researchers affirmed:

> In view of the widespread agreement of research studies based upon many types of students and teachers, the conclusion can be stated in strong and unqualified terms: the teaching of formal grammar has a negligible, or because it usually displaces some instruction and practice in actual composition, even a harmful effect on the improvement of writing (1962, p.37)

Many scholars supported Braddock's report until recently in that they could prevent schools from teaching grammar. Frater (2004, p.80) is convinced that explicit grammar instruction creates "second order skills," that is, students who live in "a closed circuit of pointlessness" and contends that writing with relevance would improve writing skills and eliminate error. Reintroduction of conventional and explicit grammar, on the other hand, would be counterproductive, and might explain the low writing achievements in national tests. His final conclusion is that students should be "imbibed" with grammar, and not taught the discipline in a direct manner. However, Tomlinson (1994) asserted that Braddock's inferences had been based on misconstrued data. Additionally, Lyster, Lightbown and Spada (1999) maintained that the recent studies have shown improvements in students' writings after explicit grammar instructions. Feng and Power (2005) cited Weaver, McNally and Moerman (2001) who think that "to teach or not to teach grammar is not the question," but whether "what and how to teach it," is a matter that teachers and instructors have to confront.

2.4 Usage-based grammar teaching versus Universal Grammar
Chomsky and other generative scholars regarded language knowledge as "competence" and the use of language as "performance". Competence is internalized knowledge of language which is tacit i.e. the "notion of structure in our minds'' (Chomsky,1986, p.21-22). Following Chomsky, Pinker (1994); and Pinker and Jackendoff (2005) assert that grammar is biologically predetermined by a particular faculty of mind. While generativists insist on the innateness of language knowledge, usage-based linguists oppose this view sharply claiming that the organization and structure of grammar is the product of language use and/or performance. Bybee (2006) proposes that "grammar is the cognitive organization of one's experience with language" (p.711). This experience can create new uses and meanings to grammar and structure (cf. Bybee 2006, 2007, 2010; Bybee and Hopper 2001; Diessel 2011; Goldberg 1995, 2006; Hopper 1987) since language should be perceived as a "dynamic network" (Diessel, 2017, p.2) which is restructured and reorganized frequently rather than assuming it as a "predefined set of innate linguistic concepts'' (Chomsky, 1969). Psychologically, the usage-based approach is more in line with Vygotsky's and Dewey's theories because of their emphasis on experience and social interaction which are the main components of this approach. However, the generativist approach follows in some way Plato's claim of being equipped with all knowledge from birth.

2.5 Explicit and implicit teaching
To choose between explicit instruction or the implicit one has always been a controversial issue in grammar teaching courses. After Krashen developed Chomsky's Language Acquisition Device (LAD) in 1981, his proponents started adopting a language teaching method in which students were instructed to learn language without conscious awareness of the rules and principles. His method suggested that formal instruction could only result in consciously-learned competence which functions as a monitor. Krashen's Monitor Theory asserts that language acquisition is a subconscious and implicit process when learners process comprehensible input (1982). Birsen (2012) views implicit instruction as more interactive, natural and

dynamic which focuses more on fluency instead of accuracy. In addition, Ellis (2009) believes that implicit instruction is passive learning in which learners are exposed to language and acquire knowledge simply through exposure without any overt metalinguistic explanation.

However, explicit instruction emphasizes overt explanation of grammar in that students are consciously engaged in the grammar learning process. Terrell (1991) suggests that a conscious knowledge of grammar may play a greater role in language acquisition and processing. Ellis (2006) provides a comprehensive definition for grammar instruction which involves any instructional techniques that draw learners' attention to some specific grammatical forms in such a way that it helps them either to understand it metalinguistically and/or process it in comprehension and/or production so that they can internalize it. While implicit instruction focuses on fluency, explicit teaching views accuracy as the most important component. Along the same lines, Terrell (1991) believes that explicit grammar instruction might not have some immediate results, but it has irrefutable long-term contributions.

Most of the studies on grammar tap into explicit teaching methodology since establishing methodological measurements to assess implicit knowledge has been problematic (Ellis, 2008; Norris & Ortega, 2000). In his study, Terrell (1991) learned that students who received explicit grammar instruction were much more successful in a discrete-point grammar test than the ones who had implicit instruction. In another study, Sopin (2015) conducted a research on teachers and students regarding implicit grammar teaching. His study showed that 84% of the teachers favored explicit teaching, and 64% of students indicated that they couldn't learn grammar if it was taught implicitly. A study by Swain (1985) on French speakers in Canada showed that students with implicit grammar instruction were fluent language users, but their accuracy was questionable. Ellis (2003) proposes that grammar classes should be conducted both explicitly and implicitly so that students will be able to test these two approaches and explore their own learning skills.

2.6 The state of teaching grammar in the United States

Grammar was at the forefront of American primary and secondary education from very early days and it could reach a high popularity in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. As Latin grammar was losing its strength in the American society, English grammar was gaining more prominence in that English grammar had become a central study at intermediate schools (Lyman 1922, pp.4-6). Following Latin grammar instructions, grammar books included some long lists of grammatical rules, definitions, examples, paradigms and practice that students had to memorize and recite later so that they could use grammar effectively. In fact, these books encouraged students to use some patterns and avoid some others in order to teach them some styles of English which were seemingly better than others (Woods, 1986, p.5). This situation has been said to result in students' hate and fear from grammar. The "drill and kill" approach continued until the 1950s, and it was then that its effectiveness was questioned, so teachers started providing more implicit instruction which continued for some decades (Stathis & Gotsch, 2013). The outcome of this solely implicit instruction was more unwillingness and hate towards English grammar in that an English professor wrote "No English teacher would be caught dead diagramming sentences today" after his class observation in the 1980s (Stathis & Gotsch, 2013). While structuralism was at its peak, Fries (1940) had opened up new avenues and offered a refined methodology based on the distribution of forms, with as little reference to meaning as possible (Fries 1951). In his scheme, he suggested more emphasis on a descriptive approach and explicit instruction of grammar. Although Fries and others made all attempts to incorporate grammar lessons in the US schools through introducing a more scientifically based scheme of grammar, NCTE decided to eliminate grammar instructions from schools based on Braddock's report. The same trend even has continued to the early 2000s in that Gartland and Smolkin (2015) claimed that grammar teaching has waned away from schools. In their idea, many reasons have contributed to this matter such as teachers' knowledge of grammar, teachers' comfortability with grammar, confusion of effectiveness of grammar teaching methods, and their uncertainty of the effectiveness of grammar learning in improving reading and writing. All these reasons call for an attempt to be able to equip teachers with better knowledge and skills so that they will feel secure when teaching grammar along with more studies on the practical role of grammar in advancing students' reading and writing skills.

3.Research Methodology

3.1 Participants

Participants in this study included 25 English undergraduate students registered in ENG 243 (two students withdrew before the midterm) of whom 15 majored in Arts and Science and 8 in Education. Among these students, 8 were sophomores, 9 juniors and 6 seniors. The class included four male and 19 female students.

3.2 Materials and Instruments

The students were given two tests in this semester and each test included 25 multiple choice question (MCQ) items examining their knowledge of the English grammar, two open-ended questions and 25 Likert questions about their perception of grammar. The pre-test was given on the second day of the class and the post-test occurred on the last day. The items on the pre-test included the topics which the first researcher was going to teach in the semester. The post-test had the same topic, but in different words and sentences. However, the open-end questions and the Likert questions were kept the same in order to see if they have changed their attitudes towards grammar.

4. Results & Discussion

4.1 Multiple choice questions (MCQs)

The MCQ questions were designed in order to see what knowledge of grammar students bring to the class and what they learn throughout the semester. All the questions were coursebook topic related except for question 20 on both tests. This question was consciously and purposefully designed to see if students were able to answer a test question which was not discussed in the class by the help of analogy with other structures. Table 1 shows the number and the mean of the grades for both the pre- and post-tests. The bar chart also shows how students improved in their grammar in the class throughout the semester.

	Pre-test	**Post-test**
Total grade	287	382
Mean	12.47	16.60

Table 1-The mean of students' improvement in this course

The participants in this test were English L1 learners/users, so the expectation was that they had a solid knowledge of grammar; however, as the table illustrates, when students entered the class, their average knowledge of grammar was not so satisfactory, the mean was 12.47. However, when grammar was taught directly, and they became familiar with the terms and expressions in grammar, the mean increased to 16.60 over the semester. This change may not seem so significant over a course of a semester, but it suggests that direct learning does show results in terms of learning grammatical knowledge. This finding suggests that these participants were/are capable of producing correct sentences undoubtedly, but their issue can be their lack of knowledge about the terms used specifically in grammar. For instance, question 7 asks about the word class of "gently", almost 65% of students answered it as "an adjective". However, question 25 asks them to fill in the gap with an adjective, adverb or a form of comparative, all the students marked the correct answer which was the "adverb". The result of the post-test for the similar question was much better as almost 85% of the students chose the correct answer. In other words, the students can easily distinguish a correct and an incorrect sentence, but they don't know the reason which can be due to their unfamiliarity with grammar terminology. An interesting finding in this test was that two students had written "we were never taught grammar explicitly in our secondary/high schools" in the pre-test at the bottom of the question sheet. This sharing of their experiences is essential to teachers as it provides them with important insights that they can use as they design their teaching materials. It also benefits them in understanding how to use students' existing knowledge as a basis for building their various course activities, adjusting their existing assignments, and deciding on what new knowledge the students need to be taught explicitly.

4.2 Sample Question

This question was intentionally designed to see if students could use some analogy to choose the correct answer. In this class, the structure of passive causative sentences was not discussed, and students were required to choose the correct answer involving this same structure. The results of the pre-test show that almost 78% of students had the wrong answer "B" and only 22% chose "D" as the correct answer.

(1) "I want this watch **repaired** immediately", the underlined verb is………

a.finite   b.past tense   c.intransitive   d.passive

In the post-test, the result was much better, as almost 55% of the students chose the correct answer. In our idea, students looked at the verb and when they saw "-ed", then they immediately chose "past tense". However, if there had been another verb such as "broken", the results might have been different in both tests.

4.3 Likert questions

In the second part of questions, students were given a 25 5-scale Likert set of questions to be evaluated based on their attitudes before and after the grammar course (see the appendix). In this section, we will elaborate on the most significant changes in their attitudes. Question one asks them if they like grammar. In the pre-test, 7 students found it "very important", 9 found it "important", 5 students indicated "moderately important", one student chose "of little importance" and one student selected "unimportant". These views can indicate their emotional states about grammar since the pre-test was given on the second day of the semester and probably students had no previous exposure to grammar-only classes. However, in the post test, their attitude changed drastically, no student chose "very important", and 14 students stated "important" and 9 said it is "moderately important", and there is no "of little importance or unimportant". This can mean that students have softened their extreme perspective about grammar, and they have limited their views to only "important and moderately important". In number 2, their conscious knowledge of grammar was questioned. In the pre-test, students found it "very important, important, moderately important and with little importance" with the frequency of 12, 7, 2 and 2 respectively, but in the post-test, the frequency changed to 4 (very important) and 8 (important) in turn and 7 students found it "moderately important". This selection can be an indicator of an increase in student's awareness of grammar over the semester. Question 3 was related to the communicative context of grammar. In the pre-test, 10 and 7 students stated, "very important, and important", one student chose "of little importance" and 5 students mentioned "unimportant", but in the post-test, the number changed to 4 and 8 for "very important" and "important" in turn and the significant increase was for the "of little importance" with 6 students. One of the most drastic changes happened in question 4 which is about the role of learning the grammar of another language to help develop their own knowledge of grammar. Surprisingly, in the pre-test, 10 students found it very important, 7 stated it is just important, 4 said "moderately important" and 2 students chose "unimportant". In the post-test; however, 8 students said it is "important" and 12 students found it moderately important. As you can see, in the pre-test 10 students chose "very important" and they moderated their view in the post-test to choose "moderately important" with 12 students. This change in view can show that students have gained some knowledge of grammar and when they think of another language, students predict the same probable issues that they had in their first language grammar so that they tried to have a moderate view rather than a sharp one. The importance of "Analyzing grammar" in question 8 has been doubled from 5 to 10 in pre- and post-tests which is significant. Another noteworthy change happened in question 9 where students were asked "Teachers don't need to correct students' mistakes unless they interrupt communication". In the pre-test, the frequency of "very important" was zero, while it changed to 11 students in the post-test. This can be interpreted that students have gained some awareness about the importance of grammar and their ability to learn and understand it. Interestingly, students answered almost the same to questions 12 and 13 about the repetition of grammar practice and necessity of grammar to speak fluently with the frequency of 17 to be "very important" in the pre-test. The viewpoint became a little more moderate in the post-test with the frequency of 9. Moreover, the number increased to "important" in section to 7 and 8 in the post-test while this number was 5 and 3 in the pre-test. Students' attitude about the importance of grammar in increasing the effectiveness of writing almost halved from the pre-test to the post-test. In question 15, they were told "While writing, I find grammar most difficult". While in the pre-test, only one student mentioned "very important" and 11 students found it "of little importance", in the post-test, 7 students chose "very important", 7 others found it "important", 6 students stated "of little importance" and 3 students chose "unimportant". This can mean that this class has helped them gain some more confidence in their grammar to help them with their writing. The sample question presented earlier was related to usefulness of compare and contrast of structures. In the pre-test, 16 students found it "very important" and only 2 "important" while in the post-test, their view dropped dramatically, and the frequency changed to 4 and 9 respectively. While 12 students had noted that the teacher's explanation could be "very important" in understanding grammar in the pre-test, only 7 students agreed with this idea in the post-test. In total, the post test showed that students have gained some metalinguistic awareness about not only the English grammar, but also the grammar of some other languages. This ability has helped them develop a better understanding of their own language.

4.4 Open-ended questions

These questions asked students to write their ideas on "learning" a language and "knowing" a language. The results of both pre and post-tests were almost the same. They related "learning" to grammar, syntax and vocabulary knowledge and "knowing" to the communicative aspects of language. In addition, a large portion of students (almost 80%) discuss the fluency in speaking and error-free writing as the main features of "knowing" a language. Another aspect that is highlighted in their responses is the understanding of the language in order to "know" it. We argue this deals with the meaning and the semantics of the language as two other students have clearly related "knowing" to "meaning". One interesting idea was that

"to know" a language means to learn "most/all vocabulary of the said language". This opinion is so striking in that it suggests that first language learners/users in any language have been able to learn all/most of the vocabulary in their own language. Two students also included "being able to know all the slangs/jargons in the language" can mean knowing that language. Surprisingly, as you can see, students have used "slang and jargon" in plural form (despite being non-count words) by which they might mean slang words or jargon phrases. This happened several times in their open-end questions. Regarding the same question, in the post-test, two students talked about learning the culture and the customs of a language could be a part of "knowing" the language. This realization is of great importance since in this class some comparisons were made between English and other languages and these students could connect language to culture. The next feature was "confidence" in that four students used this word in describing "to know" the language. They indicated that being able to use the language "confidently" is the key for "knowing" the language. The other important observation was that students had declined their extreme viewpoints about learning the language from "knowing all the vocabulary, grammar and slang words" to "knowing as much as you can get by your routine life". This is an important understanding that students have made when learning a new language or communicating with second language learners. This moderate thinking led most of the students to use some technical words in their responses such as "learning the function, being able to analyze the language, learning the morphology, and phonetics". These terms were absent in the pre-test.

In short, most students related "learning a language" to learn the basics such as vocabulary, grammar, syntax and "knowing a language" to the practical aspect of the language. What is certain is that "knowing" a language has been linked to the meaning and communicative aspect of language. The results of the post-test indicated that students have developed a more moderate perspective to "knowing" and "learning" a language. They also mentioned that learning a language is tied to the learning of the culture of that language.

5. Conclusion

When speaking of first language users/learners, it is said that they have the authority of the grammar of their language (Chomsky, 1969). Following Chomsky, Davies (1991, p.1) defines a first language user as a person who "knows what the language is […] and what the language isn't […]". This view can mean that L1 users/learners are incapable of making mistakes and they have all the commands in the language. However, Nayar (1994) argues that L1 learners/users are not "ipso facto knowledgeable, correct and infallible in their competence" (p. 4). They might be proficient language users, but the problem is that their grammar knowledge is unconscious, and they have little knowledge of syntax. This claim can be true for all L1 users/learners since they don't learn grammar the same way second language learners do. Second language learners learn grammar in a rather controlled environment with some feedback to correct their errors/ mistakes. However, L1 users/learners usually learn grammar in a natural setting where little to no correction happens.

The results of the MCQ test indicated that if students are taught directly and explicitly, they will learn grammar better. Although the participants were all L1 learners/users of English, their knowledge of the examined morphosyntactic terms was at a very low level. This course helped them learn these terms and expressions much better in that they could use them in their own paper or project presentations. In addition, they were able to analyze the sentences by drawing tree diagrams and stating the function of each word class.

The outcome of the Likert test was very interesting. As we can observe, in some items, their attitudes and perceptions about grammar had changed drastically. The pre-test showed some extreme views, but the post-test was more moderate with more equal distribution of thoughts between "very important" and "important".

Finally, the two open-ended questions could change their world view about "knowing" and "learning" grammar. As we could see, in the pre-test, the emphasis was more given to the role of grammar and the communicative aspect of language respectively; however, in the post-test, culture and knowledge of the second language were given as the parameters of "knowing" a language. In addition, we see that students are able to use linguistic terms in their description.

Although some of the students connected their learning of grammar to writing, we have seen earlier in the paper that not all scholars are in agreement regarding the efficacy of grammar learning in writing. It is not the purpose of this study to engage in that question in any direct way, but to show that students can learn and benefit generally from grammar instruction, even if, for no other reason, it helps to build their scientific knowledge of the world, analytic skills and to lose their fear of grammar.

In general, explicit grammar instruction helped students have a better understanding of syntax and grammar, become familiar with similarities and differences between English grammar and some other languages, have a better perception of descriptive quality of language, i.e. they learned to describe different parts of speech, and to analyze simple to compound complex sentences, develop critical thinking about grammar, become able to analyze sentences at the morphosyntactic level, and improve their linguistic performance.

5.1 Limitations and Future Recommendations

The student sample used in this study is small and future research should consider examining a bigger sample. It should also expand the participants' type beyond English majors to include other majors such as Education major students training to work with ESL learners. Since students and teachers are essential members of the classroom space, future research should examine teachers' perceptions regarding students' grammar repertoire and investigate how these perceptions might inform their teaching practices and their instructional approaches to grammar. Since this study was conducted over the span of one semester, the time limitation hindered examining the factors that contributed to students' fear of grammar. Therefore, future studies should look into employing research instruments that help students reflect on their prior experiences with grammar and study how they can shift those factors into teaching tools that can benefit them in developing their grammar practice.

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Appendix

1= very important   2=important

3=moderately important   4=of little importance

5=unimportant

No	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	I like learning grammar.					
2	I need a conscious knowledge of grammar in order to improve my language.					
3	Practice of structures must always be within a full, communicative context.					
4	Learning the grammar of another language can help learn the grammar of your own language better.					
5	I need to be consciously aware of a structure's form and its function before I can use it proficiently.					
6	Decontextualised practice of structures has a place in language learning.					
7	I learn grammar more successfully if it is presented within a complete text.					
8	I learn the grammar more successfully through analysis.					
9	Teachers don't need to correct students' mistakes unless they interrupt communication.					
10	Explicit discussion of grammar rules is helpful for students.					
11	It is important for learners to know grammatical terminology.					
12	In learning grammar, repeated practice can help students learn better.					
13	It is necessary to study the grammar of a second or foreign language in order to speak it fluently.					
14	Learning grammar can make a student's writing more effective.					

15	While writing, I find grammar most difficult.					
16	I like learning grammar by looking at examples.					
17	I understand the grammar of texts I read.					
18	I can use grammatically correct sentences without thinking carefully about the rules.					
19	I can learn grammar through exposure to language in natural use.					
20	Comparison and contrast of individual structures is helpful for students learning grammar.					
21	I like it when the teacher explains grammar rules.					
22	Learning a second language means learning a lot of grammar.					
23	People will respect me if they see I use correct grammar.					
24	I feel satisfied when I understand I had no grammar mistakes in my writing.					
25	I feel proud when I can find my friends' grammar mistakes.					