Teachers and Learners' Views on Isolated vs. Integrated Form-focused Grammar Instruction: A Comparison of Two Contexts

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Abstract

Acknowledging the distinction between two types of form-focused instruction (FFI) on grammar, this study investigated learners and teachers' stated beliefs about isolated and integrated FFI. Placed in two major groups (ESL and EFL), 120 teachers and 280 learners were recruited from college-wide Intensive English Programs in Iran and USA. The analysis of quantitative and qualitative data collected from participants' responses to two questionnaires developed and validated by Valeo and Spada (2016) pointed to the existence of both harmony and discord between learners and teachers' views across ESL and EFL contexts. While teachers were mostly in favor of integrated FFI, learners were more interested in isolated FFI. However, their preferences for either of these approaches were not absolute, and both groups acknowledged the complimentary nature of these approaches. Data also showed that each group's preferences could be attributed to individual background factors which shaped their views in their respective specific context. A number of discrepancies were, however, evident between learners' and teachers' perceptions within each context particularly regarding attitudes towards formal grammar instruction. The study also makes recommendations for synthesizing these approaches in various learning environments to enhance grammar awareness in communicative-oriented language instruction.

Key words: Form-focused grammar instruction, isolated/ integrated FFI, teachers/ learners' preferences, cross-contextual comparison, individual differences

Introduction

Grammar has always been regarded an inseparable part of second/foreign language pedagogy. Traditionally, grammar has been taught by focusing on accuracy of form and rules through decontextualized exercises. However, this view has been challenged by substantial evidence in support of teaching grammar through content/meaning-based instruction. Accordingly, teachers are encouraged to engage learners in various communicative tasks to work out the "strategies, maxims, and organizational principles that govern the communicative language use" (Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei, & Thurrell 1997, p. 141). Motivated by the debate over the role of explicit versus implicit learning in cognitive psychology as well as naturalistic exposure versus formal instruction in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research, ample evidence is available on the effectiveness of focus on form and meaning together instead of exclusive focus on either form or meaning (Spada, 2011).

Form-focused instruction (FFI) refers to "any pedagogical effort which is used to draw learners' attention to form either implicitly or explicitly within meaning-based approaches to L2 instruction and in which a focus on language is provided in either spontaneous or predetermined ways" (Spada, 1997, p. 73). It is different from decontextualized grammar instruction by viewing grammar as a communication facilitator but not as a set of discrete forms and rules isolated from meaning (Spada & Lightbown, 2008). While the latter mostly focuses on teaching and learning forms of a language prescribed in a structural syllabus and excluding learners' communicative priorities, the former emphasizes the communicative aspect of using grammar (Spada, 2011). In this sense, grammar instruction is embedded within the context of communicative interaction in which attention to both form and meaning is emphasized (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). Arguably, separating grammar from meaning entails minimal impact on learning since learners may erroneously view language instruction separately from language use. In other words, language features might be remembered and used for the same decontextualized purpose (e.g., taking a grammar test) rather than promoting interactions (Swain & Lapkin, 2002). In contrast, the communicatively attained features of language can be easily accessible for future meaningful linguistic interactions while embedded in communicative activities (Ellis, 2006). Thus, the effectiveness of FFI-driven grammar instruction will be reinforced when they are embedded in communicative contexts.

Research findings have noted that myriad factors could impact the effectiveness of the grammar instruction in language classrooms. Spada and Lightbown (2008) argued that some of these factors could be the influence of learners' first language, salience and frequency of the input, complexity and communicative values of forms and meaning as well as teachers and learners' preferences. The existing research on beliefs about and preferences for language instruction has proven that values, beliefs, and preferences held by both teachers and learners have great impact on the process of language learning and teaching including grammar instruction (Basturkmen, 2012). Such a congruence and/ or incongruence makes grammar instruction a controversial topic in SLA research. The existing literature on teacher cognition and grammar teaching shows that teachers mostly rely on their socially and contextually situated practical theories in enacting instructional practices. For example, Graus and Coppen (2016) found that teachers' preferences for grammar teaching varied based on their background factors such as age and educational level. Accordingly, teachers with higher educational level are more willing to use meaning/content-based instruction. Borg and Burns (2008) also argued that teachers' instructional decisions on integrating grammar into communicative tasks could be temporal

and contextual. Additionally, Phipps and Borg (2009) found that teachers' peripheral and core beliefs about grammar teaching could lead to tensions in their pedagogical decisions. In this sense, teachers constantly modify their instructional practices regarding learners' expectations and the requirements of the teaching context.

Research on learners' cognition also shows that their beliefs and preferences play a major role in the success or failure of L2 learning. For example, Yang (1999) suggested that college English as a foreign language (EFL) learners' selection of learning strategies had a cyclical relationship with their beliefs as well as the ones instilled by teachers' instructional practices. Loewen et al. (2009) noted that the type of context, linguistic background, and the nature of target language had a significant effect on participants' beliefs about grammar instruction and error correction. Specifically, they found that English as second language (ESL) learners held less strict beliefs about grammar instruction and error correction while placing a high value on communicative skills compared to foreign language (FL) learners. Pointing to the gaps between teachers' and learners' beliefs on FL learning, Peacock (1999) also found that learners were much more in favor of error correction and grammar exercises than their instructors. Peacock concluded that there was a high probability that such a discrepancy in views had a negative effect not only on the learners' progress but also on their satisfaction with the class and their confidence in their teachers. Investigating the compatibility and mismatches between teachers and learners' view toward grammar instruction and error correction in a foreign language setting, Schulz (1996) argued that learners are more positive toward explicit in-class grammar instruction in comparison with their teachers and viewed it as an integral element in gaining L2 mastery. On the other hand, teachers preferred practicing grammar in simulated real-life activities rather than explicit instruction of forms. Schulz (2001), in a similar study found that the L2 learning context could lead to congruent and incongruent beliefs teachers and learners had about explicit grammar instruction.

Isolated vs. Integrated FFI

The SLA literature is filled with various taxonomies and perspectives on the inclusion of grammar instruction in L2 communicative pedagogy (see Spada & Lightbown, 2008 for an overview). Regardless of the specific perspectives and proposed terminologies, they share some basic characteristics which utilize both implicit and explicit form of grammar instruction through communicative activities. However, Spada and Lightbown (2008) took one step ahead and argued that instead of addressing the existence or absence of grammar instruction in language classroom researchers should focus on the best way of teaching grammar and the optimal time of providing the proper intervention. Accordingly, they proposed *isolated* and *integrated* FFI as two approaches to the timing of grammatical instruction within FFI framework. Unlike the traditional views such as grammar translation method, both approaches primarily concentrate on meaning while differing in the timing of providing instruction for specific language forms (Spada, 2011). They also differ from Long's (1991) conceptualization of 'focus on form' which is unplanned, spontaneous, and reactive while there is an exclusive attention to form. Specifically, in isolated FFI approach grammar instruction is provided before, during, or even after the activities whereas in the integrated FFI grammar instruction occurs only during the communicative activity. In other words, a language form can be introduced to learners in preparation for the communicative activity or after when learners experience problems with a specific language form while doing a communicative task or an activity in isolated FFI grammar instruction. On the other hand, in integrated FFI the learner is

simultaneously involved in receiving meaning/content-based instruction while paying attention to form via getting feedback on specific forms of the language (Spada & Lightbown, 2008; Valeo, 2018). Hence, learners can find the connection between language forms and their functions without interrupting the flow of meaning in the communicative task (Spada, Jessop, Tomita, Suzuki, & Valeo, 2014).

Despite the wealth of research on FFI and beliefs on grammar instruction (see Larsen-Freeman, 2015), few studies have specifically addressed the issue of teachers/learners' views toward isolated and integrated FFI. In a recent study, Valeo and Spada (2016) surveyed ESL and EFL teachers and learners' views in Canada and Brazil and found that that both groups of participants distinctively preferred integrated FFI over isolated FFI. However, both groups acknowledged the value of isolated FFI whenever it was necessary within the course of grammar instruction. Songhori (2012) found that while Iranian college EFL instructors and learners favored integrated FFI, there was a mismatch between teachers and learners' views. Likewise, language proficiency found to be related to learners' preferences for integrated and isolated FFI drawing a line between less proficient learners preferring isolated FFI and more proficient learners favoring integrated FFI (Ansarin, Abad, & Khojasteh, 2015). Similarly, Elgün-Gündüz, Akcan, and Bayyurt (2012) found that Turkish EFL learners with a preference toward integrated FFI had a higher level of motivation and ability for using grammatical and vocabulary knowledge in communicative activities. Barrot (2014) argued that implementing a combined isolated-integrated syllabus would lead to higher level of productive skills among Filipino EFL learners compared to skill-based syllabus.

However, these studies are prone to some limitations such as failing to compare teachers/ learners' preferences across contexts. In other words, except for Valeo and Spada (2016) who compared teachers and learners' preferences for isolated and integrated FFI across ESL and EFL contexts, other studies only focused on EFL contexts while extending the findings to contexts beyond the investigated one. Since each context has its unique features, conducting a comparative study encompassing various instructional contexts sounds promising in providing a deeper understanding of methodological, theoretical, and practical aspects of grammar instruction (Phipps & Borg, 2009). Moreover, these studies did not address the connection between participants' beliefs and their background factors such as age, gender, and teaching/ learning experience commonly known as individual differences (Ellis, 2004). Researching the possible effects of these factors could be important because having a comprehensive knowledge about teachers/ learners' individual differences in their selection of isolated and integrated FFI may contribute to more effective grammar teaching and learning (Basturkmen, 2012). Furthermore, despite the substantial evidence on the influence of beliefs on teaching and learning practices, there is still mismatch between these two (Borg & Burns, 2008). One source of such inconsistency could be linked to factors which differ across educational contexts and vary among individuals depending on their personal, educational, and occupational experiences (Graus & Coppen, 2016). In other words, these beliefs could be situated and context-dependent which necessitate further studies on how they can be translated into concrete instructional practices. To address these issues, the current study was conducted with the two main objectives: (1) replicating Valeo and Spada's (2016) study within different ESL and EFL contexts, and (2) assessing the effect of individual differences on teachers/learners' beliefs. The following research questions guided the analysis:

1. Do both groups of teachers/ learners have any preferences for either isolated or integrated FFI?

2. Are there any significant differences between ESL and EFL teachers/ learners' preferences for isolated and integrated FFI? How can such a difference (if any) be actualized in their stated beliefs and practices?

3. To what extent are ESL and EFL teachers/learners' beliefs and preferences for isolated and integrated FFI determined by the related background factors (e.g., age, gender, and teaching/ learning experience)?

To answer the research questions, we conducted a comparative study with four groups of participants (i.e., ESL and EFL teachers and learners) utilizing a mixed-method design to ensure that both qualitative and quantitative data provide in-depth information about teachers/ learners' views (Riazi & Candlin, 2014). Quantitative accounts of teachers and learners' views were collected from participants' responses to survey items while qualitative data were drawn from their written descriptions of grammar teaching and learning experiences.

Method

Participants

Sample 1 consists of 120 teachers (54 males) ranging in age from 21 to 69 years old ($M = 36.63$, $SD = 10.38$), working in university-sponsored intensive English programs in Iran and the U. S., who voluntarily participated in this study. Participants were divided into ESL ($N = 57$) and EFL group based on their current place of teaching. The first language spoken by ESL group was English, whereas EFL teachers used Farsi as their first language. Based on the responses provided to the first section of the questionnaire (see Materials section) the majority of teacher participants in both groups obtained a graduate degree in language education, received communicative language teaching in their teacher education programs, and learned their second/ foreign language in the communicative approach. Participants differed in their teaching experience within the range of 3 to 30 years ($M = 11$, $SD = 7.45$).

Sample 2 included 280 adult English learners (126 males; 170 EFL learners) with an age range of 15 to 53 years old ($M = 25.55$, $SD = 7.58$), who voluntarily participated in this study. Participants were from different educational backgrounds with bachelor's degree as the dominant educational level (52.5%). Following Loewen et al.'s (2009) procedure for determining learners' level of proficiency, participants were asked to rate their current proficiency level on a 6-point Likert scale (1= *Beginner* to 6= *Advanced*). As an additional assessment of proficiency level, learners' self-reports were matched with the class-placement reports provided by their respective programs. Accordingly, both groups had a range of lower intermediate to upper intermediate level of proficiency in English with an average of 6 years ($SD = 4.2$) exposure to learning English. All EFL learners spoke Farsi as their first language, while ESL learners were from diverse linguistic backgrounds (e.g., Spanish, Arabic, and Portuguese) with the majority speaking Chinese (39%). Prior to participating in the study, all participants were provided with consent form approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of a southern university in the U.S. Tables 1 and 2 summarize the demographic information of teachers and learners respectively.

Table 1. *Profile of EFL and ESL Teachers*

	EFL (*n* = 63)		ESL (*n* = 57)	
Gender	Female 54% (n = 34)	Male 46% (n = 29)	Female 56.1% (n = 32)	Male 43.9% (n= 25)
Age	31.00 ± 8.3	32.38 ± 6.6	42.25 ± 8.5	42.04 ± 12.5
Teaching experience	9.15 ± 6.4	9.59 ± 7.2	13.41 ± 6.5	12.08 ± 9.4
Education	Graduate degree 76.5% (n = 26)	Graduate degree 69% (n = 20)	Graduate degree 93.8% (n = 30)	Graduate degree 88% (n = 22)
Method of teacher education	Communicative 82.4% (n = 28)	Communicative 82.8% (n = 24)	Communicative 81.3% (n = 26)	Communicative 80% (n = 20)
Method of L2 study	Communicative 73.5% (n = 25) Other 17.6% (n = 6)	Communicative 65.5% (n = 19) Audio-lingual 17.2% (n = 5)	Communicative 78.1% (n = 25) Other 18.8% (n = 6)	Communicative 64% (n = 16) Other 24% (n = 6)

Table 2. *Profile of EFL and ESL Learners*

	EFL (*n* = 170)		ESL (*n* = 110)	
Gender	Female 61.8% (n = 105)	Male 38.2% (n = 65)	Female 44.5% (n = 49)	Male 55.5% (n = 61)
Age	25.32 ± 5.8	25.82 ± 6.9	29.86 ± 11.6	22.18 ± 5
Length of exposure	5.27 ± 3.4	4.85±3.3	8.04 ±6	5.54 ± 4.1
Education	Bachelor's degree 57% (n = 60)	Bachelor's degree 51% (n = 33)	Diploma 51% (n = 25)	Bachelor's degree 57% (n = 35)

Materials

For assessing teachers and learners' preferences, the two questionnaires developed and validated by Valeo and Spada (2016), modified from an earlier version (Spada, Barkaoui, Peters, So, & Valeo, 2009) were used. The questionnaires have been widely used and validated within ESL (Valeo & Spada, 2016) and EFL contexts (Ansarin et al., 2015; (Wind, Mansouri, & Jami, 2019). Briefly, in both contexts the questionnaires showed acceptable reliability (ranged from 0.64 to 0.83) and good fit to the two-factor model (see Spada et al., 2009 for details). Each questionnaire consisted of three parts: (a) background information, (b) 5-point Likert-scale statements, and (c) an open-ended question. The original questionnaires can be accessible from Valeo and Spada (2016).

Learners' questionnaire. Following the background information section, the second part consisted 24 statements on preferences for grammar learning divided evenly between integrated

and isolated FFI items (12 statements for each category). Participants rated each statement on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5). Following Valeo and Spada (2016), items in each category were summed and divided by the number of items to provide a final average score for each subscale. The final score ranged from 1 to 5 on each subscale where a higher score indicated a higher tendency on that subscale. The third section consisted an open-ended question asking for learners' verbatim comments about preferences and experiences they might have had toward learning grammar. Internal consistency reliability calculated for each subscale was acceptable: $\alpha_{INT} = .92$ and $\alpha_{ISO} = .86$.

Teachers' questionnaire. The first section required participants to provide demographic information and teaching experiences. The second section consisted 22 statements on preferences for grammar teaching divided evenly between integrated and isolated FFI items (11 statements for each category). Participants were asked to answer each statement on a 5-point Likert-Scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5). The same scoring system explained in previous section was applied for teachers' questionnaire. The third section consisted an open-ended question asking for teacher' further comments about preferences and experiences they might have had about teaching grammar. The Cronbach's alpha found for internal consistency for each subscale was $\alpha_{INT} = .92$ and $\alpha_{ISO} = .86$.

Data Collection

The surveys were distributed in electronic and hard-copy formats. Upon securing the IRB approval, ESL and EFL teachers were contacted through their institutions' mailing lists. The details of the study were emailed to them and they were invited to volunteer for the study. By volunteering, teachers also gave permission to distribute the learners' questionnaire and collect data from students in their classes who agreed to participate in this study. All teachers received an electronic link to the survey while learners received the hard copy of the questionnaire and answered it within their class time. Each questionnaire approximately took 15 minutes to complete.

Data Analysis

Our data analysis procedure included separate analyses to address the research questions. First, two separate paired-sample t-tests were conducted for examining ESL/EFL teachers' and learners' preferences (if any) for isolated and integrated FFI. The other aspiration of the current study was to test the effect of gender, group, and any possible interactions between the two. The best approach for achieving such a goal, is the multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). In addition to allow for evaluating the effect of independent variables on more than one dependent variable, MANOVA could be the most appropriate approach for exploring the interaction effect of independent variables (Pituch & Stevens, 2016). Specifically, we administered two separate 2 x 2 MANOVAs with Type III Sum Square in which group affiliation (i.e., ESL and EFL) and gender (i.e., male and female) were independent and scores on the integrated and isolated FFI were dependent variables. Lastly, two separate Pearson Product-moment correlation analysis were conducted for assessing the relationship between participants' age, teaching experience (for teachers) or length of exposure (for learners), and their preferences for integrated and isolated FFI. Before conducting the analyses, the degree to which the data matched the assumptions of proposed analysis was evaluated. No univariate or multivariate outliers ($p < 0.001$) were found, and assumptions related to sampling distributions

normality, homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices, and linearity were met. All analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS statistics 24.

Results

Teachers' Data: Quantitative Analysis

Table 3 and Figure 1 show the descriptive statistics for both ESL and EFL teachers' responses to the survey. As Table 3 depicts, there is a difference between preference for integrated and isolated FFI. A comparison of the mean scores shows that ESL teachers had a stronger preference for integrated FFI, which was supported by the result of paired-sample t-test, t (56) = 7.032, $p < .001$, $d = .931$. On the other hand, EFL teachers favored isolated FFI, however the difference was not significant, t (62) = 1.139, $p = .259$, $d = .144$.

Table 3. *Teacher Survey Descriptive Statistics*

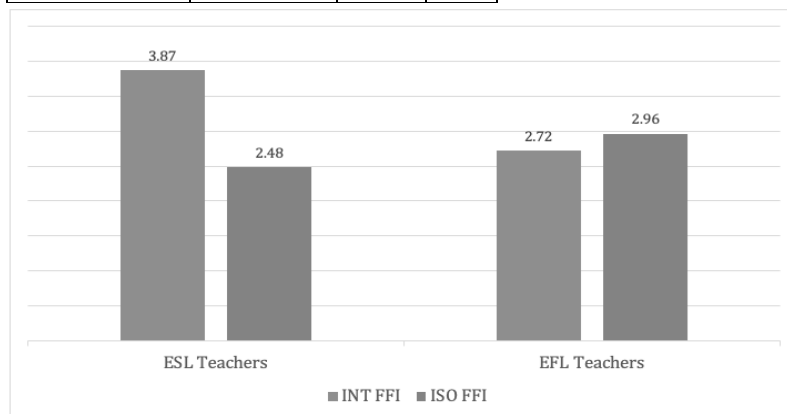| Group	Item Type	Mean	SD
ESL ($n = 57$)	Integrated	3.87	.89
	Isolated	2.48	.72
EFL ($n = 63$)	Integrated	2.72	1.14
	Isolated	2.96	.72

Figure 1. Means of INT and ISO items for ESL and EFL teachers.

Results of MANOVA indicated that the interaction between gender and group affiliation of participants was not significant, Wilks' = .997, F (2, 115) = .201, $p = .818$, $\eta^2 = .003$. Likewise, participants' gender did not affect their preference for either of the subscales, Wilks' $\lambda = .988$, F (2, 115) = .694, $p = .501$, $\eta^2 = .012$. Overall, both male and female teachers had higher preferences for integrated FFI items (Table 4). The only significant effect on teachers' preference for integrated and isolated FFI was found for group affiliation, Wilks' $\lambda = .768$, F (2, 115) = 17.399, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .232$. Significant univariate main effect of group affiliation was found for integrated, F (1, 116) = 35.100, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .232$; and isolated FFI, F (1, 116) = 12.560, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .098$. Between the two groups of participants, ESL teachers had a significantly higher preference for integrated FFI, whereas EFL teachers were more in favor of isolated FFI.

Table 4. *Gender differences in ISO and INT items among teachers*

| Items | Group | Gender | Mean | SD | 95% Confidence Interval for Mean | |
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
ISO	ESL	Male	2.59	.81	2.26	2.92
		Female	2.39	.65	2.16	2.63
	EFL	Male	2.98	.75	2.69	3.26
		Female	2.95	.71	2.70	3.20
INT	ESL	Male	3.69	.99	3.28	4.11
		Female	4.00	.79	3.72	4.30
	EFL	Male	2.65	1.08	2.24	3.06
		Female	2.79	1.22	2.36	3.21

Note: all Ps > .05; INT: integrated FFI; ISO: isolated FFI

Correlational analyses revealed some robust findings. Age and years of experience correlated negatively with teachers' preference toward isolated items, (r_{age}= -.229, p = .012, $r_{experience}$= -.220, p = .016). On the other hand, teachers' preference for integrated items had a positive correlation with age, r = .347, p < .001, and teaching experience, r = .263, p = .004, suggesting that older and more experienced teachers tend to implement integrated FFI in teaching grammar. Overall, both age and teaching experience significantly correlated with teachers' preferences for integrated and isolated FFI.

Teacher's Data: Qualitative Analysis

The comments made by teachers in responding to the open-ended question in the survey were also scrutinized for a clearer understanding of teachers' preferred grammar instruction approach. All comments were transformed into a conceptually clustered matrix to uncover the various categories that go together. Fifty-four ESL teachers (94.7%) provided full length and detailed comments. The comments provided by twenty-one ESL teachers extensively elaborated on their preferences for integrated FFI because it simultaneously fostered focus on meaning and communication. For example, one teacher described his views as:

I think the best way of teaching grammar is helping students develop noticing and inference skills in students to independently extract grammatical rules. Allowing students to discover grammatical structures without explicit instruction is the best way to build grammatical competence.

Six ESL teachers also clearly supported isolated FFI because it could help learners produce more standard and error-free forms of language. One ESL teacher wrote: "I believe mistakes in grammar should, for most students, be corrected immediately after an activity, and students should practice using the correct/standard grammar at that time". Another teacher supported isolated FFI depending on learners' level of proficiency: "I believe that attention to grammar is not only important, but it is something that students crave. At the same time, separate grammar classes may not be necessary for more advanced levels of ESL".

Twelve ESL teachers assigned equal value to both isolated and integrated FFI in teaching grammar. For example, one of the teachers stated that:

I feel like the best way to grammar instruction is a balanced approach. Communication is our main aim; however, I think that students can benefit from studying grammar out of context sometimes as well, especially to focus on form and producing certain structures. I think effective pedagogy involves a mixture of direct grammar instruction and opportunities for meaningful practice.

Eight teachers argued their decision would depend on various factors, including their institution's policy, students' needs and goals, test-oriented teaching, context of teaching, and individual differences among learners. For instance, one teacher, while supporting the integrated FFI, clearly stated that:

Grammar instruction is integrated into all courses – reading, writing, speaking and listening. However, the institution [where she currently teaches] has a separate grammar course and the current curriculum that I am required to follow limits the amount I can teach grammar using meaningful activities and content.

The remaining comments revealed some other concerns teachers had including error correction ($N = 2$), positive feedback ($N = 3$), and integrating grammar instruction into various L2 learning theories such as noticing, socio-cultural theory, and corpus-based approaches.

Of the 63 EFL teachers, 38 responded to the open-ended section of the survey. Nearly one third ($N = 12$) stated their support for integrated FFI because they valued learners' interaction with the teacher through communicative activities. As an example, one EFL teacher wrote "I do believe in the communicative method when students and the teacher are involved in communication simultaneously. Grammar is best taught via real- life examples". Nearly half of EFL teachers ($N=15$) indicated preference for isolated FFI, while acknowledging the importance of integrated FFI. They mainly argued that their choice was determined by the proficiency level of their students, the difficulty level of the grammatical structures, the policies of their institutions, and their teaching context. For example, one teacher stated that "Grammar is the backbone of a language. It should be included in every syllabus and taught explicitly to assist learners to understand the complex forms and functions of language". Six EFL teachers assigned equal weight to both approaches and acknowledged the need for ongoing transition between them. One teacher pointed to the discrepancy between their preferences and the realities of the classroom by criticizing the expectations that institutions have. She noted that the institution left few options for them to be more communication-oriented. In other comments teachers directed their concerns toward the needs and goals of their students as well as the specific methodology they chose which impacted their choice of grammar instruction.

As is evident from the findings of both types of analysis, it is obvious that teachers' preferences and beliefs about isolated and integrated FFI are influenced by their group affiliation. More specifically, while ESL teachers are in favor of integrated FFI, EFL teachers have taken an opposite stance. However, the findings of qualitative analysis reveal that isolated FFI is not disregarded by teachers and is favored as a complementary approach to teaching grammar. Moreover, the discrepancy between ESL and EFL teachers could be traced to their background factors, as well as the context of their teaching. In other words, the type of awareness reflected in teachers' views could be directly influenced by classroom dynamics, as well as the needs and goals of learners, and the requirements of institutions.

Learners' Data: Quantitative Analysis

A comparison of the group means indicates that both groups of learners preferred isolated FFI items (Table 5). A paired-sample t-test confirmed this difference to be statistically significant for both EFL learners, $t (169) = 5.776$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.443$, and ESL learners, $t (109) = 3.743$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.357$.

Table 5. *Learner Survey Descriptive Statistics*

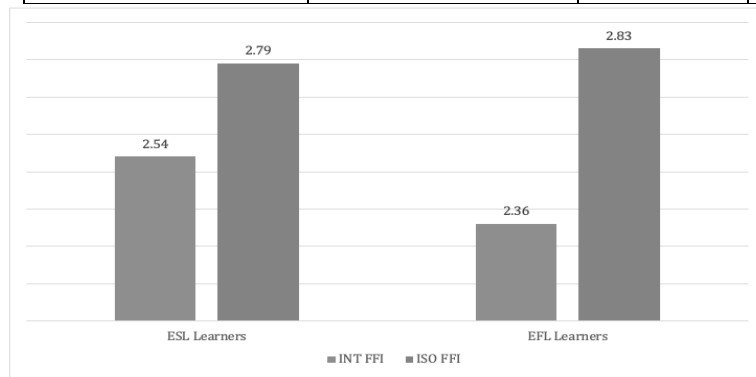| Group	Item Type	Mean	SD
ESL ($n = 110$)	Integrated	2.54	.89
	Isolated	2.79	.76
EFL ($n = 170$)	Integrated	2.36	.73
	Isolated	2.83	.83

Figure 2. Means of ISO and INT items for ESL and EFL learners

Results of MANOVA indicated that the interaction between gender and group affiliation of learner participants was not significant, Wilks' = .976, $F (4, 273) = 1.710$, $p = .148$, $\eta^2 = .024$. Likewise, the result suggested a non-significant effect of group affiliation in participants' preference for integrated and isolated FFI, Wilks' $\lambda = .987$, $F (4, 273) = .875$, $p = .480$, $\eta^2 = .013$. Overall, both groups of learners had a slightly higher preference for isolated over integrated FFI as illustrated in figure 2. Regarding the effect of participants' gender a significant multivariate effect was found, Wilks' $\lambda = .956$, $F (4, 273) = 3.146$, $p = .015$, $\eta^2 = .044$. Significant univariate main effects of gender were obtained only for integrated FFI, $F (1, 276) = 7.573$, $p = .006$, $\eta^2 = .027$. Although male participants had a slightly higher preference for isolated FFI, the result did not reach a significant level, $F (1, 276) = .789$, $p = .375$, $\eta^2 = .003$. On average, male learners showed higher agreement with the integrated items compared to their female peers (Table 6).

Table 6. *Gender differences in ISO and INT items among learners*

Items	Group	Gender	Mean	SD	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
ISO	ESL	Male	2.88	.75	2.69	3.07
		Female	2.69	.78	2.47	2.91
	EFL	Male	2.82	.78	2.62	3.00
		Female	2.84	.70	2.70	2.98
INT	ESL	Male	2.77	.91	2.54	3.00
		Female	2.25	.79	2.02	2.47
	EFL	Male	2.39	.73	2.21	2.57
		Female	2.34	.89	2.17	2.51

Correlational analyses suggested that learners' beliefs might vary based on their age as it negatively correlated with learners' preference for both FFI approaches ($r_{INT} = -.172$, $p = .004$ and $r_{ISO} = -.192$, $p = .001$). However, length of exposure did not correlate significantly with learners' preference ($r_{ISO} = -.059$, $p = .328$, and $r_{INT} = .040$, $p = .504$). Overall, younger learners expressed their preference more strongly than their older counterparts in both categories (i.e., isolated and integrated).

Learner's Data: Qualitative Analysis

Of 110 ESL learners, 81 (73.63%) participants provided further comments on the survey. Thirty-seven learners wrote about their preferences for integrated FFI. One thing that all these learners mentioned in their comments was the importance of communication in their learning. For example, one ESL learner stated, "I like to listen to news and watch TV programs and find out how grammar is used in the way people talk". Another learner highlighted learning grammar through interacting with native English speakers: "In my opinion, the best way to learn English grammar is to be exposed to the native form of the language through talking to native speakers instead of learning and memorizing them from the book". Twenty-six ESL learners stated that they preferred isolated FFI mostly because they valued structural accuracy over communication, "I like to study grammar separately from other skills, because it is the most important aspect of the language and we need to learn it before starting any conversations with others". Twelve learners found both approaches equally valuable while identifying communication as the main reason of learning a language. Four learners mentioned that some individual differences, such as goals and motivation, shaped their views toward either of these approaches. In other comments, respondents considered teacher's pedagogical approach, types of learning activities, class size, and time spent on teaching grammar influential on their views.

Of 170 EFL learners, 113 (63.8%) provided further comments to the open-ended question. Almost one-third of comments (*N* = 35) pointed to EFL learners' preference for integrated FFI because they believed in using contextualized forms of language rather than its decontextualized rules, as one learner wrote: "I think learning grammar out of its context of use cannot be helpful enough in communicating others". On the other hand, thirty-two learners

directly stated their preferences for isolated FFI because learning grammar could lead to a more robust foundation for future communicative learning. For example, one of the learners wrote, "I suggest that students study the grammar at the beginning of class time to solve their problem and understand the content better". Eleven learners acknowledged the value of both approaches an example of which is: "I like to know the basics of grammar before any communicative activities, but I still think communication is the best way to practice what I have learned about the grammar". The rest of the comments addressed a wide range of issues such as request for more practice, change of the textbooks, a focus on learning grammar through games, and using multimedia to facilitate learning grammar.

Overall, both the quantitative and qualitative analyses suggest learners' preference for isolated FFI in both EFL and ESL contexts supporting its contribution in learning and using language communicatively. However, there is a high level of acknowledgement of integrated FFI among both groups of learners meaning that these two approaches are not dichotomous in nature and can contribute to effective grammar learning. Quite interestingly, the majority of learners stressed the importance of using accurate grammatical structures while dealing with productive language skills (i.e., speaking and writing). However, the approach that most learners found suitable differed between ESL and EFL contexts. While EFL learners indicated that they mostly prefer learning grammar through interactive study sources, ESL learners pointed to interaction with native speakers.

Discussion

The study described in this paper sought to investigate and compare views about isolated and integrated FFI stated by ESL and EFL teachers and learners. The first research question addressed the existence of any preferences for the two FFI approaches among participants. Quantitative and qualitative analyses of the survey items and written comments provided by each group showed a distinction between participants' preferences. Looking at learners' preferences, the findings partially replicated the results reported in previous studies (Elgün-Gündüz et al., 2012; Songhori, 2012; Valeo & Spada, 2016). Although both groups of learners supported isolated FFI, their comments revealed that they approved of isolated FFI if it leads to using L2 communicatively (Spada & Lightbown, 2008).

On the other hand, group distinction was more evident in teachers' responses with the ESL teachers favoring integrated FFI and EFL teachers adopting isolated FFI as the preferred grammar teaching approach. However, as qualitative analysis suggested both groups supported integrated FFI when the goal is communication. Such finding is in line with the theoretical underpinnings of embedding grammar within and across communicative activities as well as proper timing for each of those activities (Spada et al., 2014). Moreover, participants in both groups of teachers extensively mentioned that their decision on either of these approaches is highly dependent on a myriad of factors, including learners' needs and goals as well as their instructional objectives. Looking at learners' views and the incongruences with teachers', one possible explanation could be the way they received grammar instruction. In both groups, learners had several years of formal instruction in their home countries where grammar was addressed in a decontextualized manner and less attention has been paid to the communication. So, it would be easier for them to access their knowledge of grammar in a condition similar to their past experiences (Larsen-Freeman, 2015; Swain & Lapkin, 2002).

The second research question investigated any possible differences between the beliefs and preferences of teachers and learners across their contexts of L2 teaching and learning as well as their actualization. Referring to learners' data from both quantitative and qualitative perspective, evidently there is a congruence between their views about integrated and isolated FFI. The findings match the results reported in Loewen et al. (2009) in which learners pointed to their goals and desires as guiding criteria to their preference for a proper grammar instruction approach. As emerged in the qualitative analysis of their comments, many learners from both camps expressed to learn grammar in real-life examples and through various communicative activities. One of the major areas that both groups of learners confirmed to share was practicing the learned grammatical forms in speaking activities. ESL learners, however, were more supportive of this idea due to having more access to individuals and communities they could interact with. EFL learners, on the other hand, have tried to fill this gap through online interactions with others as well as their peers in the class. Such a finding resonates with the ones reported in Loewen et al. (2009). Accordingly, one of the reasons for the existence of such differences could be the immediate linguistic context teachers and especially learners are situated in. ESL learners, due to their access to target language outside the classroom, may need to have more specific and explicit instruction of grammar in the class in order to engage themselves with the communicative activities outside the class. One the other hand, EFL learners have sought to translate their isolated-driven FFI knowledge into communicative opportunities in their outsides classroom learning activities despite being exposed to isolated FFI in the classroom as a way of compensating their limited access to L2 environment.

The analysis of teachers' responses suggested a difference between ESL and EFL teachers' views toward isolated and integrated FFI. While ESL teachers were more willing to implement integrated FFI in their classes, EFL teachers preferred the implementation of isolated FFI. Looking at the comments provided by each group showed the possible reasons for such as mismatch. Accordingly, teachers' selection of either of these approaches was mostly dependent on their students' preferences and the needs they had. In both groups teachers tended to match their instructional practices and goals with the ones of their learners. The result supported the claims made in Schulz (2001), which emphasize the importance of developing shared preferences by teachers and learners to guarantee a successful learning and teaching. In other words, teaching and learning grammar will be more effective as long as more convergence exist in teaching and learning beliefs among teachers and learners (Phipps & Borg, 2009).

The third question addressed the role of participants' background factors on their preferred choices of FFI. The results suggested both teachers and learners value these approaches of grammar instruction, necessarily not equal, as integral to L2 learning and teaching. The variation of their belief system could be sought in the variation of the background factors each group of participants had. The findings suggested that teacher's belief is somehow influenced by their age and teaching experience. As they get more experienced in their teaching career, teachers might be more cognizant of using grammar in communication and tend to be more willing to teach grammar interactively. Similarly, the related findings from learners' data supported the impact of background factors especially age and gender as determining criteria for learners' preference. Interestingly, the amount of time of being exposed to L2 did not show any significant effect on learners' preferences as predicted in Valeo and Spada (2016). One of the reasons for this could be sought through investigating the amount of time these learners spend using their L2 and their L1. Although not reported here (due to the lack of enough data), the impression from some informal interviews suggested that in both contexts learners tend to

spend more time with peers who have more linguistic and cultural similarities. Moreover, the negative correlation between learners' age with both FFI approaches can explain learners' goal for ultimate attainment in grammar to be achieved in a way that more explicit input is provided (Valeo, 2018). Since most learners have been exposed to L2 for a fairly short period, they tend to be more analytic in their choice of L2 grammar learning. However, such an interpretation would not be accurate unless further studies clarify it.

Conclusion

Although the current research did not specifically address the effectiveness of isolated and integrated form-focused grammar instruction, the findings may suggest that their effectiveness might be observed if proper interventions are implemented. In other words, from a learners' perspective when L2 forms and meanings are included in communicative activities either or both approaches can lead to effective instruction (Wind et al., 2019). Such a conclusion is consistent with current theory and research in instructed SLA and language pedagogy (Spada, 2011). However, as the findings showed there is not an absolute and cut-off degree of learners and teachers' preferences for either of the isolated and integrated FFI grammar instruction. Conversely, their selection as the main instructional strategy in the classroom depends on a variety of pedagogical variables, contextual factors, and individual differences among learners and teachers. Accordingly, learners can have access to appropriate input to meet the required level of grammatical accuracy as well as communicative abilities (Spada et al., 2014). However, there is a need to conduct more studies that are more intervention-based and explore how these beliefs and preferences can be put into actual practice to enhance L2 instruction. Thus, one line of future studies this research can contribute to is conducting classroom research with experimental and control groups to explore how each or a combination of these approaches help learners develop implicit and explicit knowledge of the second language. In this way, the specific effects of each of these approaches could be clearly identified.

Additionally, the current study emphasizes on the importance of paying attention to the individual and sociocultural background factors in shaping teachers and learners' preferences as well as any possible congruence and incongruence in between. This reflects that further studies are required to investigate implementation of compatible instructional approaches with respect to teachers and learners' attitudes, cognitive styles, and educational goals especially in EFL contexts similar to the one in this study where teaching and learning grammar is at the forefront of foreign language education. Given that EFL education in Iranian context is mostly inspired by communicative language teaching, the findings have suggested that the effectiveness of such an educational curriculum would be partially dependent on minimizing the belief-mismatches and including both individual and sociocultural factors in designing and implementing the curriculum. Furthermore, due to the importance of language in the spread of globalization and individuals' integration in various multicultural and multilingual contexts, looking at the ways grammar is best taught and learned to facilitate such integration could initiate another future line of research. Since both teachers and learners in this study attested to the importance of grammar in corroborating communication and interactions, it would be highly insightful to investigate how grammar facilitate language socialization and cultural integration. Moreover, the findings regarding EFL learners could be different due to the fact that all participants were Farsi speakers. Given that learners' L1 background and their context of learning might impact their preferences for isolated and integrated FFI (Spada & Lightbown, 2008), further studies are needed to explore which factor is more dominant over the other.

Given the fact that there was no variability in EFL learners' L1 background as well as their immediate sociolinguistic context, it would be interesting to conduct further studies to investigate aspects of L1 reinforcing effects on their preferences for and use of isolated and integrated FFI.

It is plausible that some limitations may have influenced the results obtained; thus, need to be addressed in future research. The first limitation is associated with an unbalanced sample size, with more female participants than men are. Although, we used the recommended analysis for unequal sample size (Type III Sum Squares; Pituch & Stevens, 2016), the main effect of gender on learners' preferences should be interpreted cautiously. Moreover, it is important to acknowledge the limitations associated with the self-report nature of the questionnaires used in the current study. As with self-report measures of other constructs, researchers and practitioners should be careful to interpret responses to the self-reported information and combine the results from these self-report items with other measures such as class observations and in-depth interviews.

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