



Article

Examining the Challenges of Teaching Grammar Implicitly Among Iraqi EFL Learners: According to Teachers' Perceptions

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Abstract: The current study aims to discuss the problems faced by teachers in teaching EFL grammar implicitly with Iraqi EFL learners from teachers' point of view. Although the explicit teaching of grammar has been reduced in communicative language teaching, the way of implementing the implicit teaching of grammar in EFL is still limited. In the Iraqi context, explicit rule-based teaching of grammar is still dominating, and this gap between theory and practice needs to be addressed. The method used in this study is quantitative descriptive. A structured questionnaire was used, which comprised quantitative items with Likert-scale and qualitative items with open-ended questions to collect data from 36 EFL teachers in Iraq. The results show that teachers' attitudes overall are positive in relation to implicit grammar teaching, especially about fluency and natural language use and student involvement. A clear gap was identified between the beliefs of teachers and what they are doing in their classrooms, however. The difficulties that were found were as follows: insufficient instructional time, large classes, an examination-based system, students' desire for explicit teaching, and insufficient professional training. These make it difficult to implement implicit grammar teaching and promote traditional methods. The study concludes that the improvement of grammar instruction in Iraqi EFL classrooms demands consideration of both pedagogical and contextual barriers, which could be solved by developing teachers' training, designing and adapting suitable and effective curriculum, and reforming assessment systems.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background to Study

New linguistic research has led to new ways of looking at grammar, which [1] foreground the tight connection between form and meaning. Some of these include Pattern Grammar and Construction Grammar, which share several commonalities but do not share a similarly oriented theory. The development of Pattern Grammar was motivated by the need to describe the behavior of individual words simply and flexibly, especially in the field of corpus lexicography. Based on the results of the corpus studies, it is noted that words which share similar grammatical features can be clustered based on common semantic properties. Construction Grammar, on the other hand, treats language as a collection of constructions, each are treated as a two-part system: form and meaning, with the latter being linked to the construction as a whole and not necessarily to any single lexical item or phrase, and variability in word choice is usually acceptable. In this way, both the approaches tie grammatical form with its meaning in a strong bond. Many of the

frequently recurring phraseological expressions can then be analyzed as grammatical patterns or as constructions, thus providing evidence that the abundant corpus research that has gone into developing Pattern Grammar can be helpful in the development of an inventory of constructions.

In addition, studies on grammar instruction in EFL settings have been conducted on the teachers' beliefs and reported classroom practices [2]. Research on teachers in L2 classrooms, both lower and upper secondary, reveals that, generally, grammar is highly prized, and teachers' beliefs are closely related to their theoretical knowledge about how grammatical competence develops. Teachers usually find that they use mostly implicit grammar instruction models in terms of teaching grammar, namely the grammar contextualization model and inductive model, except for time constraints and specific needs of the curriculum. Grammar teaching is occasionally seen as less central in the upper secondary context and, when it is taught, it is usually short, abstract, and deductive. Additionally, a grammar- and examination-based educational system and indirect summative assessment of grammar have been found to have an impact on teachers' practices, with a tendency to undervalue the learning of grammar, though it is known to play a significant role in skill development and general language proficiency.

In foreign language teaching, the teaching of grammar has always been an important and effective means to promote learners' reading, writing, speaking, and comprehension ability. So, grammar at the secondary and foreign language levels has become a topic of discussion and debate. Scholars and teachers have been interested in finding the best way to teach grammar, and that has raised the debate regarding the explicit/implicit presentation of grammar. The study was conducted in a senior high school environment that used an implicit grammar teaching strategy. The data collection involved classroom observations and interviews to have a complete picture of the instructional practices. Results in general showed teachers' positive attitudes toward the use of implicit grammar instruction, but it was seen that there were differences in how they used the methods of instruction, such as Focus on Form/or Focus on Forms. This is an example of the difficulties that may arise in the application of implicit grammar in practice. Therefore, this study highlights the need for teachers to consider the implicit approach to give their students the chance to acquire natural language instead of formal language only [3].

Teacher cognition (or what teachers think, know and believe, and how these mental constructs are related to classroom practices) is an important area of research in language teaching. The language teacher cognition could be investigated from three perspectives within this framework: (1) how teachers' previous language learning experiences affect their cognition; (2) how teacher education and professional training affect teachers' cognition; and (3) the relationship between teachers' cognition and their classroom practices. Research on teacher cognition has addressed some specific aspects of teaching, for instance, grammar teaching and literacy, and many points have been highlighted as teachers' mental processes in these domains. Yet, although it is becoming a crucial field of study, there is still no definite way of approaching research in this area, and a few issues in language teaching, such as the implementation of implicit grammar teaching, are still poorly studied [4].

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Grammar instruction is thought to be integral to the learning process of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) because it equips learners with the knowledge of how to build structures and produce accurate and meaningful English in speaking and writing. Traditionally, grammar is taught through explicit teaching, in which the teacher spells out the rules of grammar, and the students use grammar rules in controlled exercises, the main aim of which is accuracy, not meaningful language use. Research in L2 acquisition and communicative language pedagogy, however, indicates that grammar may also be acquired implicitly, as it is part of the communicative task that gives the learner opportunities to process the meaning of the message while grammatical patterns are integrated into the message spontaneously. Implicit grammar learning helps learners learn the language without awareness of rules, and this helps in acquiring grammar and communicative competence. The use of grammar in meaningful communicative activities

has been proven to improve learners' fluency and spontaneous use of grammar in real communication, highlighting the need to link form-focused teaching and learning to meaningful, real communication in the classroom [5].

The past few decades have seen changes in the teaching methods used in language education, with a more communicative and learner-centered approach. The approach that has had the greatest impact is Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which stresses meaningful use of language and builds communicative competence. In this approach, grammar is typically taught indirectly, as it is acquired using language in practical contexts, instead of by formal grammar rules. Implicit grammar instruction is one in which the learners' attention is paid to meaning, and grammar is learned from interaction and communicative activities [6].

Although there is theoretical justification for the study of implicit grammar, most students' EFL classrooms around the world still use a lot of explicit rule-based teaching techniques. Teachers may give their students grammar rules, after which they will have grammar exercises in which they are taught about grammar in terms of form and accuracy. Such learner activities might facilitate good performance during a grammar test but not necessarily the development of the learners' ability to use the grammar in their spontaneous communication [7].

Teachers also struggle when implementing implicit grammar teaching in many educational contexts with English as a foreign language (EFL), especially in the case that communicative approaches are recommended in the curriculum. Some scholars have suggested that teachers might encounter some problems in incorporating grammar teaching into the communicative classroom. Some of the problems might be insufficient professional training in communicative grammar teaching, large classes, insufficient teaching hours, and examinations that focus on grammatical accuracy rather than communicative performance [8].

In the Iraqi EFL context, the use of communicative principles in the context of classroom English language instruction has increased, and the requirement for students to interact, participate, and use language in meaningful ways. In real classes, however, the teaching of grammar in many classrooms in Iraq is still based on the explicit presentation of grammatical features. This might be affected by different contextual factors, including traditional approaches to teaching, students' expectations, assessment methods, and lack of communicative language opportunities in the classroom.

This discrepancy between theory and practice in the classroom brings up pertinent issues with respect to the difficulties teachers encounter in trying to teach grammar implicitly. Teachers' perceptions of these problems are very important to improve the teaching of grammar in their class because the teacher is the one who implements the instructional approach in the classroom. The present study tries to investigate the problems of teaching grammar implicitly from teachers' perspective concerning the Iraqi EFL learners in the classroom and to find out the factors that affect the effective use of implicit grammar teaching in Iraqi EFL classrooms.

1.3 Significance of the Study

The importance of this study lies in its concern with tackling a vital issue in educating English language learners in Iraq, which is the problem of teachers' difficulties in implementing grammar instruction in an implicit way in the communicative teaching method. Incorporating communicative language teaching (CLT) into English teaching has promoted meaningful interaction and language use, but it has been found that many teachers have the problems of practicing CLT in practice. These problems can affect the learners' communicative competence and fluency because they tend to learn grammar with explicit rule-based instruction instead of using authentic language to learn it.

It is crucial to know the difficulties of implicit grammar teaching to enhance classroom practices. This study investigates the factors that hinder effective implementation of implicit grammar instruction based on teachers' perceptions, including limitations of curriculum, limitations of class size, limitations of instructional time, and students' expectations. The various barriers identified not only reveal the discrepancies between

theory and practice in the classroom but also contribute to the design of strategies to facilitate the teaching and learning process.

In addition, this study contributes to improving the quality of English language learning in general in Iraq. It can help teachers overcome the obstacles to implicit grammar teaching to plan more effective lessons and classroom activities, and incorporate grammar into communication naturally. This, in turn, can help to enhance learners' competence to apply grammatical structures in a spontaneous and appropriate way in real-life situations, thereby contributing to their language proficiency.

To sum up, this study will help gain more insight into the difficulties of teaching grammar implicitly, provide practical suggestions to overcome them, and support the development of communicative English language teaching in Iraqi classrooms. The results can provide a basis for the improvement of teaching, teacher training, and, ultimately, learning results for EFL learners.

1.4 Research Question

What are the main challenges of Iraqi EFL teachers in teaching grammar implicitly?

1.5 Literature Review

1.5.1. Theoretical Framework

Implicit grammar teaching is seen as one that facilitates the acquisition of grammatical competence without the explicit presentation of grammar rules, by maintaining the primary focus in the main classroom on meaning/communication and the learning of grammar from exposure, use, and attention. In this respect, grammar is supposed to come to the fore through input and tasks, rather than by explicit grammar rules. A related construct to FonF in SLA is Focus on Form (FonF): brief and momentary shifts of focus to linguistic elements in meaning-focused lessons, typically induced by comprehension/production problems. The principles of FonF are generally used as a guideline to implement implicit grammar teaching in communicative classes [9] [10].

A study by Krashen [11] suggests that input-based views indicate that acquisition is strongly linked to the input that the learners receive and the conditions in which the input is received (low anxiety and long exposure times). According to this view, the learning of grammar structures implicitly can be facilitated if they are encountered repeatedly by learners in meaningful cases in which they can comprehend the message.

But there are many researchers who warn that grammatical development is not certain to take place if the learner does not attend to form in some way as well. That is the reason why, in modern frameworks, instruction is more often and more importantly directed towards meaning while focusing on form in a selective manner (e.g., FonF) [9].

One of the key cognitive explanations was also proposed by Schmidt [12], namely the Noticing Hypothesis, which suggested that the input is not noticed by the learners and thus is not noticed as input for language learning unless the relevant features in the language stream are noticed by the learners, even if they cannot verbalise a rule. In the case of implicit grammar teaching, it means that forms need to be highlighted to attract attention through the tasks and feedback provided.

Implicit knowledge is very much related to fluent usage from a usage-based/cognitive point of view, and develops over time by exposure to patterns and distributions of input. This perspective also underscores the fact that students learn differently in terms of their implicit learning ability, a reason why implicit teaching of grammar can be effective for some, but not all students [13].

The key difference in theory is the contrast between explicit knowledge (the conscious rules that can be verbalised) and implicit knowledge (the automatic intuitive knowledge used in real-time communication). Classroom activities can inadvertently start to involve explicit teaching of grammar even though a teacher's intention is to teach grammar implicitly, for example, because they want students to gain accuracy quickly or because students ask to see the rules. When looking at teachers' perceptions of challenges, the tension is the notion of grammar in the context of communicative competence, such as "grammatical competence" and "grammatical accuracy", and the routes learners might follow when developing their grammar knowledge, such as through inductive exposure

to authentic language. This reinforces the validity of the approach of implicit grammar teaching and introduces an issue of how to achieve progress and accuracy [10] [13].

You are studying something according to the teachers' perceptions, and therefore a suitable framework would be the concept of Teacher Cognition (Cognitive Theory of the teacher), which holds that the teachers' decisions in the classroom are influenced by their thoughts, knowledge, beliefs, and previous learning experiences, professional education, and contextual constraints. Understand the reasons why two different teachers in the same school might see implicit grammar teaching in very different ways. The relevance of teachers' beliefs and practices to the context is also highlighted in teacher cognition research: institutional policy, exams, textbooks, time pressure, and learners' expectations can push teachers toward explicit grammar despite their principles of teaching implicitly [4].

Grammar teaching is sometimes considered traditional grammar, and teachers might prefer explicit grammar teaching to implicit grammar teaching, as revealed in research in Iraq, suggesting that there is a gap between the communicative/implicit ideal and the classroom reality. Other work reports practical issues that decrease the possibility of implementing IGT, such as problems of teaching grammar as a communicative language skill, lack of experience in communicative syllabus, and difficulties in evaluating learners' performance in the classroom, which are all common reasons why teachers opt for direct grammar teaching [14] [15].

1.5.2. Theoretical Background to the Study

Grammar teaching has always been one of the major problems in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching. The traditional explicit grammar teaching method has been replaced by more communicative and implicit methods in recent years. Implicit grammar instruction is the indirect teaching of grammar structures through meaningful communication, exposure, and interaction, without the explicit teaching of rules. This method is in line with communicative language teaching (CLT) that focuses on language use instead of on rules. Ellis [7] claims that implicit learning takes place naturally when learners are provided with abundant language input and are urged to deal with meaning instead of form. This exposure allows the learner to internalize grammatical patterns without conscious awareness, but the effectiveness of implicit teaching is not always accepted, especially in the foreign language context, where the amount of exposure to the English language outside the classroom is not sufficient to guarantee grammar accuracy, particularly for those who depend heavily on formal rule-based learning. One problem teacher frequently have is how to balance, for the learner, the focus on meaning with the need to explicitly correct the learner's grammar. This tension is more apparent in EFL settings like Iraq, where classroom input is the major source of language input.

The study on implicit grammar learning was done by Lightbown and Spada [16] and is closely related to theories of second language acquisition (SLA) such as the Input Hypothesis by Krashen and the Interaction Hypothesis by Long. While corrective feedback and focus on form may be required to boost grammatical development, Lightbown and Spada [16] explain that learners learn grammar when they receive comprehensible input just beyond their own proficiency. Thus, it becomes a challenge to know to what extent implicit instruction alone can be used to promote grammatical accuracy for EFL learners.

A communicative classroom teacher is urged to use grammar in tasks, discussions, and in real-life situations instead of grammar in isolation. Richards and Rodgers [17] point out that communicative methods favour implicit learning because of authentic usage of the language. They argue, however, that in exam-based educational systems, teachers might be tempted to go back to explicit grammar explanations to fulfill curriculum demands. This presents a methodological challenge, especially in situations where standardized tests are focused on grammatical competence.

Brown [18] points out that the motivation, cognitive style, background knowledge, and language aptitude of learners will affect their reactions to implicit teaching. In most EFL environments, students are used to being taught by their teacher and the teacher provides students with explicit rules for learning. Therefore, teachers might feel resistance

or confusion when adopting implicit grammar instruction, which may lead to difficulties. This makes teachers feel resistance or confusion when adopting implicit grammar instruction, which may cause difficulties. S. language teaching in the Iraqi EFL context has traditionally focused on explicit and direct teaching of grammar and has placed a high priority on the use of knowledge of grammar to ensure accuracy in writing. Thus, implicit methods can have difficulties with learners' expectations, teachers' training, time, and content of the curriculum. The teachers' perceptions are thus very important, because they are directly involved in the implementation of instructional approaches and observing the responses of learners.

1.5.3. Empirical Background to the Study

There have been recent empirical research studies on the effectiveness and problems with implicit grammar teaching in EFL environments. The results of the research indicate mixed effects on the students' grammatical accuracy and their communicative competence. Borg [19] carried out a study of teachers' beliefs and classroom practices in relation to the teaching of grammar in the foreign language context. The results indicated that while some teachers reported having positive attitudes towards the teaching of communicative and implicit grammar, many teachers tended to go back to explicit teaching because of the demands of the curriculum, the assessment system, and the students' expectations. Teachers' perceptions were stressed as essential influencing factors in the implementation of implicit methods in the classroom.

Nassaji [20] conducted an empirical study to investigate the differences in using implicit and explicit corrective feedback in EFL classrooms. The results indicated that implicit feedback (recasts, etc.) helped the learners to gain fluency, but in some cases, it was not enough to gain the grammatical accuracy required, particularly for lower-level learners. The study found that in an L2 context, implicit teaching is effective for L1 development but might require attention to form in an L2 environment.

In the same way, Sato and Loewen [21] investigated the role of interaction and implicit feedback in the learning of grammar. The results they obtained revealed gradual over time the grammatical development of the communicative tasks with implicit feedback. Teachers, however, encountered difficulties such as being pressed for time, classes of large size, and the lack of opportunities for learners to notice the grammatical forms in meaning-oriented activities. The present results are especially relevant to contexts of EFL where the classroom conditions might reduce the effectiveness of implicit instruction.

A study conducted by Ellis and Shintani [22] analyzed empirical studies on implicit grammar teaching, which showed that contextual factors such as the level of proficiency, input, and pedagogical skill play very significant roles in the success of such teaching. Based on their analysis, they proposed that a limited amount of exposure to English outside the classroom—like in many Middle Eastern contexts—might still require strategic instructional interventions to achieve good levels of accuracy in the grammar domain of the language. The findings of this study indicate that the teachers' perception is important in assessing instructional problems. In EFL settings like Iraq, empirical studies have revealed that the problems involved in applying implicit grammar instruction are the following: examination-oriented curriculum, students' learning by rules, lack of teacher training, and lack of opportunities for authentic communication. Thus, a study of the perceptions of Iraqi teachers will offer some empirical understanding of the nature of these challenges in local classrooms.

Alenezi [23] introduced different methods of grammar teaching in an EFL setting their theories and applications. Main methods are:

Deductive Approach: This approach will explicitly teach the learners the grammatical rules first and ask them to apply the rules. Teachers describe the form, function, and application of target grammatical points, and then practice or use controlled exercises or guided practice to follow. This helps to ensure clarity and helps learners to understand rules quickly, particularly for learners who are beginning to learn or would prefer to learn rules systematically. For example, a teacher might present the rules of the past tense, and then have students create sentences in the past tense with the structures. This can be

effective in the acquisition of the rules, but it can restrict spontaneous communication if learners only memorize rules.

On the other hand, the inductive approach makes students learn by discovering rules for themselves from examples, texts, or dialogues. Students are encouraged to be active in their learning and to make inferences based on patterns, thereby deepening their understanding of the concept. For instance, they could read a text and deduce the use of various verb tenses based on frequent exposure to them. It promotes thinking and enables the learner to become familiar with grammar patterns but demands careful guidance to avoid hasty generalizations.

The Cyclical Approach in language teaching, which has been highlighted by Namaghi and Gholami [24] which is to present the materials repeatedly in different phases to make the learners understand and remember them is the approach that has been prioritized. Studies have shown that when a material is introduced cyclically, the cycle helps students to internalise the material better, reduces stress, offers remedial support, and motivates students. It is very important for teachers to have a positive attitude towards its implementation, as their decisions can either be helpful or hinder their success. Many curricula are linear, which requires some practical advice on how to adapt and modify the syllabi and cyclically structure them so that students will revisit grammatical structures and language functions and do so in different contexts. This activity not only helps students to become proficient in language but also follows language learning methodology principles of learner-centredness by incorporating repetition, reinforcement and meaningful language practice.

The Lexical Approach that Lewis [25] introduced rejected the dichotomy between grammar and vocabulary and posited that words are mostly made up of chunks, collocations, and fixed or semi-fixed expressions. In this view, grammar is not meant to be the main organizing principle of a language, but rather grammatical patterns are generated by lexis. The emphasis is therefore placed on raising learners' awareness of so often-used word combinations and prefabricated phrases commonly used by native speakers. The learners gradually build lexical knowledge and fluency by being exposed to authentic input and repeated encounters with the lexical items in context without the language being overloaded with explicit instruction of grammar. The Lexical Approach, therefore, restates grammar as a part of the lexis, not as a set of rules that must be mastered separately.

The Genre-Based Approach sees academic writing as a socially situated practice where the decisions of language are influenced by context, purpose, and audience. This method is based on Systemic Functional Linguistics, which presents grammar in terms of meaningful texts and not as a series of fixed rules. This model is usually implemented in teaching and learning using the teaching-learning cycle, which has four stages: modeling, co-construction, and independent construction. The study with EFL pre-service teachers from Colombia shows that genre-based teaching helps learners become aware of the role of grammatical structures in achieving communicative goals in a certain academic context. Results, however, also suggest that students might experience difficulties in discarding their beliefs about grammar as a set of rules, which means that there is a need for long-term pedagogical assistance when teaching with genres [26].

This study, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, is the first study investigating the challenges that Iraqi EFL teachers face when implementing implicit grammar instruction. Although the theoretical orientation of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) has shifted to the concept of implicit learning to develop Second Language Communicative Competence (L2CC) and natural language acquisition, its application in foreign language contexts is still a topic of debate. It has been documented that in the Iraqi EFL environment, there is a "methodological dilemma", which means that in many cases the EFL teachers encounter a conflict between the ideal and the reality in their classroom. The research literature has investigated the general effectiveness of implicit grammar teaching, but there is a significant gap in the literature in the perception and management of the diverse problematics of teaching grammar implicitly in the context of Iraqi teachers. In particular, the "Teacher Cognition" aspect (how teachers' beliefs are formed and limited

by local factors like exam-oriented curricula, big classes, and the strong beliefs of students used to a rule-based teaching-learning approach) has not received much empirical attention. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to address that gap by exploring these challenges from the teachers' perspective in Iraq by analyzing the psycholinguistic and contextual impediments to the shift from explicit to implicit grammar teaching/learning in Iraqi schools.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Research Design

In the current study, a descriptive research design is used. This design was chosen as the most suitable one for the study because it enabled the researcher to investigate the perceptions and attitudes of 37 Iraqi EFL teachers towards the implementation of implicit grammar teaching. The quantitative part contains a 20-item Likert scale questionnaire that is used to determine the frequency and intensity of teachers' beliefs. At the same time, the qualitative component comes from the open-ended questions given to participants, which enable them to give detailed information about the pedagogical problems and 'methodological dilemmas' they face in Iraqi secondary schools. This holistic and comprehensive approach provides a thorough understanding of the research problem.

2.2. Participants

The present study targeted the Iraqi secondary school teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). A convenience sampling technique was used to access and recruit participants, and after screening, 37 participants were found to be suitable for the final research sample. As shown in Table 1, the sample was mostly female (33), and there were 4 males. The ages of the participants were between 25 and 51 years.

Table 1. Demographic Information of Participants

Participant	Gender	No.	Age
English teachers	Male	4	25–51 years
English teachers	Female	33	25–51 years
Total		37	

2.3. Instruments

To accomplish the purpose of this study, the research instrument was used to get data from the participants. The main instrument used was a quantitative questionnaire with 20 items that aimed to tap into the implicit grammar teaching perceptions of Iraqi EFL teachers. They were assessed on a 5-point Likert scale from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree'.

Table 2. The Value of the Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient

Measure	Value
Cronbach's Alpha (α)	0.87
Number of Items	20

2.4. Procedure

The method of collecting data for the current research was carried out in a systematic manner to ensure that the data was accurate and reliable. The first step was to design the mixed-methods questionnaire based on the research goals related to implicit grammar teaching. The instrument was discussed by academic experts in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) for content validity and clarity of the items. The items were then refined according to their feedback, and subsequently the questionnaire was made electronic to facilitate access for the participants using Google Forms. This link to the questionnaire was then sent to Iraqi EFL teachers in secondary schools through the educational platforms in the field of education. The distribution and data collection period

lasted a week, and 37 teachers were involved who voluntarily provided their responses. After collecting data, they were analyzed in the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS version 26). Initially, the instrument's internal consistency was tested using Cronbach's Alpha, and descriptive data were used to calculate the Means (M) and Standard Deviations (SD) for each of its items.

3. Results

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Teachers' Perceptions of Implicit Grammar Teaching

Item	Statement	SD (1)	D (2)	N (3)	A (4)	SA (5)	Mean	SD
1	Implicit grammar helps students learn naturally	0	2	7	19	9	3.95	0.71
2	Grammar through context improves understanding	0	2	3	23	9	4.05	0.71
3	Implicit grammar enhances communicative competence	0	4	8	17	8	3.78	0.85
4	Students learn better through examples	0	2	4	17	14	4.16	0.80
5	Implicit grammar increases motivation	0	1	11	18	7	3.84	0.80
6	Large class size hinders implicit teaching	0	7	8	13	9	3.65	1.09
7	Limited class time is a major challenge	0	1	5	16	15	4.22	0.85
8	Students prefer explicit rule explanation	0	2	9	17	9	3.89	0.88
9	Low proficiency makes implicit teaching difficult	0	1	8	12	16	4.16	0.90
10	Textbooks don't support implicit teaching	0	3	11	15	8	3.78	0.92
11	Teachers lack training in implicit methods	0	4	11	15	7	3.68	0.97
12	Students find it hard to discover rules	0	2	6	18	11	4.03	0.86
13	Implicit teaching requires more preparation/effort	0	3	10	17	7	3.76	0.89
14	Communicative activities help understanding	0	0	7	17	13	4.16	0.73
15	Group work supports implicit learning	0	1	6	17	13	4.14	0.79
16	Reading texts teach grammar implicitly	0	3	10	16	8	3.78	0.92

Item	Statement	SD (1)	D (2)	N (3)	A (4)	SA (5)	Mean	SD
17	Listening helps notice grammatical structures	0	2	12	15	8	3.78	0.88
18	I encourage discovery from examples	0	1	4	17	15	4.24	0.79
19	Combining implicit and explicit teaching is more effective	0	1	5	18	13	4.16	0.73
20	Implicit teaching improves real communication	1	0	6	18	12	4.05	0.88

The findings derived from the questionnaire answers of 37 secondary school English teachers in Iraq revealed a high level of agreement on the principles and benefits of implicit grammar teaching, especially on its impact on improving natural learning ($M = 3.95$), understanding of context ($M = 4.05$), and real communication ($M = 4.05$). Teachers actively report that discovery-based learning from examples ($M = 4.24$) and communicative activities ($M = 4.16$), group work ($M = 4.14$), and implicit and explicit instruction ($M = 4.16$) are effective. However, there are recurrent problems that are identified, such as limited class time ($M = 4.22$), low student proficiency ($M = 4.16$), large class sizes ($M = 3.65$), and insufficient textbook support ($M = 3.78$). Moreover, teachers believe students favor explicit rule explanation ($M = 3.89$) but find it difficult for students to discover rules on their own ($M = 4.03$), and there is a significant training gap for students ($M = 3.68$). To sum up, Iraqi teachers are aware of and try to use implicit grammar teaching, but it is also limited by several factors related to teaching, learning, and the curriculum, which suggests that there is a need for implementing an integrated approach, changing class size, improving teachers' competence, and reforming the curriculum.

3.1. Challenges in Applying Implicit Grammar Teaching in the Classroom

In applying implicit grammar teaching in the classroom, several problems emerged. There were several difficulties in implementing implicit grammar teaching in the classroom. Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that there are some serious problems that are encountered by the teachers in implementing implicit grammar teaching. The results indicate that teachers are aware of the positive effects of context, as in Items (2) and (20) with a mean of 4.05; however, they point to significant barriers. For example, limited class time is a major challenge ($M = 4.22$), and low students' proficiency is an obstacle for implicit teaching ($M = 4.16$), as shown in Item (7) and Item (9). This implies that implicit methods take more time and effort than can be afforded at the secondary level of education in Iraqi schools.

3.2. Learners' Difficulties in Understanding Implicit Grammar Teaching

The findings reflect the teachers' perception of the learners' views. Many teachers ($M = 3.89$, Table 3, Item (8) indicated that the students' preference was for explicit grammar instruction, not for learning through self-discovery. In addition, the results of Table (3), particularly Items (12) and (9), suggest that students have great difficulties in learning grammar implicitly. It is noted from Item (12) that students are not able to find the rules themselves easily ($M = 4.03$), and from Item (9) that their level of English proficiency makes it very difficult for students to find implicit rules ($M = 4.16$). This level of dependency of learners weakens their capacity to participate actively in self-discovery learning. Teachers also observed that the students were greatly affected by the exam-oriented system in which they study the language rules rather than the language in context. This situation fosters resistance to implicit teaching methods and makes it more challenging to implement these methods in an effective way in Iraqi secondary classrooms.

4. Discussion

The importance of some of the issues that have emerged in the implementation of implicit grammar teaching in secondary schools in Iraq is highlighted. Contrary to expectations, the results presented in Table (3) indicate that teachers overall agree with the principles of implicit instruction, including the idea that it facilitates natural learning ($M = 3.95$) and contextual understanding ($M = 4.05$). They possess some great ideas for doing so, but there are large practical hurdles. One of the main challenges is related to classroom conditions. Items (6) and (7) of Table (3) show that large class size ($M = 3.65$) and limited instructional time ($M = 4.22$) create challenges in implementing implicit teaching strategies that require a high level of interaction and student participation. Another big problem is the issue of the learners. Table (3) shows that students' level of proficiency is low (Item 9, $M = 4.16$), and relying on memorization leads to problems in understanding grammar from context. Furthermore, teachers feel that students do not easily find the rules themselves (Item 12, $M = 4.03$) and that they still like to be told the rules explicitly (Item 8, $M = 3.89$). In addition, the curriculum and assessment system are also key. As more teachers reported that textbooks do not facilitate implicit teaching ($M = 3.78$) (Item 10), the exam-oriented system also tended to teach explicit knowledge of rules, discouraging the use of implicit approaches in the classroom. In conclusion, all these problems, from institutional problems to learner readiness, put an obstacle to the effective use of implicit grammar teaching in the Iraqi context, even though there are theoretical benefits in the use of implicit grammar teaching.

5. Conclusion

The present study focused on the perceptions and problems of applying implicit grammar teaching in the EFL field in Iraq. Results indicated that overall, teachers were not negative about the theoretical advantages of implicit instruction, suggesting their understanding of its contribution to natural and discovery learning. But several practical challenges were also identified in the study, which make the implementation of these methods very difficult. The results indicate that positive pedagogical beliefs are not sufficient for effective implementation in the classroom. While these factors may have more of an impact on teachers' actual practices, they are less salient where instructional time is limited, students' proficiency is low, and there are constraints associated with an exam-oriented educational system. The study concludes that considering the institutional and environmental influences is very important to implement communicative teaching methods in Iraqi schools. Specific strategies and programmatic training that can support teachers in managing implicit instruction more effectively in these challenging classroom contexts are recommended for further research.

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