



**MALMÖ  
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SOCIETY

Department of Culture, Languages and  
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## **Implicit and Explicit Grammar Instruction**

A study on teachers' perceptions of the effects and benefits of implicit and explicit instruction on L2 learners' grammar knowledge

**Gunay Amirjanli**

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Examiner: Damon Tutunjian

Supervisor: Shaun Nolan



## Abstract

This study explores perceptions of explicit and implicit grammar instruction among in-service teachers and their students in upper-secondary schools in Sweden. This is a vital topic given continuous discussions over optimal language teaching methods. A mixed methods research approach was adopted, incorporating qualitative semi-structured interviews with six in-service teachers in Sweden and a quantitative questionnaire administered to their students. Findings revealed that some teachers preferred implicit grammar instruction combined with Focus on Meaning (FoM) approach, emphasizing natural language acquisition through communicative tasks. Moreover, some teachers also favored explicit, Form-Focused Instruction (FFI), citing its structured approach, time efficiency, and suitability for mixed-ability classrooms. The remaining teachers preferred a mix of implicit and explicit grammar instruction, highlighting its flexibility in addressing diverse learner needs and its effectiveness in balancing grammatical accuracy with communicative fluency. Similarly, students expressed a preference for a blend of methods, appreciating explicit instruction for clarity and engaging implicit activities for contextual practice. These findings show the importance of combining both explicit and implicit grammar instruction to cater to varied learning preferences and optimize language proficiency outcomes. Future research should further examine the combination of both methods since limited quantitative studies have been conducted on this topic.

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## 1. Introduction

The pedagogy of English language grammar and its instructional methodologies have long polarized scholars, given its perceived critical role in achieving language proficiency (Burns, 2016; Ellis, 2006; Spada & Tomita, 2010; Pawlak, 2010; Young et al., 2019). At this level, the available approaches to grammar instruction are generally characterized as implicit or explicit in nature. Explicit grammar instruction, which can involve both a Focus on Forms, with its systematic and sequenced presentation of discrete grammatical elements, or the more context-sensitive Focus on Form, where attention to specific linguistic features emerges naturally within meaningful communicative tasks, has long been favored for its perceived efficiency in helping learners internalize target structures (DeKeyser, 1998; Ellis, 2006). However, in recent decades, a shift toward Focus on Meaning—prioritizing implicit grammar instruction and the use of authentic, content-rich input—has gained momentum. This approach, emphasizing natural acquisition and communicative fluency over explicit rule explanation, aligns with the belief that learners can develop robust language competence more organically when their attention is directed primarily toward understanding and conveying meaning (Thornbury, 2002). Despite the distinct advantages offered by both explicit and implicit grammar instruction, the debate continues as scholars remain divided on which approach more effectively facilitates successful language acquisition (Rahman & Rashid, 2017; Nunan, 1991; Ling, 2015; Lichtman & VanPattern, 2021).

Grammar instruction plays a nuanced role in the Swedish upper-secondary English curriculum. The Swedish upper-secondary English curriculum does not explicitly mandate grammar teaching, yet, it implies that students should be able to “formulate his-/herself with fluency [...]” and “[...] with good precision [...]” (Skolverket, 2011a). This suggests that, while not the central focus, grammar instruction is still necessary for accurate language use. Furthermore, the curriculum guidelines do not mandate the use of a specific instructional approach, thereby granting teachers the flexibility to select the most appropriate teaching method. This underscores the importance of identifying and implementing effective strategies for grammar instruction.

Selecting effective grammar teaching strategies is essential in English language education, as these strategies significantly influence learners' ability to comprehend and use the language accurately (Celce-Murcia, 2002; Long, 1991). As Başöz (2014) emphasizes, it is crucial for English language educators to identify the grammar teaching strategies that best facilitate learning in the classroom to adopt a practical and effective approach. Given the diverse dynamics of classroom environments, no single methodology is universally applicable. Educators must therefore take into account learners' proficiency levels, needs, and objectives when selecting the most suitable approach for grammar instruction. For some learners, fluency and communicative competence are the primary goals, while others may derive greater confidence from the mastery of accurate grammatical knowledge (Ellis, 2006; Larsen-Freeman, 1995; Burgess & Etherington, 2002).

In light of the ongoing debate surrounding grammar instruction and its significance in language pedagogy, it is critical to explore the perspectives of in-service English language educators and their students' preferences regarding the effectiveness of explicit and implicit grammar instruction within the Swedish educational context. The primary objective of this study is to investigate teachers' perspectives through online interviews and assess learners' preferences for implicit versus explicit grammar instruction via a questionnaire. Understanding learners' preferences is particularly important, as student motivation and engagement often increase when instructional methods align with their preferred learning styles. Learners who favor implicit grammar instruction may be more motivated when lessons focus on communication and meaning rather than on rule-based approaches, whereas others may feel more confident with explicit instruction, where grammatical structures are explicitly taught. By addressing this critical issue, the study aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse and provide practical insights for enhancing grammar instruction in Swedish schools, ensuring that both teacher perspectives and student motivations are taken into consideration to improve overall learning outcomes.



## **2. Aim and Research Questions**

The primary aim of this thesis is to investigate in-service teachers' views regarding the comparative effectiveness of implicit and explicit grammar instruction in upper-secondary schools in Sweden. For the purpose of comparison, this thesis also aims to examine upper-secondary learners' preferences regarding English language instruction, specifically whether they favor implicit or explicit approaches, with the objective of determining the extent to which teachers' and learners' perspectives align. Accordingly, the research questions guiding this study are as follows:

1. What are teachers' perspectives regarding the effectiveness of implicit and explicit grammar instruction and its impact on L2 learners' grammatical competence?
2. What are the preferences of upper-secondary learners in Sweden regarding implicit and explicit English language instruction, and to what extent do these preferences align with the beliefs of their teachers?

### 3. Literature Review

In this section, I will explore key pedagogical approaches to grammar instruction, particularly in relation to explicit and implicit teaching methods. The historical evolution of language teaching—from the Grammar-Translation Method to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)—will be traced to show how the focus on grammar has shifted over time. Furthermore, various grammar instruction methods such as explicit grammar teaching, which emphasizes rule-based learning, and implicit instruction, which allows for natural language acquisition, will be examined. This discussion will also cover form-focused instruction (FFI), distinguishing between focus-on-form (FonF) and focus-on-forms (FonFS), as well as meaning-focused instruction. Drawing on established theories, policy documents (such as the Swedish curriculum), and recent empirical research, this section will not only clarify the theoretical foundations of explicit, implicit, and mixed grammar instruction but also emphasize the importance of aligning teaching practices with learners' preferences and educational contexts. In doing so, this chapter aims to provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how different approaches to grammar instruction contribute to more effective and meaningful language acquisition.

#### 3.1 Various Approaches to Language Teaching and Learning: from the Grammar-Translation to Communicative Language Teaching

In the recent past, language teaching methodologies have evolved significantly, reflecting shifts in educational priorities, linguistic theory, and broader socio-cultural contexts (Celce-Murcia, 1991). The following sections trace this historical progression, examining the theoretical underpinnings, strengths, and limitations of these influential approaches. Moreover, understanding how contemporary teaching approaches have emerged and evolved over time requires thorough research. To achieve this, it is crucial to carefully select authoritative and reliable sources. In this section, the manual for an advanced TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) certification course published by Notting Hill College (2009) is frequently referenced because it provides a comprehensive examination of various grammatical methods, alongside a clear analysis of their respective strengths and limitations.

The earliest documented pedagogical approach to language instruction is the Grammar-Translation method, dating back to the early nineteenth century. During that time, the principal objective of language acquisition was solely aligned with translation methodologies (Ellis & Laporte, 2014), explanation of rules, and vocabulary lists (Eriksson, 2023). Literary works from German, French, and Latin languages demanded translation, so the main aim of the lesson was verbatim translation (Notting Hill College, 2009). Lessons revolved around long, elaborate explanations of grammar rules, and learners were mandated to engage with classical English literary works (Notting Hill College, 2009). Increasing students' communication abilities was not the focal point of the classroom, and the main objective for learners was to achieve grammatical accuracy (Benati, 2018b). As a result of this, many learners were not able to converse in the target language, yet they were able to render intricate sentences from their native language into the target language without any problems. For this reason, numerous academicians critiqued this approach and argued that this type of teaching is explicit, teacher-centered, and has little active use of the target language (Prator & Celce-Murcia, 1979).

The constrained emphasis on cultivating students' communicative competence in the Grammar-Translation method culminated in the emergence of a novel pedagogical approach known as the Direct Method. This approach is considered by many academics to be "the dawn of modern foreign language teaching" (Notting Hill College, 2009, p.37). The Direct Method promoted natural and spontaneous ways of learning and students were required to use the language actively in their speech rather than to remember the grammatical rules (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Another premise of this method was that lessons were exclusively taught in the English language, thereby enhancing students' oral skills. Moreover, it allowed students to employ language extemporaneously, through the utilization of realia and imagery to associate meaning with linguistic expressions (Larsen-Freeman, 1986). One disadvantage of the Direct Method was that lessons did not focus on reading and writing, therefore, learners sometimes remembered incorrect grammatical rules (Benati, 2018a). The principal distinction between the Grammar-Translation method and the Direct method was that the latter imparted grammar implicitly, enabling students to acquire solely colloquial vocabulary to express their ideas freely (Richards & Rodgers, 1986).

Similarly to the Direct Method, the Audio-lingual Method emerged subsequently as a strategy to enhance language acquisition efficiency. However, the Audio-lingual Method, developed amidst World War II, harbored a distinct objective to rapidly equip soldiers with multilingual competencies. The intent of this approach paralleled that of the Direct Method aiming to cultivate advanced communicative competencies in learners (Notting Hill College, 2009). This method contained behaviorist origins, where through the employment of drilling and memorization techniques, linguistic elements become ingrained in students' memories by forming a habit (Rivers, 1967). Grammar instruction was predominantly implicit, avoiding explicit grammatical explanations while much attention was given to vocabulary acquisition, and rote memorization of established phrases was prevalent (Brown, 1994). One disadvantage of the Audio-lingual Method was that although the learners improved their communicative skills, there was a lack of focus on meaningful language use. Consequently, learners were not offered meaningful language that could help them speak in real-life conversations (Eriksson, 2023).

With the lack of emphasis on developing learners' communicative skills, an overt obsession with grammatical accuracy, and a lack of focus on meaning, arose a necessity for a new language-teaching approach. This pedagogical method, which significantly influenced contemporary English language instruction, is known as the Communicative Language Teaching Approach (CLT). Developed in the 1970s through the contributions of various researchers, CLT began including previously unexplored facets of learning into instructional methodologies (Notting Hill College, 2009). Brandl (2008) asserted that the primary aim of language is communication, and thus, the most successful way of learning a language is through social interaction. The CLT approach began to consider students' motivation for learning English, recognizing that each student has a different learning style and unique needs (Savignon, 1991). Compared to the Grammar-Translation method, which focused primarily on accuracy, CLT prioritized fluency as the main objective for learners, with accuracy being evaluated only if it affected the understanding of the context. Another benefit of CLT is that teachers can identify their students' individual needs and tailor instruction accordingly, thus increasing students' intrinsic motivation to participate in the classroom (Harmer, 2015). Finally, in CLT, language acquisition occurs via a variety of texts, both traditional textbooks and authentic materials, allowing students to acquire the language much faster and more efficiently (Nunan, 1991; Burns, 2009). This flexibility

allows educators to choose the correct teaching tool, as CLT does not possess universal syllabi or specific teaching content.

Moreover, CLT encompasses various approaches, and to categorize these Scrivener (2005) divided CLT into two types: the shallow and the deep end of CLT. In the shallow end of CLT, grammar teaching was welcomed, however, it was dressed as functional language, such as asking for directions, making plans, and talking about oneself. In the early years of this approach, grammar rules were included in coursebooks and curriculums and explicit grammar teaching was part of CLT. As it progressed, later in the deep end of CLT, some educators proposed to exclude grammar from language learning, viewing it as unnecessary. With the introduction of Task-Based Learning (TBL) by Prabhu (1987), the removal of formal grammar instruction from CLT accelerated, as this technique replicated the natural acquisition process by having students work through tasks. Implicit grammar teaching started to become fundamental to CLT, as it suggests that students should be exposed to grammatical structures in a meaningful and comprehensible context to naturally acquire the target language's grammar (Scott, 1990). The main objective of TBL is to engage learners in interactive tasks, where communication is necessary to complete the task. For example, a TBL activity might involve asking learners to plan an itinerary for a guest visiting their country. This approach emphasized students' extensive task completion rather than solely focusing on explicit grammar instruction (TBL - Task-based Learning, n.d.). However, some scholars criticized the CLT approach to grammar teaching and Lightbown and Spada (1990) argued that too much focus on communication and too little focus on form can create a deficiency in grammatical accuracy. Savignon (1991) also suggested that comprehensible communication cannot occur without the knowledge that a language is grammatically structured. Consequently, while CLT suggests a versatile and communicative approach to language learning, however, educators must balance the focus on communication with enough attention to grammatical accuracy to ensure comprehensive language proficiency.

## 3.2 Key Concepts in Grammar Instruction

Having explored the evolution of foreign language teaching approaches, it is paramount to delineate the principal types of grammar instruction employed within these methodologies. Thus, this section defines the three key terms used throughout the study and explores the benefits and challenges of using explicit and implicit grammar teaching and the combination of both methods.

### 3.3.1 Explicit Grammar Teaching

Explicit grammar instruction is one of the oldest and most traditional techniques in teaching English as a Second Language (ESL), historically prominent in the Grammar-Translation method (Altun & Dinçer, 2020b). This approach involves presenting grammar rules to students in a clear, structured manner and providing opportunities to practice until grammatical accuracy is achieved (Krashen, 1982; Gültekin & Çögenli, 2014b). Many educators continue to favor this pedagogical method, recognizing its numerous benefits, particularly within form-focused instruction.

Firstly, explicit grammar instruction allows learners to engage with written examples of the target language, facilitating a clearer understanding of grammatical rules (Nazari, 2013). This is especially advantageous for visual learners, who benefit from seeing rules and timelines displayed on the board. Secondly, it promotes conscious learning, making students aware of the language content they are acquiring. This is particularly beneficial for adult learners, who often prefer to understand the cognitive processes involved in language acquisition (Ling, 2015; Thornbury, 2002). Furthermore, learning efficacy is significantly enhanced through structured exercises and tasks that accelerate the acquisition process (Shirzad, 2016). This approach enables learners to refine their grammar, achieve a high level of grammatical accuracy, and build confidence in their language skills.

Ellis (2015) supports this view, noting that explicit grammar instruction positions the teacher as the primary source of information, which can expedite language acquisition by allowing educators to focus on other critical aspects of linguistic education. Thornbury (2002) and Nunan (1991) emphasize that explicit grammar instruction provides learners with specific, deliberate information about grammatical structures, resulting in more conscious, intentional learning. This

method ensures that students comprehend and apply grammatical rules with greater confidence and precision. Robinson (1997) further argues that explicit instruction facilitates the generalization of grammatical rules to new contexts, while implicit instruction tends to associate rules with previously encountered structures, making it more difficult for learners to apply these rules in unfamiliar situations. Moreover, explicit grammar instruction can be particularly effective in classrooms with mixed-ability learners. One of the most significant challenges in such classrooms is the varying proficiency levels among students; even if they are in the same grade, their English language skills may differ due to individual differences in learning pace (Shank, 1995). By employing explicit grammar instruction, teachers can ensure that all learners, regardless of their proficiency level, are able to grasp the necessary language structures (Harmer, 2012).

In summary, explicit grammar instruction is favored by many educators due to its structured approach, its ability to clarify grammatical rules for learners, and its role in accelerating the learning process through a conscious focus on forms.

### 3.3.2 Implicit Grammar Teaching

As foreign language teaching methodologies have evolved, there has been a marked shift from explicit to more implicit forms of grammar instruction, with a stronger focus on meaning. This transition is evident in approaches such as the Direct Method, and, most notably, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), where the focus shifts from explicit grammar instruction to communicative proficiency, emphasizing the use of language in meaningful contexts.

Proponents of implicit grammar instruction argue that this approach offers several advantages, particularly by centering instruction around meaningful communication rather than isolated grammatical forms. First, implicit grammar instruction enables learners to acquire grammatical rules naturally through engagement with meaningful language use, without an explicit focus on rules or forms (Doughty, 2003). Krashen (1981) further contends that overtly teaching grammatical rules disrupts the natural learning process and hinders effective language

acquisition. He compares first-language acquisition to second-language learning, arguing that a significant portion of language acquisition occurs subconsciously through meaningful input, thus advocating for implicit grammar instruction. Additionally, implicit grammar teaching promotes learner autonomy, allowing students to become independent learners who develop language competence through meaningful communication (Rahman & Rashid, 2017). This approach allows learners to acquire language at their own pace, gradually internalizing grammatical rules within meaningful contexts. Although this process may take time, it is believed to result in long-term retention of grammatical knowledge. Moreover, implicit learning can be facilitated through the use of popular media and authentic materials, which provide learners with opportunities to encounter language in meaningful, real-world contexts (Filoni, 1993; Fukunaga, 2006; Nazari & Allahyar, 2012; Celce-Murcia, 1991). Games also offer a stimulating learning environment where learners use language meaningfully while working towards a goal (Yaccob & Yunus, 2019; Rinvolverci, 1984). Motivation plays a critical role in language learning, and according to Thao (2009), implicit learning fosters “more motivating learning, which encourages students to think, form, and test their assumptions about new knowledge, leading to deeper insights into target structures” (p.132). By focusing on meaning, learners can enhance their ability to communicate effectively, while simultaneously acquiring grammatical structures.

In summary, implicit grammar instruction enhances learner motivation by de-emphasizing a conscious focus on form and emphasizing meaningful communication. This approach allows students to discover the language at their own pace and within meaningful contexts, fostering communicative competence and grammatical development.

### 3.3.3 Combination of Implicit and Explicit Grammar Instruction

Many scholars contend that grammar instruction should be exclusively explicit or implicit; however, some academics advocate for the advantages of integrating both explicit and implicit approaches within the classroom. One of the advantages of integrating explicit and implicit grammar instruction is that learners can develop both fluency and accuracy simultaneously (Alenexi, 2019). Moreover, implicit instruction enhances learners’ communicative competence, while explicit instruction facilitates the acquisition of grammatical rules and improves accuracy.



Consequently, combining these two methods is particularly effective for learners at intermediate to advanced levels, as they are better equipped to assimilate complex grammatical structures (Corzo, 2013). According to Ling (2015), explicit and implicit grammar instruction are not “mutually exclusive opposites” but rather complementary and parallel methods for teaching foreign languages (p. 559). Ling further asserts that implicit instruction fosters a more dynamic and interactive classroom environment, enhancing the student-teacher relationship. However, when language structures become too complex for learners, explicit grammar instruction serves as a more effective pedagogical tool for educators. In the following years, numerous researchers (Alenexi, 2019; Ling, 2015; Pawlak, 2021; Moeen et al., 2019) have continued to analyze the effectiveness of combining implicit and explicit instruction. Conclusions from these studies are almost identical in that for lower levels of English language students, implicit grammar instruction should be the best approach since students have not yet developed their interlanguage skills. As learners improve their English language skills, and slowly become proficient in the language, students will be able to grasp complex grammar notions without much difficulty with the help of explicit grammar instruction.

### 3.4 Grammar Integration Techniques

In the field of language education, scholars are divided on whether grammar instruction should prioritize a focus on form or a focus on meaning (Ellis, 2006; Long, 1991; Loewen, 2011; Spada & Lightbown, 2008; Yang et al., 2019). While form-focused instruction emphasizes grammatical accuracy, meaning-focused instruction promotes the natural acquisition of language (Çelik, 2015). The following sections will examine both approaches, discussing the contrasting paradigms in foreign language teaching while analyzing their methodologies and educational outcomes.

According to Long et al. (1988), form-focused instruction includes two types: Focus on Form (FonF) and Focus on Forms (FonFs). First, FonF shifts learners’ attention to linguistic form during communicative activities, integrating grammar instruction into a syllabus of meaningful tasks rather than isolating it in standalone lessons (Ellis, 2006). This approach emphasizes the contextualized teaching of grammar as it naturally arises in communication. Anh (2013) and Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) similarly argue that grammar should not be taught in isolation

but integrated into communicative contexts to enhance learners' ability to use language effectively, emphasizing the inseparability of grammar and communication. Furthermore, Ellis (2001) distinguishes between two types of focus on form: planned and incidental. Incidental focus on form occurs unintentionally when learners make errors during communication, and these errors are implicitly addressed by the instructor (Çelik, 2015). In contrast, planned focus on form occurs during targeted tasks, where learners' errors are explicitly addressed, often through the use of metalinguistic feedback (Ellis, 2001).

Conversely, FonFs emphasizes the explicit teaching of grammatical features by organizing them into discrete units such as words, grammatical structures, notions, and functions. These features are taught sequentially, with each lesson focused on specific grammatical structures. Many scholars argue that FonFs instruction involves intentional learning, where the primary objective is to practice and internalize specific grammatical features through targeted exercises (Ellis et al., 2002; Sheen, 2002). The ultimate goal of FonFs instruction is to provide learners with opportunities to practice and acquire grammatical structures through the "automatization of explicit knowledge" (DeKeyser, 1998, as cited in Ellis, 2006). In FonFs, grammar lessons are typically teacher-centered, meaning learners acquire language through direct instruction. This approach is often considered explicit, as lessons are centered around the systematic teaching of grammatical features. Moreover, learners receive immediate feedback on their errors, which reduces the likelihood of repeating the same mistakes (Shintani, 2013).

On the other hand, Çelik (2015) suggests that when language lessons prioritize meaning, the instruction can be classified as meaning-focused. This approach emphasizes the use of language in meaningful contexts to facilitate language acquisition, encouraging learners to absorb grammatical structures implicitly rather than through explicit instruction. The underlying principle of this method is to emulate first language acquisition, where learners are exposed to rich and meaningful input, leading to incidental language learning. The key characteristics of meaning-focused instruction include the use of authentic texts, tasks that encourage the negotiation of meaning, and minimal emphasis on form, thereby fostering learner autonomy. Nishimura (2000) posits that meaning-focused instruction represents a form of implicit grammar teaching, where learners acquire the language naturally, with limited focus on explicit

grammatical forms. However, Swain (1991, as cited in Long and Robinson, 1998) argues that while focusing on meaning can improve learners' fluency, it may negatively impact their long-term grammatical competence.

Therefore, Ellis (2006) argues that no single approach is universally suitable for all grammatical structures, as the acquisition of these structures depends on various factors. He advocates for integrating elements of both Focus on Form and Focus on Meaning within a single lesson, emphasizing that "the grammar taught should be one that emphasizes not just form but also the meanings and uses of different grammatical structures" (p. 102). Additionally, Ellis suggests that the Focus on Forms approach can still be effective when learners are provided with opportunities to practice speaking through communicative tasks. Based on his research, it can be concluded that combining form-focused instruction with a focus on meaning can be highly beneficial, provided these methods are adapted to suit the specific grammatical structures being taught and the learners' individual abilities.

In conclusion, the debate between form-focused and meaning-focused grammar instruction reflects fundamental differences in language teaching priorities, with each approach offering unique benefits. While form-focused instruction provides structure and precision, meaning-focused instruction fosters natural language acquisition and fluency. Striking a balance between these methods may offer the most comprehensive approach to developing both grammatical accuracy and communicative competence in language learners.

### 3.5 The Relevance of Learners' Preferences to Teaching Practices

Investigating and incorporating learners' preferences in language learning and designing lessons accordingly can significantly enhance their language acquisition (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). This paragraph, therefore, will analyze certain benefits of aligning learners' preferences with teachers' instructional methods, and the reasons behind learners' preferences for explicit, implicit, and mixed methods.

First, Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) investigated how aligning instructional methods with student preferences can significantly help impact classroom engagement and motivation. They assert that adapting instructional methods to align with students' personal preferences and learning styles can substantially increase their motivation. This approach fosters a more supportive and engaging learning environment, promoting meaningful and effective language learning. Knowing more about learner preferences offers teachers insights that can later help them shape their instructional strategies. Ultimately, this facilitates a learner-centered approach that prioritizes autonomy and relevance (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). Another benefit of paying more attention to student preferences is that, once their preferences are taken into account, learners' emotional connection to the learning process strengthens and this leads to higher levels of motivation and classroom engagement (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). Finally, as Lightbown and Spada (2013) suggest teachers should create motivating learning environments as “classrooms are places that students enjoy coming to because the content is interesting and relevant to their age and level of ability, the learning goals are challenging yet manageable and clear, and the atmosphere is supportive” (p.88).

Next, preferences for explicit and implicit grammar instruction, or mixed preferences for grammar instruction can arise from various factors. Some learners may find explicit grammar instruction more straightforward, as it “involves the direct instruction of language rules, which is why it is the most well-known method for explicit learning” (Şahinkaya, 2023, p.18). On the other hand, a preference for implicit grammar instruction can arise from learning the language naturally through exposure and practice as some learners may find explicit grammar instruction teacher-centered and repetitive, which can make the learning process rigid and less engaging (Alenezi, 2019). Finally, many learners benefit from a combination of both approaches, where explicit teaching provides foundational knowledge, and implicit activities reinforce it through application (Pawlak, 2021).

Similarly, learners' preference for certain types of grammar instruction can stem from various factors, including cultural context. For instance, Swedish schools host learners from diverse cultural backgrounds, each bringing unique perspectives and preferences toward learning. Cultural attitudes toward education and teaching styles may shape these preferences. For

example, some cultures place a high value on teacher-centered instruction (explicit), where the teacher serves as the primary authority, presenting rules and concepts directly. In contrast, other cultures prioritize learner autonomy (implicit), favoring self-discovery and exploration within the learning process. This diversity in cultural expectations underscores the importance of adopting flexible instructional strategies that accommodate varying learner needs, ensuring inclusivity and effectiveness in language education. (Ellis, 2006; Cortazzi & Lin, 1996c)

Moreover, preferences may also vary depending on whether learners prioritize grammatical accuracy or communicative fluency. Learners preparing for exams that demand a strong understanding of grammar structures, such as standardized language proficiency tests, are more likely to prefer explicit grammar instruction. This preference stems from the structured and rule-focused nature of explicit instruction, which enables learners to systematically internalize grammatical features and apply them accurately in controlled contexts. Explicit instruction provides clarity and directness, making it particularly appealing for those whose primary goal is to master formal linguistic rules for academic or professional purposes (DeKeyser, 1998). On the other hand, learners who seek to improve their ability to communicate effectively in real-life scenarios may favor implicit grammar instruction. This approach emphasizes fluency and practical language use, allowing learners to acquire grammatical structures naturally through exposure and practice in meaningful contexts. Such learners often value the opportunity to engage in communicative tasks, such as role-playing or interactive discussions, which help them develop intuitive language skills without the pressure of memorizing rules. Implicit instruction aligns with their desire to gain confidence and competence in spontaneous language use, emphasizing fluency over formal accuracy (Thornbury, 2002).

These differing preferences underscore the need for a balanced approach to grammar teaching, where explicit and implicit methods are thoughtfully integrated. By combining the strengths of both approaches, educators can address the varied goals of learners, accommodating those who require grammatical precision as well as those aiming to develop functional communication skills. Such flexibility ensures that learners not only achieve their academic objectives but also become proficient and confident users of the language in diverse contexts.

### 3.6 English Grammar Instruction in the Swedish Curriculum

The role of grammar instruction in English language teaching is a significant aspect of the Swedish educational curriculum. The syllabus and related policy documents outline the objectives for English language learning, emphasizing the development of students' communicative abilities and linguistic precision. However, while the importance of linguistic competence is well-documented, the absence of explicit guidelines for grammar instruction presents challenges for educators in determining effective teaching methods. The following paragraphs explore these policy directives, their implications for grammar teaching, and the resulting challenges faced by teachers in the Swedish context.

The English course's syllabus contains an overall description of English and its objectives (The Swedish National Agency for Education, 2021). A detailed examination of the policy documents reveals that students should be given opportunities to improve their all-around communicative abilities to develop their fluency. Moreover, it also suggests teachers offer chances for learners "to develop correctness in their use of language in speech and writing" (Skolverket, 2011a, p.1). The commentaries for the steering documents by the National Agency of Education also underline the importance of possessing linguistic competence by arguing that "the all-around communicative ability includes an increasing degree of linguistic security" (Skolverket, 2011b, p.12). Therefore, according to the steering documents, students must cultivate linguistic capabilities to articulate themselves both verbally and in writing. In the Swedish context, therefore, students are expected to master various linguistic forms, including vocabulary, phraseology, pronunciation, spelling, and grammar (Skolverket, 2011b). Given the frequent mentions of linguistic abilities in the steering document, it is clear that grammar instruction should be present in the classroom to ensure that students can express themselves with fluency and good precision.

However, this document does not address the methodology for grammar instruction. In this case, it can be understood that the techniques that are used to elucidate grammar points reside at the educator's discretion, and they are tasked with determining the most suitable technique for their respective classrooms. This can create challenges for teachers, as the lack of explicit guidance

might result in confusion regarding how to effectively teach grammar, which could lead to difficulties for students in developing accuracy in their speech and writing (Rahman & Rashid, 2017). Such ambiguity not only complicates the teaching process but may also negatively impact students' learning outcomes. Without a structured approach, students might receive incomplete grammar instruction, potentially hindering their ability to develop the grammatical accuracy required for effective and precise communication. For instance, some learners might excel with explicit grammar instruction, which provides clear rules and structures, while others may benefit more from implicit approaches that integrate grammar within communicative tasks. Without guidance, teachers might find it challenging to balance these methods or effectively address the varying needs of their students.

In conclusion, while the Swedish curriculum emphasizes the importance of linguistic competence and communicative abilities, the absence of explicit guidelines for grammar instruction leaves educators with the challenge of determining effective methods on their own. This lack of clarity can lead to inconsistent teaching practices, potentially hindering students' ability to achieve both fluency and accuracy in their language use. Addressing this gap through clearer policy directives could ensure a more cohesive and effective approach to grammar teaching across classrooms.

### 3.7 Recent Research on Implicit and Explicit Grammar Instruction

The debate surrounding the effectiveness of implicit and explicit grammar instruction in second language (L2) acquisition has remained a central focus in language education research. Studies such as Norris and Ortega (2000) have provided foundational insights into the comparative impact of these instructional methods, demonstrating that explicit instruction consistently yields significant short-term learning gains, while implicit instruction shows potential for long-term retention. Subsequent research, including Spada and Tomita (2010) and Goo et al. (2015), has reinforced these findings, highlighting the importance of contextual factors such as the complexity of grammatical structures and instructional settings. More recent studies, such as those by Kang et al. (2018) and El-Dakhs et al. (2022), underscore the necessity of tailoring

grammar instruction to learners' needs, combining implicit and explicit approaches for optimal outcomes. Additionally, researchers have examined educators' and learners' perspectives, as seen in studies by Başöz (2014) and Rahman and Rashid (2017), which emphasize the importance of integrating grammar into communicative activities to enhance practical usage. These studies collectively demonstrate that a balanced, context-sensitive approach to grammar instruction is essential for fostering both linguistic accuracy and communicative competence in L2 learners.

First, Norris and Ortega's (2000) study provides a comprehensive analysis of the effectiveness of different types of second language (L2) instruction, mainly focusing on the comparative impact of explicit versus implicit methods. The research questions of this meta-analysis sought to determine the overall efficacy of L2 instruction compared to natural exposure or meaning-based communication, as well as to compare the relative effectiveness of different instructional types, particularly focus-on-form (FonF) and focus-on-forms (FonFS). By synthesizing data from 49 empirical studies conducted between 1980 and 1998, Norris and Ortega reviewed both experimental and quasi-experimental studies within L2 classroom and laboratory contexts. They utilized effect size calculations to assess the impact of various instructional approaches. The key findings demonstrated that explicit instruction consistently led to more significant gains in L2 learning compared to implicit methods. Both FonF and FonFS approaches yielded substantial, target-oriented improvements in learners' abilities, with no significant difference found between these two approaches. Additionally, explicit instruction was particularly effective in producing long-term, durable learning outcomes, thereby emphasizing its importance in language education. The implications of these findings strongly support the argument that explicit instruction—such as teaching focused on explicit grammatical rules—plays a critical role in L2 acquisition.

Second, Spada and Tomita (2010) examined the effectiveness of explicit and implicit grammar instruction and their interaction with different types of language features, such as simple and complex grammar. The study posed two key research questions: whether the effects of explicit and implicit instruction vary with simple and complex grammar and whether these instructional methods lead to distinct types of linguistic knowledge. Using a meta-analytic approach, the



researchers analyzed data from forty-one studies conducted in both classroom and laboratory settings, with participants learning English grammar. The study defined explicit instruction as rule-focused and implicit instruction as exposure-based, with participants assessed through controlled and free-production tasks. The results showed that explicit instruction was significantly more effective than implicit instruction for both simple and complex grammatical forms, particularly in fostering immediate understanding and retention. However, implicit instruction was more effective for complex forms in fostering spontaneous language use over time. These findings suggest that explicit instruction is generally more effective for teaching grammar but should be complemented by implicit methods when promoting practical and communicative competence in complex structures. This research highlights the importance of tailoring grammar instruction to the linguistic feature and learning context.

Third, Goo et al. (2015) conducted a meta-analysis to revisit the findings of Norris and Ortega (2000), focusing on whether explicit or implicit instruction leads to better second language outcomes. Their study analyzed thirty-four experimental and quasi-experimental studies, involving adolescent and adult learners in diverse second and foreign language contexts. The analysis revealed that explicit instruction generally produced larger immediate and short-term gains (effect size: 1.29) compared to implicit methods (effect size: 0.77). However, implicit instruction showed potential for developing long-term retention in some contexts. Moderator variables, such as the mode of instruction (oral, written, or combined), indicated that combined approaches were more effective under both methods. These findings suggest that while explicit instruction accelerates immediate understanding, implicit instruction can complement it by fostering practical language use over time. The research highlights the importance of adapting instructional strategies to the learners' needs, task complexity, and context for optimal language acquisition.

Fourth, Young Kang et al. (2018) conducted a meta-analysis of fifty-four studies published between 1980 and 2015, involving over five thousand second language learners across diverse educational contexts. Their primary research questions examined the overall efficacy of second language instruction and the moderating variables affecting outcomes. The studies included learners of varying age groups, proficiency levels, and instructional settings, ranging from

classroom-based to laboratory studies. Using statistical meta-analytic methods, the researchers found that while both implicit and explicit instruction were highly effective, explicit instruction yielded stronger immediate results, particularly in formal grammar tasks. Implicit instruction, however, demonstrated a significant advantage in long-term retention and practical language use. The analysis revealed that factors such as instructional mode, linguistic targets, and learner proficiency moderated the effectiveness of both approaches. These findings underscore the importance of tailoring grammar instruction to the learner's context, goals, and proficiency level, emphasizing that a balanced approach combining explicit and implicit methods may maximize language acquisition outcomes. This research contributes valuable insights into optimizing second language teaching methodologies for diverse learner populations.

Fifth, Ellis (2002) reviews the role of form-focused instruction (FFI) in promoting the acquisition of implicit knowledge in second language learners. The central research questions addressed in the review are: (1) Does FFI contribute to the acquisition of implicit knowledge in L2 learners? (2) Is FFI more effective when it includes a focus-on-form as opposed to a focus-on-forms approach? The study synthesizes findings from eleven empirical studies, with participants ranging from young learners to adult students at different levels of proficiency. The studies covered various target structures, including simple morphological forms (e.g., verb tense) and complex syntactic forms (e.g., passive voice). The data were gathered from free-production tasks such as narratives, role-plays, and picture descriptions, which allowed for natural language use. Key findings suggest that FFI does have a positive effect on implicit knowledge acquisition, especially when the instructional focus is extensive and the target structure is relatively simple. For complex structures, the success of FFI was less consistent, particularly when the instruction was limited in scope. Notably, explicit instruction proved more effective for complex syntactic forms when learners were able to apply the rules during communicative activities, supporting Long's (1988, 1991) focus-on-form theory. The findings highlight that FFI tends to be more successful for morphological features than for complex syntactic structures, which may require prolonged exposure and practice for implicit learning to take place. The implications of this research suggest that FFI, particularly when extensive and integrated into communicative tasks, can foster implicit knowledge in L2 learners.

It is also vital to delve into research that investigates teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of implicit and explicit grammar instruction. This study was conducted by Başöz (2014) to determine teachers' perspectives in regard to the effectiveness of implicit and explicit teaching. For this research, Başöz collected data from eighty-six teachers at Balıkesir University in Turkey. The participants were asked to respond to a survey about their perceptions of grammar and grammar instruction. The data that were gathered were analyzed quantitatively using SPSS software. The collected information revealed that educators predominantly upheld the notion that grammar is instrumental in developing students' writing skills. A majority of teachers believe that both implicit and explicit teaching methods can help students enhance their abilities. Furthermore, teachers suggested that grammar should be integrated into communicative activities, and students should be encouraged to use grammar in their real-life conversations with their peers. Finally, teachers agreed that there is no superior methodology for imparting grammatical knowledge; it is contingent upon the classroom dynamics and learners' needs. For implications of the study, Başöz stated that the participants were limited to only Balıkesir University and a much bigger population can reveal different results. It was also noted that the data that was gathered was confined to the questionnaire that was created by Al-Kalbani (2004).

Next, Recent research by Rahman and Rashid (2017) investigated educators' beliefs about explicit and implicit grammar instruction in Malaysian higher learning institutions. The study sought to explore educators' preferences for teaching grammar and the sources of their instructional beliefs. Five experienced ESL educators from private colleges participated, and semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather qualitative data. The educators described explicit instruction as structured, rule-driven, and teacher-centered, involving drills and memorization, while implicit instruction was viewed as integrated and communicative, prioritizing fluency and learner autonomy. Results revealed that most participants preferred explicit instruction due to its perceived efficiency in ensuring grammatical accuracy and meeting institutional requirements, such as exam preparation. However, they acknowledged the importance of implicit instruction for fostering communicative competence and catering to learners' individual needs. The findings underscore the role of educators' prior experiences and institutional pressures in shaping their instructional beliefs. This research highlights the need for

flexible grammar teaching approaches that balance explicit and implicit methods to address diverse learner contexts effectively.

Finally, examining learners' preferences for explicit and implicit approaches to learning the English language should also be carefully examined. Therefore, El-Dakhs et al. (2022) investigated the effectiveness of explicit and implicit instruction in teaching interactional metadiscourse markers to Arab EFL learners and explored learners' perceptions of these approaches. The study included one hundred and twenty female undergraduates enrolled in an English language and translation program at a Saudi university, divided into three groups: explicit instruction, implicit instruction, and a control group. Over two weeks, the experimental groups received a hundred and forty minutes of instruction on interactional markers, using city reviews as the instructional genre. Explicit instruction involved a direct explanation of marker functions, definitions, and examples, while implicit instruction exposed students to markers in sample texts without explicit explanation. Results revealed limited but positive effects of both methods. The explicit group outperformed in using markers like appeals to shared knowledge, while the implicit group demonstrated gains in directives and questions, with effects sustained over time. Learners in both groups found the instruction helpful but expressed a need for more practice and feedback. The study highlights that both explicit and implicit methods can enhance writing, but combining these approaches with extended practice may yield better outcomes for metadiscourse acquisition.

The empirical studies examined in this review provide valuable insights into the ongoing debate over explicit versus implicit grammar instruction. These studies underscore the need for a balanced, context-dependent approach to grammar instruction that incorporates both explicit and implicit elements, depending on the specific linguistic goals and learner needs. By doing so, educators can create a more effective and flexible teaching environment that supports the development of both grammatical competence and communicative fluency.

## 4. Method

This section will delineate the methodological frameworks and considerations involved in data collection. This encompasses participant selection criteria, the methods used to collect the data, analytical procedures, and ethical considerations employed in the study. The method for this study was mixed methods research, a qualitative interview with teachers, and a quantitative questionnaire with the students. The choice of a mixed-methods approach was guided by the research objectives, which included investigating teachers' perspectives on the effectiveness of explicit and implicit grammar instruction. Online interviews were deemed the most effective means to capture these insights in depth. Additionally, a secondary objective of this study was to understand students' preferences regarding explicit versus implicit grammar instruction in English language learning. To address this aim efficiently, a structured questionnaire was used, allowing for clear, concise responses without requiring significant time investment from the learners.

### 4.1 Participants

The primary aim of this study is to investigate to what extent English language teachers prefer implicit or explicit grammar instruction. Moreover, this study will also explore learners' preferences for implicit or explicit English language instruction and their alignment with teachers' preferences. The participants for the study were obtained in two phases.

In Phase One, online interviews were conducted with six in-service English language teachers to gather their perspectives on implicit and explicit grammar instruction. This sample size was chosen as it provided a manageable yet diverse group for an in-depth, exploratory investigation into teacher preferences. Four of the six teachers were fully certified within the Swedish education system and worked in upper-secondary schools across Sweden, specifically in the regions of Malmö and Helsingborg. These regions were selected due to their representation of

both urban and suburban educational environments, contributing to a broader understanding of instructional practices across diverse school settings.

Notably, four of the six teachers shared a similar educational background, having attained their credentials from higher education institutions within Skåne County. This similarity provided an opportunity to explore whether shared educational experiences influenced instructional preferences. The remaining two teachers, although not certified, possessed extensive teaching experience and worked part-time in Swedish schools, instructing grades 5 and 6. Their combined certification and extensive experience working with diverse learners allowed the study to encompass varied perspectives on grammar instruction practices within Sweden's educational context. Moreover, the selection of teacher participants was influenced by convenience sampling, based on proximity and availability, which facilitated efficient study execution. Cohen et al. (2017) describe convenience sampling as a method of selecting participants based on their accessibility and availability to the researcher, meeting the required sample size through those who are most readily accessible. This method ensured that the data could be efficiently gathered from accessible participants while maintaining relevance to the study's objectives and the context of the educational environment.

Phase Two of the study involved seventeen students from the participating teachers' classes, all aged between 15 and 16 years, and studying in grades 5 and 6. The sample of students provided a complementary perspective to that of the teachers, allowing for a comparative exploration of teacher and learner preferences. Understanding students' learning preferences is valuable for educators, as it helps them tailor their lessons to enhance learning outcomes (Harmer, 2015). The diversity within this student sample, reflecting the recent demographic shifts within Sweden, offered a preliminary look into how students from various cultural backgrounds approach grammar learning in English. To avoid influencing responses, teachers provided minimal assistance during the questionnaire, ensuring that students completed it independently and voluntarily.

## 4.2 Materials

In Phase One of the study, the primary data collection instrument was an interview guide with a set of preformulated questions (see Appendix A). This guide followed a semi-structured format, chosen because it allowed for flexibility in exploring teachers' perspectives on grammar instruction while maintaining consistency across interviews. Semi-structured interviews are ideal for qualitative research, as they enable the interviewer to probe deeper based on participants' responses, which aligns with the study's aim of gaining nuanced insights into teachers' perspectives. Cohen et al. (2017) emphasize that open-ended questions in such formats allow the interviewer to "probe so that he/she may go into more depth if she chooses, or to clear up any misunderstandings" (p. 513).

The interview guide was meticulously developed to align with the study's objectives, structured around three carefully selected themes that provided a comprehensive framework for data collection. The first theme focused on participants' background knowledge, encompassing their high school learning experiences, pre-service education, and university training. This theme aimed to establish a foundational understanding of their instructional approaches by exploring the key factors that shaped their pedagogical practices and perspectives. The second theme delved into participants' general views on teaching grammar and the perceived importance of grammar instruction. This theme was directly tied to the study's research question, offering insights into teachers' conceptualizations of grammar teaching and their motivations for adopting specific instructional methods. The third theme explored teachers' preferences for implicit versus explicit grammar instruction, a central focus of the study. By addressing this theme, the interview sought to uncover the rationale behind their preferred approaches and how these align with or diverge from established theories and practices in language teaching. Although the primary aim of the study was to investigate teachers' views on explicit and implicit grammar instruction, the interview process revealed an additional layer of complexity. During the interviews, it became apparent through follow-up questions that some teachers favored a blended approach rather than relying solely on one method. This observation led to further inquiries, enabling a deeper exploration of their use of combined methods. These additional questions allowed for a more

nuanced understanding of teachers' strategies and their alignment with the diverse needs of learners, even though the blended approach was not initially a separate focus in the interview guide.

In Phase Two, a structured, close-ended quantitative questionnaire was developed to capture students' preferences for implicit versus explicit grammar instruction (see Appendix B). The structured format was chosen to allow for efficient data collection, as it provides clear, direct responses that can be easily analyzed and compared. This approach aligns with mixed-methods research, where qualitative depth is achieved through interviews, and quantitative clarity is provided by structured questionnaires. According to Cohen et al. (2017), closed-ended questions are advantageous in that they yield straightforward answers, facilitating quick data interpretation. Given the goal of understanding students' preferences without inducing fatigue, the questionnaire was kept concise, with multiple-choice questions that ensured clarity and accessibility. Bhandari (2023) notes that closed-ended questions should be clear and fixed, with language that avoids complex terminology. To meet this requirement, the language of the questionnaire was deliberately simplified, ensuring that students could comprehend the questions easily. As Denscombe (2014, cited in Cohen et al., 2017) notes, keeping questionnaires short reduces "respondent fatigue" (p. 474), making it more likely that students complete all questions thoughtfully. The selection of questions for the student questionnaire was carefully designed to explore learners' preferences for implicit versus explicit English language instruction and the tools they prefer to use in the learning process. The questionnaire is structured around four thematic areas. The first theme examines participants' preferences for explicit learning (rule-focused instruction) or implicit learning (rule discovery through contextual examples). Questions 1, 2, and 4 focus on learners' instructional preferences, reflecting their cognitive styles and approaches to language acquisition. The second theme investigates students' enjoyment of specific classroom activities, comparing grammar-focused learning with immersive, communicative methods. For instance, Question 3 contrasts preferences for watching videos or reading stories in English versus learning and discussing grammar rules, offering insights into motivational factors and engagement. The third theme explores participants' perceptions of confidence in English, focusing on whether it is derived from mastery of grammar rules (rule-based competence) or practical usage in real-life situations (practical fluency). Question 5



highlights learners' priorities in developing linguistic confidence. Finally, the questionnaire examines learners' views on the optimal balance between grammar instruction and communicative practice. Question 6 evaluates whether learners believe English proficiency is best achieved through regular practice, structured grammar instruction, or a combination of both, offering a holistic view of their learning beliefs. This structured approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of students' preferences and perceptions in relation to English language instruction.

### 4.3 Procedure

Regarding the first part of the research, it was decided that the interviews should take place over the online platform called Zoom since it proved to be the most convenient way for interview respondents to provide data. It is recommended that software used for synchronous or real-time interviews be trustworthy, up-to-date, and commonly used (Cohen et al., 2017). The interviews were conducted in English, as all teachers were proficient in the language and had no issues expressing themselves. Interviews were ensured not to extend beyond one hour because if the interview process was prolonged, participants might not maintain their full focus. Additionally, permission was obtained from interviewees before each session to audio-visually record the interviews for transcription and observation of reactions. Each participant signed a consent form, allowing their answers to be used in the project (see Appendix C). During the interview process, Cohen et al. (2017) suggest that "the biases and values of the interviewer should not be revealed, and the interviewer must be neutral and avoid being judgemental" (p. 517). Therefore, interviewees were given the opportunity to fully express themselves without the fear of judgment. Finally, to ensure that no data would be lost, after the interview, the video was immediately watched, and notes were taken regarding the interviewee's responses.

For phase two of the study, to determine learners' preferences for grammar instruction, a questionnaire was devised using Google Forms. This platform was selected for its easy use, accessibility, and ability to effectively collect and organize data. Teachers distributed the link to this multiple-choice questionnaire to students, who were invited but not compelled to participate in the research. There were no strict time limits imposed on students for completing the

questionnaire; the duration was left to the discretion of the teachers. However, teachers were instructed to ensure that students were provided with sufficient time to complete the questionnaire without feeling rushed. The questionnaire included questions about learners' preferences for explicit versus implicit grammar instruction and their engagement with various teaching approaches. To facilitate the visualization of these data, a table was created to display the data obtained from the questionnaire (see Table 1).

#### 4.4 Analysis

To analyze and interpret the data collected from the interviews and questionnaires, several structured steps were implemented. For phase one, the interview data were transcribed verbatim using the Microsoft Word dictate function, and transcriptions were manually spot-checked to ensure accuracy and consistency in capturing participants' statements. Following transcription, the interviews were meticulously analyzed to identify and select relevant quotes. Subsequently, the teachers were grouped into three categories: explicit instruction, implicit instruction, and a combination of both methods. These categories were chosen to align directly with the study's research objectives, enabling a structured and meaningful analysis of the data.

For Phase Two, the quantitative data derived from the multiple-choice questions were processed to identify overarching trends and frequencies in student preferences for implicit versus explicit grammar instruction. Google Forms facilitated this analysis by automatically generating percentages and visual summaries, which provided an accessible and comprehensive view of the data. These numerical insights were further visualized in charts to enhance interpretability and support comparative analysis (see Table 1). This visual representation of data allowed for the identification of significant patterns and facilitated a more nuanced understanding of students' preferences, contributing to the broader objectives of the study.

## 4.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are a crucial part of any research study. As Bhandari (2022) suggests, there are many aspects to consider while conducting ethical research. In this study, ethical protocols were followed to ensure voluntary participation, data confidentiality, and transparency.

The first factor is voluntary involvement. When inviting each interviewee to participate in the project, efforts were made to ensure the approach was non-coercive and respectful. Participants were provided with ample time to consider their decision, and their responses were obtained voluntarily, without any form of pressure or undue influence. Moreover, a consent form was created to inform participants of their rights, including the freedom to withdraw or decline to answer specific questions, mitigating any risk of coercion (see Appendix C). Verbal consent was also obtained before recording interviews, as participants were informed about the purpose of recording and given the option to decline. Participants could review the collected data if they wished, ensuring transparency and the opportunity for participants to clarify or retract any statements.

The second factor involves potential bias. Given the use of convenience sampling and my familiarity with some participants, there was a risk of selection bias. To reduce this, a structured interview protocol was used to maintain consistency and neutrality in interactions. In educational research, power dynamics between researcher and participant can influence responses, especially when teachers may feel inclined to respond in a way that aligns with institutional expectations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). To address this, the interview environment was structured to foster open, non-judgmental discussions, allowing participants to express their views freely. Additionally, participants were assured of their anonymity and reminded that there were no “right” or “wrong” answers, further encouraging honest and unbiased contributions. This approach aimed to minimize external pressures and create a comfortable setting for authentic dialogue.

Confidentiality of data was another primary concern, particularly in compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) applicable in the European Union and Sweden. All

identifiable information was anonymized, with teachers labeled as participants 1 through 6. The anonymization process involved double-checking transcripts to ensure that no identifying information remained, thus safeguarding participant privacy. For Phase Two, additional consent from students was deemed unnecessary as learners were not asked to give any personal data, such as their names or email addresses while filling out the questionnaire and gave implicit consent by filling out the questionnaire.

Finally, data were securely stored on a portable hard drive with no internet connection, ensuring restricted access and protection against data breaches. After the conclusion of both phases and the evaluation of this thesis project, all collected data were permanently deleted as per institutional guidelines (Studentwebben, 2023). This strict data-handling process further protected participant confidentiality.

Overall, by following these procedures, this study adhered to ethical standards, addressing issues of consent, confidentiality, and bias, thus ensuring the ethical integrity of the research process.

## 5. Results

This section presents findings from interviews with six English language teachers and a student questionnaire, focusing on preferences for explicit, implicit, or combined grammar instruction. The results are organized into four main themes: (1) teachers' rationale for explicit grammar instruction, (2) teachers' rationale for implicit grammar instruction, (3) teachers' preference for a combination of both methods, and (4) student preferences for grammar instruction. Each theme is illustrated with specific examples and quotes to provide clarity and support the findings.

### 5.1 Rationale for Teachers' Preference for Explicit Grammar Instruction

To investigate whether explicit or implicit grammar instruction yields better learning outcomes, interviews were conducted with six English language teachers working in Sweden. Among the six teachers, Teachers 1 and 4 articulated views that demonstrated a degree of support for or preference toward explicit grammar instruction. The following section examines the reasons these teachers favored explicit grammar instruction.

First, Teacher 1 indicated that he primarily chooses to teach grammar explicitly, as he believes that this approach presents grammatical rules and structures in a clear and accessible manner. He argued that explicit instruction reduces confusion and alleviates unnecessary anxiety around grammar, as students can easily visualize the grammatical elements:

It's not always easy to find the magical rules of grammar, therefore, sometimes offering a guiding hand or explaining the rules more explicitly could be the better way of going about it. (Teacher 1)

Teacher 1 also believes that the primary purpose of grammar instruction should be to promote accuracy in communication. Therefore, he incorporates a Focus on Form approach and argues that grammar should not be taught in isolation. Instead, students' attention is drawn to specific grammatical structures through communicative tasks, emphasizing that grammar should be addressed when questions naturally arise during interaction and require further clarification.

Teacher 1 contends that this approach helps students focus on linguistic forms that might otherwise be overlooked, thereby ensuring that they receive the necessary attention to internalize these language features.

Next, Teacher 4 also predominantly employed explicit grammar instruction due to the mixed-ability composition of her classrooms:

In a class where there is a big discrepancy between the stronger and the weaker students, it feels like it is better to teach grammar explicitly so that the weaker students do not get left behind. (Teacher 4)

In her view, students often vary significantly in their grasp of language skills, making it difficult for all learners to progress at the same pace. She believes that when there is a marked disparity between weaker and stronger students, explicit grammar instruction helps to ensure that the less proficient students are not left behind. By explicitly teaching grammar, she aims to make the principles of English syntax clear and accessible for all students, allowing even those who struggle with implicit learning to follow along more easily.

In summary, explicit grammar instruction is often favored by the interviewed teachers due to its clear presentation of grammar rules, its appropriateness for mixed-ability classrooms, and its effectiveness in drawing students' attention to specific linguistic forms within a focus on form approach.

## 5.2 Rationale for Teachers' Preference for Implicit Grammar Instruction

Although explicit grammar instruction is supported by some of the interviewed teachers, not all agreed on its importance. Teachers 2 and 5 believe that implicit grammar instruction can promote autonomous learning and help learners retain rules more effectively over time. Additionally, they find explicit grammar instruction potentially unengaging, preferring instead to use Focus on Meaning approach, as it encourages students to see grammar as part of real-world language use, rather than as isolated rules. Finally, interviewed teachers noted that the majority of the time,

they utilize implicit grammar instruction, however, they would refer to explicit grammar instruction if students needed more clarity or struggled to understand complex grammatical structures, as explicit instruction provides a more direct and structured approach to addressing specific language challenges.

Similarly, Teacher 2 predominantly employs implicit grammar instruction but resorts to explicit methods only when students struggle to grasp complex grammatical features. He explains:

My overall view is that an implicit way of teaching is most useful. Generally speaking, I tend to teach mainly implicitly and use explicit grammar instruction when there is a need for it. (Teacher 2)

Moreover, Teacher 2 designs activities where students derive grammar rules through interaction. For example, he presents learners with sentence halves to match, enabling them to form grammatically correct sentences and deduce patterns on their own. This activity not only fosters autonomous learning but also grounds grammar in a meaningful context, helping students understand grammar as it functions within real language use. Teacher 2 emphasizes that the ultimate goal of learning a language is to communicate accurately, suggesting that grammar instruction should involve examples that demonstrate correct usage within communicative settings.

Similarly, Teacher 5 employs implicit grammar instruction by embedding grammatical structures into engaging, meaning-focused tasks, particularly through interactive games and communicative activities. For example, she uses role-playing scenarios, collaborative problem-solving tasks, and storytelling exercises where students naturally encounter and use target grammar in context. These tasks are designed to encourage students to focus on the communicative purpose of language, allowing them to infer grammatical rules inductively without direct explanation. Having started her teaching career in Sweden, Teacher 5 observed that many students perceive grammar as tedious and less engaging than other aspects of language learning. To address this challenge, she deliberately integrates grammar into activities that emphasize communication and real-life relevance, making grammar learning feel incidental and enjoyable. She explains:

I understand that for many students, grammar is not fun; in contrast, it is rather boring, and some teachers can make it dry and intense. (Teacher 5)

Furthermore, Teacher 5 believes that grammar becomes less intimidating when it is embedded within meaningful tasks, fostering a more positive and engaging learning environment. She argues that this approach not only boosts students' motivation but also encourages them to apply grammatical concepts naturally within language, leading to better retention and more confident use.

In summary, interviewed teachers choose implicit instruction since it offers autonomy to learners, and emphasizes fluency over accuracy while making grammar learning enjoyable through games and engaging tasks.

### 5.3 Rationale for Teachers' Preference for Teaching a Combination of Both Methods.

The main aim of this study was to determine if teachers mainly use explicit or implicit grammar instruction. However, while interviewing teachers, some teachers believed that solely using explicit or implicit grammar instruction would not yield strong learning outcomes. Instead, Teachers 3 and 6 believe that using a combination of both of these methods will yield stronger learning outcomes.

Teacher 3 advocates for explicit grammar instruction as an effective starting point for teaching grammar rules. By presenting grammar in concise, clear segments, she believes that students can quickly understand and retain grammatical structures. However, she recognizes that solely relying on explicit instruction may not result in long-term retention. To reinforce these rules, she incorporates communicative activities that implicitly prompt learners to use the target language, ensuring that grammar instruction is not isolated from real-life applications.



This approach reflects a balanced methodology, where explicit grammar instruction provides a structured foundation for grammar learning, while implicit activities enable students to use these rules within meaningful contexts. By reminding learners of grammatical structures within communication, Teacher 3 aims to strengthen students' retention and help them internalize grammar rules in an autonomous and practical manner:

Teaching explicitly, I would say, is a better starting point because students learn a lot very quickly, but you need to implicitly remind learners about the rules. If you only teach grammar explicitly then students will eventually be going to forget the rules. (Teacher 3)

Teacher 6 shares a similar approach with the other interviewed teachers, believing that combining explicit and implicit grammar instruction can offer a variety of possibilities. Teacher 6 mentioned that grammar first be taught explicitly so learners can assimilate the conceptual understanding of the rules more rapidly and effectively. They believe that starting with clear instructions and practice exercises helps students better familiarize themselves with specific grammatical features. Later, once students have grasped the grammar through explicit instruction, implicit methods can be introduced to reinforce their understanding by applying these rules in meaningful communication activities. This transition from explicit to implicit instruction allows students to internalize grammatical structures and use them more naturally in real-life contexts. He explains that:

I prefer not to assume students understand and waste 10–15 minutes on implicit teaching, only to find they're confused. So, I start with explicit grammar instruction, then transition to communication or listening activities. (Teacher 6)

In summary, the combination of implicit and explicit instructional methods provides a comprehensive approach to language learning. While explicit grammar instruction offers a strong foundation for grammar rules, implicit teaching increases retention and fluency, ensuring students learn and effectively apply their knowledge.

## 5.4 Student Preferences for Explicit vs. Implicit Grammar Instruction

In addition to gathering insights from teachers, this study collected data from a questionnaire completed by students of the interviewed teachers. Understanding students' preferences for grammar instruction provides valuable insights for educators to tailor their lessons effectively. The following section presents the results of this questionnaire, with data visualized in Table 1 for clarity.

The first question in the questionnaire aimed to determine whether students preferred explicit or implicit grammar instruction. A majority of students, 64.7% to be exact, indicated a preference for explicit instruction, stating that they find it helpful when teachers write grammar rules on the board and explain them directly. This preference for explicit instruction indicates that students feel more comfortable when grammar rules and patterns are clearly presented.

Another question examined whether students favored learning grammar rules by seeing them applied in sentences or by discussing the rules first. Most students expressed a preference for a blended approach, suggesting that they benefit from both explicit explanations and contextual examples. This preference aligns with an integrative approach, where students appreciate a combination of structured explanations and practical applications.

The questionnaire also explored students' perspectives on the importance of knowing all grammar rules for language proficiency. When asked if they felt a comprehensive understanding of grammar rules was necessary for fluency in English, 64.7% of students indicated that their primary goal was achieving fluency. This response highlights that students recognize language proficiency extends beyond mere grammatical knowledge, as they prioritize communication skills in their learning journey.

Students were also asked to compare whether they preferred learning grammar through explicit rule explanations followed by practice or through exposure to English in books, movies, and other media. A notable 64.7% of students indicated a preference for learning English through popular media, which they find engaging and less demanding. This preference reflects the

growing appeal of incidental language learning through entertainment, without explicit focus on grammatical rules or structured instruction.

In summary, the questionnaire results indicate a clear preference among students for a blended approach to grammar instruction, combining both explicit and implicit methods. Students expressed a desire to discover language features through books, songs, and media, followed by structured explanations to reinforce their understanding of grammatical structure.

Table 1

*Survey Results on Learning Preferences and Techniques in English*

| Learning styles  | Techniques   | Percentages |
|--|--|-------------|
| Preferences for learning grammar rules                       | When the grammar rules are written on the board and explained to you | 64.7%       |
|  | When the grammar rules are written on the board and explained to you | 35.3%       |
| Techniques that help in learning the English language better | Reading books and watching videos                                    | 64.7%       |
|  | Studying and practicing grammar rules                                | 35.3%       |
| Activities enjoyed more in English class                     | Watching videos or reading stories                                   | 70.6%       |
|  | Learning and discussing grammar rules                                | 29.4%       |
| Methods for learning new English grammar                     | Seeing the rules used in sentences                                   | 11.8%       |
|  | Learning the rules first   | 5.9%        |
|  | A mix of both  | 82.4%       |
| Confidence in English usage                                  | Using English in most situations                                     | 64.7%       |
|  | Understanding the rules  | 35.3%       |
| Best ways to improve English proficiency                     | Regular practice without focusing on rules                           | 17.6%       |
|  | Understanding and learning the rules                                 | 11.8%       |
|  | A mix of both  | 70.6%       |

## 6. Discussion

The discussion chapter aims to analyze the findings from the study on explicit and implicit grammar instruction in relation to teachers' and learners' preferences. It connects these findings to existing research, explores their broader implications for language teaching, and evaluates their alignment with the Swedish curriculum for English instruction. By examining the rationale for teachers' preferences, students' perspectives, and the role of combined methods, this chapter highlights the importance of creating a balanced approach to grammar teaching that caters to diverse learner needs while fostering communicative competence and grammatical accuracy.

### 6.1 Analyzing the Rationale for Teachers' Preference for Explicit Grammar Instruction

The main objective of this research project was to explore whether explicit or implicit grammar instruction offers stronger learning outcomes in English language grammar instruction. This section mainly focuses on teachers' preferences for choosing explicit grammar instructions and how their perspectives align with existing theories and practices in language teaching.

The results of the interviews revealed that explicit grammar instruction is favored for its ability to deliver grammar rules directly and overtly. Teacher 1, for instance, preferred this method as it helps learners comprehend grammatical structures more successfully by presenting rules systematically and in context. Moreover, he emphasized that explicit grammar instruction decreases confusion and anxiety, allowing students to visualize and internalize grammatical elements. Similarly, Teacher 4 asserted that explicit grammar instruction becomes a valuable grammar instruction tool for addressing disparities in students' proficiency levels, ensuring that weaker students are not left behind. These findings underscore the perceived utility of explicit grammar instruction in creating a comprehensive and structured learning environment.

When compared, the findings align with credible studies in the field, emphasizing the benefits of explicit grammar instruction. This structured approach, as Ellis (2015) and Nazari (2013) suggest, accelerates the learning process and fosters learner confidence by clarifying complex

grammar rules and structures. Teacher 4 favored explicit grammar instruction for her mixed-ability classes, reflecting Harmer's (2012) assertion that this method ensures all learners, regardless of proficiency, can grasp essential language structures. This aligns with the historical prominence of explicit instruction in the Grammar-Translation method, which emphasizes a clear, systematic presentation of grammar rules (Altun & Dinçer, 2020b). Additionally, explicit grammar instruction promotes conscious learning as it provides deliberate information about grammatical structures and engages learners with written examples to facilitate understanding (Ling, 2015; Thornbury, 2002; Nazari, 2013). Moreover, Teacher 1 incorporated a Focus on Form approach, blending explicit instruction with communicative tasks. This practice ensures grammar is introduced in meaningful contexts, where learners can comprehend new structures and address errors during interactions. This aligns with Larsen-Freeman and Long's (1991) argument that grammar and communication are inseparable in effective language learning, highlighting the importance of contextualized instruction. Structured exercises within this framework further enhance learning efficacy by accelerating grammar acquisition and fostering confidence (Shirzad, 2016). Finally, explicit grammar instruction is particularly valuable in classrooms with mixed-ability learners, where varying proficiency levels present significant challenges. As Shank (1995) and Harmer (2012) note, this structured approach ensures that in Sweden's multicultural classrooms, all students, regardless of proficiency level, can grasp the fundamental rules of grammar, thereby minimizing disparities in learning outcomes. By integrating explicit instruction with communicative approaches, such as Focus on Form, educators can bridge traditional and modern teaching paradigms, creating a comprehensive method that enhances learners' grammatical accuracy, fluency, and confidence.

Although explicit grammar instruction offers benefits for language learning, it also contains challenges. The focus on rule-based learning may not be suitable to all learning styles, especially those of learners who develop their language learning skills in more communicative, less structured environments. Moreover, learners may experience a decline in motivation due to the teacher's role as the primary provider of information, potentially leading to a perceived loss of autonomy in their learning process (Rahman & Rashid, 2017). Another reason learners might find explicit grammar instruction less appealing is that extensive focus on grammatical rules can appear monotonous to them. They may prefer lessons that incorporate more engaging elements,

such as interactive games and enjoyable activities, which can foster a more dynamic and stimulating learning environment. These limitations highlight the need for further research into how explicit instruction can be balanced with implicit methods to address diverse learner needs effectively.

In conclusion, this research highlights the significance of explicit grammar instruction in fostering grammatical accuracy and addressing mixed-ability classrooms, while also acknowledging its limitations. Teachers' preferences for explicit methods align with established theories that emphasize structured and deliberate grammar instruction as a means to accelerate learning and build learner confidence. However, the findings also underscore the need to balance explicit instruction with more engaging and interactive methods to address diverse learning styles and maintain learner motivation. Incorporating elements such as communicative tasks and interactive activities can bridge the gap between traditional and modern teaching approaches, ensuring both grammatical precision and fluency. Future research should explore how integrating explicit and implicit methods can create a more inclusive and effective instructional framework, particularly in multicultural and mixed-ability classrooms.

## 6.2 Analyzing the Rationale for Teachers' Preference for Implicit Grammar Instruction

The main objective of this study is to explore teachers' rationale behind explicit and implicit grammar instruction methods in English language teaching. This section predominantly analyzes the reasons behind interviewed teachers' preferences for instructing grammar implicitly.

The results of the interviews indicated that several teachers favor implicit grammar instruction due to its potential to engage learners in meaningful language use without deliberate instruction of grammar. First, Teacher 2 asserted that implicit grammar instructions enable students to derive grammar rules on their own, supporting their understanding and facilitating long-term retention of grammar rules. To achieve implicit grammar instruction, Teacher 2 offers grammar discreetly, such as matching sentence halves or playing games that require learners to use a certain

grammatical feature, as this assists students in acquiring grammatical structures naturally. Similarly, Teacher 5 underscores the motivational element of implicit instruction, remarking that embedding grammar into enjoyable activities decreases feelings of intimidation and increases student participation. However, teachers also acknowledged that sometimes they have to rely on explicit methods when students face difficulties with complex grammatical concepts, thus this demonstrates a need for flexibility in instructional approaches.

Teachers' preference for implicit grammar instruction is aligned with crucial principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which gives precedence to fluency and the use of language in meaningful contexts (Krashen, 1981; Nishimura, 2000). Teacher 2 underscores the notion that implicit grammar instruction mirrors first-language acquisition, where learners absorb language through exposure to meaningful input rather than through explicit rule memorization. This perspective aligns with Krashen's (1981) Input Hypothesis, which argues that language acquisition is facilitated by comprehensible input, making explicit grammar instruction largely unnecessary. According to Krashen (1981), natural exposure to language structures within context enables learners to internalize grammatical rules effectively and achieve proficiency over time. Furthermore, Teacher 5 emphasizes the use of games and authentic materials in fostering an immersive and enjoyable learning environment. She argues that these strategies help students acquire grammar implicitly, as they are actively engaged in meaningful language use rather than passive rule learning. The value of integrating games into grammar instruction is supported by Thao (2009) and Yacob and Yunus (2019), who contend that such activities provide students with opportunities to apply language in dynamic, goal-oriented settings. This approach not only enhances motivation but also reinforces grammatical structures through practice in real-world scenarios. Additionally, the incorporation of authentic materials, such as books, songs, and videos, offers learners exposure to the language as it is naturally used. This helps bridge the gap between classroom learning and practical communication, reinforcing implicit learning by contextualizing grammatical concepts (Filoni, 1993; Fukunaga, 2006). Teacher 5's preference for these methods reflects an understanding of the need to make grammar instruction relatable and engaging, especially for students who may perceive traditional approaches as tedious or overly abstract.



Although implicit grammar instruction offers numerous benefits, several limitations persist. One advantage of implicit instruction is its ability to emulate first-language acquisition, enabling learners to internalize the language naturally through exposure. However, this method has been subject to critique by scholars. For instance, Robinson (1997) highlights the risk of overgeneralization in implicit learning, where learners associate grammatical rules with previously encountered structures. This reliance on familiar patterns can impede their ability to apply these rules effectively in novel or unfamiliar contexts. Furthermore, Teachers 2 and 5 observed that implicit grammar instruction was sometimes insufficient for addressing specific challenges. In such cases, they found it necessary to incorporate explicit grammar instruction, particularly to provide clear explanations and corrective feedback when students made errors. This indicates that while implicit instruction fosters natural language acquisition, explicit methods remain crucial for addressing specific learning needs and ensuring clarity.

The reliance on explicit instruction to address student difficulties aligns with Ellis's (2006) argument that no single instructional approach can effectively address the diverse complexities of all grammatical structures. He argues that language acquisition is influenced by factors such as learners' proficiency levels, cognitive styles, and the inherent complexity of specific grammatical forms. Combining Focus on Form strategies with meaning-focused tasks creates a balanced instructional approach that meets diverse learner needs. Focus-on-form strategies draw attention to grammatical structures as they arise naturally in communication, ensuring contextualized and relevant instruction. When paired with meaning-focused tasks, such as communicative activities or authentic language use, these strategies enable learners to apply grammatical rules in meaningful contexts, fostering both accuracy and fluency. This blended approach also addresses challenges in mixed-ability classrooms, providing foundational knowledge for struggling students through explicit instruction while engaging advanced learners through creative application. Such adaptability ensures grammar instruction is effective and inclusive, benefiting a broad range of learners.

In conclusion, implicit grammar instruction, with its emphasis on meaningful communication, can enhance learner motivation and engagement, particularly in contexts where students find traditional grammar lessons uninteresting. Additionally, this approach supports the development

of competence by fostering natural language acquisition through meaningful communication. However, its limitations include the risk of overgeneralization, as noted by Robinson (1997), and the occasional need for explicit methods to clarify complex grammatical concepts, as observed by Teachers 2 and 5. These findings align with Ellis's (2006) argument that no single approach suffices for all grammatical structures. A balanced approach combining focus-on-form strategies with meaning-focused tasks addresses diverse learner needs, fostering both fluency and accuracy. This adaptability ensures grammar instruction is inclusive and effective across varying learner contexts.

### 6.3 Analyzing Teachers' Rationale for Combining Both Teaching Methods

The main aim of this study was to investigate whether teachers utilized explicit or implicit grammar instruction more. However, through the interview process, it was revealed that some teachers did not believe in solely using explicit or implicit grammar instruction, instead, they preferred combining these two methods. Therefore, this section will examine the rationale behind teachers' selection of combining these methods.

To start, Teachers 3 and 6 shared the same reasoning behind using the combination of explicit and implicit meaning. These teachers believed grammatical accuracy is vital for learners to establish clarity, therefore, they emphasized using explicit grammar instruction as a foundational method to present grammar rules. Later, to internalize grammar and improve communication skills, different exercises were offered. These exercises were listening activities that utilized the same grammar that was taught during that class, or learners were given speaking activities that helped learners internalize the newly taught grammar. Moreover, Teachers 3 and 6 also believed that just using one method can never meet all learning requirements. They believe that if explicit instruction is used alone, learners may deter from it as it can be teacher-centered and grammar-focused. On the other hand, just using implicit methods, although can mirror first language acquisition and learners can retain grammar better, cannot be welcomed by all students. These learners may believe that implicit grammar instruction can become hard to follow, especially for complex grammar structures. Therefore, using the best parts of each grammar instruction type can offer strong learning outcomes.

These findings strongly support Alenexi's (2019) assertion that integrating explicit and implicit grammar instruction can foster both accuracy and fluency in learners. This dual approach leverages the strengths of explicit methods, such as providing structured rule-based learning, and implicit methods, which encourage natural language acquisition through contextual exposure. Ling (2015) further emphasized that these two instructional strategies are not opposing forces but rather complementary components of an effective teaching framework. By combining them, educators can address diverse learner needs, offering clarity and structure where necessary while fostering intuitive understanding through meaningful practice. This dual approach not only supports students preparing for exams demanding grammatical precision but also promotes fluency in real-life communication. Additionally, the findings indicate that incorporating meaningful tasks and interactive activities enhances student engagement and long-term knowledge retention (DeKeyser, 1998; Thornbury, 2002). Moreover, this approach aligns with the goals of communicative language teaching (CLT), which emphasizes the inseparability of grammar and real-world communication. The integration of these methods, therefore, represents a comprehensive pedagogical strategy that enhances both the cognitive and practical dimensions of language learning.

Future studies might examine the effectiveness of integrating explicit and implicit grammar instruction across different learner proficiency levels. Additionally, examining the impact of cultural and institutional factors on teacher and student preferences would provide valuable insights. Longitudinal research exploring the long-term impact of blended instructional approaches on students' grammatical accuracy and fluency would further strengthen these findings.

In conclusion, the findings of this study underscore the value of integrating explicit and implicit grammar instruction to address diverse learning needs effectively. Teachers 3 and 6 highlighted how combining these methods allows for a balance between achieving grammatical accuracy through structured rule presentation and fostering fluency through meaningful, communicative exercises. This dual approach not only meets varying learner preferences but also aligns with contemporary pedagogical frameworks, such as communicative language teaching, which

emphasize the interplay between grammar and real-world language use. By leveraging the strengths of both methods, educators can create a comprehensive teaching strategy that supports both short-term learning goals and long-term language retention.

#### 6.4 Interpreting Student Preferences for Explicit and Implicit Instruction

The secondary aim of this study was to investigate learners' preferences for explicit and implicit grammar instruction, as well as the reasoning behind these preferences. This section, therefore, analyzes the findings related to learners' preferences for grammar instruction, while also examining whether these preferences are aligned with their teachers' views.

The results highlight a strong preference among learners for a blended approach to grammar instruction, combining structured grammar explanations with opportunities for incidental learning through meaningful exposure. While many learners acknowledged the value of explicit instruction, with 64.7% finding direct explanations of grammar rules beneficial, they also emphasized the importance of integrating grammar practice into activities that develop communication skills. This preference underscores the need for instruction that balances grammatical accuracy with practical application.

Although learners recognized the significance of grammar acquisition, the same percentage (64.7%) identified fluency as their ultimate goal, prioritizing the ability to communicate effectively over complete grammatical mastery. Additionally, learners expressed a strong interest in implicit learning methods, with 64.7% appreciating the role of popular media, such as books and movies, in exposing them to grammar in natural contexts. These findings suggest that learners value instructional approaches that cater to both accuracy and fluency, reinforcing the importance of a balanced strategy that integrates explicit explanations with engaging, authentic, and incidental learning opportunities.

These findings align with prior research that emphasizes the effectiveness of explicit grammar instruction for learners who prioritize grammatical accuracy (Şahinkaya, 2023; Alenezi, 2019). The majority of students answered that they prefer when the teacher writes the answers on the board and explicitly explains the rules to them. According to Ling (2015), explicit grammar

teaching can help students profoundly understand grammatical items due to its strong systemic approach, which provides a clear and structured pathway to mastering language rules. This method not only clarifies complex grammatical structures but also reduces confusion, enabling students to internalize and apply the rules more effectively. Additionally, explicit explanations provide a sense of security for learners, particularly those who may feel overwhelmed by the abstract nature of implicit instruction. It is evident that learners feel more comfortable and confident when they can visually observe the rules and patterns of grammar being clearly explained, reinforcing their understanding and fostering better retention.

The findings of this study reveal that learners favor a blended approach to grammar instruction, one that integrates explicit explanations with opportunities for meaningful, implicit application. While learners value the clarity and structure provided by explicit instruction, which fosters confidence and grammatical accuracy, they also recognize the importance of applying these rules in authentic, real-life contexts. This preference aligns with Ellis (2006) and Pawlak (2021), who argue for combining focus-on-form strategies, which draw attention to grammatical structures during communication, with focus-on-meaning approaches that prioritize fluency and practical language use. Students expressed a clear desire for instruction that balances structured explanations with interactive and contextually rich tasks, as this integration allows them to internalize grammatical rules while fostering confidence in real-world communication.

The study also highlights learners' prioritization of fluency over mastering all grammar rules. Many participants indicated that understanding grammar is essential but insufficient on its own for achieving proficiency, emphasizing the need for practical communication skills. This preference is supported by Burns (2009), who advocates for using authentic materials, such as magazines, newspapers, and spoken interactions, to develop learners' communicative abilities. Similarly, the use of popular media, such as songs, movies, and storybooks, was widely appreciated by learners for its engaging and natural approach to language acquisition. Researchers like Failoni (1993) and Fukunaga (2006) have shown that integrating media-based learning enhances motivation, facilitates incidental learning, and provides practical examples of grammar use in authentic contexts.

Diverse learner goals, cultural backgrounds, and educational settings also influence preferences for grammar instruction. While some students prefer structured, teacher-centered explicit methods for preparing for exams or achieving high grammatical accuracy (DeKeyser, 1998), others value the autonomy and discovery inherent in implicit approaches. This is particularly relevant in multicultural classrooms, such as those in Sweden, where learners bring varied expectations regarding teacher-led versus autonomous learning. These findings underscore the need for flexible instructional strategies that combine explicit and implicit methods, as advocated by Thornbury (2002) and Şahinkaya (2023). By integrating structured grammar explanations with opportunities for communicative practice, educators can address learners' diverse needs, fostering both accuracy and fluency. This cohesive framework provides learners with a solid foundation in grammar while empowering them to communicate effectively in real-life situations.

The questionnaire results were then compared with the teachers' perspectives on grammar instruction. A substantial alignment emerged between teachers' and students' preferences, as both groups acknowledged the clarity and structure provided by explicit grammar instruction. Many teachers also recognize the potential monotony of grammar lessons and therefore incorporate engaging methods, such as games and media (songs, cartoons, and movies), to make learning more enjoyable. This approach appears to resonate with students, who likewise demonstrated a strong preference for incorporating media into grammar instruction. One notable discrepancy between the questionnaire and interview data is that students generally favored a more integrated approach to grammar instruction. They expressed a preference for deducing rules from examples before receiving explicit explanations, a strategy advocated by Teachers 3 and 6. These teachers support a blended approach, believing that explicit instruction provides a strong foundation that can be reinforced through implicit techniques to promote natural language use.

In conclusion, the results from the questionnaire suggest that grammar instruction should be flexible, catering to both learners seeking grammatical precision and those prioritizing communicative fluency. By incorporating explicit instruction as a foundation and implicit activities for application, educators can create a balanced curriculum that meets varied learning objectives. For instance, structured rule explanations can aid learners in preparing for exams,

while media-based or communicative tasks can support fluency development. This dual approach not only enhances learner motivation, as suggested by Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) but also fosters a learner-centered environment that is both engaging and effective.

## 6.5 Findings Alignment with the Swedish Curriculum

The interviews set out to determine what teachers' beliefs are about explicit and implicit grammar instruction and which type they use and prefer in their classrooms. While examining the steering documents, it is clear that this document does not explicitly mention the type of instruction teachers should use when teaching grammar, granting teachers autonomy to decide the instructional type based on the classroom context. This discrepancy between the methods can be seen in teachers' choices for grammar instruction. While Teachers 1 and 4 primarily preferred explicit instruction, Teachers 2 and 5 utilized implicit grammar instruction. Meanwhile, Teachers 3 and 6 emphasized the importance of combining both implicit and explicit grammar methods.

Additionally, the steering document for the English language advises that “students should be given the opportunity, through the use of language in functional and meaningful contexts, to develop all-round communicative skills” (Skolverket, 2011a, p1). The Swedish curriculum emphasizes the development of communicative skills. Teachers 1, 2, and 5 align their instruction with this recommendation by integrating grammar into communicative tasks. These teachers believe the primary reason for learning grammar is to develop communication skills and express themselves freely.

Unfortunately, the Swedish curriculum for English subjects does not include any information about learners' preferences in language learning. The questionnaire revealed important data about students' favored methods of grammar instruction, mainly preferring the combination of explicit and implicit methods. Learners also expressed enjoyment in engaging activities, such as role-play and communication tasks, and the use of authentic learning materials like popular media. The curriculum should provide suggestions for teachers, encouraging them to create lessons that also meet students' needs for learning a foreign language.

Finally, this section highlights the nuanced perspectives of teachers and learners on explicit and implicit grammar instruction, demonstrating that a one-size-fits-all approach is insufficient.

Teachers adapt their methods to suit classroom contexts, while learners express preferences for a combination of methods that ensure both fluency and accuracy. These findings underscore the importance of aligning instructional practices with student preferences and the goals outlined in the Swedish curriculum.



## 7. Conclusion

This study assessed in-service teachers' and learners' views regarding explicit and implicit grammar instruction in Sweden's upper-secondary education. To determine teachers' views on explicit and implicit grammar instruction, interviews were conducted with six in-service teachers, and their students were surveyed using a questionnaire.

The findings indicate that some of these teachers recognize and promote the importance of implicit grammar instruction. They believed that implicit grammar instruction facilitates autonomous learning by emphasizing a focus on meaning, allowing learners to internalize language structures without consciously focusing on form. Moreover, they highlighted that integrating grammar games and other communicative tasks aligned with a Focus on Meaning approach could mitigate the daunting nature of grammar learning, promoting more effective implicit learning. Consequently, this fosters a fun learning environment that can enhance seamless implicit learning among students.

Next, teachers also expressed that explicit grammar instruction remains a crucial component of language teaching, particularly in contexts like Sweden's mixed-ability classrooms, where diverse learner needs must be addressed. Its systematic and structured approach provides clarity, ensuring that students of all proficiency levels can grasp essential grammatical rules. Teachers contended that to accommodate all students, they rely on Focus on Form strategies, which involve integrating explicit grammar instruction into communicative activities, ensuring that grammatical structures are taught within meaningful contexts while addressing the diverse needs of learners.

Some teachers also showed a preference for combining explicit and implicit grammar instruction. They used explicit grammar instruction at the outset to provide learners with a foundation of grammar rules and structures, followed by activities that adopted focus on meaning, enabling students to internalize grammar through authentic communication. This integrated approach was seen as particularly effective in balancing the dual objectives of

grammatical accuracy and communicative fluency. To maximize the learning outcomes, explicit grammar instruction should be complemented with engaging, interactive elements, such as communicative tasks and real-world applications, striking a balance between traditional and modern teaching methods. This integrated approach offers a pathway to achieving both grammatical precision and practical fluency in diverse educational settings.

Furthermore, the questionnaire revealed that while learners preferred to learn grammar explicitly for its clarity and structure, they also favored practicing grammar through authentic materials, such as books, videos, and movies. These preferences align with the principles of focus on meaning, where learners engage with language in real-world contexts, promoting natural acquisition and deeper understanding. At the same time, many students appreciated opportunities for structured rule explanations provided by focus on forms, suggesting that they value a balanced approach to grammar instruction. From the results, it can be concluded that learners preferred an integration of both approaches to learning English grammar, combining explicit rule-based instruction with implicit, context-driven activities.

The limitation of the study was that the sample of teachers and learners used for the research project was small, limiting the generalizability of the findings. To reliably determine whether implicit or explicit grammar instruction improves learners' proficiency, a larger participant sample is necessary. Future research should continue to investigate the efficacy of combining implicit and explicit grammar instruction, with particular attention to the interplay of focus on form, focus on forms, and focus on meaning in the classroom. Existing theoretical studies suggest benefits from integrating focus on form, where grammar is addressed within meaningful communication, with focus on forms, which emphasizes clear, explicit instruction. Conducting empirical quantitative and qualitative research with pre-and post-tests for learners would provide deeper insights into the effectiveness of this integrated approach in fostering both grammatical accuracy and communicative competence.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A

### Interview guide

| <b>Themes</b>               | <b>Questions</b>  | <b>Follow-up questions</b>   |
|-----------------------------|---|--|
| Knowledge background        | <p>How long have you been working as an upper secondary school teacher?</p> <p>How did your high school teachers instruct English language grammar?</p> <p>What specific coursework or training have you received related to grammar instruction?</p> | <p>Was it mainly implicit or explicit?</p> <p>How did your training approach different types of grammar instruction?</p> |
| Overall views about grammar | <p>What is your overall view on teaching grammar to students?</p> <p>How do you think grammar construction contributes to overall language proficiency?</p>   | <p>What kind of teaching method do you favor particularly?</p>   |

|                      |   |  |
|----------------------|---|--|
|                      | <p>How do you decide which grammar structures, models, and tenses to teach?</p> <p>Should grammar be taught separately or in combination with communication activities?</p>   |  |
| Implicit vs Explicit | <p>What role does explicit grammar instruction play in language learning?</p> <p>What role does implicit grammar instruction play in language learning?</p> <p>If grammar is taught implicitly, how do you ensure student's understanding of grammar rules?</p> <p>If grammar is taught explicitly, how do you ensure students internalize grammar rules?</p> | Which grammar instruction do you employ more in your classrooms? |
| Follow-up questions  | Have you ever integrated both of the methods in your classroom?   | If yes, which techniques have you used?                          |

|  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
|  | How do you strike a balance between teaching grammar explicitly and implicitly? |  |
|--|---|--|

## Appendix B

### Questionnaire questions

#### Personal information

1. Name and Surname (optional)
2. Grade

#### Learning preferences

1. When learning a new grammar rule, do you prefer:

Discovering the rules by looking at given examples

When the teacher writes the rules on the board and explains them to you

2. Which technique helps you learn the English language better?

Studying English grammar rules and then practicing them

Reading books and watching videos in English without focusing on grammar

3. Which of the activities do you enjoy more in English class?

Watching videos or reading stories in English

Learning and then talking about English grammar rules

4. How do you like to learn new English grammar?

By seeing the rules used in sentences

By learning the rules first

A mix of both

5. Do you feel more confident in English when:

You understand the rules and can use them correctly in your speaking and writing

You can use English in most situations, even if you don't know all the rules



6. In your opinion, what is the best way to improve your English?

Regular practice without focusing too much on the rules

Understanding and learning the rules thoroughly with your teacher and a textbook

A balance of both

## Appendix C

### Consent Form for Participation in Research

**Research Title:** Exploring Teachers' Perceptions of Implicit and Explicit Grammar Instruction in Upper- Secondary Education

**Researcher:** Gunay Amirjanli

**Supervisor:** Shaun Nolan

This study aims to investigate in-service teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of explicit and implicit grammar instruction methods and how these methods impact learners' grammar knowledge in upper-secondary education settings. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to engage in a semi-structured interview that will last approximately 30-60 minutes. The interview will be conducted online via a platform called Zoom and will be audio and video recorded to ensure accuracy in data collection. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and interviewees can choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences to them. All the responses will be confidential. All data will be stored securely and only accessible to the research team. Names and any identifying information will be removed from the transcripts and will not be used in any reports or publications. There are no anticipated risks to participating in this study beyond those encountered in everyday life. All participants have the right to ask questions about this research study. They may contact the researcher at any time if they have questions or concerns. By signing this form, participants agree that they have read this consent form, had an opportunity to ask questions about the research study, and agreed to participate in this research study.

Please sign below if you agree to participate:

Participant's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_