A Survey Study of Secondary Students' Beliefs and Preferences about Grammar Instruction: An Investigation of Iranian EFL Context[1]

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Abstract

In this study, we investigated Iranian high school students' preferences and beliefs about two types of form-focused instruction (FFI) for teaching and learning grammar, namely isolated FFI and integrated FFI. Using an adapted version of the questionnaire developed by Valeo and Spada (2016), we collected data from a large sample of senior high school students (n=1,058) in the Iranian public school system. The results of the analysis showed that most participants expressed preference toward having more integrated FFI grammar in their curricula. The analysis also indicated that learners' preferences for each of these types of grammar instructions vary depending on their high school major and length of exposure to English. The results are discussed with special attention to the context of the research and in light of the country's attempt to implement communicative language teaching at K-12 schools.

Resumen

En este estudio, investigamos las preferencias y creencias de los estudiantes de secundaria iraníes sobre dos tipos de instrucción centrada en la forma (FFI) para enseñar gramática, a saber, FFI aislado e FFI integrado. Usando una versión adaptada del cuestionario desarrollado por Valeo y Spada (2016), recolectamos datos de una muestra grande de estudiantes de secundaria (n=1,058) en el sistema escolar público iraní. Los resultados del análisis mostraron que la mayoría de los participantes expresaron su preferencia por tener una gramática FFI más integrada en sus planes de estudio. El análisis también indicó que las preferencias de los estudiantes para cada uno de estos tipos de instrucciones gramaticales varían según su especialidad en la escuela secundaria y su exposición al inglés. Los resultados se discuten con especial atención al contexto de la investigación y a la luz del intento nacional de implementar la enseñanza comunicativa del lenguaje en las escuelas K-12.

Introduction

Grammar has always been one of the major areas of focus in second/ foreign language (L2) education as well as second language acquisition (SLA) research. Over the years, research on grammar instruction, both within English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts, has criticized the decontextualized nature of grammar instruction and L2 teaching and learning (Larsen-Freeman, 2015). In line with advancements in the field of SLA, research on grammar has also promoted applying novel approaches in teaching grammar with a focus on enhancing communicative competence and ability among language learners. Despite the growth of theoretical discussions and empirical findings about grammar instruction in L2 settings, pedagogic grammar is still conceptualized in its traditional sense where prescriptive accounts on accuracy of forms and rules through decontextualized mechanical exercises outweigh its communicative aspects (Larsen-Freeman, 2015; Schurz & Coumel, 2020). Numerous studies revealed that explicit grammar instruction and written exercises are highly valued by students (e.g., Jean & Simard, 2011; Loewen et al., 2009), as well as teachers (e.g., Graus & Coppen, 2016; Schurz & Coumel, 2020). Yet, research on form-focused instruction (FFI) has suggested that learners benefit from both explicit and implicit approaches of grammar instruction while maintaining its communicative function (Mansouri et al., 2019; Spada & Lightbown, 2008; Spada et al., 2014).

Spada (1997) defined form-focused instruction as "any pedagogical effort which is used to draw learners' attention to form either implicitly or explicitly within meaning-based approaches to L2 instruction and in which a focus on language is provided in either spontaneous or predetermined ways" (p. 73). Unlike focus on forms (Long, 1991) in which mastery over language structures is the primary goal, Spada and Lightbown (2008) assert that mastery over grammar could be attained within the communicative tasks rather than discrete drills and mechanical exercises. Accordingly, instead of advocating the separation of form and

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meaning and promoting decontextualized L2 instruction, FFI emphasizes on contextualized L2 instruction in which both language structures and meaning will be learned through interactive and communicative tasks.

As a meaning-based pedagogical approach, FFI supports learners in communicative acquisition of language features promoted via meaningful linguistic interactions rather than remembering them for decontextualized purposes (Valeo & Sapada, 2016). The existing FFI-oriented L2 classroom research has confirmed that effective L2 teaching and learning is linked to the way that meaning and form in L2 are connected (Lyster, 2017; Spada et al., 2014; Valeo, 2018). In this sense, what matters most is the quality and the timing of such interconnection (Spada & Lightbown, 2008; Valeo & Spada, 2016). According to Spada and Lightbown (2008), attention to the timing of instruction has both theoretical and empirical merits. From a theoretical view, attention to the timing of the combination of form and meaning could help learners retrieve the acquired knowledge when situated in a similar language use context. Empirically, it will enhance learners' performance in oral communicative tasks (Spada et al., 2014), written communitive tasks (Khezrlou, 2019), and vocabulary and grammar development (File & Adams, 2010).

Recent research also showed that the timing of offering explicit and implicit instruction hinges upon numerous factors including the language learners' beliefs about and preferences for utilizing grammar learning strategies in a specific context of the instruction (Pawlak, 2018). According to Kalaja and Barcelos (2003), "beliefs are considered one area of individual learner differences that may influence the processes and outcomes of second/ foreign language learning/ acquisition" (p. 1). As argued in Jean and Simard (2011), learners' preferences for and perceptions about L2 instruction are deeply rooted in their belief system which makes it difficult to separate them from each other. In other words, they are so interwoven into each other that any changes in one would potentially lead to changes in the other. In this regard, a congruence between L2 learners' beliefs and preferences and the actual teaching and learning practices could contribute to more efficient L2 learning (Jean & Simard, 2011). On the other hand, beliefs and perceptions about and preference for L2 learning and teaching may vary from context to context influencing the way L2 is instructed and acquired (Mansouri et al., 2019; Sato & Storch, 2020). As argued in Sato and Storch (2020) "exploring context-specific teaching/learning behaviors is crucial because it contributes to developing teaching techniques and tasks better suited to support learners in local contexts" (p. 3). Hence, it is important to understand how instructional approaches work best in a given context and how they are viewed by L2 learners. In line with this argument, this study aims to explore the beliefs and preferences of Iranian high school students toward the timing of grammar instruction as part of their ascribed school curriculum. An understanding of FFI and its different forms is a prerequisite of the topic of this paper and would help the reader to follow the logic of the current study.

Isolated FFI vs. Integrated FFI: Theoretical Foundation

With grammar being one of the main themes in SLA research, multiple taxonomies have been proposed to provide theoretical underpinnings for the efficient teaching and learning of grammar (see Spada & Lightbown, 2008 for an overview). Attempting to highlight the importance of grammar in meaning-based communication, most of these perspectives "share some basic characteristics which utilize both implicit and explicit form of grammar instruction through communicative activities" (Mansouri et al., 2019, p. 3). In a move from focusing on the inclusion or exclusion of grammar in L2 instruction, Spada and Lightbown (2008) argued for an interventionist approach toward teaching grammar mainly focusing on the proper timing for explicit or implicit grammar instruction through communicative activities designed and implemented within an FFI framework.

Introducing isolated and integrated grammar instruction as the two approaches derived from FFI, Spada and Lightbown (2008) believe in their complementary nature. While "isolated FFI is provided in activities that are separate from the communicative use of language," integrated FFI "draws learners' attention to "language form during communicative or content/meaning-based instruction" (Spada & Lightbown, 2008, p. 186). The primary focus in both approaches is on meaning and how and when it can be attained. In other words, it is the timing of instruction which leads to the efficiency of combining form and meaning and hence, L2 learning (Spada, 2011). This view is different from traditional views toward L2 instruction where the mastery of forms is equal to mastery in the target language (see Spada et al., 2014 for detailed examples on each approach).

Isolated FFI vs. Integrated FFI: Empirical Evidence

Research findings have shown that a variety of factors could influence the delivery and efficacy of grammar instruction in L2 classrooms. Some of these factors are L2 learners' linguistic background, the degree of L2 input salience and enhancement, complexity and the communicative values of L2 rules and forms, the situated context of L2 instruction as well as teachers and learners' preferences (see Spada & Lightbown, 2008 for details). Additionally, the existing scholarship on language learner cognition denotes that success or failure in L2 learning could also be tied to the beliefs and preferences learners have about learning an additional language (e.g., Jean & Simard, 2011; Loewen et al., 2009; Schulz, 1996). Schulz (1996) conducted a large-scale survey of 824 students and 92 L2 teachers in the U.S. regarding their views on the role of grammar on error correction. She found that unlike the participating teachers, L2 learners favored explicit grammar instruction taking place in class and calling it essential for enhancing their proficiency in their target L2. As argued by the author, the context of L2 learning could also lead to formation and changes in learners' preferences and beliefs about grammar instruction. Contrarily, in their survey of grammar instruction and error correction among 754 L2 learners in a U.S. university, Loewen et al. (2009) found that ESL learners valued meaning-based learning through developing communicative skills over structured grammar instruction and error correction. On the other hand, their peers learning a different L2 (i.e., a language other than English) believed in explicit grammar instruction as well as error correction as the gateway to their success in learning L2. The authors also acknowledged the existence of a connection between L2 learning preferences and context of learning and learners' linguistic background. Jean and Simard (2011), in a survey of 2,321 of English and French learners' beliefs and perceptions about grammar instruction, reported mixed feelings about grammar instruction among the surveyed L2 learners. They found that both French and ESL high school learners acknowledged the value of grammar instruction and at the same time found it overwhelmingly boring. In all these studies, the researchers found that grammar instruction is an integral part of any L2 learning and teaching process. However, there needs to be more investigation of the relevant factors with regard to situated educational context impacting the way grammar instruction is delivered.

In a multi-site comparative survey study, Valeo and Spada (2016) surveyed Canadian and Brazilian English teachers and learners' views and preferences toward isolated and integrated form-focused grammar instruction (53 EFL and 47 ESL teachers; 175 EFL and 294 ESL learners). The findings showed that most participants regardless of their situated instructional context believed that learning grammar via integrated FFI would be beneficial to them specially when the main objective is "the development of fluency and the automatization of language features for effective communication" (p. 329). Despite their stance toward integrated FFI, both groups of teachers and learners recognized the usefulness of delivering isolated FFI grammar "particularly in promoting the acquisition of language features that are difficult to notice in the input (e.g., third person singular s in English)" (p. 329). Similar result was reported by Songhori (2012) showing congruences in teachers and learners' preferences toward integrated and isolated FFI in Iranian higher education setting. However, their preferences were in stark contrast with the realities in the context. In other words, the context did not allow them to pursue the type of instruction they preferred. In both of these studies, teachers and learners preferred integrated FFI, but learners' level of proficiency impacted their preferences. Learners with higher levels of L2 proficiency have been found to be more inclined to integrated FFI and the ones with lower mastery in L2 would prefer isolated FFI as their preferred grammar instruction approach (Ansarin et al., 2015).

Although a handful of studies are available, to the best of our knowledge, no large-scale study has been reported on L2 learners' beliefs about isolated and integrated FFI in a setting where learning English is a curricular requirement of the educational system and how their beliefs might be influenced by their individual differences such as grade level, exposure to L2, and proficiency within a specific context. Additionally, research on L2 learners' beliefs has provided plenty of evidence underlying the impact of (mis)matches in beliefs system on the success or failure of L2 learning (Jean & Simard, 2011, Loewen et al. 2009). As argued in Graus and Coppen (2016) these incongruencies could originate from multiple sources including individuals' personal and professional experiences with regard to learning and teaching L2 which by themselves would vary from context to context. Sato and Storch (2020) extend the argument and call for considering beliefs as contextually situated phenomena overlooking which would minimize our understanding of L2 learning and teaching. In other words, designing and delivering successful and practical

instructional L2 tasks hinges upon understanding the contextual affordances that L2 practitioners face. To address these limitations, the current study tried to consider both context and individual factors. To do so, we seek to explore (1) the extent to which Iranian secondary EFL students believe in isolated and integrated FFI, and (2) the influence of language proficiency, L2 exposure, major, and grade level on their stated beliefs.

The following research questions guided the current study:

1. What are the preferences for isolated and integrated FFI among Iranian high school students learning English in the mainstream K-12 education system?
2. To what extent are the Iranian high school students' preferences for isolated and integrated FFI influenced by their educational background factors?

Method

Context of Research

Out of the 100 countries listed in EF Proficiency Index, Iran is ranked as the first among the Middle East countries and 56th among all the countries listed (Education First, 2020). With an overall score of 483 out of 800, Iran is listed among the low English proficiency countries (Education First, 2020). In Iranian K-12 education system, which is a centralized educational system and all policies and curricula (e.g., textbooks, time to start learning L2) come from Ministry of Education, English is a mandatory subject at both K-12 schools and higher education. In K-12 schools, learning English formally starts from 7th grade and ends in 12th grade when students graduate from high school. Despite efforts to reform the English language instruction at K-12 schools and promoting communicative language teaching (CLT), English instruction is still delivered in a top-down manner with less attention to teachers and learners' attitudes toward the appropriate method of course delivery, teaching materials and teaching and learning environment. In other words, English instruction is still delivered mostly via a combination of grammar translation and audiolingual methods while the major concern is transferring the linguistic knowledge rather than the communicative aspect of language.

Sample and Data Collection

Implementing snowball sampling procedure, a total of 1,211 high school students from different geographical locations in Iran ranging in age from 15 to 18 participated in this study. Generally, students attending high school are in grade 10, 11, or 12 and can select one of the following majors: Science, humanities, and math. Upon initial screening, any incomplete or randomly answered surveys were removed. The final dataset included responses from 1,053 students (281 male, 772 female) with a mean age of 16.62 (*SD* = 0.85). Upon securing the approval of the study by the Institutional Review Board of a southern university in the U.S. and securing the permission from local education offices, we contacted the schools and invited them to coordinate in this research. Upon securing each school's approval, we handed informed consent forms to prospective participants which they signed before taking part in this study. Table 1 provides a summary of participants' demographic information.

		Female (*N* = 772)	Male (*N* = 281)
Grade	10th	343 (44%)	122 (43 %)
	11th	249(32 %)	115 (41%)
	12th	180 (23%)	44 (16%)
Major	Humanities	161 (21%)	74 (26%)
	Math	208 (27%)	97 (35%)
	Science	403 (52%)	110 (39%)
Proficiency	Starter	130 (17%)	71 (25%)
	Pre-Intermediate	172 (22%)	68 (24%)
	Intermediate	288 (37%)	96 (34%)
	Upper- Intermediate	182 (24%)	46 (16%)

Note. Dependent variables used for analysis were grade, major, proficiency level, and gender.

Table 1. Participants profile (N = 1,053)

Measures

Since this study is about secondary students' preferences for the integration or isolation of grammar instruction, we used an adapted version of a survey originally developed by Valeo and Spada (2016). Following the guidelines provided in Dörnyei and Taguchi (2010), we modified and translated the survey into Farsi to make it suitable for the sample recruited in this study (see Wind et al., 2019) for detailed description of validation process). The modified survey included four major parts: (1) background information (gender, age, grade, self-reported proficiency), (2) two 4-point Likert scale items on the effectiveness of textbook and teacher(s)' instructional practices (1 = high impact, 2 = low impact, 3 = equal impact, 4 = no impact), (3) 5-point Likert scale items related to isolated and integrated FFI (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), and (4) an open-ended question for further comments. In total, there were 26 items in the survey adapted from Valeo and Spada (2016) that evenly distributed between integrated and isolated items.

Procedure

In order to collect the data for this study, we applied a snowball sampling method in order to reach out to more participants. Accordingly, we contacted some of our colleagues in different cities and asked them to help us to publicize the study in their schools and others within their school districts. Prior to the distribution of the surveys, we obtained research permission by the local research department of Iranian Ministry of Education in the selected school districts. Additionally, we obtained the consent from school authorities to distribute the survey in each selected school. Finally, we obtained consent from EFL learners prior to distributing the surveys.

Analysis

As part of a larger study, we first explored the psychometric properties of the adapted survey and validated it using Rasch measurement theory, principal component analysis (PCA), and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The results of the validation process were reported elsewhere (see Wind et al., 2019). For the purpose of this specific study, we analyzed the collected data using SPSS 25.0. Descriptive statistics (Table 2 and Figure 1), paired-sample t-test was conducted to assess the difference (if any) between integrated and isolated FFI. Moreover, multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to examine students' preferences for grammar instruction and the influence of L2 proficiency, major, and grade level on their preferences. We also used Type III Sum Square in MANOVA, because of unbalanced sample size between our groups (Pituch & Stevens, 2015).

		Language Preference					
		Integrated			Isolated		
			95% CI			95%CI	
Independent Variables	Levels	M (SD)	Lower	Upper	M (SD)	Lower	Upper
Grade	10th	3.50 (.03)	3.44	3.55	3.19 (.03)	3.14	3.25
	11th	3.35 (.03)	3.29	3.40	3.17 (.03)	3.11	3.22
	12th	3.41 (.04)	3.34	3.48	3.10 (.04)	3.03	3.17
Major	Humanity	3.39 (.04)	3.32	3.46	3.15 (.04)	3.08	3.22
	Science	3.39 (.03)	3.33	3.44	3.22 (.03)	3.17	3.27
	Math	3.48 (.03)	3.42	3.54	3.09 (.03)	3.02	3.15
Proficiency	Starter	3.35 (.04)	3.27	3.42	3.20 (.04)	3.13	3.28
	Pre-intermediate	3.36 (.03)	3.30	3.43	3.18 (.03)	3.11	3.25
	Intermediate	3.47 (.03)	3.41	3.53	3.21 (.03)	3.15	3.26
	Upper-intermediate	3.50 (.04)	3.42	3.57	3.02 (.04)	2.95	3.09

Table 2. ISO-FFI and INT-FFI comparison between participants with different grades, major, and language

Results

In order to calculate the mean score in each subscale of questionnaires, descriptive data analyses were conducted (Appendix 1). As mentioned earlier, besides providing responses to the items regarding the integration or isolation of grammar, participants responded to the items related to demographic information, practicality of their course book, and the effectiveness of their teacher and textbook. Only 30% of participants found their book of high practicality while the remaining found their textbook to be partial (30%) or low (35%) practical in their learning. Moreover, 59% of respondents believed that their teacher played a more important role in their learning compared to their textbook. As the responses to these two questions

were not normally distributed and to keep the sample homogenous, these two factors were excluded from further analysis. The results are presented in order of analysis described in Data Analysis section.

Comparison between Integrated and Isolated FFI

To examine how participants' responses to items differed based on subscales, a paired-sample t-test was conducted. Accordingly, there was a significant difference in the mean scores of integrated (M = 3.44, SD = 0.54) and isolated (M = 3.19, SD = 0.53) items, t (1052) = 11.292, p < .001, Cohen's d = 0.35, 95% CI [0.20, 0.29]. These results suggest that participants' language learning preference was dependent on the form of instruction. Particularly, participants indicated they prefer to learn grammar when it is integrated with communication.

Grammar instruction preference and educational setting differences

The other focus of the current paper was to examine the effect of participants' grade, major, and language proficiency as well as any potential interaction between these variables on participants' grammar instruction preference. For this purpose, a 3 x 3 x 4 (Grade [10th, 11th, and 12th] × Major [humanity, science, and math] × language proficiency [starter, pre-intermediate, intermediate, and upper-intermediate]) MANOVA was conducted.

As the result indicated, there was no significant three-way interaction effect, Wilks' λ = .97, F (24, 2034) = 1.23, p = .20, η_p^2 = .014; thus, it was removed from further analyses. Likewise, the two-way interaction between major and proficiency, Wilks' λ = .99, F (12, 2056) = 1.10, p = .35, η_p^2 = .006, and grade and proficiency, Wilks' λ = .98, F (12, 2068) = 1.55, p = .10, η_p^2 = .009, did not reach statistical significance. The only interaction effect that reached the significant level was interaction between grade and major, Wilks' λ = .98, F (8, 2080) = 3.14, p = .002, η_p^2 = .012; however, the effect was small. The univariate interaction of grade and major obtained for integrated FFI, F (4, 1041) = 4.11, p = .003, η_p^2 = .016; and isolated FFI, F (4, 1041) = 2.44, p = .045, η_p^2 = .009.

A pairwise comparison showed that students in 12th grade who majored in Science reported the least agreement with the statements in integrated FFI (M = 3.24); whereas 10th graders majored in Math had the highest score in integrated FFI (M = 3.55). For the isolated FFI, the highest score was reported by participants in Science major in 10th grade (M = 3.31), and the lowest score was from 12th grade participants in Math (M = 2.97). In general, participants studying Science major felt that integrating grammar with communication activities is less effective for their grammar learning, as they went to the next grade. Similar pattern was observed among the same group of participants with respect to isolated items, however the difference was less noticeable. For the other two majors (i.e., Math and Humanity), the pattern of change fluctuated depending on the grade. Particularly, participants in 11th grade studying Math were less in favor of integrating grammar compared to both 10th and 12th grades. Likewise, humanity majors' responses to the isolated items fluctuated over grade with a small increase of agreement among 12th grade. On the contrary, participants who majored in Math reported less and less agreement with isolating grammar learning from communicative activities as they went to the next grade (Figure 1).

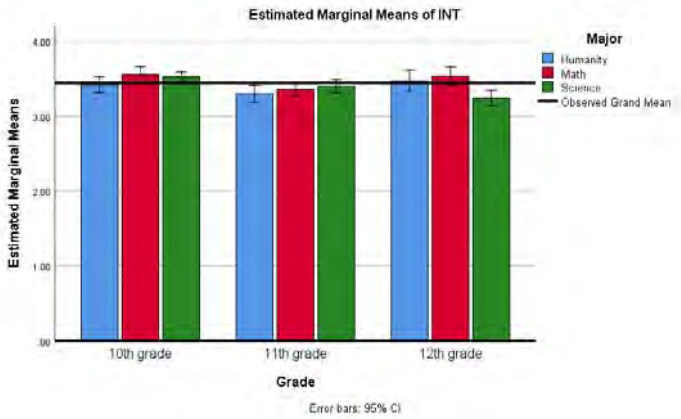

Figure 1. Mean comparison of grammar instruction preferences based on grade and major

Effect of grade on language preference

The multivariate result was significant for grade, Wilks' λ = .98, *F* (4, 2080) = 4.60, *p* = .001, η_p^2 = .009, indicating a difference in the student's preference toward one form of grammar instruction among 10th, 11th, and 12th graders. The univariate *F* tests showed there was a significant difference between grades for integrated items, *F* (2, 1041) = 7.175, *p* = .001, η_p^2 = .014; but not for isolated items, *F* (2, 1041) = 2.293, *p* = .101, η_p^2 = .004. Students in higher grades indicated less agreement with isolating grammar learning from communication; however, the difference between each grade was negligible. On the contrary, depending on participants' grade, the responses for integrated items differ significantly. Particularly, students in 10th grade preferred integrating grammar instruction with communicative activities significantly more than the other two grades.

Effect of major on language preference

A significant multivariate main effect of major was found, Wilks' λ = .98, *F (*4, 2080) = 4.92, *p* = .001, η_p^2 = .009. Since the result of the test was significant, we examined the univariate main effects. The results showed a significant effect of participants' major in high school on responses to the isolated items: *F (*2, 1041) = 5.93, *p* = .003, η_p^2 = .011, but not on responses to the integrated items *F (*2, 1041) = 2.98, *p* = .051, η_p^2 = .006. Results of a pairwise comparison suggested that participants majored in math indicated less agreement with isolated items compared to other two groups, especially with students in science major, who had the highest score in this subscale. Although participants who majored in humanity scored in the middle, the difference between this group and the other two was not significant.

To summarize, although all participants indicated they preferred to learn grammar in parallel with communicative activities, still if they were exposed to learn grammar separately from communication, participants in science and humanity majors thought this method would be more effective.

Effect of language proficiency on language preference

The multivariate effect of language proficiency was significant, Wilks' λ = .97, F (6, 2080) = 5.96, p < .001, ηp2 = .017, suggesting at least in one of the subscales there is a significant difference between participants with various language proficiency background. Significant univariate main effects of language proficiency were obtained for integrated FFI, F (3, 1041) =4.442, p = .004, ηp2 = .013, and isolated FFI, F (3, 1041) = 6.798, p < .001, ηp2 = .019.

Results of a pairwise comparison revealed that participants grouped as Starter and Pre-intermediate proficient differ significantly from their peers in the other two groups (Intermediate and Upper-intermediate) on their response to integrated items. Particularly, participants with the highest proficiency had the highest score in this subscale, which was significantly different from Starter group (p = .003) and those in Pre-intermediate level (p = .010). Likewise, respondents in intermediate level had a significantly higher score in Integrated subscale compared to the two other groups with lower language proficiency level (Starter, p = .011; and, Pre-intermediate, p = .034). On the isolated subscale, however, the only significant difference was found between participants in Upper-intermediate level, who had the lowest score on this subscale, and other participants in the remaining groups (all ps < .05). On this subscale, the Intermediate group had the highest score followed by Starter and Pre-intermediate. However, the difference between them was non-significant.

Considering the result of pairwise comparison and inspection of the mean in each subscale, it can be noted that as language proficiency level of students increases, they play a more active role in their language learning process and develop their sense of agency in expressing their preference in learning and become more interested in integrating grammar learning with communication. Table 2 summarizes the details.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore Iranian high school students' attitudes and preferences toward integrated and isolated FFI grammar instruction in their adapted CLT-based curriculum. It also investigated how individual and educational differences might have impacted their attitudes towards the two approaches of grammar instruction. To meet this goal, we administered an adapted version of Valeo and Spada's (2016) survey to a large sample of high school students in Iran. Our findings suggest that attitudes towards grammar instruction are developed at both individual and contextual levels. Students' educational and individual characteristics were found to be highly influential in determining how they perceive grammar instruction. For example, students' grade level and their perceived proficiency can be viewed as their

exposure to L2 input as mentioned in Spada and Lightbown (2008). Accordingly, the more the learners' exposure to a particular L2 form, the more they would pay attention to the communicative aspects of grammar. This study also yielded similar results. The students who were studying at higher grade levels had more exposure to L2 input and rated themselves more proficient in the target L2. Thus, they were more interested in receiving their instruction in communicative mode instead of receiving it as decontextualized and mechanical drills. On the other hand, students who had less exposure to L2 and were studying in lower grade levels reported to view isolated grammar instruction as their preferred approach. In this sense, they preferred explicit grammar instruction and learning the forms not integrated into a communicative task.

The results reported in this study are in line with the existing findings supported in the research on nexus of content and meaning in teaching and learning L2. With that being said, our findings support the arguments on the inclusion of teaching and learning grammatical forms within the communicative tasks and activities practiced in L2 classes (Khezrlou, 2019; Sato & Storch, 2020; Valeo & Spada, 2016) where researchers have observed the effectiveness of grammar instruction in which grammatical forms are integrated within communicative tasks (Sato & Storch, 2020; Valeo & Spada, 2016). Although we framed this study by looking at the two scales of isolated FFI and integrated FFI, they are both part of the broad range of form-focused grammar instruction. However, as shown in the findings, high school L2 learners' interest and preference for learning grammar in an integrated FFI mode and within communicative activities can be an indicator of valuing the communicative ability over the sole mastery of forms in their L2 learning process. This interpretation requires teachers and curriculum developers to "identify, describe and account for all the various strategic behaviors that learners fall back on when studying target language grammar, not to mention apprise their effectiveness, determine the effects of training or describe the factors impacting their use" (Pawlak, 2009, p. 45). In other words, once instructional practices, educational policies, contextual affordances of L2 education, and students' needs are aligned, all stakeholders can expect successful outcomes in terms of both L2 teachers and students' success in their endeavor.

Interpreting the findings of the study from the lens of existing scholarship on the role of context in L2 education can also be noteworthy. As advocated in Sato and Storch (2020), acknowledging the context-dependent nature of L2 teaching and learning and approaching any forms of L2 instruction as a contextually meaning making and communicative process, we assert that educational practices need to be designed and adjusted with regard to the affordances, limitations, and sensitivities that exist in target instructional context. Developing a comprehensive understanding of the contextual nuances would lead a better conceptualization of the dynamics among the instructed language, learners, teachers, and other stakeholders which eventually lead to improvement of the instruction and enhancement of learning. In line with this argument, we interpreted context as an instructional environment in which language learners' needs and purposes are influenced by the various educational and curricular policies leading to a more realistic understanding of "the sociolinguistic status of the target language in a given community" and "instructional settings where the learners are situated" (Sato & Storch, 2020, p. 3). Research has shown that there is a gap between what policymakers have in mind and what teachers, learners, and schools implement. The existence of the gap shows an ideological distance between these two camps which makes all those policies inactive. Undoubtedly, the source of such a divergence and mismatch originates from the differences between explicit policies and ideologies policymakers adopt and what actually get implemented. This divergence influences all aspects of formal English education, leading to mismatches between what learners prefer to learn and what actually takes place in the Iranian secondary schools. Despite the existing motives and actions in promoting CLT in Iranian secondary schools, the system is still exam-oriented, thus involving students in preparing for tests instead of being able to learn English through performing discipline-related tasks. The end result of such a mismatch between what learners actually learn in the classroom and what educational policies pursue is that students will not be able to use the accumulated knowledge in their future career.

Conclusion

The findings implicate the inclusion of learners' beliefs and preferences in L2 instruction in a context in which the curricula are designed to promote communicative language teaching and learning. In other words, the findings suggest that a bottom-up approach to grammar instruction and hence L2 teaching and learning are more beneficial in achieving the goals set in the investigated educational context. Narrowing the gap and minimizing the mismatches in beliefs held by students and teachers and reframing practices based on the

perceived congruencies would help EFL teachers set and pursue achievable goals for their classes. In this sense, teachers need to modify their instructional strategies based on the communicative needs of the learners while keeping the main aims of the instruction in the hindsight. Moreover, teachers' awareness on the timing of applying each form of grammar instructions (i.e., isolated FFI and integrated FFI) can be included in designing and modifying the various kinds of task (e.g., pre-instruction and post-instruction) they intend to bring to the class.

On the other hand, students' dissatisfaction with textbooks and their overall preference for more integrated FFI shows that achieving more positive outcomes depended on a set of interwoven factors: teachers' practice, ELT materials, and educational policies. In order to include L2 learners' beliefs and preferences in instructional practices, teachers need to be equipped with the ability to raise their awareness about their students' preferences. One way to make it possible is providing teachers with the necessary critical skills in their teacher education programs. This requires a shift from the current banking model of education in Iranian educational system to a more critical pedagogy-oriented system in which teachers and subsequently learners can be more autonomous and self-efficient. In line with this argument, ELT policy makers and material developers are also encouraged to conduct thorough needs analysis about what students need to learn and consider the findings of the existing research and adapt in a way to both address the cultural sensitivities as well as enhance the learning outcome.

Like any other L2-related research, our study also bears some shortcomings which need to be considered while interpreting the findings. First, our study solely relied on participants' self-reported responses to survey items regarding their beliefs and preferences on two approaches of grammar instruction without directly investigating learner's learning process. We are aware that using questionnaires could be restrictive since they minimize the opportunity to have participants' own voices. Future studies are encouraged to use multiple sources of data (e.g., written journal entries, classroom observation, and interviews) to sketch a more detailed picture of learners' stated beliefs. Moreover, our data solely came from public schools in the research context. However, there are other types of schools (e.g., private schools) which might pursue other instructional approaches mostly in the form of extracurricular activities and programs. Further studies could shed light on the congruences and incongruences of grammar instruction approaches among the students in these schools.

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Appendix 1. Descriptive Statistic of Items

	Mean	Std. Deviation
INT1: Grammar should be taught during communicative activities.	3.51	1.113
ISO1: I like to study grammar before I use it.	3.67	1.058
INT2: I like learning grammar by communicating.	3.69	1.105
INT3: I can learn grammar during reading or speaking activities.	3.42	1.085
ISO2: I like lessons that focus only on teaching grammar.	2.42	1.047
INT4: Doing communicative activities is the best way to use English accurately.	3.68	.973
ISO3: I like grammar teaching before, not during, communicative activities.	3.64	1.060
INT5: My grammar improves when I do communicative activities.	3.79	.934
ISO4: I like the teacher to correct my mistakes after I finish communicative activities.	3.96	.974
ISO5: I find it hard to learn grammar by reading or listening.	2.86	1.190
INT6: I like activities that focus on grammar and communication at the same time.	3.66	1.005
ISO6: My English will improve if I study grammar separately from communicative activities.	3.05	1.100
INT7: I find it helpful when the instructor teaches grammar while we read a text.	3.27	1.096
ISO7: I like studying grammar rules first and then doing communicative activities.	3.68	1.064
INT8: I can learn grammar while reading or listening to a passage.	2.98	1.112
INT9: I like the teacher to correct my mistakes while I am doing communicative activities.	3.57	1.101
ISO8: I like learning grammar separately from communicative activities.	3.11	1.101
INT10: I like grammar teaching during communicative activities.	3.14	1.044
ISO9: Doing grammar exercises is the best way to use English accurately.	3.51	.977
INT11: I like to learn grammar as I work on different skills and activities.	3.47	.999
ISO10: Grammar should be taught separately from communicative activities.	3.17	1.153
ISO11: Before reading an article, I like to study the grammar used in it.	3.24	1.160

INT12: I like communicative activities that include grammar instruction.	3.25	.997
ISO12: I find it helpful to study grammar separately from communicative activities.	3.26	1.091
INT13: I like learning grammar during speaking, writing, listening or reading activities.	3.43	1.060
ISO13: I like grammar teaching after, not during, communicative activities.	3.01	1.199