Another Researcher Explores the Views and Expectations of Arab EFL Learners on the Role of Grammar Instruction in Developing Their Competence: A Case Study of the Preparatory-Year Students of Taif University, KSA

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Abstract: *This study is an attempt to explore the opinions and expectations of preparatory-year Saudi EFL students at Taif university's College of Education and Science in Khurma Province as to the benefits of explicit grammar instruction in developing their competence in the target language.A randomly selected sample ofpreparatory-year Taif University (n=80) participated in the study whose main aim was to explore the different reasons for which preparatory- year students at Taif University would want to be formally instructed in the different aspects of the grammar of English. To collect data for the study, the researcher designed and administeredaquestionnaire of 20 items to the sample of the study seeking their opinions,attitudes, beliefs, and expectations as to the potential benefits of classroom grammar instruction in the two-semester intensive English course they study prior to majoring in English or some other humanity disciplines. The key question this study was meant to find answers to was the extent to which the students who took part in the study equate the requirements of learning English with the grammar of English per se. The data collected were statistically treated using measures of descriptive statistics and the results clearly showed that the study participants' opinions, beliefs, and expectations of the benefits of explicit grammar instructions are positive.*

Key words: *explicit, grammar instruction, grammar teaching models/ methods*

I. Introduction

As a university EFL teacher, the researcher has experienced working with EFL secondary and tertiary students for well over a decade and a half. During those years, the researcher has taught a variety of courses ranging from freshman general English courses to supervising graduation requirement projects. Uppermost among the priorities students of English as a foreign language have is their worry about their competence (i.e. linguistic competence) in producing error-free English (which often implies grammar).

Despite the controversy of acquisition – learning distinction (Krashen 1981), research results and practicing teachers' experience have indicated that, directly or indirectly, EFL learners do benefit from grammar work, particularly if they are exposed to grammar via effective teaching techniques. However, it must be pointed out that much researching and experimenting remains to be done in order establish methodologically sound ways of dealing with grammar instruction in the context of EFL.

Compared to the four language skills that are traditionally taught as part of almost all EFL syllabi, grammar has always attracted the attention of classroom instructors, syllabus designers and educators as to what to do about it, how much of it to be put into the syllabus, and above all, how best to teach it. The plethora of literature regarding the place of grammar in the EFL syllabus past and present all bear witness to the need to time and again explore the pros and cons of the role(s) grammar is supposed to play in the development of EFL learners' competence in the target language.

Without getting too much into the complexities of what grammar is and the different approaches to it especially in the context of EFL, grammar has always been regarded as the sum total of rules that govern the correct use of language. Therefore, grammar learning is manifested in learners' ability to put its rules into actual use with clarity and accuracy. On the teaching side of the equation, the conceptualization of grammar has always been geared to methods and approaches dealing with matters related to syllabus design and classroom instruction.

II. Literature Review

In today's EFL learning-teaching context, perhaps the main researchable problems relating to grammar are: Does grammar have any role(s) to play in learning the target language? Can EFL learners successfully learn

the language without any recourse to grammar? Is grammar learning-teaching a formidable task for both EFL learners and teachers? As to the first question, a perusal of the literature on the issue of grammar learning-teaching makes it clear that the answer is that grammar can and does have a role to play in developing EFL learner's linguistic competence.

Prominent among language teaching experts who have tried to answer the question 'does explicit grammar teaching have any effect on EFL learners' grammatical competence?' was Keashen. At the beginning, Krashen (1982) strongly objected to any kind of explicit grammar teaching (EGT). He thinks that EGT leads to a 'learned' knowledge (i.e. conscious/explicit knowledge) which is useful to learners only as a 'monitor device' learners resort to edit/check their production in the target language. Krashen claims that even if learning takes place, only easy rules are thus learned. Nonetheless, acquiring the language through 'creative construction processes' is seen by Krashen as much more beneficial to learners.

To acquire language the way Krashen (1982) advocates might not be feasible especially in circumstances where the language is foreign and chances of naturalistic exposure to it are extremely limited. This is in spite of Krashen's appealing suggestion that instead of EGI teachers have to give learners lots of comprehensible input. This comprehensible input, Krashen assumes, is sufficient to help learners acquire the target language the way children acquire their L_1 (Ellis, 1999).

Subsequently, Krashen modified his views on teaching grammar and suggested that classroom formal instruction can be effective particularly in relation to adult EFL learners. In this respect, Krashen considers the formal classroom environment to be of great value to learners not only because it affords them grammar instruction, but learners benefit from 'teacher talk' and other comprehensible input elements as well.

Rutherford (1987) avoids talking of grammar teaching, instead, he uses the rubric 'grammatical consciousness-raising' which is, in essence, comprises tasks and activities meant to draw learners' attention to the formal features of the target language. The objective of these C-R tasks and activities is to ease learners through the 'grammaticization process' which refers to 'the process of achieving linguistic expression through recourse to grammatical rule'. (Rutherford, 1987: 189).

According to Widdowson (1990), grammar learning-teaching had to deal with the combination of words plus contexts and, accordingly, the fundamental issue here is to determine these words – contexts relationship. Besides, it has often been claimed that making EFL learners engaged in void/artificial grammar practice activities will hardly achieve the goal of inducing EFL learners to realize the required expression of meaning in the target language. This realization of form-meaning relationship aims at having EFL learners seeing, appreciating and becoming aware of the communicative value of grammar.

As far as EFL teachers are concerned, the essence of grammar instruction can be attributed to two main factors: first, approving or disapproving of grammar teaching; second, how best to teach grammar. For whether to approve or disapprove of grammar teaching to EFL learners there are three schools of thought: the first is in favour of always teach grammar. The second favours only a little grammar teaching and the third bars any kind of grammar teaching.

Concerning the question of how best to teach grammar, again, opinions, beliefs and practices are as divergent as are those relating to the question of approving/disapproving of grammar teaching in the first place. If the question of approving/disapproving of grammar teaching concerns EFL teachers' conviction as to teach or not to teach grammar, the question of how best to teach grammar is basically a methodology matter. So, perhaps one can say that the issue of grammar learning-teaching fundamentally hinges on EFL learners needs/wants of the target language together with EFL teachers' beliefs, principles and practice and ELT methodology.

Learning the grammar of English language is basically seen as learning the rules on which the linguistic system of English is based. Therefore, EFL learners are expected to exert a lot of efforts and spend much time learning grammar rules so as to come to grips with the intricacies and subtleties of it. Nonetheless, time and efforts, learning difficulties, stumbling blocks, frustrations and errors which underlie learning the grammar of English are what make the investigation of how EFL learners learn grammar an ever researchable topic.

The issue of grammar instruction has two aspects:

1. Explicit grammar teaching

2. Consciousness-raising activities

Grammar taught explicitly refers to the traditional, time-tested and teacher-fronted classroom instruction on grammar rules. On the other hand, consciousness-raising refers to EFL learners' attention being drawn to the workings of the linguistic system of English. In other words, EFL learners have to have a self-grown "feel" for the grammar of English through activities/tasks (i.e. input) they are exposed to.

Speaking of consciousness-raising, Ellis (1985:215) says: "… focusing on linguistic form aids the acquisition of grammatical knowledge, or … raising the learner's consciousness about the nature of target language rules helps the learner to internalize them. "According to Harmer (2001) consciousness-raising, together with other related factors, facilitates the task of learning EFL. He states "to learn the language, students need

comprehensible input which is not enough for the mighty task of L2/FL learning. The task is completed by the availability of opportunities for noticing/ consciousness-raising to help students remember language facts"(2001: 96).

Whether to use instruction or consciousness-raising with EFL learners, the crucial issue to the EFL teacher is how practically, pedagogically and effectively to make EFL learners learn the grammar of the target language. That is to say, the EFL teacher is basically looking for workable models to put grammar notions and concepts into practice. Hence, satisfying learners' goals and needs to learn the grammar of English.

Perhaps it is true that opponents of formal grammar teaching have a case in point by claiming that learning forms of the target language is one thing and learning how to use these forms to express meaning is another thing. When the formal features of the target language become known to EFL learners and with more practice to learn about these formal features, then they will be able to come up with the required form-meaning combination correctly and appropriately.

III.   Some grammar teaching models

Based on the commonly known English language teaching methods, the following models of grammar instruction can be identified:

1.   **The Grammar-Translation Model**

It goes without saying that GTM is the oldest known model of EFL grammar instruction. According to Celce-Murcia (1979: 3) and Richards and Rodgers (2001: 3-5), the following are the main features of the GTM:

-     Grammar provides the rules for putting words together, and instruction often focuses on the form and reflection.
-     Long elaborate explanations of the intricacies of grammar are given.
-     Often the only drills are exercises in translating disconnected sentences from the target language into the mother tongue.
-     Grammar is taught deductively based on sequenced grammar points systematically and in an organized way.

2.   **The Direct Language Teaching Model**

Following the criticism and rejection of GTM and based on what Richards and Rodgers (2001) call the 'Reform movement', there began an attempt to rid language teaching of the practice of heavy dependence on pedantic grammar and translation. This led to the emergence of this model to language teaching which is based on what is known in the literature as the 'natural language learning principle' (Richard and Rodgers, 2001: 9).Among the characteristics of the direct model is that grammar is to be presented along inductive lines which means that rules and explanations using the metalanguage of grammar are avoided.

3.   **The Audio-Lingual Model**

This model, with its bases in structural linguistics, regards learning a language as tantamount to learning its structural system. Hence, grammar occupies a considerable place in the audio-lingual model wherein grammar is regarded as 'a system consists of a listing of grammatical elements and rules for their linear combination into words, phrases and sentences'. (Richards and Rodgers, 2001: 55).The main types of activities in the audio-lingual model are dialogues and drills. Here, dialogues are used for contextualizing structural patterns, whereas drills are meant to instill in learners grammatical accuracy and correctness.

4.   **The Consciousness-Raising Model**

To all intents and purposes, Consciousness-Raising(C-R) activities are grammatical in nature. Rutherford (1987), a key proponent of C-R in language learning talks of 'grammatical consciousness-raising, 'instruments of grammatical exploitation' and 'grammaticization'. These different nomenclatures bear witness to the centrality of grammar in these types of language learning activities. The kind of grammar this model advocates soften regarded as pedagogic grammar (PG). The label 'pedagogic' is, of course, meant to distinguish this kind of grammar from the purely theoretical/scholarly grammars. According to Rutherford and Sharwood Smith (1988: 1), pedagogical grammar is 'the means by which acquisition of second or foreign language grammar may be expressly facilitated'.

Corder (1988: 130) thinks of PG as '… pedagogical descriptions of the target language must be devised to help the learner learn whatever it is he learns but are not the object of learning'. These pedagogical descriptions are seen as a 'continuum between pure deductive and pure inductive learning processes'

Speaking of rules and formulations, Rutherford and Sharwood Smith (1983: 3) draw attention to the fact that rules can cover a variety of things such as 'schemata, formulas, principles, conditions, constraints, postulates, hierarchies, maxims and algorithms'. So, to deal with the complexity and sophistication of rules, PG tries to provide effective and adequate ways of language learning. That is to say, PG is not about learning grammar for its own sake, rather, it is a means to help learners learn language (i.e. raising their grammatical consciousness).

5.   **Chen's Explicit Grammar Instruction Model**

Chen's (1995) Explicit Grammar Instruction (EGI) aims to enable EFL learners to use the language appropriately and correctly in communicative contexts. According to her, the name of the model is based on the term 'explicit grammar instruction' she borrowed from Terrel (1991). The term refers to teacher's use of formal instruction strategies to focus learners' attention on the formal features of the target language (a goal the model shares with C-R). In Terrel's (1991) perspective, EGI works as follows: (1) utilizing texts to be broken up to make input comprehensible, hence, learnable; (2) creating the necessary atmosphere conductive to communicating in the target language without losing sight of its formal features; (3) helping learners produce correct/accurate output in the target language (i.e. via the use of explicitly learned competence).

6. Ellis' Model of Grammar Teaching

Ellis' Model of Grammar Teaching stems from his conviction that learners expect not only benefit from learning grammar they also naturally expect teachers to teach them grammar as well. In spite of his agreement with what many studies have found about learners' inability to internalize the grammar of the target language via explicit instruction, yet, Ellis (1999) disagrees with Krashen's (1982) claim that learners can only acquire grammar naturally.

Key to Ellis' model of grammar teaching is the assumption that grammar teaching can be effective if it is done 'in a way that is compatible with how learners acquire grammar' (Ellis, 1999: 2). Ellis model of grammar teaching is based on tree principles:

• Learners need to attend to both meaning and form when learning a second language.

• New grammatical features are more likely to be acquired when learners notice and comprehend them in input more than when they engage in extensive production practice.

• Learners' awareness of grammatical forms helps them to acquire grammatical features slowly and gradually.

Contrary to Krashen's objection to exposing EFL learners to the grammar of the target language via mainly form-focused instruction, Ellis' model of grammar instruction tries to reconcile the two. That is, Ellis first makes learners to process language input for meaning and only then (i.e. after they successfully have worked out meaning) can the form-focus side of learning begin. It can be said that the model concurs with the widely-held belief that explicit grammar instruction expedites the rate / success of acquisition. The model also emphasizes the role of conscious awareness in learning the grammar of the target languageowing to the fact that grammar learning is a lengthy temporal process, learners need to be trained on how to use conscious strategies necessary for noticing and subconscious learning.

7. Bourke's Two Models of Grammar Teaching

Bourke (1989) suggests two related though contrasting grammar teaching models: the first is product-focused and the second is process-focused.

The first model (i.e. the product-focused) favours a presentation of grammar points and structures in a hierarchically systematic way beginning with the easy and simple moving on to the difficult and complex. This perspective on grammar teaching resembles what Rutherford (1987) calls the 'accumulative entities' viewpoint of grammar teaching. However, Brouke (1989: 22) believes that this model is 'systematic, analytic atomistic and its objective is to help learners generate instances of correct usage'. By focusing learners' attention on the forms of the target language, the model presumes that mastery of the mechanical side of the target language will ultimately enable learners to produce accurate and appropriate instances in the target language.

The second grammar-teaching model of Brouke (1989) is function-based which means that it is basically targeting language use rather than the mechanical side of language. In contrast to the previous model, this one moves learners from 'discourse to structure', thus, it is 'holistic rather than atomistic' (ibid, 22). Here, the main assumption is that actual language use helps learners to discover for themselves how the target language works. Since this model is discovery-oriented, it can be said that it resembles C-R wherein grammar problem solving builds grammatical competence. Of course, this feature of the model contrasts sharply with the previous one in which grammar is presented ready-made.

IV. Historical Background to Grammar Instruction in EFL Context

Previous studies relevant to the present study can be divided into two types: (1) those which hypothesize that explicit / formal instruction is always effective (2) those which claim that explicit formal instruction can be effective only to some extent. According to Long (1983: 359) these two types are called the 'absolute effect' and the 'relative utility' of instruction respectively.

Chihara and Oller's (1978) study was conducted with subjects whose L_1 is Japanese. Subjects of the study (N. 123) who represent diverse proficiency levels were experimented with for one month using both instruction and exposure to English. A battery of four discrete-point tests was used to collect data. The results of the study are: first, there was positive correlation between the amount of instruction and scores on all four tests (rs = .45 to

.48, p < 001). Second, no significant relationship was reported between the amount of exposure and tests score (rs = .01 to .02).

In (1976) Krashen and Seliger investigated the effect of both instruction and exposure on learners' development. In terms of design, the study used (14) pairs matched for measuring the effect of instruction and exposure on learners of English. An integrative test used to collect data for the study. The study found that instruction helps while exposure does not.

Another study by Krashen, Seliger and Hartnett (1974) explored the effect of both instruction and exposure on EFL learners' development. The study utilized the matched pairs design. The highlights of study are: in (8) pairs matched for the amount of practice, those with more instruction scored higher in the administered discrete-point test. That is (p < .04), and therefore, instruction was found to be helpful while exposure was not. Since this study was conducted in the U.S with EFL learners of varied L1, exposure was defined in terms of the amount of time subjects spent in the U.S.

Martin's (1980) study investigated the influence of instruction on EFL learners' development. 166 subjects took part in the study. The study was designed as follows: subjects, who were international students in the U.S. were divided into 83 pairs matched on Michigan pre-test scores had received 22.5 hours of instruction per week for a period of 14)weeks. As a treatment, half of the subjects (n. 83) lived in campus dormitories with other non-native speakers while the other half (n. 83) stayed with local families. Post-test data consisted of scores on the TOEFL and grades of class work. Using ANOVA for data analysis, the researcher found that subjects with more exposure (i.e. the ones who stayed with local families) scored high not only on the TOEFL (p < .05) but on all other tests as well (p < .001).

The study by Krashen, Jones, Zelinki and Usprich (1978) whose subjects were adult learners of English as a second language in U.S. subjects received instruction for 4.05 years. Since subjects of the study were residents of the U.S, exposure was the study's treatment. The tool of data collection was a discrete-point test. The study revealed that the amount of instruction subjects had correlates positively with test score (rs = .34 to .50, p < .005 to .001). Besides, the amount of exposure also positively correlates with test score (rs = .18 to .25, p < .05 to .01).

In (1983) Van Baalen conducted a study into the effectiveness of explicit grammar instruction. He investigated 80 Dutch-speaking school students. Subjects were grouped as follows: 20 subjects are called the 'implicit' group; two groups of 20 assigned to the 'explicit' group and the remaining 20 subjects were referred to as the 'compromise' group which combines implicit and explicit teaching strategies. A questionnaire was used to collect data for the study. Subjects were then tested using a battery of two tests: the first test is a 'story-recall' test and the second one is a 'picture' test. No time limit was set for the completion of the two tests. Data collected was analyzed focusing on (1) do-support structures; (2) –ing forms; (3) SVO-order and (4) 3^{rd}person-s (Van Baalen, 1983: 71).

On the basis of statistical analysis (i.e. subjects' means and variance indexes, actual scores percentage and t-test) the study showed that: (1) subjects who received formal instruction performed equal to those who were exposed to the language via implicit techniques on the more complex items of the study (i.e. the do-support structures and –ing forms). (2) the explicit instruction group outperformed the implicit group on the less complex items of the study (i.e. the SVO-order and 3rd person-s.

One of the implications of Van Baalen's (1983) study is that it challenges Krashen's claim that conscious awareness to grammar is not conductive to acquisition. That is, learning and acquisition (hence explicit and implicit knowledge) are separate entities; therefore, learning does not guarantee acquisition. According to Van Baalen, 'conscious attention allocated to grammar is conducive to the development of acquired knowledge'. (1983: 71).

Linnell's (1991) study was conducted to see whether EGT makes any difference in the acquisition of some English modals or whether C-R tasks and noticing are as effective as well. The duration of the study was one hour per week lasting for a six-week period. Subjects of the study were eight non-native speakers drawn from several L_1 backgrounds. The instrument of data collection was a test on the modals 'will', 'won't' and the modal equivalent 'be going to'. A covariance analysis was used to treat data generated by the test. The study's result revealed that: (1) minimal instruction can make a difference at the elementary level; (2) instruction can be effective even for a complex grammar area such as the modals.

Fotos' (1993) study showed that (1) teacher-fronted formal instruction and grammatical C-R tasks increase learners' noticing of the grammar of the target language; (2) the control group of the study which was given no grammar-noticing tasks showed no increase in their ability to notice features of the FL; (3) achievement rates of both groups of the experimental study indicated no significant differences in noticing.

One of the implications of Fotos' (1993) study for practicing EFL teachers is that classroom, teacher-led grammar work can be effective so long as it is done via noticing and C-R tasks and activities. However, what matters here most is the question whether the effectiveness of such grammar work is the same regardless of whether the grammar point dealt with is simple or complex.

El-Bana (1994) investigated the effect of formal grammar teaching on the improvement of ESL learners' writing skills. Subjects of the study were (97) university students majoring in English. Subjects were divided into experimental group (n. 46) and control group (n. 51). The experimental group was subjected to intensive teacher-fronted grammar instruction covering divers grammar points and structures lasting for (12) weeks.

The implications of El-Bana's (1994) study are: first, explicit / conscious grammar practice increases chances for learning the formal features of the target language. Second, when EFL learners are exposed to the language through formal instruction, they will be anxious to demonstrate their learning (i.e. monitoring) when circumstances arise for them to use the FL. Third, in EFL contexts, teachers have always inclined to impart grammar knowledge to learners in the belief that it helps them.

V.   Aims of the study

This study aims at the following:

1.   Exploring the different reasons for which first-year preparatory students at Taif University would want to learn the different aspects of the grammar of English.
2.   Analyzing the beliefs these students have as to learning the grammar of English.
3.   Finding out whether the materials they study meet their needs of learning the different features and aspects of English grammar.

Limitation of the Study

This study is limited to a group of beginning EFL learners (n= 200) taking a two-semester intensive English programme as part of the requirements to pursue BA study at Taif university, KSA during the academic year 2015-2016**.**

Methodology
Questions of the Study

This study was carried out to find answers to these questions:

1.   To what extent do the students in this study equate learning English with the grammar of English?
2.   What are the reasons for which these students believe that learning grammar is key to mastering the English language?
3.   How do the materials through which these students are exposed to English shape their mindset as to the significance they attach to grammar learning?
4.   What type(s) of grammar instruction/tasks/activities these students prefer in order to learn about the grammar of English?

Participants of the Study

The sample of the study (n=80) was randomly drawn from first-year male students at Taif University, College of Education and Science in Khurma completing their preparatory- year intensive English progarmme during the second semester of the academic year 2016.

Instruments of Data Collection

A questionnaire of 20 items was administered to the sample of the study (n=80). Responses are to be indicated using a three-point scale (i.e. always. sometimes and never). The questionnaire statements were constructed regarding students' attitudes, beliefs, and expectations as to the potential benefits of grammar instruction in the two-semester intensive English course.

Statistical Analyses

The data collected via the students' questionnaire was statistically treated using measures of descriptive statistics especially the mean and the standard deviation.

Table 3.1a Students' responses to statements 1-10 of the questionnaire

	Statement	Alw	Som	Nev	M	SD
1	I need grammar to understand English	61%	15%	4%	72.3	96.7
2	Grammar might help me to speak English	36%	40%	4%	64	53.8
3	Grammar is needed for reading English	35%	30%	15%	60	45
4	Grammar is needed for writing in English	44%	30%	6%	66	63.2
5	Grammar is the most needed part of learning English.	41%	30%	9%	64	57

6	Learning English starts with learning its grammar	50%	25%	5%	68.3	74.2
7	Without much grammar learning, I will not be able to learn English.	40%	35%	5%	65	57.7
8	Due to my intermediate and secondary schooling, I believe that grammar is *the* key to learning English.	41%	17%	2%	53	62.7
9	I had to study grammar in order to major in English.	40%	25%	15%	61.7	53.5
10	Grammar courses distinguish English majors from other learners of English.	34%	40%	6%	62.7	50.3
11	Grammar develops logical and reasoning skills need for the study of English	43%	27%	10%	64.3	60.2

- Number of respondents 80
- Alw = Always
- Nev = Never
- SD = Standard Deviation
- Som = Sometimes
- M = Mean

Students' responses to the questionnaire showed that 61% indicated that grammar instruction is always needed to understand the English language on the whole. However, when respondents were asked to state their views regarding the benefits of grammar instruction in improving their speaking, reading and writing skills in English, responses varied as is shown in table 3.1a.40% pointed out that grammar instruction is only sometimes helpful in developing their speaking skills in English compared to 35% who stated that grammar instruction is always helpful for better English speaking skills. As for the usefulness of grammar instruction to improving EFL learners' writing skills, the vast majority of the study's sample did agree that they either always or sometimes (44% and 30% respectively) needed grammar instruction to write in English.

Students' responses to the question whether grammar is the most needed part of learning English showed that 41% did indicate that grammar is always the most needed component of their EFL syllabus compared to only 9% who tended to view grammar as 'never' the most important part of their learning materials. As EFL learners, statement six of the questionnaire which was meant to find out what students believe should be the component to begin the study of English with, 50% admitted that learning English should always start with learning its grammar. However, only 5% did not see grammar as the part of the syllabus they should start learning English with. Participants' responses to the next two statements of the questionnaire (i.e. seven and eight in table 3.1a) seem to follow the trend that has emerged so far concerning their views and expectations of grammar instruction. Without much grammar learning, 40% of the sample surveyed indicated that they always think they will not be able to learn English. On the other hand, 41% of the students who participated in the study said that their views on grammar in the context of the EFL syllabus were always largely based on what they were told should be the role of grammar instruction in developing their competence.

Previously, the preparatory-year students of Taif University in Saudi Arabia study two intensive English courses (i.e.in two semesters)prior to specializing in either humanity or science disciplines. According to statement nine in table 3.1a, 40% of the respondents viewed grammar instruction and learning as always a requirement to specialize in English compared to 15% who did not look at grammar as a 'must' for majoring in English. Whether or not grammar courses distinguish English majors from other learners of English, 40% of the study's sample said that they sometimes think that English majors, unlike other EFL learners, had to study a lot of grammar.

Table 3.1b Students' responses to statements 12-20 of the questionnaire

	Statement	Alw	Som	Nev	M	SD
12	Grammar tasks and activities make English Majors less dependent on their teachers.	38%	28%	14%	61.3	50.2
13	Grammar improves my intellectual and academic potentials	33%	37%	10%	61	45.9
14	The quality of my English is determined by the amount of grammar I study as an English major.	42%	30%	8%	64.7	59.1
15	Grammar helps me to read and understand English literature.	45%	30%	5%	66.7	65.3
16	Grammar enables me to watch and enjoy English movies	40%	30%	10%	63.3	55.1
17	Learning English means learning the grammar of English.	45%	34%	1%	68	67
18	You are good at English when you know the	44%	30%	6%	66	63.2

	grammar of English.					
19	Studying grammar brings my English closer to that of native speakers of the language.	37%	38%	5%	64	54
20	Grammar tasks/activities motivate me to learn the rules of the language.	46%	24%	10%	65.3	65.7

- Number of respondents 80
- Alw = Always • Som = Sometimes
- Nev = Never   •   M = Mean
- SD = Standard Deviation

Table 3.1b lists respondents' answers to statements 11-20 of the questionnaire administered to the sample of the study (n 80). From the table, it is apparent that students' views and expectations of the role and benefits of grammar instruction continue to corroborate the pattern the researcher believes has emerged so far. That is, on the whole, respondents tended to have strongly positive views as to the benefits of explicit grammar instruction in the EFL context: to them, grammar is always desired to be present in classroom teaching and learning activities. Referring to whether grammar develops logical and reasoning skills needed for the study of English as well as improving academic and intellectual skills, 43% of the participants stated that grammar can always develop their logical and reasoning skills. However, 37% pointed out that grammar instruction can only sometimes help them to improve their academic and intellectual skills.

In their quest for improving their English language skills, can EFL students especially those who are planning to major in English, depend more on doing grammar activates and tasks than waiting for their teachers and instructors to lead them through the difficulties and complexities of the English language system? Less than half of the students who took part in the study (n 80), that is, 38% opted to say that grammar tasks and activities can always make them feel that they are less dependent on their teachers vis-a-vis 14% who held to the view that grammar tasks and activities can never make them feel less dependent on their teachers. Statement number fourteen of the questionnaire asked respondents whether they think that the quality of their English, when/if they major in English, will to be evaluated mainly on the basis of how much grammar they are going to study and subsequently know.42% of the sample of the study indicated that how good or not the quality of their English might be, will always be linked to the amount of grammar they will study as EFL students. By comparison, only 8% of the students surveyed expressed the view that they never felt that the quality of their English will be determined by how much grammar they are going to study and master when/if they become English majors.

Do EFL students have to worry about grammar when it comes to reading and understanding English literature or watching movies in English? According to the responses generated by statements fifteen and sixteen of the study's questionnaire, 45% of the participants of the study agreed that grammar can always help them to read and understand English literature. Similarly, 40% viewed grammar as always needed in order to watch and enjoy movies in English.

It goes without saying that, amongst other components, the study of English language may entail the study some aspects of English grammar. However, can learning English as a foreign language be equated with learning its grammar? According to respondents' answers shown in table 3.1b, 45% admitted that, to them, learning the English language always means leaning its grammar. 34% chose the 'sometimes' point of the questionnaire's answering scale regarding statement seventeen of the questionnaire. In addition, the majority of the study's participants (i.e. 44%) pointed out that EFL student are said to be good at English on the merits of grammar knowledge. Interestingly, when asking the EFL students who took part in the study whether they consider the study of grammar as a sure means of bringing the quality of their English closer to that of native English speakers, 38% said that they sometimes believe that a lot of grammar study brings their English closer to that of native English speakers while only 5% stated that they never thought so.

In the last statement of the study's questionnaire, respondents' views as to whether grammar tasks and activities motivate EFL learners to learn the language. 46% opted to say that grammar tasks and activities always motivate EFL learners to learn the language; 24% said sometimes and 10% believed that grammar tasks and activities never motivate EFL learners to learn the language.

VI.   Results of the study

The scope of this study is limited to a group of 80 preparatory-year students at Taif University, KSA who study two-semester intensive general English courses prior to joining either humanity or science bachelor programmes of study. Therefore, the results and findings shown in the previous tables are valid only as far as the study participants are concerned. With reference to the results and findings arrived at via the analysis of the data generated by the study's questionnaire (tables 3.1a and 3.1b); the statistics indicate that, on the whole, participants' views and expectations of grammar instruction and its benefits to developing their competence are

positive. By positive, and as far as the study's design is concerned, it has been found that with almost all the questionnaire's statements, respondents tended to be on the 'always' side of the questionnaire' responses points (i.e. always, sometimes and never). Therefore, results can be highlighted as follows:

1. Grammar is *always* needed for understanding English.
2. Learning English *always* starts with learning its grammar.
3. Grammar tasks and activities *always* motivate me to learn English.
4. Learning English *always* starts with learning its grammar
5. Grammar *always* helps me to read and understand English literature.
6. Grammar is *always* needed for writing in English.
7. Grammar is *always* needed for writing in English.
8. Grammar *always* develops logical and reasoning skills needed for the study of English.
9. The quality of my English is *always* determined by the amount of grammar I study as an English major.
10. Grammar is *always* the most needed part of learning English.

VII.   Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications

This study was conducted to provide answers to the following questions:

1. To what extent do the students in this study equate learning English with the grammar of English?
2. What are the reasons for which these students believe that learning grammar is key to mastering the English language?
3. How do the materials through which these students are exposed to English shape their mindset as to the significance they attach to grammar learning?
4. What type(s) of grammar instruction/tasks/activities these students prefer in order to acquire the grammar of English?

According to the opinions, views and expectations of the ELF students (n 80) who participated in the study, it can be said that the majority of them did express a strong opinion as to their need of English grammar instruction (50%) and the positive role it plays in the very beginning of their study of English as a foreign language, hence, developing their linguistic competence in the target language. As for the role grammar instruction can play in improving their learning of the skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing as is expressed in statements 1, 2, 3 and 4 of the study's questionnaire (table 3.1a), responses were noticeably diverged. Whereas 61% of the students surveyed indicated that grammar is very much needed for understanding English, 44% said that grammar is importantly needed for writing. As for whether grammar is needed for speaking English, 40% of the respondents tended to see grammar as important for speaking only *sometimes*. Regarding the place of grammar in the reading skill in the target language, 35% opted to say it is *always* needed compared to 30% who considered grammar instruction as *sometimes* needed in improving their reading skills in English.

The second question this study sought to find answer to was the reasons why the EFL students investigated believe that learning grammar is *key* to mastering the target language. 40% of the respondent' views indicated that without much grammar learning, they will not be able to learnEnglish.44% of the students surveyed believed that when their teachers recognize their English as good, they do so only because of the grammar knowledge they attained. In addition, 42% of them pointed out that the quality of their English is very much connected with the amount of grammar they studied in their school or university syllabi. 40% admitted that the reason for them to study grammar is that they would like to major in English later on. Does the study of grammar bring the language of EFL learners closer to that of native speakers? Respondents' views were split between yes it *sometimes* does (38%) and yes it *always* does (37%).

Due to the textbooks and materials through which they were exposed to the English language during their intermediate and secondary schooling, data analysis revealed that 40% of the students who took part in the study were made to believe that grammar instruction and memorizing the rules of grammar is *always* indispensable for the study of English as a foreign language. This opinion is also featured in respondents' view wherein 45% did acknowledge that learning English means learning the grammar of English.

In connection with the fourth question of the study which asked about the type(s) of grammar instruction/tasks/activities the participants of the study prefer in order to learn the target language, the statistics have shown that 46% agreed that they always preferred grammar instruction/tasks/activities which focus on grammar rules. Not only that, they did also indicate that they always find grammar instruction/tasks/activities which are based on teaching the grammar rules, motivating for them to acquire the target language.

Appendix: Students' questionnaire

Dear student,

I have designed this questionnaire to find out your views, attitudes, beliefs and expectations regarding grammar instruction during your preparatory-year intensive English course. I absolutely assure you that your responses will only be used by me for the purpose of carrying out this study.

Please respond to each of the following statements by ticking (√) your choice:

	Statement	Alw	Som	Nev
1	I need grammar to understand English			
2	Grammar might help me to speak English			
3	Grammar is needed for reading English			
4	Without enough knowledge of grammar, I will not be able to write in English.			
5	I believe that grammar is the most needed part of learning the English language.			
6	Because English is not my mother tongue, I have to start learning English by learning its grammar first.			
7	My teachers have always told me that without much grammar learning, I will not be able to achieve success in learning English.			
8	Due to my intermediate and secondary schooling, I was made to believe that grammar is *the* key to learning English.			
9	I had to study grammar in order to major in English.			
10	Grammar courses distinguish English majors from other learners of English.			
11	Grammar develops logical and reasoning skills needed for the study of English.			
12	Grammar tasks and activities make English majors less dependent on their teachers.			
13	Grammar improves my intellectual and academic potentials.			
14	The quality of my English is very much determined by the amount of grammar I study as an English major.			
15	Grammar helps me to read and understand English literature.			
16	Grammar enables me to watch and enjoy English movies.			
17	To me, learning English means learning the grammar of English.			
18	Someone is said to be good at English when they know the grammar of English.			
19	Studying grammar brings my English closer to that of native speakers of the language.			
20	Grammar tasks and activities motivate me to learn the rules of the language.			

- Alw = Always   •   Som = Sometimes
- Nev = Never
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