# Identifying Grammar Learning Strategies Used by EFL Learners to Develop Explicit and Implicit Knowledge of Grammar

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**الملخص**

تناقش الدراسة استخدام استراتيجيات تعلم قواعد اللغة الأجنبية (الانجليزية) التي استعملها المشاركون في الدراسة لتطوير معرفتهم الصريحة والضمنية (explicit and implicit knowledge) لقواعد اللغة الأجنبية حيث أن هذا المجال البحثي لم يكن تحت محط أنظار الباحثين لفترة طويلة. شارك في الدراسة 172 طالباً من طلاب السنة التحضيرية بمعهد الجبيل للغة الانجليزية والسنة التحضيرية حيث قاموا بتعبئة جزئين من استبانة حديثة صممها الباحث البولندي Mirosław Pawlak لقياس استراتيجيات تعلم قواعد اللغة الأجنبية كما شارك 24 طالباً منهم في أربع مقابلات لمجموعات اهتمام بؤرية focus) (group لمعرفة المزيد عن استعمال الطلاب لتلك الاستراتيجيات. أظهرت نتائج الاستبانة استعمالاً متوسطاً لاستراتيجيات تعلم قواعد اللغة لتطوير المعرفة الصريحة والضمنية لقواعد اللغة مع قليلٍ من التفوق لاستعمال استراتيجيات تعلم قواعد اللغة لتطوير المعرفة الضمنية لقواعد اللغة بين المشاركين. وكان من أعلى الاستراتيجيات المستخدمة لتطوير المعرفة الصريحة لقواعد اللغة استعمالاً "محاولة فهم كل قاعدة لغوية" أما أقل الاستراتيجيات استعمالاً لتطوير المعرفة الصريحة لقواعد اللغة فكانت "استخدام الإيقاع الصوتي والأغاني لتذكر قواعد اللغة". أما أعلى الاستراتيجيات المستعملة لتطوير المعرفة الضمنية لقواعد اللغة فكانت "استخدام قواعد اللغة في سياق سليم وذي معنى وذلك في أقرب وقت" أما أقل الاستراتجيات استعمالاً لتطوير المعرفة الضمنية لقواعد اللغة فكانت " محاولة ضبط طريقة معالجة النصوص المنطوقة أو المكتوبة بحسب ماهي عليه في قواعد اللغة الأجنبية". كما أظهرت نتائج مقابلات المجموعات البؤرية استعمالات متنوعة لاستراتيجيات أخرى شملت استراتيجيات للانتباه وأخرى لتسهيل الفهم واستراتيجيات للتواصل مع الآخرين وأخرى لاستخدام التقنية في تعلم قواعد اللغة وكذلك استراتيجيات للتفاعل مع المعلم والكتاب المقرر. ومن اللافت للنظر أظهرت النتائج استعمال الطلاب للغتهم الأم كاستراتيجية لتعلم قواعد اللغة الأجنبية. وأخيراً دعت الدراسة إلى أهمية زيادة وعي الطلاب بمعرفة استراتيجيات تعلم قواعد اللغة الأجنبية المرتبطة بتطوير المعرفة الصريحة والضمنية لقواعد اللغة كما أشارت الدراسة إلى بعض جوانب القصور في الدراسة ومن أبرزها غياب قياس بعض العوامل المؤثرة في استخدام الاستراتيجيات كقياس عامل الشخصية أو عامل النمط التعلمي.

## Abstract

The present study addressed using Grammar Learning Strategies (GLSs) to develop explicit and implicit knowledge of grammar. This area has received little focus from researchers in the field of Language Learning Strategies (LLSs). 172 Saudi male college students enrolled in a preparatory program completed two subcategories of Pawlak's (2018) Grammar Learning Strategy Inventory (GLSI), and 24 students participated in four focus-group interviews. The purpose was to triangulate methods to collect quantitative and qualitative data to understand better what GLSs students used to develop their explicit and implicit grammar knowledge. The results showed overall medium use of GLSs for developing explicit and implicit knowledge of grammar with slight superiority for strategies used to develop implicit grammar knowledge. "I try to understand every grammar rule" was the most used strategy to develop explicit grammar knowledge, while "I use rhymes or songs to remember new grammar rules" reported the least used strategy. Under developing implicit knowledge of grammar, "I try to use grammar rules as soon as possible in a meaningful context" was reported as the most used strategy, whereas "I try to adjust the way I process spoken and written language in accordance with L2 spoken and written rules" was the least used strategy. The participants reported using a variety of GLSs, including strategies for paying attention, facilitation, communication, technology, teachers, textbooks, and mother tongue. The study presented some implications, such as raising students' awareness of using GLSs, and some limitations, like the absence of measuring other factors that affect strategy use, such as learning style or personality.

**Keywords:** *explicit and implicit learning, grammar knowledge, grammar learning strategies, language learning strategies, strategy use*

# Introduction

Learning English grammar is essential to learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). This is due to the importance of grammar in conveying correct messages while communicating in a second or foreign language (L2). Arabic learners of English face some difficulties in learning English, such as using the correct word order to build a sentence in English, differences in tenses, using definite and indefinite articles, using modal verbs, and many other challenges (Betti & Bsharah. 2023). Thus, providing those learners with helpful tools to facilitate their English grammar learning is essential. Research in Language Learning Strategies (LLSs) indicates that L2 learners use different LLSs, consciously or unconsciously (Cohen, 2011; Cohen & Macaro, 2007; Oxford, 1990, 2011, 2017), to learn different aspects of L2, where grammar is one of them. Using these LLSs positively impacts L2 learning or leads to successful learning (Dreyer & Oxford, 1996; Green & Oxford, 1995; Grenfell & Harris, 1999; Macaro, 2001).

Identifying learners' LLSs raises learners' awareness of their L2 learning (Chamot, 2005; Dickinson, 1992) and consequently improves learners' attitudes, motivation, and beliefs about their L2 learning (Oxford, 1990). Grammar Learning Strategies (GLSs) have been categorized under LLSs for decades (Oxford et al., 2007; Pawlak, 2018) until recently when Oxford et al. (2007) and Pawlak (2013, 2018) managed to separate them and assign them in an independent classification. Pawlak (2018) classified GLSs into metacognitive, cognitive, affective, and social strategies with four subcategories under cognitive strategies, as explained later. Since then, studies investigating GLSs have been increasing, though still limited, particularly exploring GLSs to develop implicit and explicit grammar knowledge.

The most important limitation of the studies that discussed GLSs is that they were mainly quantitative, where inventories were only used to measure GLSs' use. The present study mixed quantitative and qualitative methods to hear students' voices regarding using GLSs. It is considered one of the early studies that mainly and only focused on GLSs used to develop explicit and implicit grammar knowledge to alert students toward achieving the goals of developing explicit and implicit English grammar knowledge (Ellis, 2005). The present study is a continuation of exploring GLSs in the context of Arab learners of EFL since there is still a considerable lack of research in this context, and more is still needed to know how Arab learners of EFL use GLSs in general and in developing their explicit and implicit knowledge of grammar in particular. Learning more about using GLSs in this context would enhance teaching L2 grammar, raise learners' awareness of strategy use, and attract L2 teachers' attention to understand better how their students learn grammar.

The study intends to achieve the following objectives: First, it aims to identify GLSs used to develop explicit and implicit knowledge of grammar among Saudi male college students using two subcategories of Pawlak's (2018) Grammar Learning Strategy Inventory (GLSI) designated to measure GLSs used to develop explicit and implicit knowledge of grammar. Second, four focus-group interviews were implemented to collect qualitative data about using GLSs to develop explicit and implicit knowledge of grammar. This instrument was

utilized to see if interview participants could provide additional details about their GLSs rather than those presented in the GLSI. Third, identifying students' GLSs in the context of the present study will provide a clearer image of how learners learn grammar and present some guidelines for language teachers and educational establishments to enhance their educational practices regarding L2 grammar learning and teaching. Fourth, emphasizing the importance of the new category of GLSs to the field of LLSs. Fifth, raising students' awareness of GLSs and encouraging them to utilize such strategies in L2 grammar learning. Sixth, attracting L2 teachers' attention in the context of the present study and other similar contexts to GLSs and how to introduce them to their L2 learners. This can be accomplished by taking the findings of the present study and similar studies into account by all L2 teaching stakeholders where research and practice converge to enhance L2 teaching practices to contribute to more successful L2 learning positively.

Since the aim of the present study is to explore learners' GLSs to develop explicit and implicit knowledge of grammar, it is essential to note that the present study also addresses the following research questions:

1. Which GLSs to develop explicit and implicit knowledge of grammar were most and least used?
2. What other GLSs did students use to develop their explicit and implicit knowledge of grammar?

**Literature Review**

## Language and Grammar Learning Strategies

The emergence of Language learning Strategies (LLSs) was almost five decades ago when Rubin (1975) published her seminal article describing the features of good language learners. Since then, the field of LLSs has flourished, with many scholars, volumes, and manuscripts that have contributed fruitfully to the field. For example, Chamot and Harris, 2019; Chamot and O'Malley, 1994; Cohen, 2011; Cohen and Macaro, 2007; Grenfell and Harris, 1999, 2017; Griffiths, 2008, 2013, 2018; Macaro, 2001, 2006; O'Malley and Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990, 1996, 2011, 2017; Oxford and Amerstorfer, 2018; and Pawlak, 2018 which all provided the field with required knowledge and covered many relevant LLSs topics. However, Grammar Learning Strategies (GLSs) were almost neglected for decades. For example, Anderson (2005) referred to the lack of studies identifying LLSs learners employed to learn L2 grammar. This was emphasized by Oxford et al. (2007) and Oxford (2011, 2017), who pointed out that GLSs were ignored or fitted under other main cognitive strategies, and Pawlak (2013, 2018, 2021, 2024), who stressed that empirical investigations in GLSs are insufficient or scarce.

Based on DeKeyser (2017), who reinforced that the efficient use of GLSs increases learners' explicit and implicit grammar knowledge, Oxford and Amerstorfer (2018, p. 244) defined GLSs as "teachable, dynamic thoughts and behaviors that language learners consciously select and employ in specific contexts to improve their self-regulated, autonomous

L2 grammar development for effective task performance and long-term efficiency." Thus, GLSs and LLSs are similar as thoughts, actions or behaviors L2 learners intentionally or unconsciously deploy to learn their L2. However, GLSs are employed "for learning and getting better control over the use of grammar structure" (Cohen & Pinilla-Herrera, 2010, p. 64). They are needed since L2 learners analyze different grammatical structures and sentences, so such strategies will likely contribute to their grammar knowledge.

To understand the classifications of LLSs and GLSs, it is essential to understand that the theory of LLSs is "highly complex, dynamic, and eclectic, drawing inclusively on insights from many different theoretical traditions" (Griffiths, 2020, p. 3). For example, the cognitive theory includes schema theory, information processing hypothesis, and noticing hypothesis; sociocultural theory includes activity theory and communicative competence; and, recently, humanism (Pawlak, 2012). All these theories have implications for strategies such as planning, organizing, monitoring, paying attention, reasoning, activating knowledge, remembering, interacting with others, overcoming knowledge gaps, dealing with sociocultural contexts and identities, activating supportive emotions, beliefs, and attitudes, generating and maintaining motivation, and handling emotions, beliefs, attitudes, and motivation (Oxford, 2011).

Therefore, LLSs were classified into different categories by some scholars in the field. For instance, O'Malley and Chamot (1990) and Oxford (1990) classified LLSs by function into metacognitive, cognitive, social, and affective (socio-affective) strategies. Other scholars, such as Cohen and Weaver (2006), classified LLSs by skill area into listening, vocabulary, speaking, reading, writing, and translation strategies. LLSs classification was criticized due to the nature of the strategy to exist in more than one domain. Thus, some scholars began to refuse the idea of LLSs classification (Macaro, 2009). Oxford (2017) stressed that due to the strategy's fluidity and flexibility, a strategy cannot be restricted to a particular category. Regarding GLSs, they were classified by Pawlak (2018), who made a successful breakthrough in the area of GLSs. He classified GLSs based on Oxford (1990) and Cohen and Dörnyei (2002) into metacognitive, cognitive, affective, and social strategies.

Under cognitive strategies, he added four subcategories: 1- Strategies aiding the production and comprehension of grammar in communication tasks. 2- Strategies employed in developing explicit knowledge of grammar. 3- Strategies employed in developing implicit knowledge of grammar. 4- Strategies employed in dealing with corrective feedback on erroneous use of grammar. This classification was used in designing Pawlak's (2018) Grammar Learning Strategy Inventory (GLSI) for measuring GLSs use among L2 learners, bearing in mind that LLSs and GLSs inventories were built upon the classifications mentioned above that depended on the theoretical underpinnings referred to earlier. These classifications assisted in combining items of strategy inventories used later to quantitatively measure strategy use among L2 learners, as practiced in the present study. This new classification of LLSs to encompass a GLSs category highlights a significant part of L2 learning, equalizing the importance of L2 grammar to other language skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking, and vocabulary) categorized in other LLSs classifications. Understanding what L2 learners were doing to learn

L2 grammar was not investigated enough for a long time. Consequently, identifying GLSs and instructing them to L2 learners will enhance L2 grammar learning.

Since the field of GLSs is still in its infancy (Pawlak, 2013, 2024), the number of studies in this area is increasing. In this part, the findings of some previous studies will be summarized. These particular previous studies were chosen since they share the following aspects with the present study: First, they all focused on exploring GLSs. Second, they used the appropriate and well-known inventories to measure GLSs use (O'Malley and Chamot's (1990) inventory, Oxford's (1990) SILL, and Pawlak's (2018) GLSI). Third, similar to the present study, the participants in these studies were all adult high school or university students. Additionally, the findings of these studies are comparable to the present study's findings, especially those related to using GLSs to develop explicit and implicit grammar knowledge.

Pawlak (2009) examined the relationship between GLSs use and attainment among 142 university students in Poland using a modified survey of Oxford et al. (2007). The findings of his study demonstrated high use of GLSs for implicit learning with a focus on form (M= 3.59) followed by medium use of GLSs for explicit deductive learning (M= 3.46) and GLSs for explicit inductive learning (M= 3.42). The present study mainly focuses on using GLSs to develop explicit and implicit grammar knowledge, a component shared with this study, where findings can be comparable.

In another study, Zekrati (2017) explored GLSs use among 230 Iranian high school students with different language proficiency levels. An adapted version of Oxford's (1990) SILL containing 35 items was used. The findings of the study showed that there is a variety of GLSs use among participants and indicated four GLSs as the most frequently used strategies: "I take notes when my teacher explains a new grammar structure," "If I do not understand my teacher's explanation of a new structure, I ask him to repeat," "While writing or speaking if I am not sure of a grammar structure, I try to use another one," and "I ask my teacher questions about his corrections of my grammatical" (Zekrati, 2017, p. 132). Paying attention to what a grammar teacher does and interacting with him/her in a language classroom are strategies examined in the present study, too. Hence, this study's findings are very relevant.

Al Abri et al. (2017) investigated GLSs used by 170 Omani grade ten students using an amended 38-item survey of O'Malley and Chamot (1990) and Oxford's (1990) SILL. The findings indicated medium use of metacognitive (M= 3.31), cognitive (3.28), and social (M= 3.28) strategies. The context of this study is culturally very close to the context of the present study, as participants have very similar cultural and social backgrounds, so it is a good idea to compare the findings.

Another study worth reviewing is Nakachi (2021), which explored GLSs use by 145 Japanese university students using Pawlak's (2018) GLSI. The results of this study showed overall medium use of GLSs (M= 3.06) with medium use of metacognitive strategies (M= 3.13), cognitive strategies (M= 3.10), affective strategies (M= 2.50), and social strategies (M= 3.24). GLSs used to develop explicit and implicit grammar knowledge reported exact medium

use (M= 2.95) consecutively. Using Pawlak's (2018) GLSI in this study stresses the importance of its findings to see how participants from a different context use GLSs.

One of the recent studies, Alnufaie and Alzahrani (2024) replicated Pawlak's (2018) GLSI with 419 EFL Saudi college students. The findings showed high use of all GLSs categories (metacognitive, cognitive, social, and affective strategies) (M= 3.54), and the correlation between all the categories of strategies was strong, positive, and significant. Although both GLSs used to develop explicit and implicit knowledge of grammar in this study reported medium use, GLSs used to develop implicit knowledge of grammar recorded slightly higher (M= 3.48) than GLSs used to develop explicit knowledge of grammar (M= 3.47). This study included all categories of GLSs in Pawlak's (2018) GLSI; however, the present study focused only on GLSs assigned to develop explicit and implicit grammar knowledge, which distinguishes the present study from this study as identifying learners' explicit and implicit grammar knowledge per se is very crucial.

Since the present study focuses mainly on GLSs used to develop explicit and implicit knowledge of grammar, the following section reviews the literature on explicit and implicit knowledge to understand the relationship between explicit and implicit knowledge and GLSs.

**Explicit and Implicit Knowledge**

Explicit and implicit learning are unique processes inside the human brain where there are distinct memories with an explicit and implicit memorizing system, which results in two types of knowledge: explicit and implicit (Ellis, 2008). To facilitate understanding the difference between implicit and explicit knowledge, we acquire the grammatical structures of our first language (L1) implicitly when we are children through communication with our parents or older brothers and sisters without any explicit instruction. However, when we acquire our foreign or second language (L2) as an adult, we need other resources or explicit instruction to acquire or learn some elements of L2.

That means consciousness is needed for explicit knowledge, which is not valid for implicit knowledge. Therefore, implicit learning and explicit learning are strongly linked to this implicit and explicit knowledge. Implicit learning can be defined as the "acquisition of knowledge about the underlying structure of a complex stimulus environment by a process which takes place naturally, simply, and without conscious operations." In contrast, explicit learning is "a more conscious operation where the individual attends to particular aspects of the stimulus array and volunteers and tests hypotheses in a search for structure" (Ellis, 2008, p. 3). DeKeyser (2003) defined implicit learning as "learning without awareness of what is being learned" (p. 314). He believes explicit learning requires awareness and is more appropriate for adult learners.

Explicit and implicit grammar knowledge is an extension of linguistic knowledge. Linguistic knowledge can be seen from two different perspectives, according to Ellis (2005). The first one is what Chomsky (1976) called linguistic competence, which requires Universal

Grammar, which means language learners have a "biological capacity for acquiring languages" (Ellis, 2005, p. 142). This position is congruent with Krashen (1982), who stresses that there is no interface between the subconscious acquisition of language and conscious learning of language. From his point of view, L2 acquisition occurs naturally similarly to L1 acquisition, where implicit processes run during learners' receiving of comprehensible input in L2 (Ellis, 2008). Later, Krashen's comprehensible input underpinned natural and communicative language teaching approaches.

The second position follows the connectionist theory of language learning, which cognitively equalizes language learning to other types of learning. In this position, linguistic knowledge exists in a gradual way where learners acquire new language word order or grammatical structures and build on their previously learned ones to learn language successfully (Ellis, 2005). In both positions, linguistic competence includes implicit knowledge. According to Chomsky (1976), this implicit knowledge is accidental, and language acquisition is intuitive under only implicit knowledge, as Gregg (1989) assumes. Furthermore, Ellis (1996) points out that implicit knowledge is required for language acquisition; however, explicit knowledge results from implicit knowledge. He suggested that explicit knowledge can boost implicit knowledge. Thus, linguistic knowledge is considered "intuitive and tacit rather than conscious and explicit in nature" and there is a kind of consensus among language theorists that L2 acquisition comprises implicit knowledge (Ellis, 2005, p. 143).

On the other hand, explicit knowledge can affect language performance, as Krashen (1977) found that explicit knowledge enables language learners to correct their performance. Many L2 immersion programs that ignored teaching grammar resulted in learners' weak language accuracy (Lightbown et al., 1993). This shortcoming encouraged calls for teaching grammar explicitly, where grammar is integrated into communicative practices and task-based exercises; thus, learners have some focus on not only language meaning but also language form (Doughty & Williams, 1998). Studies such as Norris and Ortega (2000) demonstrated that explicit instruction was robust and more effective than implicit instruction. DeKeyser (2003) stresses that explicit learning is required for adult learners who need to pay attention to language form. Similarly, Schmidt (1995, p. 1) indicates that noticing "seems to be associated with all learning." Emphasizing the importance of consciousness, he proposed a model for consciousness that included four main parts: attention, intention, control, and awareness. All of these parts are directly or indirectly involved in explicit learning.

To understand explicit and implicit grammar knowledge in practical implications within the scope of GLSs, explicit grammar knowledge is represented when a language learner starts analyzing grammar structures or sentences in preparation for using them in specific practices or exercises where s/he will be engaged in some cognitive strategies such as monitoring, analyzing, and paying attention. These strategic elements are expected to contribute positively to the learner's explicit knowledge. In contrast, using those grammatical structures or sentences in conversations with native speakers, for instance, improves the learner's implicit knowledge of grammar (Pawlak, 2018).

Despite this attempt to differentiate between implicit and explicit knowledge, Ellis (2005) calls for more studies investigating the differences and relationship between implicit and explicit knowledge. Moreover, applied linguists such as Ellis (1994) and Long (1991) emphasized a moderate position that although implicit knowledge is essential in L2 learning, explicit knowledge plays a pivotal role in terms of noticing and consciousness, particularly in early language learning stages and controlling declarative knowledge which leads to procedural knowledge that guides implicit processing during language learning (Ellis, 2008).

Concerning how grammar is instructed, Oxford et al. (2007) adapted DeKeyser (2003) and provided a practical summary of how L2 grammar is instructed in the classroom. Oxford et al. (2007) state that grammar can be instructed implicitly or explicitly. According to them, implicit grammar instruction encompasses two modes: The first is "focus on meaning," where no attention is paid to grammatical rules. The second mode is "focus on form," where only little attention is paid to grammatical rules. On the other hand, explicit grammar instruction involves two manifestations: The first is called explicit-inductive (with "focus on forms"), in which grammar is taught indirectly but explicitly, where students should discover grammatical rules based on the teacher's guidelines and instructions. The second is called explicit-deductive, a more robust version of "focus on forms," in which the teacher presents grammatical rules and structures to students, and then, students apply rules in examples (See Oxford et al., 2007).

Since GLSs have been found as a new area for research in the field of LLSs, the number of studies in this area is increasing, and the present study is an example. After defining and classifying GLSs, Pawlak (2018) presented his crucial GLSI, which encourages researchers to explore using GLSs in different contexts due to the importance of how L2 learners deal with grammar. Exploring GLSs cannot be isolated from explicit and implicit knowledge, which underpin the base of L2 grammar learning and instruction. Identifying GLSs in the present study and other studies is presumably to positively impact how L2 grammar is learned and instructed, as many scholars in the field of LLSs call for strategy instruction to be encompassed within L2 education.

**Methods**

The present study aims to explore using GLSs to develop explicit and implicit grammar knowledge by EFL college students at Jubail English Language and Preparatory Year Institute (JELPYI), Saudi Arabia. This purpose was accomplished using only the two assigned cognitive categories of Pawlak's (2018) GLSI. The most and least used GLSs listed in the two categories were quantitatively measured through GLSI. That was triangulated by qualitative data collected through four focus-group interviews. Thus, quantitative and qualitative data were simultaneously collected to answer the research questions in a mixed-methods concurrent triangulation, where quantitative data were collected first, followed by qualitative data through focus-group interviews, which complemented quantitative data collected by the inventory. Since GLSI has determined items relevant to GLSs, participants may use other GLSs that are not mentioned or different from those listed in the GLSI. Therefore, hearing learners' voices

in this regard is expected to provide fruitful data contributing to our understanding of how L2 learners use GLSs.

**Participants**

The participants of the present study were 172 male preparatory-year college students at JELPYI in Saudi Arabia. Students at JELPYI were all male and were going to join industrial specializations designated only for male students, and that is why female students were absent in the present study. They enrolled in the preparatory year, where English One and English Two are required courses in which they learn General English following the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for languages, which only included A1, A2, B1, and B1+ at JELPYI at the time of conducting the present study. The participants were all at the A2 level due to the availability and willingness of other teachers to enable their students to participate in the present study. Before conducting the study, the participants were provided with details about the study and given the option to withdraw or take part in the study. Their consent was assured by their agreement to complete the survey. It has been noted that their responses are confidential and only used for research purposes. Equally, for the focus-group interviews, the researcher randomly asked volunteers from different classes to participate and informed them that their participation was optional.

**Survey: Pawlak's Grammar Learning Strategy Inventory**

Since GLSI provides standardized and comparable data with other studies, it was used in the present study. To measure students' use of GLSs, only two subcategories of Pawlak's (2018) GLSI were introduced to students. These two subcategories were mainly chosen because they are strongly associated with the nature of L2 grammar learning and teaching, as discussed earlier. Both subcategories underlie cognitive strategies in Pawlak's (2018) GLSI used by L2 learners to develop their explicit and implicit knowledge of grammar. In the first subcategory, 24 GLSs indicate how explicit knowledge of grammar is developed; in the second subcategory, 10 GLSs indicate how implicit knowledge of grammar is developed. This survey used a five-point Likert scale where 5 (it perfectly applies to me) refers to the high use of strategies, and 1 (it does not apply to me at all) refers to the low use of strategies. The inventory items were translated into Arabic because participants were at the A2 level, and their English proficiency was inadequate to fully comprehend all listed items. A fellow PhD colleague reviewed the translation for verification and validity, addressing the clarity, relevance, and cultural appropriateness of translated items. The inventory was prepared for completion online via Google Forms, where the participants received the link to the inventory through Blackboard, where they completed it in their free time. It was available online for them for one month.

**Focus Group**

To triangulate research methods in the present study, qualitative data about participants' other GLSs used to develop their explicit and implicit knowledge of grammar were collected through four focus-group interviews. Six participants were randomly selected to join each group since the size of the focus-group is advised to be between six and ten or twelve (Dörnyei, 2007). This tool aims to mix methods and examine if the participants may provide additional or different data from their responses on the survey or advocate them. The researcher conducted the interviews in Arabic to enable participants to express themselves more comfortably and adequately, and each interview session lasted about one hour. The researcher used an application on his phone (Voice Memos) to record each session. The discussion in the focus-group interviews encompassed main questions where participants were asked how they benefit from different sources. Participants' responses to these questions are considered GLSs, which they use while learning grammar. The main questions were followed up by other questions whenever needed. The participants in the four focus-group interviews were asked the following questions consecutively:

1. What do you usually do to learn English grammatical rules?
2. How do you benefit from the teacher and his corrective feedback in learning grammar?
3. How do you benefit from the textbook to learn grammar?
4. How do you benefit from your mother tongue (Arabic) to learn English grammar?

**Results**

**Quantitative Analysis**

The first research question was to find what GLSs the study's participants used most and least to develop their explicit and implicit knowledge of grammar. This question was answered through quantitative data collected via the GLSI.

**Descriptive Statistics**

The quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS, where descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were calculated for each GLS identified in the study. The means of using strategies were used to decide the most and least used GLSs based on Oxford's (1990) distribution as follows: Low use: 1.00-2.49, Medium use: 2.50-3.49, and High use: 3.5-5.00. Additionally, Cronbach's alpha value was calculated to assess the reliability of the inventory post-translation, and it yielded $\alpha = .91$.

**Results Presentation**

Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations of the GLSs used to develop explicit knowledge of grammar. The overall mean usage of GLSs to develop explicit knowledge was medium (M=3.02). Among the 24 strategies, seven were identified with high usage (M ranges from 3.50 to 4.00), ten with medium usage (M ranges from 2.59 to 3.38), and seven with low usage (M=2.45 and less). Table 1 indicates variability in the strategy use

means, with most strategies showing significant differences from the hypothesized population mean of 2.5 based on the conducted one-sample t-tests. Therefore, these findings suggest that the samples likely represent populations with mean values that differ significantly from 2.5.

**Table 1**

*The Most and Least GLSs Used to Develop Explicit Knowledge of Grammar*

| | GLSs to develop explicit knowledge of grammar | M | SD | P | Use |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | I try to understand every grammar rule | 4.00 | 0.93 | .00* | High |
| 2 | I pay attention to rules provided by the teacher or course book | 3.95 | 0.79 | .00* | High |
| 3 | I try to discover grammar rules by analyzing examples | 3.69 | 1.15 | .00* | High |
| 4 | When I do not know the part of speech, I consider such clues as form, meaning and context | 3.68 | 1.15 | .00* | High |
| 5 | I notice when the teacher leads me into overgeneralization error (e.g. saying breaked) and then I think about what went wrong | 3.54 | 1.22 | .00* | High |
| 6 | I paraphrase the rules I am given because I understand them better in my own words | 3.52 | 1.39 | .00* | High |
| 7 | I review grammar lessons to remember the rules better | 3.50 | 1.25 | .00* | High |
| 8 | I memorize rules about frequently used linguistic forms/structures (e.g. formation and use of the passive) | 3.38 | 1.09 | .00* | Medium |
| 9 | I use electronic resources (e.g. English websites, corpora) to figure out rules | 3.37 | 1.28 | .00* | Medium |
| 10 | I use my mother tongue or other languages I know to understand and remember grammar rule | 3.36 | 1.29 | .00* | Medium |
| 11 | I group grammar structures to remember them better (verbs followed by gerund and infinitive) | 3.25 | 1.27 | .00* | Medium |
| 12 | I memorize rules about how structures change their form (e.g. form an adjective to an adverb) | 3.20 | 1.21 | .00* | Medium |
| 13 | I create my own hypotheses about how structures work and check these hypotheses | 3.09 | 1.29 | .00* | Medium |
| 14 | I use a notebook/note cards for new rules and examples | 3.03 | 1.48 | .00* | Medium |
| 15 | I memorize whole phrases containing specific language forms | 2.79 | 1.29 | .00* | Medium |
| 16 | I analyze diagrams, graphs and tables to understand grammar | 2.65 | 1.33 | .12 | Medium |
| 17 | I remember grammar information by location on a page in a book | 2.59 | 1.32 | .32 | Medium |
| 18 | I mark new grammar structures graphically (e.g. colors, underlining) | 2.45 | 1.40 | .66 | Low |
| 19 | I work with others to reconstruct texts read by the teacher which contain many examples of a particular structure | 2.42 | 1.24 | .42 | Low |

| | | Mean | SD | P | Use |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 20 | I work with others to discover grammar rules | 2.40 | 1.20 | .28 | Low |
| 21 | I make charts, diagrams or drawings to illustrate grammar rules | 2.26 | 1.32 | .01* | Low |
| 22 | I use grammar reference books, grammar sections of course books, or grammatical information in dictionaries | 2.19 | 1.25 | .00* | Low |
| 23 | I physically act out new grammar structures | 2.18 | 1.30 | .00* | Low |
| 24 | I use rhymes or songs to remember new grammar rules | 2.12 | 1.37 | .00* | Low |
| | Overall Mean | 3.02 | .62 | | Medium |

The use of GLSs to develop implicit knowledge of grammar among participants was also medium (M= 3.21), as shown in Table 2. None of the GLSs under this category recorded high or low use, as they all recorded medium use (M ranges from 2.87 to 3.46), as shown in Table 2 below. All strategies show statistically significant differences from the hypothesized population mean of 2.5 based on the conducted one-sample t-tests.

**Table 2**

*The Most and Least GLSs Used to Develop Implicit Knowledge of Grammar*

| | GLSs to develop implicit knowledge of grammar | Mean | SD | P | Use |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | I try to use grammar rules as soon as possible in a meaningful context (e.g. use them in my speech and writing) | 3.46 | 1.19 | .00* | Medium |
| 2 | I try to apply new rules carefully and accurately in specific sentences (e.g. to complete a gap) | 3.36 | 1.23 | .00* | Medium |
| 3 | I do many exercises to practice grammar (e.g. paraphrasing, translation, multiple-choice) | 3.34 | 1.29 | .00* | Medium |
| 4 | I listen to and read texts containing many examples of a grammar structure | 3.32 | 1.17 | .00* | Medium |
| 5 | I compare the way grammar is used in written and spoken language with how I use it | 3.27 | 1.21 | .00* | Medium |
| 6 | I use newly learnt rules to create new sentences (to write about my plans) | 3.17 | 1.31 | .00* | Medium |
| 7 | I repeat the rules and examples to myself or rewrite them many times. | 3.13 | 1.27 | .00* | Medium |
| 8 | I try to use whole phrases containing specific structures in my speech | 3.12 | 1.17 | .00* | Medium |
| 9 | I notice (or remember) a structure which, when I encounter it, causes me to do something, like check a box, choose a drawing or underline a structure | 3.06 | 1.30 | .00* | Medium |
| 10 | I try to adjust the way I process spoken and written language in accordance with L2 spoken and written rules (e.g. in the case of some passive voice sentences) | 2.87 | 1.28 | .00* | Medium |
| | Overall Mean | 3.21 | .83 | | Medium |

## Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative data were mainly collected to answer the second research question by identifying whether participants used different GLSs from those listed in the GLSI or similar ones.

## Data Handling

Initially, the researcher transcribed qualitative data in Arabic into separate documents on Microsoft Word in preparation for translation. Then, he translated the data into English, and another PhD colleague revised the translation, focusing more on tone, maintaining the original meaning, and highlighting the nuances of participants' responses for better reliability.

## Thematic Analysis

After the translation was examined, interviews were transcribed into Microsoft Word for analysis, where a separate document was created for each group interview. Coding keys were created in each document, and relevant passages were highlighted using different colors for different codes. Afterward, a coding matrix (table) was created on a separate page in Word to analyze and organize coded data and initiate themes. Then, a separate document was created to identify and deeply analyze themes, interpreting data related to those determined themes.

Seven main themes emerged from the focus-group discussions, reflecting the variety of GLSs participants used to enhance their grammar learning. These themes encompass strategies focusing on attention to grammar instruction, facilitation techniques in learning, utilization of technology, communication methods, interactions with teachers, textbook usage, and integration of the mother tongue.

## Presentation of Qualitative Findings

This section will summarize qualitative findings with illustrative participant quotes to substantiate identified themes.

### 1) Paying Attention to Grammar Instruction

When participants were asked a general question about what they usually do to learn English grammatical rules, their responses included paying attention to different aspects, such as the teacher's highlights of common grammatical mistakes, as a repeated comment was, "I pay attention to the teacher's highlights of students' common grammatical mistakes;" classmates' questions to the teacher as another participant commented, "I pay attention to my classmates' questions to the teacher and listen carefully to the teacher's answer;" classroom discussion of grammar as one participant indicated, "I pay attention to classroom discussions

about grammar;" teacher's examples to explain grammar as another participant reported, "I pay attention to the examples provided by my teacher to understand the given grammatical rule;" and grammatical structures while reading or listening since multiple participants expressed, "I pay attention to grammar while listening to or reading texts in English."

### 2) Facilitation Techniques in Learning

Among participants' responses to the general question about what they usually do to learn grammar, participants reported using different facilitation techniques. For example, one participant commented, "I divide more complicated grammatical rules into simpler divisions." Some other participants reported using mind mapping to facilitate understanding grammar. A comment such as, "I use mind mapping to summarize complicated grammatical rules or to simplify them," was heard in different groups. Summarizing was also mentioned by another participant who commented, "I summarize the grammatical rule in a small piece of paper and keep it as a reference." Another way of facilitation was sentence analysis, which was done in smaller segments. For instance, a participant said, "I analyze English sentences into isolated words and try to understand how these words join together."

### 3) Utilization of Technology

Participants referred to some GLSs for technology use when asked what they usually do to learn English grammar. One repeated response was, "I watch a video on YouTube about a particular grammatical rule with explanations and examples." Other participants reported using WhatsApp as one participant reported, "I use grammar materials students share on WhatsApp groups." Google was another strategy students used to learn grammar; one participant indicated, "I do more exercises at home on the same grammatical rule using many exercises and quizzes on Google." Some students also mentioned phone applications, as this participant said, "I use different language applications on my phone to improve my grammar." A comment like "I learn grammar through watching documentaries in English or listening to podcasts" was recorded in more than one group.

### 4) Communication Methods

Participants reported using some GLSs for communication when they responded to the question about what they usually do to learn grammar. For instance, more than one participant commented, "I talk about grammar with someone expert in English." This is similar to another participant's response, which included speaking to better language speakers: "If I encounter difficulties in grammar, I ask others who speak English fluently about them." One participant preferred to speak to his friends to practice grammar. He said, "I practice new grammatical rules in speaking with friends." Furthermore, one participant communicated with native speakers and reported, "I speak to native speakers and notice how they use grammar."

## 5) Interactions with Teachers

Participants' responses emphasized asking grammar teachers questions for various purposes. One participant replied, "I ask the teacher questions to ensure my understanding is correct." Another participant commented, "I ask the teacher if I am unsure how to use the grammatical rule." Other comments, such as "I ask the teacher to simplify more complicated grammatical rules" and "I ask the teacher for extra explanations or examples through handouts," were reported. Some participants asked teachers for assistance in challenging grammar exercises or advice on learning grammar. For example, one participant indicated, "I ask my teacher to help me do difficult exercises on my grammar textbook," while another participant said, "I ask the teacher for advice on how to learn particular grammatical rules."

## 6) Textbook Usage

Participants mentioned a variety of GLSs they utilized to learn grammar through grammar textbooks. Participants repeatedly commented, "I use the grammar textbook as a reference to check grammatical rules when needed." Others reported using examples in the grammar textbook to help them write similar example sentences, such as "I use examples in the textbook to write down new similar examples." In another repeated comment, participants stressed doing exercises at the end of each lesson of their grammar textbooks, saying, "I do all grammar exercises by the end of units of my grammar textbook." Moreover, participants reported using their grammar notebooks for different purposes. For example, more than one participant reported, "I use a notebook to write examples of different grammatical rules." One participant indicated using his grammar notebook to do additional practice. He said, "I use my grammar notebook to do extra exercises on specific grammatical rules."

## 7) Integration of the Mother Tongue (Arabic)

When participants were asked how they benefited from their mother tongue's grammatical structures in learning English grammatical rules, they reported some helpful GLSs. For instance, translating grammar English explanations into Arabic for better understanding was highlighted as one participant expressed, "I translate the English explanation of the grammatical rule into Arabic." Comparing similarities between some English and Arabic grammatical rules was another interesting strategy reported by participants, though it is not always practical. A participant explained, "I compare the English grammatical rule to something similar in the Arabic grammar and check similarities and differences such as sentence word order or passive voice."

Despite the focus of the present study on GLSs to develop explicit and implicit knowledge of grammar, themes identified included other categories of GLSs, such as GLSs used to improve communication for better comprehension and production and GLSs used to deal with the teacher's corrective feedback, two subcategories of cognitive strategies in Pawlak (2018), and that is due to strategy flexibility to exist in more than one category (Oxford, 2017), as earlier mentioned.

**Discussion**

Paragraph. The quantitative data results of this study revealed that participants reported a moderate level of use for GLSs to develop explicit and implicit knowledge of grammar, with a slight inclination towards GLSs for developing implicit grammar knowledge. This finding aligns with the findings of Alnufaie and Alzahrani (2024) and Nakachi (2021), where both types of strategies were reported to be used moderately, with a slight preference for GLSs for developing implicit grammar knowledge in Alnufaie and Alzahrani (2024), but no clear superiority in Nakachi (2021). However, this contrasts with the findings of Pawlak (2009), who reported a high use of GLSs for developing implicit grammar knowledge. The variation in findings could be attributed to differences in participants' learning styles, as noted by Ehrman and Oxford (1990) and Oxford (2017), who emphasized that learning style influences learners' choice of GLSs. Other factors such as motivation, personality, age, culture, and aptitude may also influence the use of GLSs (Griffiths, 2018).

Further analysis of the quantitative data revealed that while a few GLSs for developing explicit grammar knowledge were reported to be used highly, most were reported to be used moderately or even low. In contrast, GLSs for developing implicit grammar knowledge were mostly reported to be used at a moderate level. The variability in using specific GLSs could be attributed to educational background, proficiency, age, and gender (Pawlak, 2020), which may influence learners' preferences and tendencies in employing specific strategies. Therefore, more studies are needed to investigate the impact of these factors.

On the other hand, qualitative data analysis from focus group interviews identified a variety of GLSs employed by participants to develop explicit and implicit grammar knowledge. These strategies encompassed themes such as paying attention to grammar instruction, facilitation techniques in learning, utilization of technology, communication methods, interactions with teachers, textbook usage, and integration of the mother tongue (Arabic). These findings are consistent with existing literature on LLSs and highlight the multifaceted nature of grammar learning processes.

Paying attention to grammar instruction emerged as a prominent theme, with participants employing strategies to focus on grammar in different contexts, such as while watching videos, listening to the radio, or during teacher explanations. This qualitative finding echoes quantitative findings, such as paying attention and noticing reported high use in the survey, as Table 1 shows. This finding underscores the importance of attention in language learning, as emphasized by Schmidt (1995), Cohen (2017), and Oxford (2017), and suggests that enhancing learners' awareness of the benefits of paying attention to grammar could improve their learning outcomes. Raising learners' awareness through strategy surveys or instruction programs requires more research.

Facilitation techniques in learning were another significant theme, with participants utilizing strategies such as comparing grammatical rules, analyzing sentence structures, and summarizing. Quantitative results in Tables 1 and 2 show high use of analysis, whereas

comparing grammatical rules reported medium use. These strategies aim to simplify grammar learning processes and enhance understanding, aligning with Pawlak and Csizér's (2023) findings on the importance of GLSs in facilitating L2 learning.

Utilization of technology in grammar learning emerged as a notable theme, with participants utilizing various electronic resources such as YouTube, WhatsApp, and podcasts to access grammar-related materials. Utilizing technology reported medium use as shown in Table 1. This finding underscores the growing importance of technology-enhanced language learning (Pawlak, 2021) and highlights the need for educators to leverage technological tools effectively to support learners' L2 learning endeavors.

Communication with others about grammar also emerged as a significant theme, with participants engaging in discussions with family members, friends, and native speakers to practice grammatical rules and seek clarification. Despite reporting low use in quantitative results, these communicative strategies play a crucial role in helping learners comprehend and produce grammar in diverse contexts (Pawlak, 2018), suggesting the importance of further investigation into their efficacy.

Interactions with teachers and utilizing grammar textbooks were prominent themes, highlighting the role of formal instruction and materials in grammar learning. Participants relied on teachers for explanations, corrections, and feedback, emphasizing the importance of teacher guidance in the learning process (Alnufaie & Alzahrani, 2024; Zekrati, 2017). Similarly, using grammar textbooks and notebooks facilitated understanding and practice, reflecting findings from previous studies (Al Abri, 2017; Alsied et al., 2018).

Lastly, participants' use of their mother tongue (Arabic) to understand and compare grammatical rules emerged as a notable theme, highlighting the role of cross-linguistic comparisons in grammar learning (Oxford, 2011; Oxford et al., 2007). Despite language differences, participants found similarities between English and Arabic (e.g., passive voice and sentence word order), suggesting the potential benefits of leveraging learners' multilingual skills in language learning contexts. Exploring similarities between Arabic and English grammar should have more research since the two languages do not belong to the same family.

The findings suggest that learners employ diverse GLSs to develop explicit and implicit grammar knowledge. Understanding the factors influencing learners' strategy use and the effectiveness of different strategies can inform language teaching practices and curriculum designers, helping them better support learners' L2 grammar learning needs.

### Implications for Grammar Teaching in an EFL Context

The findings proved that learning English in such a context is still teacher-centered, as strategies like paying attention to the teacher's explanation and how the teacher corrects overgeneralized errors were reported to be highly used among participants. Although learner-centered classrooms are widely recommended in the literature, teachers in such contexts

presumably need to take this advantage and present appropriate GLSs that are more adequate for their students to develop their students' explicit and implicit grammar knowledge.

In the present study, highly used GLSs to develop explicit and implicit grammar knowledge should have been given priority in teaching them to students in similar contexts, and students' awareness of such strategies should also have been raised. This is due to the effectiveness of these strategies in increasing students' knowledge of grammar and, consequently, improving their grammar learning. The moderate and low use of some GLSs to develop explicit and implicit knowledge of grammar indicates the absence of students' awareness of how grammar is learned or weak strategic awareness. Thus, raising students' awareness of learning how to learn grammar with references and explanations of explicit and implicit grammar knowledge will benefit them.

Other GLSs identified through focus-group interviews, such as those used to facilitate grammar learning, utilize technology, communicate with others, interact with teachers, use textbooks, and integrate mother tongues, should never have been neglected since participants referred to using them while learning grammar. Such focus-group interviews assist students in learning from each other, sharing, and exchanging their GLSs.

### Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research

Although the study presented a general image of how GLSs were used to develop explicit and implicit knowledge of grammar and the variety of GLSs used, some limitations should be noted. Though mixing methods boosted the present study's findings, the participants were all male EFL college students. Other results could be found if the female students were involved in another study. Since participants were all at the A2 level, students at other levels (A1, B1, or B1Plus) might show different results if a future study mixes participants from different English proficiency levels. Factors like learning style or personality presumably impact strategy use but were not measured in the present study. Finding more about these factors among participants in future studies might enable us to justify using or ignoring some GLSs. Further research is warranted to explore the relative effectiveness of various GLSs in different contexts and learner populations, focusing more on other factors that affect strategy use, raising students' awareness towards using GLSs, and examining the limited similarities between Arabic and English Grammar.

### Conclusion

The present study measured learners' use of GLSs to develop explicit and implicit grammar knowledge. It also explored other GLSs learners use to develop explicit and implicit grammar knowledge. The results from the survey demonstrated overall medium use of GLSs to develop explicit and implicit grammar knowledge. However, some GLSs for developing explicit grammar knowledge reported high use, and some reported low use. On the other hand, learners reported using several GLSs through the focus-group interviews. That encompassed strategies for paying attention, facilitation, utilizing technology, communication, interacting

with teachers, using grammar textbooks, and using the mother tongue. This variety of GLSs used by participants in the present study emphasizes the claim that if L1 and L2 belong to different families, using GLSs will be more effective. Therefore, students in a similar context, where students' L1 and L2 do not belong to the same family, are advantageous and have the privilege to utilize more GLSs to enhance their L2 learning. Consequently, educational establishments and stakeholders are responsible for encouraging the use of GLSs and raising students' awareness regarding their strategic L2 learning.

**Bio**
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