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Effects of a Combined Approach to Grammar Instruction in a Foreign Language Classroom

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**Effects of a Combined Approach to Grammar Instruction
in a Foreign-Language Classroom**

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Northwestern College

An Action Research Project Presented
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Education

Abstract

The purpose of this action research project was to determine the impact of brief, targeted explicit grammar instruction on Spanish I students' achievement in the acquisition of a foreign language. The research was conducted in the action researcher's classroom, in a 3A school district in rural Iowa with 88 participants, aged 14-17. Students were split into two groups; one receiving implicit grammar instruction and the other receiving brief, targeted explicit grammar instruction in addition to the implicit grammar instruction. Quantitative data was collected throughout a unit from four main teacher-created summative assessments centered around the four domains of language; baseline data from a previous unit was also collected and analyzed. The findings indicated that a combined approach to grammar education can help learners more efficiently improve their Reading and Writing abilities when compared to a purely implicit approach. At the same time, learners' Speaking abilities were negatively impacted, indicating that when using a combined approach to grammar instruction, it may be beneficial to incorporate more speaking activities.

Keywords: Explicit grammar instruction, implicit grammar instruction, foreign—language education

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Introduction

Over the past forty years, foreign-language grammar instruction has been highly debated, focusing on two conflicting schools of thought: that grammar should be taught implicitly and that grammar should be taught explicitly (Alenexi, 2019). While the implicit approach tries to replicate the conditions of natural acquisition, the explicit approach attempts to compensate for their absence by explicitly teaching grammatical knowledge (Scheffler, 2011). Without a consensus on this debate, the problem is that best practices in regards to foreign-language education have been hard to determine. The explicit and implicit approaches to grammar instruction have mainly been at odds with one another, but recent research has hypothesized that a combined approach to grammar instruction may benefit educators and students alike (Pawlak, 2021; Alenexi, 2019; Zheng, 2015).

The purpose of this action research project is to determine the impact of brief, targeted explicit grammar instruction on Spanish I students' achievement in the acquisition of a foreign language. This will be done by exploring and answering the following research question within the context of the action researcher's own classroom: Does incorporating brief, targeted explicit grammar instruction into an implicitly structured classroom setting improve student achievement for the acquisition of a foreign language? By conducting this action research project in the action researcher's classroom, she hopes to better understand whether brief, targeted explicit grammar instruction can help her students more accurately and efficiently acquire grammatical structures in the target language. This will inform her practice, giving her insight into how she should approach grammar instruction in her foreign-language classroom.

As a result of this action research project, learners more efficiently improved their Reading and Writing abilities when using a combined approach to grammar instruction than

when they were presented with a purely implicit approach. This shows when incorporating brief, targeted explicit grammar instruction into an implicitly structured classroom setting, student achievement for the acquisition of a foreign language is increased. This finding corroborates the idea that a combined approach to foreign-language grammar education has the potential to utilize the strengths of both the explicit and implicit approaches.

For this action research project, the literature review will be composed of articles found using scholarly databases. The main source for this research was Northwestern's DeWitt online library database. The articles selected were peer-reviewed, published within the last ten years, and included the following keywords: implicit grammar instruction, explicit grammar instruction, comprehensible input, proficiency levels, best practices, educators' perceptions of grammar instruction, and foreign language grammar instruction. The exceptions to these article inclusion criteria are seminal works by Krashen and VanPatten, which will be used to give a historical background of the ongoing discussion of using implicit or explicit methods for grammar instruction.

The following literature review is organized into four main sections. It will start with an introduction that contains a historical background on the implicit approach to grammar instruction. Then, it will delve into current research that supports an explicit approach to grammar instruction. From there, the literature review will explore educators' perspectives and perceptions to determine how grammar is typically taught in the foreign-language classroom. Finally, the last section will give a summary of recent research that has started to investigate the possibility of using a combined approach to grammar instruction.

Review of the Literature

Prior to the 1980s, foreign-language education largely utilized an explicit approach to grammar instruction. In the 1980s, Krashen's monitor theory was developed, including his input hypothesis. This theory stated that in order to acquire language, learners need to be provided with input that is slightly beyond their level of competence, supporting an implicit approach to grammar instruction. This idea sparked a debate on the best methods for grammar instruction in a foreign language. At first, Krashen's Monitor Theory was quickly criticized, but it was not ever fully thrown out of the debate (Lichtman & VanPatten, 2021).

Research Supporting an Implicit Approach

In 1987, VanPatten analyzed Krashen's monitor theory by compiling and examining the findings from 31 studies. As a result of his work, he concluded that while monitor theory should be modified in regards to learner interaction with input, implicit grammar instruction has a place in foreign-language education curriculum and pedagogy. In addition, he called for the profession to move from a focus on traditional concepts to a more global perspective, which includes viewing foreign-language acquisition as a progression (VanPatten, 1987). In 1989, after analyzing and compiling the findings from 144 studies, Krashen published another article that further supported his input hypothesis. In this article, he argued that while conscious language learning can result in some gains in acquisition, an implicit approach to language education leads to consciously learned competence, which is more efficient than an explicit approach (Krashen, 1989).

Although Krashen's monitor theory and his input hypothesis received some support when they were first developed, their relevance has continued to be debated. Recently, they have gained some traction within the linguistic community. In 2016, VanPatten argued for the implicit

approach, challenging Lindseth's (2016) previous finding that explicit learning and practice help learners to develop implicit knowledge. In his analysis of 23 studies, VanPatten (2016) found that in contrast to Lindseth's (2016) findings, "the internal mechanisms that are responsible for the creation of language can only respond to one particular kind of data: the data contained in input... [they] cannot work with explicit information" (p. 654). This finding suggests that without being provided implicit grammar instruction, learners will not be able to acquire a second language.

Although these findings seem to suggest that explicit instruction does not have a place in foreign-language education, a more recent article that VanPatten released with Lichtman (2021), contrasts with this idea, stating that the implicit and explicit approaches to foreign-language education may be able to work in conjunction. In 2021, after compiling the finds from 98 studies and analyzing their findings, Lichtman and VanPatten released "Was Krashen right? Forty years later", where they conclude that the fundamental ideas of Krashen's monitor theory have not been forgotten; rather, they have taken other names over time, being attributed to other scholars. They also determined that while implicit learning should be at the forefront of language education and explicit learning should be minimized, explicit knowledge can "play a role in learner self-editing, particularly of written compositions" (Lichtman & VanPatten, 2021, p. 299).

Research Supporting an Explicit Approach

On the other side of the debate, the explicit approach to grammar instruction has received ample support in research. In 2013, Nazari explored how both implicit and explicit grammar instruction impact student achievement in both the receptive and productive modes. By working with 60 adult novice-English learners, Nazarani (2013) found that students who received explicit instruction tended to outperform students who received implicit methods of instruction. She then

contended that educators should use explicit instructional methods to draw learners' attention to the rules, rather than using implicit methods.

Zhao & Macaro (2016) later corroborated Nazarani's (2013) findings, after conducting a study to determine how different mediums of instruction impact students' acquisition of concrete and abstract words. In their study, Zhao & Macaro (2016) worked with 148 second-year non-English majors, providing two different interventions: one using an explicit approach and the other utilizing an implicit approach. As a result of their work, they determined that when teachers use the learners' native language to explain components of the language, learners are better able to understand both concrete and abstract words than when they are provided with explanations in the target language.

In 2015, Nagai et al. further explored the place that explicit grammar instruction should have in foreign-language education. By analyzing and compiling the findings from 41 studies, they found that there were two main explicit methods that help students attain correct grammatical knowledge of the target language: focusing on lexical properties, and focusing on language-particular properties. By explicitly focusing on lexical properties, Nagai et al. (2015) noted that language learners may be able to more efficiently acquire verb argument structure, whereas focusing on language-particular properties can increase learners' metalinguistic knowledge.

In 2020, Altun & Dinçer also proposed that the explicit approach to grammar instruction is beneficial to foreign-language education, specifically when it comes to developing learners' writing skills. In their study, they worked with 40 university students, instructing half of them with explicit grammar methods and the other half with implicit grammar instructional methods. The results of their research revealed that while both methods helped students to increase their

grammatical knowledge and writing ability, the explicit group outperformed the implicit group. This discovery seems to suggest that by adopting explicit grammar methods, educators may help their students more efficiently both learn and accurately use target-language grammatical structures.

Although researchers have found the explicit approach to grammar instruction to be effective in a variety of contexts, Berges-Puyó (2017) contended that the explicit approach may benefit some learners more than others. In his study, 42 students learning Spanish either received implicit or explicit grammar instruction with the goal of determining how these instructional methods impacted students' implicit and explicit knowledge of Spanish-language grammar. According to his findings, while explicit instructional methods are more effective than implicit methods for all levels of learners in regards to grammatical knowledge, higher-proficiency learners achieved significantly higher gains than lower-proficiency learners. In other words, higher-proficiency language learners will benefit more from explicit grammar instruction than lower-proficiency learners.

The explicit approach to grammar instruction has also been researched in conjunction with several pedagogical approaches, including concept-based instruction (CBI), the flipped model, and structural learning contexts. In 2019, Harun et al. built off of previous research on the explicit approach to grammar instruction by researching how CBI, an instructional method that explicitly teaches grammar, facilitated in-depth understanding of both structural forms and the semantic meaning of the target language in second-language learners. Through their research with 12 Malay university-level English learners, Harun et al. found that CBI increased learners' grammatical knowledge and competence.

The use of the flipped model in conjunction with an explicit approach has also been investigated. Moranski & Kim (2016) explored how an inverted classroom model for explicit grammar instruction compared to an in-class presentational model. Their findings indicated that students in the inverted classroom model performed significantly better than the in-class presentational model when they were asked to identify the grammatical uses of target structures. This finding seems to suggest that when utilizing an explicit approach to grammar instruction, a flipped model may benefit learners when learning to identify grammatical structures and their uses.

In 2011, Scheffler researched structural learning contexts within an adult foreign-language environment. After analyzing and compiling the findings from 49 studies, he concluded that using a grammar-based, structural approach to foreign-language instruction is more appropriate for adult learners than an implicit approach, especially in regards to noticing and comprehending grammatical features. In other words, an explicit approach to grammar instruction can be beneficial to adult learners from the onset of instruction as explicit explanations of grammatical features can increase students' comprehension and processing of input in the foreign-language.

Educators' Perceptions and Perspectives of Grammar Instruction

Although the debate on implicit vs. explicit methods for grammar instruction is ongoing, educators' perceptions and perspectives of grammar instruction tend to favor implicit approaches. In 2014, Basöz conducted a study with 86 pre-service English-as-a-foreign-language educators, intending to find out how prospective language educators perceive and teach grammar. As a result of their work, Basös found that pre-service educators regard grammatical knowledge to be important in building learners' writing and reading abilities, while at the same

time favoring an implicit approach to grammar instruction. In addition, they proposed that grammar instruction should be included in foreign-language courses, but should not take place as isolated grammar lessons. Rather, it should be implicitly incorporated into communicative activities, such as authentic and real-life oriented tasks.

Nurusus et al. (2015) continued this line of research, analyzing what teachers with various years of experience believe in regards to foreign-language grammar instruction. By conducting surveys with 345 secondary English-language teachers in Malaysia and analyzing the data, they found several differences between the beliefs of teachers with fewer years of experience and teachers with more years of experience. According to their findings, educators with fewer years of experience consider students' output practice to be an important factor in grammar acquisition, while this belief decreased as educators' years of experience increased. In addition, the more experience an educator had, the more weight they put on providing feedback to students. Moreover, they also found that the teachers with less experience ranked students' output as an important factor while also rating explicit grammatical knowledge to be the least important factor in grammar acquisition. Otherwise stated, foreign-language educators who are newer to the profession seem to support an implicit approach to grammar instruction while educators with more experience favor an explicit approach.

In 2022, another study was published that provided more insight into educators' perceptions and perspectives on grammar instruction. By collecting and analyzing surveys and student test score data from 26 educators, Vyn et al. (2022) were able to research how foreign-language instructional practices relate to student performance outcomes. Their findings revealed two significant factors in student achievement: the time they spent in the target language and the teachers' use of explicit grammar instruction. At the lower levels of language acquisition, the

teachers' reported time in the target language had a positive correlation with student achievement, whereas at the higher levels of language acquisition there was a negative correlation. In addition, teachers' reported levels of agreement with teaching explicit grammar correlated negatively with student achievement at the lower levels while at the same time it correlated positively at the higher levels of language acquisition. Due to their findings, Vyn et al. proposed that while novice-level courses should emphasize an implicit approach to grammar education, more advanced-level courses should integrate the explicit approach into their grammar instruction. Otherwise stated, the explicit and implicit approaches to grammar instruction each have their own place in the foreign-language classroom. As learners increase their proficiency, the explicit approach can be emphasized more, leading to a combined approach to grammar instruction.

Research Supporting a Combined Approach

Within the past ten years, research has started to investigate the possibility of using a combined approach to grammar instruction, which may be able to utilize the strengths of each method. In 2013, Corzo researched the role formal grammar instruction can play in foreign language curriculum by analyzing and compiling the findings from 20 studies. As a result of her work, she found that research has demonstrated the significance of grammar instruction in language education, to develop both a fluent and accurate construction of language. While implicit grammar instruction can increase fluency, Corzo corroborated the idea that explicit grammar instruction can be presented to intermediate- and advanced-level language learners to intensively focus on learners' form to increase accuracy. This phenomenon seems to indicate that a combined approach to grammar instruction may be beneficial to students, with a larger emphasis on explicit methods at higher levels of proficiency.

Building off of Corzo's findings, in 2015 Ling researched the advantages that explicit and implicit grammar approaches have on learners by analyzing and compiling the findings from eight studies. As a result of their work, Ling found that while the explicit approach to grammar instruction increases students' grammatical accuracy, it does not significantly help students increase their fluency and communication skills. Conversely, an implicit approach provides more interaction in the target language, emphasizing grammar functions and increasing students' output. Due to their findings, Ling proposed that the explicit and implicit approaches to grammar instruction are not "mutually exclusive two opposites, but complement each other, and are two parallel methods" for teaching foreign-language (2015, p. 559).

In 2019, Alenexi analyzed and compiled the findings from 21 studies, researching whether or not foreign-language grammar should be taught implicitly or explicitly. Like Corzo (2013) and Ling (2015), as a result of his work, Alenexi (2019) also recommended the usage of a combined approach in foreign-language grammar education. According to his findings, an explicit approach to grammar instruction provides learners with declarative knowledge whereas an implicit approach results in learners gaining procedural knowledge. He also suggested that explicit grammar instruction may be beneficial for learners who struggle to acquire the target language. By learning grammatical rules, learners may better understand the logic behind the grammar of the target language, fostering an active and conscious approach to grammar acquisition.

More recently, Pawlak (2021) has also corroborated a combined approach to foreign-language grammar instruction. By analyzing and compiling the findings from 84 studies, he was able to research how proposals for foreign-language grammar instruction have been able to help learners acquire grammar and successfully use it in communication. Through his research,

Pawlak (2021) found that using a purely implicit or explicit approach to foreign-language grammar instruction is no longer a supported approach. Rather, Pawlak argues for a combined approach, emphasizing how utilizing both implicit and explicit methods enable learners to more efficiently use grammar structures in communication.

Research on the combined approach to grammar instruction has also targeted how it can impact learners' acquisition of foreign-language speaking skills. In 2019, Moeen et al. explored the impact of explicit and implicit approaches to grammar instruction on learners' speaking abilities, including their accuracy, fluency, and complexity. By working with 90 Iranian university students learning English, they found that both implicit and explicit approaches to grammar education are effective in improving learners' speaking abilities in the foreign language, albeit in different ways. The implicit approach was more effective in regards to learners' fluency whereas the explicit approach had a more significant effect on learners' accuracy and complexity than the implicit approach. In other words, by utilizing only one approach to grammar education, learners will not significantly increase all of the components making up their ability to speak in the target language. A combined approach to grammar education is more appropriate for foreign-language speech development, as it will benefit students in increasing their fluency, accuracy, and complexity.

In 2020, Peltekov built off of Moeen et al.'s (2019) research on the effects of a combined approach on learners' acquisition of foreign-language speaking skills. In his research, Peltekov (2020) explored how implicit and explicit grammar instruction effects learners' pronunciation. In order to determine the effects, 15 undergraduate university students taking a second-semester beginning German course were split into three groups: a control group, a group receiving implicit pronunciation training, and a group receiving explicit pronunciation training. The results

of his research revealed that in regards to students' comprehensibility and accent, there were no significant differences in improvement between the three groups. While there were no significant differences in these aspects of pronunciation, there were significant correlations between learner variables and their test scores. In the explicit and control groups, students' self-rated motivation level positively correlated with their scores. These findings suggest that while other aspects of students' speaking abilities may benefit from a combined approach, pronunciation is not significantly impacted by one approach or another.

Conclusion

While foreign-language grammar instruction has been highly debated over the past forty years, a combined approach has more recently gained support, especially at the higher levels of language proficiency. Research has indicated that a combined approach may help learners in regards to both their fluency and accuracy, whereas a purely implicit or explicit approach will merely target one of these two aspects (Corzo, 2013). By further exploring the impacts of a combined approach, researchers and educators will be able to better determine best practices in regards to foreign-language education.

Methodology

Participants

This action research study was conducted in the action researcher's classroom, in a 3A school district in rural Iowa. Within the school district, 90% of students are of Caucasian descent, while 6% are Hispanic, 2% are bi-racial, 1% are of Asian descent and 1% are of African American descent (Public School Review). Economically, 26% of the student population is eligible for free-or-reduced lunch (Public School Review). The action-researcher conducted their action-research project in their Spanish I classes, consisting of four sections, with a total of 88 students aged 14-17. Of these 88 students, six had 504 Plans and one had an Individualized Education Plans (IEP).

Data Collection

The purpose of this action research project was to determine the impact of brief, targeted explicit grammar instruction on Spanish I students' achievement in the acquisition of a foreign language. This was done by exploring and answering the following research question within the context of the action researcher's own classroom: Does incorporating brief, targeted explicit grammar instruction into an implicitly structured classroom setting improve student achievement for the acquisition of a foreign language?

For this action research project, the independent variable was providing brief, targeted explicit grammar instruction within a mainly comprehensible-input based environment. The brief, targeted explicit grammar instruction was provided to 2 of the 4 Spanish I sections. They received this instruction over four weeks throughout their unit over the book *Piratas del Caribe y el Mapa Secreto* by Mira Canion. Instruction was provided in a variety of ways, by directly translating sentences containing the targeted grammar forms, organizing and classifying verbs

based on their endings, and searching areas of the text for the targeted grammar forms. No data was collected on the independent variable.

The dependent variable was student achievement, which was determined quantitatively through student test scores. Student scores were determined on a 4-point scale, corresponding to how students met current learning targets for each standard assessed. On this scale, a 3 meant that the student met the instructional target whereas a 1 meant that they did not approach the target, 2 meant that they approached the target and a 4 meant that they exceeded the target. Throughout the *Piratas del Caribe y el Mapa Secreto* unit, students had four main teacher-created summative assessments, centered around the four domains of language: reading, writing, speaking and listening. The data collected from these assessments for both the control and test groups were analyzed to determine the mean and standard deviation for each group as whole, then compared using independent samples t-tests. The action researcher also collected baseline data from a previous unit based around the book *El Capibara con Botas* by Mira Canion. This baseline data was used to determine whether students made individual gains in achievement by determining the mean and standard deviation for each group as whole, then comparing those with the current data through dependent samples t-tests.

In order to adhere to FERPA requirements and keep collected student data confidential, the action researcher applied for IRB exemption, which was approved on February 6th, 2022. As part of this exemption, the action researcher committed themselves to keeping student data confidential by storing and describing the data in a way that does not use identifiable information, such as students' names. In addition, the action researcher destroyed their records of personally identifiable information upon the conclusion of their research project.

Data Analysis

Of the 88 students enrolled in Spanish I where the action research took place, only students who had data for all of the analyzed assessments were included in the data analysis. There was one student who had incomplete data for the baseline unit, and for this reason their data was not included. Due to this, the collected and analyzed data came from 87 of the 88 enrolled students.

Independent Samples – Piratas

The dependent variable that was analyzed in the action research was student achievement, which was determined quantitatively through student test scores. In order to determine how the test group did in comparison to the control group for their *Piratas* unit, test data was collected and analyzed for the four following standards, centered around the domains of language: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations for each *Piratas* test, for both the test and control groups.

Table 1. Test & Control Groups' Mean Scores & Standard Deviations for *Piratas*

	Reading		Writing		Speaking		Listening	
	Test	Control	Test	Control	Test	Control	Test	Control
Mean Score	3.08	2.52	3.35	2.91	3.28	3.03	3.02	3.09
Standard Deviation	0.94	1.02	0.76	0.90	0.77	0.83	0.94	1.01

As seen in Table 1, the test group had higher means than the control group for the following standards: Reading, Writing, and Speaking. For listening the test group had a lower mean than the control group. The test group also had lower standard deviations for each standard than the control group.

An independent samples t-test was run for each standard. Results of the independent samples t-tests revealed a significant difference in scores, where the test group scored higher than the control group in Reading $t(85) = 2.65, p < .001$ and Writing $t(85) = 2.46, p = .016$. Results for the Speaking standard revealed an insignificant difference where the test group scored higher than the control group $t(85) = 1.42, p = .159$ whereas the results for the Listening standard revealed an insignificant difference where the test group scored lower than the control group $t(85) = -0.32, p = .747$. Students receiving brief, targeted explicit grammar instruction in a primarily implicit grammar environment achieved significantly higher test scores in Reading and Writing in comparison with students who only received implicit grammar instruction.

Baseline Samples – Capibara & Piratas

In order to continue analyzing student achievement, the action researcher then determined whether each group made individual gains in achievement throughout the *Piratas* unit in comparison to their baseline data from the *Capibara* unit. Test data was collected from both the *Capibara* and *Piratas* units for each of the four following standards, centered around the domains of language: reading, writing, speaking and listening.

Test Group

Table 2 presents the means and standard deviations for the test group's scores from both the *Capibara* and *Piratas* tests.

Table 2. Test Group's Mean Scores & Standard Deviations for both *Capibara* & *Piratas*

	Reading		Writing		Speaking		Listening	
	Capibara	Piratas	Capibara	Piratas	Capibara	Piratas	Capibara	Piratas
Mean Score	3.02	3.08	3.05	3.35	3.52	3.28	3.26	3.02
Standard Deviation	0.83	0.94	0.97	0.76	0.70	0.77	0.85	0.94

As seen in Table 2, the test group had higher means for the *Piratas* unit than the *Capibara* unit in the following standards: Reading and Writing. For the Speaking and Listening standards, the test group scored lower for the *Piratas* unit than the *Capibara* unit.

A dependent samples t-test was run for each standard to determine whether there was a significant change in student achievement between the two units. Results of the dependent samples t-tests revealed an insignificant difference in scores, where students tested higher on the *Piratas* unit than the *Capibara* unit for Reading $t(42) = -0.46$, $p = .646$, and students tested lower on the *Piratas* unit than the *Capibara* unit for Listening $t(42) = 1.57$, $p = 0.124$. The results of the dependent samples t-tests also revealed a significant difference in scores, where students tested higher on the *Piratas* unit than the *Capibara* unit for Writing $t(42) = -2.70$, $p = .010$ and students tested lower on the *Piratas* unit than the *Capibara* unit for Speaking $t(42) = 2.07$, $p = .045$. By receiving brief, targeted explicit grammar instruction in a primarily implicit grammar environment during the *Piratas* unit, students achieved significantly higher test scores for Reading and Writing and significantly lower test scores for Speaking in comparison with their test scores from the *Capibara* unit where they only received implicit grammar instruction.

Control Group

Table 2 presents the means and standard deviations for the control group's scores from both the *Capibara* and *Piratas* tests.

Table 3. Control Group's Mean Scores & Standard Deviations for both *Capibara* & *Piratas*

	Reading		Writing		Speaking		Listening	
	Capibara	Piratas	Capibara	Piratas	Capibara	Piratas	Capibara	Piratas
Mean Score	3.02	2.52	2.84	2.91	3.31	3.03	2.93	3.09
Standard Deviation	0.66	1.02	0.99	0.90	0.79	0.83	0.90	1.01

As seen in Table 3, the control group had higher means for the *Piratas* unit than the *Capibara* unit in the following standards: Writing and Reading. For the Reading and Speaking standards, the control group scored lower for the *Piratas* unit than the *Capibara* unit.

A dependent samples t-test was run for each standard to determine whether there was a significant change in student achievement between the two units. Results of the dependent samples t-tests revealed a significant difference in scores, where students tested lower on the *Piratas* unit than the *Capibara* unit for Reading $t(43) = 3.51$, $p = .001$ and Speaking $t(43) = 2.34$, $p = .024$. The results of the dependent samples t-tests also revealed an insignificant difference in scores, where students tested higher on the *Piratas* unit than the *Capibara* unit for Writing $t(43) = -0.46$, $p = .645$ and Listening $t(43) = -0.93$, $p = .360$. Although students in the control group received implicit grammar instruction for both the *Capibara* and *Piratas* units, students achieved significantly lower test scores for both Reading and Speaking on their *Piratas* unit in comparison to their *Capibara* unit.

Discussion

Summary of Major Findings

The purpose of this action research study was to determine the impact brief, targeted explicit grammar instruction has on Spanish I students' achievement in the acquisition of a foreign language. With respect to the test and control groups' achievement on the *Piratas* unit, the test group achieved significantly higher test scores for Reading and Writing. This finding indicates that by using a combined approach by adding brief, targeted explicit grammar instruction to a largely implicit environment, learners may be able to more efficiently improve their Reading and Writing abilities.

When looking at the baseline data, the test group achieved significantly higher test scores for Writing and significantly lower test scores for Speaking on the *Piratas* unit in comparison to their test scores from the *Capibara* unit. This finding further supports the idea that by providing brief, targeted explicit grammar instruction, learners may be able to more efficiently improve their Writing abilities. At the same time, learners' Speaking abilities were negatively impacted, pointing to the idea that when using a combined approach to grammar instruction, it may be beneficial to incorporate more speaking activities to counteract the negative impact of incorporating the explicit approach. This also directly supports Moeen et al.'s (2019) finding that the implicit approach is more effective than the explicit approach on learners' fluency in regards to their speaking abilities in the foreign language.

Limitations of the Study

There were a number of limitations to this action research study that could have influenced its results, including sample size, the duration of the study, and confounding variables. While the current action research study collected and analyzed data from 87 students, a

larger sample size may have produced clearer, more accurate results. In addition, the unit in question took place over four weeks. A study taking place without time constraints could give significantly different results.

Finally, there were other potentially confounding variables that were not able to be controlled in this study, including student motivation and the general make-up of each class. When looking at the control group's data, the students achieved significantly lower test scores for both Reading and Speaking on their *Piratas* tests in comparison to their *Capibara* unit. Since the control group did not receive the brief, targeted explicit grammar instruction, it is clear that there were other factors at play that impacted their achievement.

Future Research

In future studies exploring the impact of a combined approach to foreign-language grammar education, it would be beneficial to extend the duration of the study, use a larger sample size, and explore students' perspectives of the various approaches to grammar instruction. By extending the duration of the study and using a larger sample size, more conclusive results may be reached, giving more insight into how a combined approach impacts student achievement for each of the domains of language. In addition, by exploring students' perspectives of implicit, explicit, and combined grammar approaches, researchers may be able to better understand how and why each approach impacts learners' achievement in regards to each of four domains of language. Through future research that gains a more detailed, conclusive picture into the impact a combined approach has on foreign-grammar education, researchers will be better able to determine best practices in foreign-language education.

Conclusion

A combined approach to foreign-language grammar education has the potential to utilize the strengths of both the explicit and implicit approaches. While more research is needed in order to determine best practices, this study provides support for the combined approach. By adding brief, targeted explicit grammar instruction to a largely implicit environment, learners were able to more efficiently improve their Reading and Writing abilities compared to students who only received implicit instruction. Moving forward, foreign-language educators should continue to explore the combined approach, seeing how it can be incorporated into best practices for foreign-language education.

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