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# A Comparison of Implicit and Explicit Teaching in Terms of Grammar and Writing Skills of Intermediate Learners

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#### **Abstract**

Teaching grammar has always been a very popular issue in the field of language studies. Explicit and implicit teachings are the main methods that are being applied for years in this field. This paper mainly aims to compare these two methods in terms of grammar success. Integrating this grammar knowledge to writing skills appropriately is another aim of this study. 40 intermediate university students whose ages are between 18-22 participated in this study. With pre and posttest and pre and post writings, quantitative method was applied in this paper. T-tests, ANCOVA and descriptive statistics were identified with the aid of SPSS. Writing scores of both groups also were evaluated by two raters and the number of grammar mistakes was calculated. As a result of this study, significant difference between pre and posttest was found. In addition, the explicit group's grammar and writing points were really better than the implicit group and the former group made fewer mistakes in their writings. This paper points out the significance of the explicit teaching method and gives the advice to administer and teachers about integrating these types of methods into language courses and curriculums.

# Bilinçli ve Örtük Öğretimin Orta Seviye Öğrencilerinin Dilbilim ve Yazı Becerilerine Etkisine Etkisinin Karşılaştırılması

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# Öz

Dilbilgisi öğretimi dil çalışmalarında sürekli popüler bir konu olmuştur. Doğrudan ve dolaylı öğretim yöntemleri ana akım olarak yıllardır bu alanda kullanılıyor. Bu çalışmanın amacı bu iki akımı öğrencilerin dilbilgisi başarıları açısından karşılaştırmaktır. Diğer bir amacı ise dilbilgisini yazma becerisine entegrasyonunu sağlamaktır. 18-22 yaş arasında 40 orta seviye üniversite öğrencisi bu çalışmaya katılmıştır. Ön test, son test, ön yazı testi ve son yazı testi ile nicel bir yöntem uygulanmıştır. SPSS programı aracılığı ile T-test, ANCOVA ve betimsel istatistikleri gösteren analiz yöntemleri uygulandı. İki grubun yazı test puanları ve dilbilgisi hata sayıları iki değerlendirici tarafından belirlendi. Bu çalışmanın sonucu olarak, ön test ve son test arasında anlamsal bir farklılık bulundu. Doğrudan öğrenme yöntemi ile öğrenen öğrencilerin dilbilgisi ve yazı puanları dolaylı öğrenmeyle öğrenen öğrencilere göre daha yüksekti ve yazı sınavlarında daha az hata yaptıkları da bulundu. Bu çalışma doğrudan öğrenme metodunun önemini ortaya koyar. Yetkililere ve öğretmenlere de bu tarz metotların derslerde ve müfredatlarda yer alması gerektiğini gösterir.

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#### Introduction

Grammar has always been one of the key factors in languages. Each language has unique grammar rules and structures. Grammar can be thought of as a system which organizes words and typical things in a sentence (Brown, 2002). As the importance of grammar is so clear for everyone, the ways of teaching grammar have always been discussed by researchers. Sheen (2002) said that finding the most useful teaching grammar method is a big concern for most of the linguists because Akakura (2009) says that each grammar structure cannot be acquired with the same method. Therefore, different techniques and methods have been conducted to be able to identify the best method for grammar teaching until now. Plenty of theories have been suggested to see how second language (L2) can be acquired, how to carry out different approaches, and how to evaluate the learning process (Andrews, 2007). Among different methods, explicit and implicit grammar teaching has come into prominence but choosing which method is more effective while teaching grammar is a controversial topic for researchers. Hammerly (1975) points out that the usage of implicit and explicit approach in terms of grammar teaching is one of the most stimulating and questionable topics. It has also consistently been discussed to find out the more effective method for teaching grammar since in the 19th century (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). Although these two approaches are disputable, grammar teaching methods generally are based on these two approaches. These approaches are mostly used in our classrooms. Naturally, the approach which teacher use in their classrooms is changing according to the topic and different approaches also cause different ideas in teachers' lesson plans. As a result of this difference, different teaching methods result in the end (Deng & Lin, 2016). However, they have generally good effect on students' grammar knowledge. These approaches influence not only students' grammar knowledge but also their grammar structure usage in their writings. When they acquire the structure implicitly or explicitly, they have a tendency to use the structures in their writings and these two approaches have also directly impact on grammar usage so it is inevitable to see the effect of these two methods on writings while they are producing the grammar topics.

Explicit grammar teaching is one of the oldest topics in language teaching. In spite of being old, it has been maintaining its importance for years. Explicit grammar teaching is built on a foundation. Krashen (1982) explains this approach's main aim by saying that educators should explain the topic clearly and learners should find practice chance until the rule is fully understood. Explicit teaching is in reliance on this idea. Nunan (1991) explains a little bit deeper by declaring that explicit teaching method can happen only when students learn the rules deliberately and teachers should give specific information. Ellis (2001) thinks that in implicit teaching, focusing the form in communicative activities is prioritized rather than comprehending the meaning and predetermined structures are taught actively and the rules firstly are given to students. Examples are also done with the class together. He also claims that the rules should be presented and then examples should be provided. Akakura (2012) also supports other researchers by pointing out that rules should be given directly in explicit teaching and the important thing is rules in the input. If a teacher teaches a form with explicit teaching method, he/she needs to pay attention to some procedures. Erlam(2003) summarizes these procedures very well. He says that the rule firstly should be showed deductively to students at the beginning of lessons. Explicit grammar teaching is mostly based on these explanations. Based on different researches, teaching grammar explicitly has lots of advantages for students development not just grammar but also different aspects of language. Nassaji and Fotos (2004) explain one of the effects by saying that students will probably remember the form of that grammar structure for a longer time if the students do enough communicative activities with that grammar structures. The accuracy of students will be also certainly affected by explicit grammar teaching. Bhatia (1997) and Widodo (2006) also believe that teaching explicitly acts on students' meaningful communication skills. In order to acquire a grammar structure explicitly, there are some important steps. Nazari (2013) identifies these steps by expressing that students should know three steps in explicit teaching. Encounter, process, and use are three steps of explicit teaching so that this grammar structure will be a part of their interlanguage.

Implicit teaching has also been searched a lot by the researchers for years as it is one of the most preferred teaching methods for grammar teaching. Krashen (1981) explains this teaching method by declaring that conscious learning is just one way to learn a language for the learners so, there is no need to acquire a language consciously. This explanation reveals the significance of acquiring a language implicitly. How teachers should implement this method in their classrooms is another issue for the researchers. Ranalli (2001) points out that this teaching method is related to consciousness-raising theory so, teachers in the classes should just focus attention on significant parts of target form because the learners should be expert instantly in terms of the target form. Andrews (2007, p. 3) also explains the steps of implicit teaching by expressing that lots of sentences from authentic texts are brought to

classes and just structure are shown as input. The aim is to focus on the meaning of the task. Students should deduce the rules from examples without consciousness. The teacher also aims at teaching the rules with texts. In this step, feedback can be necessary to clarify the forms of the rule but input can just be enough to push students to understand the forms alone. The implicit teaching method is also affecting students' skills positively. Dekeyser (1995) explains how implicit teaching has an influence on students' skills by stating that metalinguistic awareness of students will work out since students don't generally attend to a specific rule. Not only explicit knowledge but also implicit knowledge is required to enhance the talent of fluent and confident communication because speaking without waiting is a very clear proof of implicit language knowledge (Ellis, 2008). Sik (2015) also draws attention to another benefit of implicit knowledge by reciting that students habit formation process can increase thanks to implicit learning because students do activities until they use that structure automatically. Implicit teaching also requires some special tasks. Hinkel and Fotos (2002) explain one of these types of tasks by saying that lots of communicative tasks are in the center of implicit teaching for success and much more these types of tasks should be encouraged outside of the class by the teachers. To develop students' implicit knowledge, students need communicative activities to find enough opportunity to be able to participate in communication activities (Ellis, 2005).

As both teaching methods have a relationship with each other, comparing them has got attention very much. While some of the researchers try to make a distinction between them, some of them attempt to find out the effectiveness of one of them on another. Ellis(1994) makes a very general distinction by saying that implicit teaching is natural and provides to use the language automatically and fluently but explicit teaching is verbal and it is about knowing something deliberately. Since both of them are different methodologies, presenting them in the classes also change a lot. At the end of the lesson, the teacher introduces the grammar rule (Seliger, 1975) and students try to figure out the rule (Robinson, 1996; Rosa & O'Neill, 1999) but the teacher never explains the rules directly (Shaffer, 1989). Explicit instruction is shown to students firstly in the lessons by the teachers while implicit instruction can be presented differently (Erlam, 2003, p. 250). Explicit instruction should get attention to the rule immediately whereas teacher gives the task, not the rule and learners pay attention to the task instead of the rule in implicit teaching (Hulstijn, 2005; Norris & Ortega, 2000). The other discussion topic is favorableness. The researchers don't have the same idea about this topic. Herron and Tomasello (1992) think that implicit teaching has more advantage but Robinson (1996, p. 35) and Seliger (1975, p 22) support explicit teaching. There are also some researchers who think that there is no distinction between them like Rosa and O'Neill (1999, p. 525) and Shaffer (1989). Both methods are also affecting each other in some ways. DeKeyser (2003) picks up on this issue by claiming that implicit teaching depends on explicit teaching though implicit teaching can be the result of explicit teaching which is known earlier if explicit teaching is practiced a lot deliberately. Explicit teaching can also be considered as focus on forms and explicit teaching is named as focus on form (Ellis, 2001; Long, 1988, 1991). Burgess and Etherington (2002) explain what these definitions are by stating that focus on forms emphasize the structure rather than meaning but focus on form highlights the grammatical structure within the communicative

When the researchers investigated this topic deeply, he realized that there weren't many studies in this field. However, a few researchers tried to find out the effect of implicit and explicit teaching types on complex grammar structures. Andrews (2007) studied on this topic and found that explicit is better than implicit in terms of complex structures. For simple structures, there was no big difference.

Macaro and Masterman (2006) just focused on explicit grammar instruction. They tried to find out the effectiveness of explicit teaching on grammar and writing. For five months, two groups, control and experimental, were compared at three points. As a result of this study, explicit grammar teaching affected some aspects of grammar. It didn't help to increase accuracy.

Andringa, de Glopper, Hacquebord (2011) investigated the effect of implicit and explicit on free writing. With 81 students, two grammar topics were practiced with implicit and explicit knowledge. It resulted that both types of structures were effective in free writing but explicit was better when two of them were compared.

Akakura (2012) conducted his study by using technology. He aimed to find the effectiveness of explicit instruction on implicit and explicit L2 knowledge. Article tasks were given by technological tools. These tasks 98

were elicited imitation, oral production, grammaticality, and metalinguistic knowledge. Treatment lasted for six weeks. Pre and post-test were used. As a result, it was seen that explicit has a great effect on implicit knowledge and on ungrammatical items on measures of explicit knowledge.

Nazari (2013) focused on productive and receptive skills. With 30 adult learners, the present perfect tense was taught. The result was the same and explicit was better than implicit in terms of receptive and productive skills.

Khodabandeh(2016) contrasted four different task types. Explicit, implicit, task-based and without instruction approach were compared to learn students' writing classified ads abilities. 72 senior students participated. Pre and post-test were used. Descriptive and inferential statistics showed that explicit and task-based groups were better than implicit and self-study.

After investigating the old studies, it was seen that implicit and explicit teaching methods have been studied a lot in the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) but checking the usage of particular grammar topic in students' writings is not common. Besides, there are few studies which are based on intermediate students' grammar in their writings in Turkish EFL context that's why this study wanted to fill these gaps. These research questions are aimed at answering:

- 1. Is there any difference between the effect of implicit and explicit grammar teaching on students' pre and posttest grammar scores?
- 2. Is there any difference between the effect of implicit and explicit grammar teaching on students' pre and posttest writing scores?
- 3. Is there any difference between the effect of implicit and explicit grammar teaching on students' grammar mistakes in their writings?

#### Method

The purpose of this study is to discover the effectiveness of implicit and explicit teaching methods on students' grammar knowledge. The target of this paper is also to see the effects of implicit and explicit grammar teaching methods on students' grammar usage in their writings. Quantitative method is preferred to conduct this study. Quantitative method is the most suitable method for the aim of this study because this study aims to see the development of students empirically in terms of grammar and writing.

#### **Participants**

40 Turkish intermediate students took part in this study. 40 students were preferred because there were just 60 intermediate students at school. Among 60 students, by using simple random sample, 40 students were chosen randomly. The ages of students were between 18-20 years and they were first and third-grade students who were studying engineering at a state university. These students were chosen based upon their English levels. Before term, a proficiency test was conducted by the school and proficiency levels of the learners were identified. English is a compulsory lesson and it was 4 hours weekly for each class. The level of students was intermediate, and it was determined based on SpeakOut proficiency test. It was published by Pearson and the school used this test to learn students' proficiency levels before education period.

#### **Instruments**

The quantitative study was chosen by the researcher to see the effects of both approaches more clearly as qualitative data gave the researcher more reliable results and it provided the researcher to see the definite effect of the grammar teaching approaches on students' grammar and writing. Firstly, students' grammar knowledge was tested through pre and posttest. The researchers wanted to learn the effect of implicit and explicit teaching on students' grammar knowledge and to see the difference between the two groups empirically. The Pre and Posttests were SpeakOut Proficiency Tests by Pearson Publishing because the learners used SpeakOut book series in their lesson throughout the term. These tests were also prepared by experts at this field and all questions were related to the lessons. Secondly, pre and post writing were conducted to evaluate their writing scores and to identify students' correct usage of that specific grammar topic in their writings. The scores were calculated based on B1 Scoring Criteria presented by Cambridge English. The scale was based on B1 Level because the participants were intermediate.

#### **Procedure**

The procedure lasted for 6 weeks. The participants were divided two different groups. The first group (n=20) learned the predetermined grammar topics explicit whereas the second group (n=20) learned the topics implicitly. Topics were chosen according to the book's content. Five grammar topics such as Real Conditionals, Present Perfect Tense, Articles, Quantifiers, and Hypothetical conditions and Reported Speech which were in the content of the book were taught explicitly to the first group and implicitly to the second group. These topics were chosen because these topics were suitable for the intermediate students. In order to verify this information, the researcher again checked the levels of these topics by taking into account of CEFR and GSE level. The same skill-based main course book was used in both groups throughout the second term. Four lessons per week were divided for English lessons and each lesson was 45 minutes. For each group, one lesson hour was divided to teach predetermined grammar topics.

For the first group, each topic was introduced explicitly. The teacher directly writes the rules to the board and practices on the book and online practices such as Kahoot, Quizizz were done with the teacher.

For the second group, topics were introduced implicitly. The participants tried to notice the rules of the predetermined topic thanks to inputs. Inputs were reading texts, listening audios and videos. The teacher encouraged the students to understand the rules and helped them interiorize the rules. After being noticed, same activities done with the first group were used by the teacher.

#### **Data Collection**

First of all, pretest including these five grammar topics was conducted to both groups and pre writings were collected from students via Edmodo. There were multiple choice and fill in the blanks questions. In addition, students' ideas were gathered at the beginning of the term. Students wrote their ideas on Edmodo which is a Web 2.0 tool. The teacher wanted them to write at least 150 words. The aim was to encourage students to express their ideas freely and to be able to evaluate their writings equally.

Lastly, the students were tested again consisting of multiple choice and correcting mistakes questions. The students also wrote their post writings to Edmodo as a comment. This time, the word limitation was 180 words at least

# **Data Analysis**

SPSS 25 was employed to analyze data. To check the 2- tailed significance value, analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was used by the researchers. After being found the significant value, T-test provided to compare pre and posttest results of both groups and to be able to evaluate whether there is any significant difference between pretest and posttest scores.

For writing evaluation, pre and post writings were checked by two raters at the same time and the scores of both groups were evaluated according to The Assessment Scale. Four different items helped the raters to calculate the points (see Appendix A). The researchers compared the mean scores of pre and post writings an account of SPSS again by using descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics helped the researcher to calculate the students' writing mean scores. To see the number of mistakes of writings, just post writings were evaluated by two raters because predetermined grammar topics were used just in post writings. Two raters just focused on predetermined topics while checking the mistakes and other mistakes were dismissed in order to see completely the effect of implicit and explicit grammar teaching methods. Thanks to SPSS, the researchers compared the number of post writing grammar mistakes.

# **Findings**

So as to check if there is any significant difference between the first and the second group pretest scores, significance value was calculated (See table 1).

Table 1. Significance Value of Pretest Scores

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	Levene's Test for Equality of	t-test for Equality of
	Variances	Means

		F	Sig.	t	Sig.(2-tailed)
Pretest	Equal variances assumed	1,704	,200	2,652	,012
	Equal variances not assumed			2,652	,012

When the table was analyzed, it was seen that there was no significant difference between groups (z=0, 12 > 0, 05). It was also understood that the groups were homogenous.

To learn whether there is any significant difference between the groups, the significant value of posttest scores was checked (see Table 2).

Table 2. Significance Value of Posttest Scores

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means	
		F	Sig.	t	Sig.(2-tailed)
Posttest	Equal variances assumed	,534	,469	3,636	,001
Е	Equal variances not assume	d		3,636	,001

According to the table, after implicit and explicit teaching approaches were applied, a significant difference between groups (z=0, 01<0, 05) can be seen. It can be said that these types of teaching styles served the purpose.

To be able to find out the more successful approach, pretest and posttest scores of both groups were compared and it was shown below (see Table 3).

**Table 3.** Descriptive Statistics of the grammar mean scores of both groups

	Treatment	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Posttest	Explicit Teaching	20	24,30	4,462	,998
	Implicit Teaching	20	18,90	4,919	1,100
Pretest	Explicit Teaching	20	21,30	6,199	1,386
	Implicit Teaching	20	16,90	4,077	,912

When the scores were checked carefully, it was easily realized that both groups increased their scores slightly but the score of explicit teaching is greater (m= 24, 30) than the score of implicit teaching group (m= 18, 90). Pretest score of the explicit group also increased nearly 3 points while the other group increased just 2 points.

In order to answer the second research question (RQ2), the scores of pre and post writing were compared. Pre and post writing scores are tabled below (see Table 4).

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of the writing mean scores of both groups

	Treatment	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pre_writing	Explicit Group	20	12,75	3,823	,855
	Implicit group	20	12,30	3,147	,704
Post_Writing	Explicit Group	20	16,75	2,552	,571
	Implicit group	20	13,45	3,316	,742

The mean scores of post writings demonstrate that explicit group (m=16, 75) did better than the other group (m=13, 45). The explicit group gained approximately 4 points whereas the other group raised just approximately 1,5 points in the post writings.

To be able to clarify the RQ3, mistakes of pre and post writings were compared and it was shown as a table (See Table 5).

**Table 5.** Descriptive Statistics of the mistakes of both groups

	Treatment	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Post mistakes	Explicit Group	20	8,10	3,878	,867
	Implicit group	20	9,45	4,359	,975

When the table was examined, the group who learned the grammar topics explicitly made fewer mistakes than the group who learned the grammar topics implicitly. It can be understood that explicit teaching was more effective than the other group.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

When the results were considered, it was easily understood that two methods were effective separately for the participants. They helped students to increase their grammar and writing points. However, the effect of both methods was really different from each other when they were compared. Results showed that there was a significant difference between pre and post-test scores contrary to the study of Andrews (2007), Nazari (2013). Furthermore, Erlam (2003) also found no significant difference between the two groups. Reaching the significant different value can be the reason of students' interest in grammar lessons. As the participants generally took grammar lessons serious, they probably were attentive to tests.

When the grammar scores of both groups were examined, it was again seen the success of the explicit group. Although the implicit group also increased their points, the explicit group was really better than the other group. These results were in accordance with the studies of Andringa, de Glopper, Hacquebord (2011), Akakura (2012), Nazari (2013), Khodabandeh(2016). There can be lots of different explanations why the explicit group came to the forefront. Time can be thought as the most significant issue while discussing the success of the explicit group. Six weeks couldn't be enough time to teach grammar implicitly. Treatment process probably provided to learn explicitly more effectively because acquiring grammar knowledge explicitly don't need a very long time but internalizing the implicit grammar knowledge requires much more treatment process. Another reason can be considered as the habits of students. The participants were adults and especially adult Turkish students generally are accustomed to explicit grammar teaching type. They have been educated through educational methods and techniques including explicit teaching methods. This habit can lead the explicit group to have higher motivation towards English classes. They probably understood the predetermined topics better than the other group. The test itself can be another reason why the explicit group was better because questions within the test require to remember the rules firstly and then to produce that sentence or that rule. These types of questions provided the participants to concentrate on just the form, not the meaning.

When the writing scores and mistakes were examined, the achievement of the explicit group was seen so apparently. Especially, the number of mistakes was less among the explicit group students and this result again shows the effectiveness of explicit teaching method. These results were in line with Scott (1989), Lightbown (1998), Macaro and Masterman (2006). Seeing the instructions and rules clearly on the board and integrating the explicit knowledge to the writing process probably affected the participants positively. These results point out the significance of the explicit type of teaching because writing again needs to remember the rule and using that rule in a sentence correctly. As the explicit group is familiar with explicit type, they organized their ideas easily and put their ideas on paper. All of these reasons also caused to increase the points of writings because the scoring criteria were based on using language properly. Time factor again can be another cause to be able to infer why the explicit group scores were better and mistakes of them were less. For the effective implicit teaching method, a longer treatment period is needed because students make very much effort to be able to clarify that structure and use it in the daily life situation. These results also were the same with the studies of Scott (1989, 1990) and Lynch (2005). Khodabandeh (2016) also found that explicit group is superior to the implicit group in terms of producing and using sentences in their writings in a right way.

As a conclusion, significant difference was found between the scores of pre and posttest. This score reveals the efficiency of the treatment process. After testing the grammar knowledge of the participants, the pre and post writings were compared. The successful grammar results of the explicit group students reflected credit on their writing scores and grammar mistakes. With the help of a rubric for writings and two raters, writing scores were calculated and the success of the explicit group students came in sight again. This success affected them to use grammar topics which were taught during the treatment process truly and mistakes of the explicit group were clearly less than the other groups. Though the implicit group also raised their points and made a few mistakes, the 102

explicit group really outperformed. These increased points and the number of a few mistakes were surely the evidence of the achievement of the explicit teaching method. It was seen that students have more tendency to explicit teaching method and this tendency triggered the positive result of the explicit group.

This paper has very good and effective suggestions for teachers and administers. Considering the students' scores, integrating and using the explicit teaching in the classes are inevitable for the language teachers. Implicit teaching should not be ignored and must be practiced along with explicit teaching methods. Teachers should also adapt their teaching methods according to the appropriateness of the topic. For educators, making enough practice is also a crucial part of the teaching process, too. For the administration, being aware of the existence of these types of methods is too important and they should modify the curriculum regarding these types of methods. The administration stuff also should have enough knowledge about these methods and they should educate candidate of the language teachers and in-service teachers.

As limitations of this study, six weeks were not so adequate to compare entirely the difference between these methods in terms of success. The treatment duration should be extended. For the writing part, the number of writing activities should be increased. The teachers should utilize more creative writing activities that provide students to use predetermined topics in their writings freely. The number of the participants also should be increased to analyze deeper and the further researchers should get the idea of students about these types of methods so, mixed method study should be applied.

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