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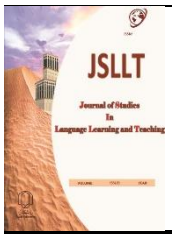

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The Impact of Pre-Task Explicit Grammar Instruction on the Explicit and Implicit Knowledge of Past Continuous

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Abstract

Lying within the dynamic landscape of language learning, task-based instruction has emerged as a prominent pedagogical approach. We examined the intersection of Task-based instruction and language learning in general and the pre-task explicit grammar instruction impact on the development of both explicit and implicit knowledge. Embedded within the task-based instruction framework, a pretest-posttest control group design was adopted to gather data. The participants consisted of two intact classes each with 18 pre-intermediate learners randomly assigned to experimental and control groups. The treatment comprised two 75-minute sessions, where the experimental group received pre-task explicit grammar instruction, whereas the control group received traditional teacher-fronted instructions more about the mechanical practice of isolated grammatical rules without embedding them in a communicative context. The findings indicated a significant impact of pre-task explicit grammar instruction on both explicit and implicit knowledge, with various substantial effects. This suggests that integrating focused grammar instruction before communicative tasks contributes to language learning. Implications of the study emphasize the potential benefits of incorporating pre-task explicit instruction in language teaching practices. Despite the limitations of the current investigation, including a relatively small sample size and a focus on a single linguistic feature, the results contribute valuable insights to optimizing task-based approaches for enhanced language learning outcomes.

Keywords: Explicit knowledge, Implicit knowledge, Pre-task grammar instruction, Task-based instruction.

I | INTRODUCTION

In the realm of language instruction over the past two decades, a lot of attention has been paid to the field of second language acquisition (SLA). This heightened interest is evident in the substantial body of the research dedicated to task-based learning and teaching, showcased through numerous publications (Bryfonski, 2024; Ellis, 2003; Long, 2015; Robinson, 2011; Sholeh, 2023; Skehan, 2014) and special journal issues (Housen & Kuiken, 2009; Mackey, 2016; Solon et al., 2017). While Task-based instruction (TBI) and task-supported instruction (TSI) have been the focus of rigorous examination, a noticeable lacuna in empirical exploration pertains to the ramifications of pre-task instruction on second language (L2) development.

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The ongoing discourse surrounding TSI (Ellis, 2017) and TBI (Long, 2016) has accentuated the theoretical and pedagogical significance of pre-task instruction. This entails explicit instruction on linguistic structures, as exemplified by the presentation-practice-production (PPP) approach in TSI, or the concurrent addressing of linguistic forms and communicative task performance in TBI, without prior explicit instruction.

The lingering query of whether explicit knowledge can evolve into implicit knowledge constitutes a pivotal aspect of this debate. Krashen (1981), a proponent of a non-interface position, argues for a clear distinction between explicit and implicit knowledge, suggesting that explicit knowledge does not convert into implicit knowledge. On the other hand, according to skill acquisition theory and the specific explanation by Dekeyser (1998), the interface position argues that explicit knowledge can transform into implicit knowledge via extensive practice.

Within this nuanced landscape, the weak interface position (Ellis, 1993) introduced a more nuanced perspective, highlighting the crucial role of explicit knowledge in facilitating the fundamental processes in language acquisition. Particularly, it underscored the significance of explicit knowledge in enhancing learners' abilities to recognize linguistic patterns and identify comprehension gaps (Schmidt, 1994). As we navigate through the uncharted terrain of pre-task instruction, it becomes imperative to consider its potential impact on the dynamics between explicit and implicit knowledge, especially concerning linguistic elements such as the past continuous tense.

The debate over the merits and drawbacks of these two instructional approaches is well-established. However, establishing the superiority of each approach necessitates comprehensive empirical evidence concerning the effect of pre-task grammar instruction on learning outcomes. Despite its theoretical and pedagogical significance, this seemingly straightforward yet crucial question remains conspicuously absent in task-based research.

In order to fill this gap, it is imperative to emphasize a study conducted by Li et al. (2018) that focused on classroom-based research. The study demonstrated that pre-task grammar teaching solely resulted in the acquisition of explicit knowledge. It is imperative to investigate whether such findings can be replicated in diverse linguistic and cultural contexts. This study, using Willis's (1996) framework of TBI, aimed to contribute to the literature by investigating the impact of pre-task explicit grammar instruction on both explicit and implicit knowledge of the past continuous tense, thereby advancing our understanding of the intricate interplay between instructional methodologies and language development.

The importance of the current inquiry lies in its endeavor to address a conspicuous gap in the literature on the field of SLA. While task-based learning and teaching, particularly through TBI and TSI, have been subject to extensive scrutiny, the empirical exploration of the pre-task instruction effect on L2 development remains notably underexplored.

The ongoing discourse on TSI and TBI underscores the theoretical and pedagogical importance of pre-task instruction, whether through explicit instruction on linguistic structures, as exemplified by the PPP approach in TSI, or the concurrent addressing of linguistic forms and communicative task performance in TBI, without prior explicit instruction. The crux of this debate, however, revolves around transforming explicit knowledge into implicit knowledge, which is an unresolved question with implications for language learning methodologies.

The present research contributes to this landscape by examining the potential impact of pre-task explicit grammar instruction on both explicit and implicit knowledge of the past continuous tense. To this end, the research sheds light on the complex interplay between instructional methodologies and language development. The significance of the research extends beyond theoretical debates to the practical realm of language instruction, providing insights for language educators and curriculum designers into the efficacy of pre-task grammar instruction.

The emphasis of the study on exploring the replicability of findings in diverse linguistic and cultural contexts adds a layer of robustness to its contribution. By drawing attention to the research by Li et al. (2018), which only examined the development of explicit knowledge through pre-task grammar instruction, the present study seeks to build upon the existing evidence. The investigation into diverse contexts ensures the generalizability of the findings, offering valuable insights into the universality or context-specific nature of the relationship between pre-task instruction and language development.

In fact, this study aims to fill a crucial gap in task-based research by providing comprehensive empirical evidence regarding the effect of pre-task grammar instruction on learning outcomes, particularly in the context of the past continuous tense. Through its contributions, the study provides information on instructional practices, advances theoretical discussions, and contributes substantively to the ongoing dialogue surrounding effective approaches to SLA.

II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

1. Theoretical Framework

The term Task-Based Instruction (TBI) denotes an instructional approach that originated in the 1980s and has since evolved considerably, playing a pivotal role in second language teaching and acquisition. Prabhu (1987) defines TBI as an instructional method that determines learners' communicative tasks, promotes learners' idea-sharing to accomplish desired outcomes, and significantly impacts the development of communicative proficiency. According to Mckinnon and Rigby (2004, as cited in Nahavandi & Mukundan, 2013) students naturally assimilate the relevant and comprehensible language in the classroom context. Richards & Rodgers (2001) assert that TBI planning and instruction involve various tasks, the key components of language education. Contrary to form-focused activities, engaging in task-based work, according to the authors, provides a much more beneficial setting for actuating learning processes and superior capacities for language learning to unfold. TBI tasks mirror real-life situations, underscoring their pivotal role.

Tasks are defined differently by linguists and academics, and Long (1985, as cited in Nunan, 2004) characterizes tasks as specific assignments completed for personal or mutual benefit. Nunan's (1998) classification distinguishes between real-world tasks and pedagogic tasks, the former pertaining to genuine circumstances and the latter comprising activities performed in the classroom. Tasks, as Willis (1996) notes, to accomplish a goal require learners to communicate in the target language, emphasizing communication over grammar or structure. In English reading classes, a task involves students understanding the meaning, modifying the language used, and producing output in the target language with support.

Willis (1996) proposed a framework of three stages including pre-task, task cycle, and language focus. The first stage aims to introduce and identify the topic, with learners engaging in brainstorming exercises. The task cycle involves task execution, planning and reporting conducted in pairs or groups. The last stage allows the in-depth analysis of language traits after concentrating on meaning, guiding learners towards language use and the forms relevant for future proficiency.

The significance of conscious attention to linguistic forms in the input has been demonstrated most clearly in the work of Schmidt (1994, 2001). His Noticing Hypothesis claims that 'people learn about the things they attend to and do not learn much from the things they do not attend to' (2001, p. 30). For Schmidt, noticing or the conscious attention to language form is essential for language acquisition. Numerous L2 researchers have highlighted the importance of noticing and its supportive role in L2 learning (e.g., DeKeyser, 1998; Ellis, 2001, 2002a; Nassaji & Swain, 2000; Skehan, 1998; Szudarski & Carter, 2016; Toomer & Elgort, 2019; Vu & Peters, 2022a,b). Skehan (1998) further suggested that, since learners cannot simultaneously process both the meaning and form of language input, they must consciously focus on the

form to effectively acquire it, thus emphasizing the value of noticing the gap (i.e., noticing that what learners say is different from the target language) in language learning.

2. Pre-task Explicit Instruction

The ongoing dispute regarding whether explicit instruction concerning the target grammatical feature should precede engagement in focused tasks has been a matter of contention. Advocates, exemplified by theorists like Long (2015), question the psycholinguistic viability of a proactive, intentional, and non-contingent focus on form, contending that learners might not be developmentally prepared for such an approach (Pienemann, 2005). Furthermore, concerns persist that explicit instruction could result in automatized declarative knowledge rather than genuine implicit knowledge, and the separate measurement of these types poses challenges (Ellis, 2017; Suzuki & DeKeyser, 2015). Ellis (2003) warns that explicit instruction in the pre-task phase may lead learners to perceive the activity more as an exercise than a task involving meaningful behavior. Willis & Willis (2007) contend that pre-teaching linguistic forms may sideline the communication of meaning, detrimentally impacting learners' fluency. Conversely, the skill-acquisition theory supports the provision of explicit instruction before focused tasks, asserting that declarative knowledge serves as a prerequisite for proceduralization and automatization to ensue (DeKeyser, 1998, 2015).

In the "Focus on forms" (FonFs) approach (Long, 1991, 1996), language is deconstructed into individual elements like vocabulary, grammar rules, or functions, which are taught sequentially, one item at a time. This method represents a traditional, linear approach to language instruction, where the syllabus, teaching materials, and related activities are all structured to introduce and practice a series of specific linguistic items. In FonFs instruction, learners primarily concentrate on linguistic forms, although the aspect of meaning is not entirely neglected.

On the other hand, "Focus on form" (FonF) (Long, 1991; Long & Crookes, 1992) centers primarily on meaning, emphasizing the process of conveying and understanding messages rather than focusing solely on linguistic forms. FonF involves occasional shifts in learners' attention from meaning to the specific linguistic forms and the meanings they express, while the main emphasis remains on communication. These shifts in focus are often triggered by difficulties in understanding or producing language and can be initiated by either the teacher or the students. A key characteristic of FonF instruction is its focus on the relationship between form and function in language.

Ellis et al. (2002) describe FonF and FonFs instruction as involving two distinct types of learning: incidental and intentional. Intentional learning occurs when students actively engage in the learning process, deliberately focusing on acquiring a specific language feature. In contrast, incidental learning happens when learners are primarily engaged in communication and acquire the language unintentionally. However, as Schmidt (1994) noted, incidental learning might still require some degree of conscious attention to linguistic forms, known as noticing. Therefore, the key difference between incidental and intentional learnings lies not in the presence of conscious awareness, but in the absence of a deliberate intention to learn.

In many contemporary instructional materials, the FonFs approach is often implemented through the PPP approach, as described by Ur (1996). DeKeyser (2015) suggests that this approach is particularly effective for older learners, who may no longer have the implicit learning capabilities that children possess. Despite it, PPP is also commonly used in teaching materials designed for children, including complete beginners (e.g., Nakata et al., 2007). A distinctive aspect of PPP is its emphasis on eliciting correct target language forms from the outset, using production as a tool for learning. Although PPP includes activities based on meaning as well as controlled production exercises, learners are typically aware that the goal is not genuine communication but rather the practice of specific linguistic forms.

FonF, on the other hand, can encompass a wide range of instructional activities. Doughty & Williams (1998) categorize these activities based on how much they disrupt the flow of communication, distinguishing between unobtrusive and obtrusive approaches. For instance, "input flood" and "task-essential language" are considered less intrusive forms of FonF, whereas activities like "consciousness-raising" and "input processing" are more disruptive. Additionally, these types of FonF vary in whether they involve reactive or proactive attention to linguistic forms. Reactive techniques, such as those used in task-based FonF, prompt immediate focus on form during task performance. In contrast, proactive techniques, like consciousness-raising activities, explicitly highlight certain language features before learners encounter them.

FonF is conceptualized as unobtrusive and reactive, which aligns with a task-based approach to language instruction. Ellis (2003) outlines four key criteria for defining a "task" including a) the primary focus is on meaning, b) there is some form of gap, such as an information gap, c) learners must use their own linguistic and non-linguistic resources to communicate, and d) the task has an outcome beyond merely demonstrating correct language use. Tasks can be either input-based or output-based. In input-based tasks, learners must comprehend the input to achieve the task's goal, often requiring a non-verbal response, such as selecting the correct picture. These tasks are designed so that learners can only succeed if they have both noticed and understood the necessary linguistic forms. Feedback on these non-verbal responses is crucial, as it helps learners determine whether they have processed the input correctly. Additionally, opportunities to focus on form can arise through the negotiation of meaning or form. Ellis (2003) also notes that "simple listening tasks can be devised that can be performed with zero competence in the L2" (p. 37).

3. Explicit and Implicit Knowledge

In SLA, explicit and implicit types of knowledge represent distinct dimensions of language proficiency. Explicit knowledge involves conscious awareness of the rules and structures of a language, allowing individuals to articulate grammatical principles and explain linguistic concepts (Ellis, 2015). In contrast, implicit knowledge involves an instinctive, intuitive grasp of language patterns, enabling seamless and natural language use without the necessity for conscious analysis (Ellis, 2005; Roehr-Brackin, 2024). It commonly develops through exposure to authentic language usage, nurturing effortless language expression (Ellis, 2015).

Evaluating explicit and implicit knowledge requires sophisticated assessment techniques. Traditional approaches for explicit knowledge include tasks that require the deliberate application of language rules, such as completing grammar exercises, explaining sentence structures, and engaging in untimed grammaticality judgment tasks (UGJTs, Ellis, 2009). While these evaluations uncover learners' grasp of linguistic concepts, they may fail to fully assess their competence in employing language with ease and spontaneity in practical situations

Assessing implicit knowledge is more intricate, often involving indirect methods like reaction time experiments or analyzing learners' spontaneous language production. Timed grammaticality judgment tasks (TGJTs, Ellis, 2009) impose time constraints on learners to evaluate the grammatical correctness of sentences. Tasks such as sentence repetition, eye-tracking studies, and neuropsychological assessments reveal how learners process language subconsciously (Ellis, 2009). By amalgamating both knowledge, educators gain a well-rounded understanding of learners' language proficiency, encompassing their competence in both linguistic structures and real-life language usage.

4. Experimental Studies on The Efficacy of Pre-Task Instruction

There is a paucity of empirical research investigating whether providing grammar instruction before engaging in a communicative task yields more effective results in facilitating L2 development compared to performing the task alone. In interaction-driven research, various studies approached pre-task instruction differently; some studies omitted it (e.g., Kim, 2012; Révész, 2009), some included pre-task grammar

instruction for all treatment groups to ensure equal prior knowledge about the target structure (e.g., Ammar, 2008; Quinn, 2014), some integrated grammar instruction as part of form-focused instruction without specifying timing or implementation (e.g., Lyster, 2004), and some differentiated between types of form-focused instruction, such as integrated and isolated focus on form (with the former involving brief grammar instruction during a communicative task and the latter consisting of blocks of grammar instruction combined with discrete item practice) (e.g., Spada et al., 2014). However, none of these categories explicitly separated the effects of pre-task grammar instruction from the effects of task performance.

Explored as form-focusing strategies prior to task performance, guided planning and pre-task modelling have undergone examination to understand their impact on task performance. Mochizuki & Ortega (2008) investigated the influences of guided planning, where learners received instructions on constructing sentences with relative clauses before engaging in an oral task. The results indicated that guided planning could lead to increased production and accuracy of relative clauses, with general complexity and fluency similar to unguided and no planning groups. However, the researchers did not assess accuracy, leaving uncertainties about the impact of guided planning on this aspect of speech performance. In a related study, Foster & Skehan (1999) explored various planning options and their influence on task performance, specifically focusing on whether planning targeted language or content. In conditions involving language-focused planning, learners received guidance on forming and using English modal verbs and conditionals before the oral task, but the researchers reported no significant effects for teacher-guided language-focused planning.

Pre-task modelling is an instructional approach in which students are exposed to a sample performance of the task they are required to perform later. The model serves multiple purposes including a) clarifying task procedures, b) demonstrating expected group dynamics (e.g., negotiation with other group members), c) providing linguistic and pragmatic support, and d) offering learning opportunities by focusing on a specific linguistic structure. Kim (2013) observed that watching a video demonstrating how to address linguistic problems related to question formation, including corrective feedback, resulted in learners producing more language-related episodes in their task performance. In a study by Van de Guchte et al. (2019), a trade-off was identified between language-focused and meaning-focused modelling. Learners instructed to attend to language while watching a modelling video demonstrated more frequent use of the target structure, but their overall linguistic complexity did not match that of the group focusing on the content of the video.

Pishadast (2015) aimed to explore the effects of a combined approach using form-focused and task-based instruction on the vocabulary acquisition and retention of Iranian EFL learners. A total of 60 junior high school students, all at the elementary level, were chosen for the study based on their performance on the Key English Test, a proficiency assessment. Before the main experiment, the study instruments, including pretests and posttests, were tested on a group of 20 learners of similar age and proficiency to ensure their reliability and validity. At the start of the study, the participants' existing vocabulary knowledge was assessed with a pretest. The participants were then divided into an experimental group and a control group. The experimental group received vocabulary instruction through a form-focused, task-based approach, while the control group was taught with traditional methods. To evaluate the learners' vocabulary acquisition and retention, two posttests were administered, one immediately after the instructional sessions and the other a week later. The results of two-sample t-tests revealed that the form-focused, task-based instruction significantly improved both vocabulary learning and retention among the learners.

Interactions between teachers and students, as well as among students themselves, play a crucial role in the process of foreign language teaching and learning. It is suggested that these interactions promote language development and enhance language acquisition. Rahimpour & Maghsoudpour (2011) aimed to examine the impact of TBI and Form-Focused Instruction (FFI), as two distinct teaching approaches, on the quantity and quality of teacher-student interactions. The interactions were measured by observing

the frequency of turn-taking, the types of questions asked, the feedback given, and the correction of errors. The study involved two groups of intermediate-level language learners. One group was taught with the FFI approach, while the other group received instruction through the TBI approach. The statistical analysis of the data indicated that the FFI approach resulted in a higher frequency of teacher-student interactions compared to the TBI approach.

While the aforementioned studies examined the influences of explicit information, their outcome measures primarily focused on task performance indicators such as the complexity, fluency, and accuracy, of learners' speech or language-related episodes, rather than assessing learning gains through pretests and posttests. Notably, they did not explore pre-task grammar instruction. It is crucial to acknowledge that the efficacy of explicit grammar instruction, even if not delivered in the pre-task stage, has been extensively investigated in research, particularly in contrast to implicit instruction. The explicit-implicit distinctiveness is often framed around whether the attention of learners is overtly directed towards linguistic forms. Various meta-analyses of L2 instruction (Li, 2010; Lyster & Saito, 2010; Norris & Ortega, 2000; Spada & Tomita, 2010) consistently highlight explicit instruction superiority over implicit instruction.

However, as cautioned by Long (2015), the advantage of explicit instruction should be considered within certain limitations. For instance, empirical SLA studies tend to focus on simple structures conducive to explicit learning. Additionally, explicit treatments often involve combinations of instructional components, unlike the relatively restricted operationalizations of implicit treatments in primary research. The outcome measures in these studies are more likely to highlight explicit knowledge than implicit knowledge. For example, Norris and Ortega's meta-analysis primarily employed discrete-point tests, widely recognized as measures of explicit knowledge (Ellis, 2005). Most studies have made no clear distinction between the measures of explicit and implicit knowledge. Nevertheless, Li et al. (2018) conducted an intriguing study to demonstrate that pre-task explicit instruction leads to explicit knowledge of passive voice, although they did not establish its impact on the implicit knowledge of the target linguistic feature.

The literature review presented a comprehensive overview of TBI and its theoretical foundations, emphasizing the critical role of pre-task instruction in language learning. Regardless of the extensive exploration of TBI, a conspicuous gap emerges in the empirical investigation of the impact of pre-task grammar instruction on L2 development. While scholars have debated the psycholinguistic plausibility of explicit instruction preceding task performance, as well as the potential trade-offs between focusing on form and communication, the literature lacks empirical studies specifically addressing whether providing grammar instruction before engaging in a communicative task yields more effective results in facilitating L2 development compared to task performance alone. Notably, the review underscored the scarcity of research explicitly examining the influences of pre-task grammar instruction on learning gains through pretests and posttests. The acknowledged need for sophisticated assessment techniques to evaluate explicit and implicit knowledge further highlights the gap in the existing literature, calling for targeted empirical investigations to address this crucial aspect of language instruction. The experiment seeks to fill this unresearched area by examining the effects of pre-task explicit grammar instruction on both explicit and implicit knowledge of the past continuous tense, contributing empirical evidence to inform pedagogical practices and theoretical discussions within the field of SLA. Therefore, the questions to answer are as follows:

1. Does pre-task grammar instruction lead to the explicit knowledge of past continuous?
2. Does pre-task grammar instruction lead to the implicit knowledge of past continuous?

III. METHODOLOGY

1. Design

The current investigation adopted a rigorous pretest-posttest CG design to systematically investigate pre-task explicit grammar instruction impact on both explicit and implicit knowledge of the past continuous tense. The design involved the careful selection and assignment of participants to EG and CG, allowing for a comparative analysis of outcomes before and after the intervention.

2. Setting and Participants

To conduct the study a language institute located in South Iran was approached, where two intact classes, each comprising 18 learners, participated in the investigation. The participants, selected based on their placement test results indicating a pre-intermediate command of English proficiency, ranged in age from 16 to 22 years. The random division of the groups resulted in an experimental group (EG) and a control group (CG), each comprising learners with similar initial proficiency levels. Within the EG, 6 learners were male and 12 learners were female, while there were 9 female learners and 9 male learners in the CG. It is noteworthy that, before the study, none of the participants of the study had visited an English-speaking country, and they all shared Farsi as their native language. Importantly, none of the participants were bilingual, ensuring a homogenous linguistic background among the research participants. These demographic details provide a contextual understanding of the setting and participants, offering insights into the diverse yet controlled characteristics of the learner groups involved in the investigation.

3. Instruments

The instruments employed for assessing both explicit and implicit knowledge of the past continuous tense were carefully designed and validated. Before the commencement of the treatment, a pretest was administered to both groups using a researcher-made UGJT with 20 items. The UGJT was construct-validated through a known-group technique (Ary et al., 2019) in a way that it was administered to 5 English teachers whose performance significantly differed from that of the participants on the pretest ($p < 0.05$). The selected items in the UGJT were based on the content covered in the Top Notch 2A textbook, providing a contextually relevant assessment of participants' explicit knowledge of the target grammatical form. It is noteworthy to pinpoint that while the textbook addresses a range of linguistic features, this study focused primarily on the past continuous tense. This focus was informed by the researchers' teaching experiences, which have consistently shown that Iranian EFL learners encounter significant challenges in mastering this particular linguistic form.

Following the treatment, another construct-validated UGJT was conducted to both groups to measure the explicit knowledge of the target form post-intervention. This UGJT, designed in alignment with the treatment content, aimed to gauge the participants' understanding of the past continuous tense after exposure to pre-task explicit grammar instruction.

To measure implicit knowledge of the target form, a sentence repetition task was employed. This task consisted of 20 items, and participants were given 5 seconds to repeat sentences uttered by the instructor. Each correctly repeated target form earned participants one score. Notably, if participants could accurately reproduce the target form but failed to repeat the entire sentence, they were awarded half a point. This approach provided a nuanced assessment of participants' implicit knowledge, capturing their ability to unconsciously replicate the target form within a contextualized sentence structure. The combination of the UGJT and sentence repetition task allowed for a comprehensive evaluation of both explicit and implicit knowledge of the past continuous tense.

4. Treatment

The treatment phase of the current investigation was meticulously designed and implemented to examine pre-task explicit grammar instruction impact on the explicit and implicit knowledge of the past continuous tense. The treatment sessions spanned two sessions, each lasting 75 minutes, and were conducted with great attention to instructional detail. During these sessions, the EG received pre-task explicit grammar instruction, while the CG underwent traditional teacher-fronted sessions. In the treatment phase, the explicit grammar instruction provided to the EG differed significantly from the traditional method employed with the CG, particularly in its alignment with the "Noticing Hypothesis" and its emphasis on "focus on form" rather than "focus on forms". The "Noticing Hypothesis", proposed by Schmidt (1990), suggests that learners must consciously notice linguistic features in input to acquire them. In line with this, the explicit instruction in the EG was designed to help learners notice the past continuous tense in a communicative context, thereby focusing on "form", which involves drawing learners' attention to a specific grammatical structure within meaningful language use. This contrasts with the traditional method used in the CG, which involved a "focus on forms", where the instruction is more about the mechanical practice of isolated grammatical rules without embedding them in a communicative context. The traditional approach often involves rote memorization and repetitive drills, which may not engage learners in noticing the form in actual language use. Thus, the explicit instruction in the EG was not only about teaching the rule but also about encouraging learners to recognize and apply the past continuous tense within real-life scenarios, facilitating deeper learning through a focus on form.

In the EG, the instructor employed a communicative and task-based approach, aligning with the principles of pre-task explicit grammar instruction. The focus was on engaging learners in meaningful language use and fostering an understanding of the past continuous tense within a communicative context. The sessions were interactive and participatory, with a clear emphasis on promoting the explicit knowledge of the grammatical structure and its practical application in real-life scenarios.

In the pre-task sessions, the teacher initiated the instruction by introducing the topic of the past continuous tense through a contextually relevant scenario. For example, the teacher might have presented a narrative about a specific event or activity that occurred in the past, highlighting the ongoing nature of the actions involved. This narrative served as a springboard for discussing the grammatical structure of the past continuous tense.

Following this introduction, the teacher engaged the learners in a collaborative discussion, encouraging them to share their own experiences and create sentences using the target grammatical structure. This interactive phase aimed to elicit learners' explicit understanding of the past continuous tense while promoting active participation and peer interaction. The learners were prompted to construct sentences, ask questions, and engage in dialogues that featured the target form.

To reinforce explicit knowledge, the teacher provided focused explanations, highlighting the structure and usage of the past continuous tense. Clear examples and comparisons with other tenses were offered to enhance the learners' comprehension. Interactive exercises, such as sentence completion tasks and guided practice, were incorporated to solidify the learners' understanding of the grammatical concept.

Furthermore, the teacher integrated role-playing activities and communicative tasks that required learners to apply the past continuous tense in practical, real-life scenarios. For instance, the learners might have engaged in role-plays depicting ongoing activities, narrating events, or describing scenes, thereby reinforcing their explicit knowledge through active language use.

Conversely, in the CG, traditional teacher-fronted sessions were conducted without the specific pre-task explicit grammar instruction. These sessions followed a more conventional approach, with the teacher delivering content in a lecture-style format, providing information, and engaging in question-and-answer interactions with the learners.

In essence, the treatment for the EG was characterized by an immersive and interactive pre-task explicit grammar instruction approach, fostering both explicit knowledge and practical application of the past continuous tense. The sessions were carefully structured to create a dynamic learning environment, promoting engagement, collaboration, and active language use among the learners.

5. Data Analysis Procedures

The procedures involved a systematic examination of both pretest and posttest results, considering the two groups: the EG, which received pre-task explicit grammar instruction, and the CG, which underwent traditional teacher-fronted sessions. To appraise the statistical significance of differences between these groups, an independent sample t-test was performed for both the pretest and posttest data, following the guidelines outlined by Pallant (2020).

To analyze the data from the pre-test, the independent sample t-test was applied to compare the initial levels of explicit and implicit knowledge of the past continuous tense between the experimental and CGs. This statistical test allowed for a rigorous examination of any baseline disparities between the two groups before the implementation of the treatment.

Similarly, for the posttest data analysis, the t-test was again conducted to evaluate the treatment impact on both explicit and implicit knowledge. By comparing the posttest scores of both groups, this statistical analysis provided insights into the effectiveness of pre-task explicit grammar instruction in fostering a deeper understanding of the past continuous tense.

The t-test is relevant in this context as it makes possible the comparison of means between two independent groups, offering a robust statistical approach to identify significant differences in the outcomes of the EG and CG. The significance level (alpha) was set in accordance with conventional standards (typically 0.05), providing a reliable criterion to determine whether any observed differences were statistically significant.

By conducting independent sample t-tests for both the pretest and posttest data, the study aimed to quantify and statistically validate pre-task explicit grammar instruction influence on the explicit and implicit knowledge of the past continuous tense, thereby contributing to the empirical understanding of the study's research questions.

IV. FINDINGS

1. The Effect of Pre-Task Instruction on Explicit Knowledge

As mentioned earlier, to examine the effect pre-task instruction on the explicit knowledge of past continuous, a t-test was required. Before administering the t-test, a one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) test was run to ensure the normal distribution of the data.

Table 1. One-sample K-S test of explicit knowledge.

		UGJT Pretest	UGJT Posttest
N		36	36
Normal Parameters	Mean	3.027	8.805
	Std. Deviation	1.362	5.497
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.191	.212
	Positive	.191	.212
	Negative	-.121	-.120
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		1.148	1.272
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.143	.079

Table 1 shows that on both pre- and posttests of explicit knowledge, the data were normally distributed ($p > 0.05$).

Table 2. Group statistics of explicit knowledge on the pretest.

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
UGJT Pretest	Experimental	18	3.111	1.490	.351
	Control	18	2.944	1.258	.296

Table 2 indicates that, regarding explicit knowledge of the form, the EG ($N = 18$, $M = 3.111$, $SD = 1.490$) and the CG ($N = 18$, $M = 2.944$, $SD = 1.258$) performed similarly.

Table 3. Independent samples test of explicit knowledge on the pretest.

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95%Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
UGJT Pretest	Equal variances assumed	1.271	.267	.362	34	.719	.166	.459	-.767	1.101
	Equal variances not assumed			.362	33.073	.719	.166	.459	-.768	1.102

The findings of the inferential statistics using t-test do not indicate a significant difference between the two groups regarding the explicit knowledge on the pretest ($F = 1.271$, $t = .362$, $df = 34$, $p > 0.05$).

Table 4. Group statistics of explicit knowledge on the posttest.

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
UGJT Posttest	Experimental	18	12.777	5.082	1.197
	Control	18	4.833	1.723	.406

On the other hand, descriptive statistics show that the EG ($N = 18$, $M = 12.777$, $SD = 5.082$) outstripped their counterparts in the control condition ($N = 18$, $M = 4.833$, $SD = 1.723$).

Table 5. Independent samples test of explicit knowledge on the posttest.

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95%Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
UGJT Posttest	Equal variances assumed	11.111	.002	6.281	34	.000	7.944	1.264	5.373	10.515
	Equal variances not assumed			6.281	20.859	.000	7.944	1.264	5.312	10.576

The results of Table 5 demonstrate a significant difference between the conditions on the posttest in terms of their explicit knowledge ($F = 11.111$, $t = 6.281$, $df = 20.859$, $p = .001$) with an enormous effect size (eta squared = .537).

2. The Effect of Pre-Task Instruction on Implicit Knowledge

Similar to what was reported above, a one-sample K-S test was conducted to ensure normality for the implicit knowledge.

Table 6. One-sample K-S test of implicit knowledge.

		SR Pretest	SR Posttest
N		36	36
Normal Parameters	Mean	3.222	6.694
	Std. Deviation	1.605	4.413
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.166	.174
	Positive	.166	.174
	Negative	-.103	-.098
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		.994	1.042
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.277	.228

Table 6 indicates that the data were normally distributed on both pre- and posttests of implicit knowledge ($p > 0.05$).

Table 7. Group statistics of implicit knowledge on the pretest.

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
SR Pretest	Experimental	18	4.055	1.625	.383
	Control	18	3.388	1.092	.257

Regarding implicit knowledge, as presented in Table 7, EG ($N = 18$, $M = 4.055$, $SD = 1.625$) and CG ($N = 18$, $M = 3.388$, $SD = 1.092$) performed almost the same on the pretest.

Table 8. Independent samples test of implicit knowledge on the posttest.

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95%Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
SR Pretest	Equal variances assumed	2.095	.157	3.610	34	.101	1.666	.461	.728	2.604
	Equal variances not assumed			3.610	29.745	.106	1.666	.461	.723	2.609

The outcomes of the inferential statistics, specifically the t-test, reveal no significant difference between the two groups concerning implicit knowledge on the pretest ($F = 2.095$, $t = 3.610$, $df = 34$, $p > 0.05$).

Table 9. Group statistics of implicit knowledge on the posttest.

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
SR Posttest	Experimental	18	9.611	4.460	1.051
	Control	18	3.777	1.477	.348

Based on Table 9, the EG ($N = 18$, $M = 9.611$, $SD = 4.460$) outperformed their peers in the CG ($N = 18$, $M = 3.777$, $SD = 1.477$) on the posttest.

Table 10. Independent samples test of implicit knowledge on the posttest.

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95%Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
SR Posttest	Equal variances assumed	13.454	.001	5.267	34	.000	5.833	1.107	3.582	8.084
	Equal variances not assumed			5.267	20.686	.000	5.833	1.107	3.527	8.138

In terms of implicit knowledge of past continuous, a significant difference was observed between the two conditions on the posttest (F = 13.454, t = 5.267, df = 20.686, p = 0.001). Additionally, the effect size was huge (eta squared = .449).

V. DISCUSSION

The findings of the current investigation threw light on the impact of pre-task instruction on both explicit and implicit knowledge of the past continuous tense. The analysis of the pretest scores revealed that, initially, both EG and CG demonstrated similar levels of explicit knowledge. The absence of a substantial disparity in the pretest scores between the two conditions suggests a balanced starting point, validating any subsequent changes as influenced by the instructional interventions.

However, the posttest results presented a notable shift. The descriptive statistics indicated a substantial increase in explicit knowledge within the EG, surpassing the CG. The t-test results for the posttest corroborated this observation, demonstrating a substantial disparity between the two conditions. Moreover, these findings underscore the effectiveness of pre-task explicit grammar instruction in enhancing learners' explicit knowledge of the past continuous tense.

Moving to implicit knowledge, the pretest analysis indicated the comparable levels of EG and CG. This equilibrium in the pretest scores ensured that any observed changes in implicit knowledge could be attributed to the instructional interventions rather than inherent group differences. In contrast to explicit knowledge, the posttest results for implicit knowledge demonstrated a substantial divergence between the two groups. The EG performance displayed a significant increase in implicit knowledge, outperforming the CG by a considerable margin. The effect size further highlighted the robust influence of pre-task explicit grammar instruction on implicit knowledge.

These findings collectively emphasize the multifaceted benefits of pre-task explicit grammar instruction. The study contributes to the ongoing discourse on task-based language teaching by empirically demonstrating its positive effects on both explicit and implicit knowledge. The insight into knowledge development is of benefit for instructional design and pedagogical practices.

The novelty of this study lies in its exploration of the impact of pre-task explicit grammar instruction on both explicit and implicit knowledge within the TBI framework. While TBI has been extensively studied, there is a noticeable gap in empirical research concerning the specific effects of pre-task instruction on language development. This study examines the potential benefits of integrating focused grammar instruction before communicative tasks. The findings shed light on how such instructional practices may contribute to enhanced language proficiency among learners. Moreover, the methodological approach of this research, including the use of validated instruments for measuring explicit and implicit knowledge, adds to its novelty by providing a rigorous and comprehensive analysis of the research question. Overall, this

study makes a significant contribution to the existing literature on TBI and language learning by uncovering the potential effectiveness of pre-task explicit grammar instruction in facilitating language development.

The findings align with the theoretical framework rooted in TBI. TBI, as outlined by Prabhu (1987), emphasizes the prominence of communicative tasks in language acquisition. The research focus on pre-task explicit grammar instruction within the TBI framework adds depth to the understanding of how linguistic structures, such as the past continuous tense, can be effectively integrated into task-based language teaching.

Willis's (1996) proposed a three-stage framework for TBI, including the pre-task stage, task cycle, and language focus. It provides a lens through which to interpret the study design. The observed efficacy of pre-task explicit grammar instruction in enhancing both explicit and implicit knowledge supports the inclusion of explicit language instruction before task engagement. This finding also supports the ongoing debate regarding the timing and necessity of explicit instruction in task-based approaches.

The findings of the study underscore the importance of conscious attention to linguistic forms in the process of language acquisition, as suggested by Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis (1994, 2001). The significant improvement in both explicit and implicit knowledge of the past continuous tense in the EG, which received pre-task explicit grammar instruction, aligns with Schmidt's assertion that learners need to consciously attend to language forms to facilitate learning. This outcome emphasizes that, without such conscious attention, what Schmidt terms "noticing", learners may struggle to acquire new linguistic structures effectively.

The pre-task explicit grammar instruction provided to the EG can be linked to the FonF approach. Unlike the FonFs approach, which deconstructs language into discrete elements to be taught sequentially (as seen in the CG's traditional teacher-fronted sessions), the FonF approach used in the EG shifts attention to specific linguistic forms as they arise naturally within a communicative context. This approach aligns with the description of intentional learning by Ellis et al. (2002), where learners actively engage with language forms within meaningful communication, rather than through isolated drills or exercises.

The results of the study show that the EG, which experienced a blend of communicative tasks and explicit grammar instruction (akin to FonF), outperformed the CG in both explicit and implicit knowledge post-intervention. This suggests that the occasional, deliberate focus on form, triggered by communicative needs or teacher intervention, was highly effective in promoting a deeper understanding of the past continuous tense. This finding is in line with Skehan's (1998) argument that learners must consciously focus on form to acquire it, particularly when processing meaning and form simultaneously is challenging.

Moreover, the research results highlight the role of noticing the gap (Skehan, 1998); the learners in the EG were likely more attuned to differences between their interlanguage and the target language, thanks to the explicit grammar instruction and communicative practice. This is in line with the emphasis of FonF approach on the relationship between form and function, where meaning-focused activities occasionally shift to form-focused attention, facilitating the internalization of new language structures.

The theoretical discussions of explicit and implicit knowledge in SLA find resonance in the study. It is demonstrated that pre-task explicit grammar instruction positively influences explicit knowledge, aligning with the assertions of scholars like DeKeyser (1998, 2015), who argue for the importance of declarative knowledge in language acquisition. However, the study goes further by revealing a parallel impact on implicit knowledge, challenging the concerns that explicit instruction may hinder true implicit knowledge development (Ellis, 2017; Suzuki & DeKeyser, 2015). The integration of both explicit and implicit assessments in the study design allows for a more comprehensive understanding of learners'

language proficiency, supporting the theoretical stance that language proficiency involves both conscious awareness and unconscious, intuitive understanding.

The debate on the psycholinguistic plausibility of explicit instruction in the pre-task phase (Long, 2015) and concerns about potential negative effects on fluency (Willis & Willis, 2007) are addressed by this study. The positive impact on both explicit and implicit knowledge challenges preconceptions about the potential drawbacks of explicit instruction before task engagement, shedding light on the potential benefits for learners' overall language development.

The current investigation highlighted a notable gap in empirical research regarding the impact of providing grammar instruction before engaging in communicative tasks, a topic that has been explored little in the existing literature. The empirical background highlighted various approaches in interaction-driven research, with studies either omitting pre-task instruction or integrating it differently across treatment groups. The majority of these studies, however, failed to explicitly separate the effects of pre-task grammar instruction from those of task performance.

In comparison, the current study focused specifically on pre-task explicit grammar instruction and its distinct influence on both explicit and implicit knowledge. This approach deviated from the common practices observed in previous research, where the emphasis was primarily on task performance indicators such as complexity, accuracy, and fluency, rather than assessing learning gains through pretests and posttests. The unique contribution of the research lies in its explicit examination of the influences of pre-task grammar instruction, shedding light on an area that has been overlooked in the literature.

The exploration of form-focusing strategies, such as guided planning and pre-task modelling, in previous studies offers insights into different instructional approaches before task performance. Notably, Mochizuki & Ortega (2008) and Foster & Skehan (1999) investigated the impact of guided planning on oral tasks, providing context for the current study's examination of pre-task explicit grammar instruction. The observed effectiveness of guided planning in increasing production and accuracy of specific linguistic structures aligns with the positive outcomes of pre-task explicit instruction in the current study, emphasizing the potential benefits of targeted preparation.

Pre-task modelling, as discussed in studies like Kim (2013) and van de Guchte et al. (2019), introduces learners to a sample performance of the upcoming task. While these studies primarily focused on task performance indicators, the current study expands the understanding by incorporating explicit and implicit assessments. The results indicate that pre-task explicit grammar instruction positively influences both dimensions of knowledge, contributing insights into the overall effect of instructional strategies.

In the broader context, the empirical background emphasizes the consistent predominance of explicit instruction over implicit instruction in various meta-analyses (Norris & Ortega, 2000; Spada & Tomita, 2010; Li, 2010; Lyster & Saito, 2010). The present study aligns with these findings by demonstrating the effectiveness of pre-task explicit instruction in enhancing both explicit and implicit knowledge, thus challenging the concerns about potential limitations associated with explicit instruction.

However, the cautionary note raised by Long (2015) regarding the limitations of explicit instruction, particularly its focus on simple structures conducive to explicit learning, is worth considering. The present study, while demonstrating the positive effect of pre-task explicit grammar instruction, prompts further exploration into the generalizability of the findings across different linguistic features and structures.

VI. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study addressed the debate about the efficacy of pre-task explicit grammar instruction in the context of TBI for language learners. By focusing on the explicit and implicit knowledge outcomes, the research provided valuable insights into the potential benefits of incorporating targeted grammatical instruction before engaging in communicative tasks. The findings of the study displayed the impact of pre-task explicit grammar instruction on both explicit and implicit knowledge of the past continuous tense.

The results contribute to the ongoing discourse on language teaching methodologies, specifically within the TBI framework. The study revealed that, contrary to concerns about potential drawbacks such as hindering fluency or overshadowing meaning, pre-task explicit instruction does not adversely affect learners' performance. Instead, it can lead to the significant enhancement of learners' explicit and implicit knowledge compared to the CG.

These outcomes suggest that language educators can strategically integrate pre-task explicit grammar instruction into TBI, providing learners with a balanced approach that combines communicative tasks with targeted grammatical support. Overall, the implications addressed language teachers, materials developers, syllabus designers, curriculum developers, and policy-makers, emphasizing the importance of recognizing and incorporating explicit instruction to a task-based language teaching paradigm.

The study has numerous implications for teachers, particularly concerning instructional strategies before engaging learners in communicative tasks. The positive effect of pre-task explicit grammar instruction on both explicit and implicit knowledge suggests that teachers could benefit from incorporating targeted grammatical instruction in the pre-task stage. This approach may enhance learners' overall language proficiency by providing them with a solid foundation that supports both grammatical accuracy and the intuitive application of language structures. Language teachers are encouraged to maintain a balance between task-based activities and explicit instruction, tailoring their approach to address not only the specific needs but also the developmental stages of their students.

The implications for language learners are substantial. By demonstrating the effectiveness of pre-task explicit grammar instruction in enhancing both explicit and implicit knowledge, the findings suggest a promising approach for language learners seeking to improve their language proficiency. Incorporating focused grammar instruction before engaging in communicative tasks can provide learners with a solid foundation in language structures while also promoting natural and intuitive language usage. This approach not only facilitates a deeper understanding of grammar rules but also cultivates the ability to apply them fluently in real-life contexts. Language learners can benefit from this insight by actively seeking out opportunities for pre-task grammar instruction in their language learning endeavors, whether through formal classroom settings or self-directed learning activities. Ultimately, understanding the implications of pre-task explicit grammar instruction empowers language learners to adopt more effective strategies for mastering the intricacies of the target language.

Materials developers play a central role in shaping the resources used in language classrooms. The study suggests that materials designed to include pre-task explicit grammar instruction can be valuable assets in promoting language development. Developers may consider creating materials that integrate targeted grammar explanations and exercises within the pre-task stage, in line with the findings that such an approach positively influences both explicit and implicit knowledge. This insight provides materials developers with a basis to design resources that foster a comprehensive language learning experience, combining communicative tasks with explicit grammatical support.

Syllabus designers, tasked with structuring the content and sequencing of language programs, can draw valuable insights from the emphasis of this study on pre-task explicit grammar instruction. Integrating explicit instruction strategically within task-based language teaching frameworks may enhance the effectiveness of syllabi. By recognizing the impact of pre-task explicit grammar instruction on both

knowledge dimensions, syllabus designers can refine language learning sequences to optimize learners' proficiency development. This approach aligns with language education and underscores the importance of a balanced and nuanced instructional design.

Curriculum developers are responsible for shaping the broader educational plans and frameworks within which language programs operate. The implications of this study for curriculum development highlight the potential benefits of incorporating pre-task explicit grammar instruction as a pedagogical principle. By recognizing the effect of explicit instruction on language development, curriculum developers can advocate for a more integrated and holistic language learning experience. This insight encourages a curriculum design that combines communicative tasks with structured grammatical support, acknowledging the interconnectedness of explicit and implicit knowledge in language acquisition.

Policy makers in the field of education can use the findings here to inform decisions related to language instruction standards and guidelines. The positive evidence for the effect of pre-task explicit grammar instruction highlights that policies promoting a flexible and diversified approach to language teaching may be beneficial. Policy makers can encourage a pedagogical environment that values both task-based activities and explicit instruction, fostering a comprehensive language learning experience. This approach aligns with the dynamic nature of language acquisition and provides policy makers with empirical support for inclusive and adaptable language education policies.

While the results boost the effectiveness of language instruction, it is essential to acknowledge the limitations of the study. Future research could explore the generalizability of the results across different language features, proficiency levels, and learner demographics. Additionally, investigations into the long-term retention and transferability of explicit and implicit knowledge gained through pre-task instruction would further enrich the field.

In brief, this study advocates for a nuanced and informed approach to language instruction that recognizes the complementary nature of explicit and implicit knowledge. By embracing pre-task explicit grammar instruction within the TBI framework, educators can foster a more comprehensive language learning experience to address the multifaceted dimensions of language proficiency.

Despite the intriguing findings, several limitations should be acknowledged. One notable limitation is the relatively small sample size, consisting of two intact classes with 18 learners each. This sample size might restrict the generalizability of the findings, and caution should be taken in extrapolating the study findings to a broader population of language learners.

Another limitation is the exclusive focus of the study on a single linguistic feature, namely the past continuous tense. While this focused approach allowed for the thorough examination of the impact on explicit and implicit knowledge of this specific grammatical aspect, it limits the applicability of the study to a more comprehensive understanding of how pre-task explicit instruction might influence various linguistic features.

Additionally, the participants were pre-intermediate learners, ranging in age from 16 to 22, who all shared Farsi as their first language. This specific demographic profile might constrain the generalizability of the findings to learners with different proficiency levels, age groups, or linguistic backgrounds. Future research can avoid this limitation by diversifying the participant pool to capture a broader spectrum of language learners.

Furthermore, the study examined the short-term influences of pre-task explicit instruction with a specific emphasis on the past continuous tense. Exploring the long-term retention of explicit and implicit knowledge and extending the investigation to various linguistic features and proficiency levels would enhance the robustness and generalizability of the research.

Considering these limitations, future research endeavors could expand the scope by incorporating larger and more diverse participant groups, investigating multiple linguistic features, and exploring the sustained impact of pre-task explicit grammar instruction over extended periods. By avoiding these limitations, future studies can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics between pre-task explicit instruction and language learning outcomes.

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