

# The Effect of Explicit and Implicit Feedback on Students' Syntactic Development: Integrating Metacognitive Confidence Judgment and Metacognitive Strategy Models

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## Abstract

The present study determined whether explicit or implicit feedback makes a difference on students' awareness of preposition use controlling for the effects of metacognitive confidence judgment and metacognitive strategy. The present theory on explicit and implicit approaches in syntactic development is expanded by including factors of metacognition in explaining the acquisition of syntactic rules. There are 200 grade 10 students from a public secondary school in the Philippines who participated in the study. Half of the participants went through explicit feedback and the other half through implicit feedback. Syntactic development was assessed by students' correct use of preposition. The metacognitive confidence judgment was measured by asking the participants to rate the accuracy of their answers on the task. The metacognitive strategy was measured by asking the participants to explain the preposition that they opted to use in each sentence in the task and the responses were rated on a three-point Scale. Using the Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA), the results showed that when metacognitive confidence judgment was controlled, explicit approach yielded higher score on preposition use. Moreover, when metacognitive strategy was controlled, the two approaches did not have a significant difference.

## 1 Introduction

There are individuals who acquire syntax when the rules are explicitly presented to them while there are some who acquire the rules by being exposed to the specific language. The approaches in syntactic development that have gained attention in

language learning research were the explicit and implicit approaches. There seems to be some contradicting outcomes in terms of the effectiveness of the two approaches. There are studies that favor the effectiveness of explicit approach (Carrol & Swain, 1993; Ellis, 1991; Lopez, 2015; Nazari, 2013; Varnosfadrani & Basturkmen, 2008). However, there are also those who promote the application of implicit approach in syntactic development (Aral, Dogan, & Oliver, 2016; Ferris, 2004; Krashen, 1981; Rashidi & Adivi, 2010; Shintani & Ellis, 2013). The conflicting outcomes that arose from different studies could be explained by the syntactic feature that was used as an outcome in the studies. Each study focused on a specific syntactic rule. The claim of effectiveness of one approach could not encompass all the features of syntax because one study could only account for specific number of syntactic rules. This observation calls to further look at specific syntactic features where explicit and implicit approaches can be appropriate.

### 1.1 Background

Ellis (1991) argued that syntactic development can be achieved through conscious noticing of forms. He further explained that it is only when the learners gained awareness of the rules that they can close the gap between their interlanguage and the target form. This claim gave birth to the use of explicit approach in language learning. It deals with presenting the rules to the learners and deliberately discussing it inside the class. Through this approach, the attention of the learners will be directed to their mistakes and it will guide them in achieving the correct structure that needs to be acquired. In

some studies, explicit approach is applied in the form of feedback (Varnosfadrani & Basturkmen, 2008). For instance, when students commit incorrect use of definite article, the researcher will provide the correct form and explain the rule behind it.

However, Krashen (1981) claimed that learners only acquire syntactic rules through unconscious acquisition and being exposed to the language. Furthermore, he argued that conscious learning does not necessarily lead to acquisition. This belief is where implicit approach is anchored on. It can be performed by providing learners with different situations in which they can apply different syntactic features. In the study of Shintani and Ellis (2013), they made use of metalinguistic feedback. When learners committed a syntactic error while writing, the researchers provided the correct form without giving the rule behind it. With these varied arguments, researchers began comparing which approach was really more effective in language learning.

Scott (1990) defined explicit approach as a study of syntax in which the rules are being deliberately discussed and stated for it is a way of efficiently and accurately acquiring the rules. Furthermore, Dekeyser (1995) argued that in explicit approach, learners are encouraged to acquire not just the rules itself but also the metalinguistic awareness of the rules. On the other hand, implicit approach is a syntactic development process in which the rules are not being explicitly stated. Instead, rules are acquired through learners' experience of using the language in different contexts (Krashen, 1981).

There are several approaches where explicit and implicit can be applied. In the present study, the approach chosen is that of feedback for it is the most powerful intervention that can be used to improve students' performance. This is supported by the study of Hattie and Timperley (2007) when they conducted a meta-analysis of different interventions and feedback accounted for the largest improvement on students' performance. In fact, its effect size had reached 0.93 in their study. Therefore, if the aim of the study is to improve students' performance, feedback has to be utilized to see the significant change.

### 1.2 Review of Related Studies

The explicit approach is more effective in syntactic development in the studies of Lopez (2015), Nazari (2013), and Varnosfadrani and

Basturkmen (2008) where the syntactic features studied were definite article, irregular past tense, plural 's', present perfect tense, *if*-clauses, and simple past tense. On the other hand, the implicit approach is more effective in syntactic development in the studies of Shintani and Ellis (2013) and Aral, Dogan, and Oliver (2016) where indefinite article and 'to be' constructions were investigated. The nature of the syntactic features that were studied as outcomes of the two approaches were different which became a source of difference in the findings of the previous studies.

The study by Lopez (2015) investigated two syntactic features namely *If*-clauses and simple past tense. The findings indicated that explicit approach is more effective as the students under this approach developed syntactic awareness as they outscored those students who belonged in implicit group and control group in the given task. However, there seems to be divergent results in the study of Varnosfadrani and Basturkmen (2008) where they found that only the early syntactic features (less complex) (Definite article, irregular past tense, plural 's') are applicable for explicit approach and the late syntactic features (more complex) (Indefinite article, regular past tense, relative clauses, active and passive voice, third person singular 's') are easily acquired through implicit approach. The study of Nazari (2013) found that the learners who underwent an explicit approach can more accurately use present perfect tense in their writing task than the learners in implicit approach. This finding affirmed the outcome of Varnosfadrani and Basturkemen's study as Nazari (2013) noted that present perfect tense is not too complex to understand and therefore part of the early features.

While there are arguments that supported the explicit approach, there are also studies that claimed the effectiveness of implicit approach in language learning. First, Shintani and Ellis (2013) revealed that Metalinguistic Explanation (ME), which is commonly used as an implicit form of feedback, is more effective because the students under ME were able to revise the incorrect used of indefinite articles in their writing and they outscored the group who underwent a Direct Corrective Feedback (DCF), which is explicit in nature, in the post-test given after the writing process. Second, the study of Rashidi and Adivi (2010) measured the correlation of vocabulary and reading. Learners under

implicit group gained more vocabulary while reading the texts compared to the explicit group who were taught specific vocabulary before they read the assigned texts. Third, when it comes to revising and composing a new text, Ferris (2004) found a conflicting result as the learners under DCF (explicit) turned out to be more effective in initial results. However, it was further found that implicit approach became more effective in the long run as the learners who went through an Indirect (implicit) Corrective Feedback (ICF) were able to significantly reduce their syntactic errors more than the explicit group. Lastly, Aral, Dogan, and Oliver (2016) argued for the effectiveness of implicit approach in the context of monolingual classrooms. The study focuses on the “to be” construction. It was discovered that, although their result was statistically insignificant, students on implicit approach had slightly larger decrease in terms of the frequency of mistakes compared to explicit group.

There are several issues that should be pointed out in the previous studies of explicit and implicit approaches. First, despite having investigated in several studies, there remains a dearth of study in the application of explicit and implicit approaches in Filipino ESL learners. It shall be examined if the effects are the same for both EFL and ESL learners. Previous studies tested the explicit and implicit approaches on Iranians (Ajabshir, 2014; Varnosfadrani & Basturkmen, 2008), low-intermediate Americans (Shintani & Ellis, 2013), and Persian (Zohrabi, 2014). The results may vary because Filipinos are ESL learners who have more exposure to the English language than EFL learners. In the perspective of bilingualism, learners who have more exposure to the language are more likely to gain proficiency than those who have less exposure (ASHA, 2004). Hence, there is a possibility that the effects of the approaches and the syntactic feature being investigated might produce different outcome in ESL learners.

Second, there are variations in the specific conditions used in studies as to when explicit or implicit works. The conditions being referred to were the features of syntax that were already studied such as *if*-clauses, present perfect tense, and ‘to be’ construction (Lopez, 2015; Nazari, 2013). It is noteworthy that even though there are studies that affirmed the effectiveness of explicit or implicit approach, none of these had focused on prepositions. The pre-

sent study focused on prepositions to provide further distinction on which approach would yield better results when used in the context of ESL learners. Prepositions are chosen because studies (Lasaten, 2014; Masangya & Lozada, 2009) showed that Filipinos are not quite adept in using prepositions accurately.

Lastly, in the reviews provided, it was not asserted how students were able to come up with the correct syntactic form. It is important to investigate why students commit syntactic errors of a specific syntactic features and how they were able to use it correctly (Cayado & Alpanta, 2016). Hence, this present study integrated two metacognitive factors to close the gap on the errors and correct uses of the learners. It is important to explore this idea for it will be helpful in understanding the cognitive processes behind the errors and the correct uses of the learners in terms of syntax, specifically preposition.

### *1.3 Preposition as a Dependent Variable*

One of the most common variables when investigating the effectiveness of explicit and implicit approaches is syntax. The present study opted to focus on preposition as it is noteworthy to be investigated because several studies on error analysis of ESL and EFL learners showed that it is one of the most difficult syntactic categories to acquire (Lasaten, 2014; Masangya & Lozada, 2009; Baghaei & Sadighi, 2015; Zheng & Park, 2013). Even the advanced learners of the English language still commit errors when using it (Baghaei & Sadighi, 2015). If explicit or implicit approach is indeed effective, the approach should make some improvements in learning prepositions regardless of its difficulty.

Studies are consistent on their claim that learners are having difficulty in using prepositions accurately. Zheng and Park (2013) analyzed the errors made by Korean and Chinese students in the context of written works. It was found that, when writing, EFL learners are having difficulty in applying the rules of preposition. Likewise, Samira and Baghaei (2015) focused on the Iranian TEFL post-graduate students and the result showed that preposition was a common mistake being committed by TEFL students when writing. Lasaten (2014) discovered that teacher education students in the Philippines are not adept in the rules of preposition. In addition, Masangya and Lozada (2009) studied the errors on the essays of high school students in the Philippines and the outcome is similar in previous

studies where preposition turned out to be one of the most misused by Filipino learners. Shim (2006) in the paper of Zheng and Park (2013) provided an explanation to these results. They argued that explicit approach was probably not utilized to identify and correct the errors committed by the learners and thus fossilization, that blocked the fluency and acquisition, were not prevented. It is noteworthy that explicit approach should be utilized to correct learners' errors and to direct their attention to the structure of the target feature.

#### *1.4 Metacognition*

Previous studies directly investigated syntactic development as influenced by the explicit and implicit approaches. They neglected the idea of explaining the cognitive processes behind the language learning of the students in different syntactic features. One of the important cognitive processes that explains much on language learning is metacognition. Metacognition is a construct that deals with students' awareness of their own mental processes (Rahimi & Katal, 2012). Moreover, Flavell (1971) described metacognition as one's awareness on their own knowledge, their learning preferences, styles, strengths, and limitations. It has also been referred by Schoen (1983) as a way of organizing one's knowledge.

Metacognition's inclusion in this present study is based on four grounds: First, studies showed that learners benefit from metacognition as it helps them enhance their language proficiency (Magno, 2008). Second, studies indicated that language proficiency and language learning are correlated with metacognitive confidence judgment (Mueller & Dunlosky, 2017; Mueller, Dunlosky, Tauber & Rhodes, 2014; Stankov et al., 2012) and metacognitive strategies (Magno et al., 2011; Magno, 2008; Nosratinia & Adibifar, 2014). Third, there are cognitive processes that students use in order to arrive at performance such as syntax and this need to be included in the study. And lastly, it is argued that metacognitive awareness is accountable in the effectiveness of either of the two approaches in the acquisition of the target syntactic feature of the language (Cayado & Alpanta, 2016). The present study tested the notion that learners' difficulty (or competence) in acquiring the target feature can be explained by their metacognitive awareness of the rule.

#### *1.5 Metacognitive Confidence Judgment (MCJ)*

Metacognitive Confidence Judgment is another factor that will be tested together with prepositions in the present study. One factor that is commonly being used to measure metacognitive ability is that of Judgment of Confidence (JOC) task (Grainger, Williams, & Lind, 2016). When used together, it is termed as Metacognitive Confidence Judgment (MCJ). According to Grainger et al. (2016), MCJ can be basically executed by asking the participants to report their confidence on the answers that they provided. In the same way, Stankov, Lee, Luo, and Hogan (2012) view MCJ as a variable that deals with the certainty of success of a specific behavioral act.

MCJ has been correlated with language performance in the study of Stankov et al. (2012). In their study, they tested the relationship of MCJ and students' achievement in English language. The result shows that MCJ is the best concurrent and future predictor of achievement in English. If MCJ is a good predictor of students' test performance and achievement in English, there could also be a possibility that MCJ can predict students' accuracy of preposition use. For this reason, the present study aims to determine if there will be a strong difference when MCJ is controlled. It is necessary to investigate whether the students' level of MCJ predict the accuracy of their usage of the specific syntactic feature because it could be a factor as to why the learners are still committing mistakes in using the specific feature. Hence, this warrants the aim of the present study to investigate if MCJ covaries with the syntactic feature being investigated and the approaches.

#### *1.6 Metacognitive Strategy (MS)*

Metacognitive Strategy (MS) is another factor that will be used in the present study that explains syntactic development. In the classification provided by O'Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Manzanas, Russo, and Kupper (1985) in their study on learning strategy, they defined metacognitive strategies as general skills that learners utilized to manage and monitor their own learning. Anderson (1991) argued that among all the learning strategies, metacognitive strategies are the most essential ones on learners' skills. Furthermore, O'Malley et al. (1985) made an emphasis on its importance by stating that when learners lack this important skill, they will have a difficulty in monitoring their own progress.

There are studies on metacognitive strategies that involve language proficiency. For instance, in the study of Magno et al. (2011) on the language learning strategies used by Taiwanese students in Taiwan and those who are based in the Philippines. It was found that metacognitive strategies enhance the oral proficiency of the students as measured by Metacognitive Knowledge Awareness Inventory (MKAI). In the same fashion, Magno (2008) discovered that metacognitive strategies help improve the students' writing proficiency. In the context of EFL learners, Nosratinia and Adibifar (2014) found that having awareness on metacognitive strategies develops the writing ability of the EFL learners.

MS has been used in different studies. In fact, it is common that as students use more metacognitive strategies, the more their language proficiency enhances. The reviews provided supported the assumption of the present study that language can be enhanced with the use of metacognitive strategies. Despite that, there is still an insufficiency when it comes to its correlation with syntactic development. It is important to venture in this area for it will provide an explanation on how learners were able to accurately use a syntactic feature. In the present study, it is tested whether the students' accuracy of use (or misuse) of the feature is due to the MS that they utilized.

Although there are studies that used explicit and implicit approaches as interventions on syntactic development, there remains a paucity of study that examines the effectiveness of explicit and implicit feedback in preposition use as it is being influenced by MCJ and MS. When these two are used as covariates, it will provide a better explanation on how powerful explicit and implicit approaches are. This study aims to investigate if preposition use and the metacognitive factors will covary as it is affected by the kind of approach being implemented.

## 2 The Present Study

The present study aims to determine if there is a significant difference between explicit and implicit feedback on preposition use when two metacognitive factors namely metacognitive confidence judgment and metacognitive strategy are controlled. It is hypothesized in the present study that there is a significant difference between explicit and implicit feedback on preposition use when controlling for the factors of metacognitive confidence judgment

and metacognitive strategy. More specifically, the present study ought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of students' preposition use, metacognitive confidence judgment, and metacognitive strategy in syntax among participants in the explicit and implicit condition?
2. Is there a significant difference between the two approaches when metacognitive confidence judgment and metacognitive strategies are controlled?
3. What is the effect size of the explicit and implicit feedback on the following?
  - 3.1 Preposition use,
  - 3.2 Metacognitive confidence judgment, and
  - 3.3 Metacognitive strategy.

## 3 Methodology

### *Participants*

The participants in the study were 200 grade 10 high school students from a public school in the National Capital Region (NCR). The 100 students went through an explicit approach and the other 100 were exposed to implicit approach.

### *Instruments*

There were three instruments used in the present study, a test on the usage of preposition, a scale to determine confidence judgment on the usage of preposition, and a scale on the metacognitive strategy.

A task was created to measure participants' usage of preposition. There are five sentences that were given to the participants. The preposition in each of the sentence was left blank and a separate piece of paper that contains a list of preposition that they may use was given to them. The participants were asked to choose the correct prepositions for five sentences in the test (see appendix A for the sentences). To check the content validity of the test, grade 10 teachers checked and revised the sentences. Moreover, a linguist who specializes in analyzing different linguistic features in various corpora of Englishes examined the appropriateness of the content of the sentences.

The participants' confidence judgment on their use of preposition was rated by the participants using a scale of 0 to 100. After the participants gave

their answer for each sentence, they were instructed to rate their confidence on the accuracy of their answer in a scale of 0 to 100. A rate of “0” means that they are not totally confident with their usage and 100 means that they are perfectly confident with their use of preposition in the sentence.

The metacognitive strategies were determined by requesting the participants to give the explanation why they used the preposition in their sentence and the observer rated the awareness of their strategy using a scale of 1 to 3. The participants were asked to explain or justify why they used the preposition in the sentence. The researchers scored the responses of the participant using this scale: 1 for wrong explanation of the preposition usage, 2 for partly correct explanation of the preposition usage, and 3 for fully correct explanation of the preposition usage.

#### Procedure

The 200 participants were divided into two groups. The 100 participants went through the explicit approach and the other 100 were exposed to implicit approach.

For the explicit approach, the researcher first presented five sentences with blank preposition to each participant. The participant tried to supply the correct preposition to each sentence by using the list provided by the researcher. After every answer, the researcher provided a feedback to explain the different rules of preposition. If the choice of preposition is wrong/correct, the researcher will give the correct preposition that should be used then explain the rule behind it.

For the implicit group, the participants were given the same five sentences and they were requested to supply the correct preposition using the list provided. If the use of preposition is wrong/correct, the researcher stated the sentence with the correct preposition that should have been used. No explanation was provided.

When the participants are done in supplying the correct prepositions in all five sentences, a test was given. The test contained another five sentences and they are asked again to supply the correct preposition for each sentence. This time, the researcher asked the participant to rate their answers from 0 to 100 on how confident they are with his choice of preposition for each sentence. The researcher went back to each sentence and asked the participant to

explain why they chose the preposition. The answers were rated using a three-point scale.

	SS	DF	MS	F	p
MCJ	30.84	1	30.84	29.14	0.00
Approach	29.72	1	29.72	28.08	0.00
Error	208.48	197	1.06		

#### Data Analysis

To determine the participants’ level of preposition use, MCJ, and MS, the mean and standard deviation were obtained.

The Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was used to determine the difference between the explicit and implicit approaches in preposition use and whether it covaries with MCJ and MS. The ANCOVA controls for MCJ and MS and how the inclusion of these additional factors can reduce the error Sum of Squares and increase the statistical power (sensitivity) of the difference.

The effect size of the two instructional approaches is determined using the eta coefficient. Eta coefficient of .60 and above is large, .30 to .50 is medium, and .20 and below is low.

## 4 Results

The means and standard deviations for the preposition use, metacognitive judgment, and metacognitive strategy were obtained each for the explicit and implicit conditions. There were two separate ANCOVA conducted. In the first ANCOVA, the covariate of preposition use is metacognitive judgment and in another ANCOVA, the covariate of preposition use is metacognitive strategy.

Table 1

*Means and Standard Deviation for Preposition Use, Metacognitive Judgment, and Metacognitive Strategy*

Level of Factor	N	Preposition Use		Metacognitive Confidence Judgment		Metacognitive Strategy	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
	200	3.75	1.22	86.72	15.35	2.07	0.68
Explicit	100	4.28	0.98	91.37	11.58	2.51	0.51
Implicit	100	3.22	1.21	82.06	17.19	1.63	0.52

Note. Preposition use = 5 points, metacognitive judgement = 0% to 100% scale, metacognitive strategy = 3-point scale

The means for the preposition for the explicit is 4.28 with small variation of scores (0.98) and 3.22 for implicit with large variation on scores (1.21). High means for the metacognitive judgment for both approaches. Explicit is high (near 100%) with larger variation of scores for the implicit. Extreme mean scores were obtained for metacognitive strategy for the explicit and implicit conditions with the same variation size (0.51 and 0.52 respectively).

Table 2  
ANCOVA Table where Metacognitive Confidence Judgment is a Covariate for Preposition

The results of the ANCOVA showed that there is a significant difference between explicit and implicit approach on the use of preposition when metacognitive confidence judgment is controlled,  $F(1,197)=28.08$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . Metacognitive confidence judgment is a significant covariate of preposition use. The mean for the preposition use is significantly higher on preposition when the effect of metacognitive judgment is removed. The effect size of explicit and implicit on preposition is moderate ( $\eta^2=.51$ ) when controlling for the influence of metacognitive confidence judgment.

Figure 1

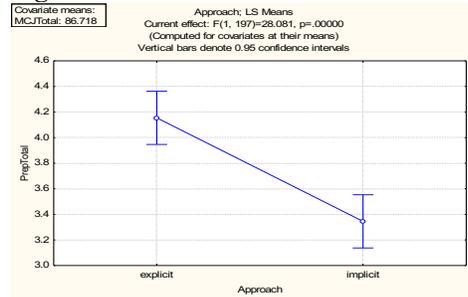
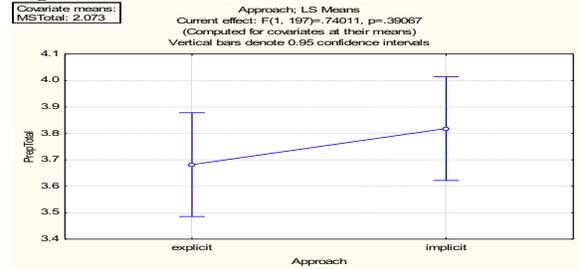


Table 3  
ANCOVA Table where Metacognitive Strategy is a Covariate for Preposition

	SS	DF	MS	F	p
Metacognitive Strategy	96.91	1	96.91	134.05	0.00
Approach	0.54	1	0.54	0.74	0.39
Error	142.41	197	0.72		

When metacognitive strategy was used as a covariate of preposition use, there was no significant difference between explicit and implicit approach,  $F(1,197)=.74$ ,  $p=0.39$ . Metacognitive strategy is a significant covariate of preposition use. However, when the influence of metacognitive strategy on preposition is removed, the kind of approach used does not matter anymore. The effect size of explicit and implicit on preposition is large ( $\eta^2=.71$ ) when controlling for the influence of metacognitive strategy.

Figure 2



The results provide insight that when metacognitive judgment is controlled, explicit approach yield higher mean scores for preposition use. However, when metacognitive strategy is controlled, the approach in learning preposition did not matter whether implicit or explicit. Explicit and implicit approaches had a larger contribution on syntactic development when metacognitive strategy was controlled ( $\eta^2=.71$ ) than controlling for metacognitive confidence judgment ( $\eta^2=.51$ ).

## 5 Discussion

The present study examined the effectiveness of explicit and implicit feedback on students' development of preposition rules awareness controlling for metacognitive confidence judgment and metacognitive strategies. The results indicated that when MCJ is controlled, explicit feedback is more effective in the development of preposition rules awareness, but when MS is controlled, both explicit and implicit feedback did not yield any significant difference. This affirmed the hypothesis of the present study that the effectiveness of the two approaches depend on the factor that is being controlled.

When MCJ was controlled, explicit approach turned to be more effective on students' development of preposition rules awareness. The effectiveness of the explicit approach was also supported by Lopez (2015), Nazari (2013), and Varnosfadrani and Basturkmen (2008). However, these studies used different syntactic features such as definite article, irregular past tense, plural 's', present perfect tense, *if*-clauses, and simple past tense. This result also pointed that regardless of the accuracy or inaccuracy of students' MCJ, once explicit approach is utilized, students still gained awareness of the preposition rules.

The rules of preposition are identified by the previous studies as being difficult to acquire (Lasaten, 2014; Masangya & Lozada, 2009; Zheng & Park, 2013) especially for ESL learners whose first language's preposition rules are distinct from that of the English language. Because of the marked differences in Filipino and English prepositions, gaining awareness of preposition is even more difficult in the case of Filipino ESL learners. To alleviate the difficulty, they need to have enough exposure on the actual rules for them to gain awareness on how preposition should be used. One of the marked differences is that Filipino prepositions are monosemous which means that it only conveys one meaning while those of English prepositions are polysemous and can be utilized in different contexts. For instance, in Filipino or Tagalog, the preposition '*ibabaw*' (equivalent of English preposition '*on*') can only be used to indicate an object on the surface. Meanwhile, its English counterpart '*on*' could be utilized in other contexts aside from referring to a specific position such as when indicating to a specific day of the week "*We have a class on Monday*", a part of the body "*She has a scar on her cheek*", a machine or a device "*We talked on the phone for three hours*", or a state of something "*Most of the shops are on sale a week ago*". Another marked difference is the wide range of prepositions that English language have. When referring to a thing on the surface, there will be three options in the English language such as '*on*', '*above*', and '*top*'. Whereas in Filipino, '*ibabaw*' is the only preposition that can be used and nothing else. These wide range of choices of English prepositions make it more difficult for the Filipino ESL learners to acquire the rules and usages. In this case, explicit approach is needed to scaffold better the learners in their difficulty in using English prepositions.

Since preposition rules are difficult to acquire especially for Filipino ESL learners, the acquisition of the rules take conscious noticing of forms. This was supported by Ellis (1991) when he explained that rules should be explicitly stated to bridge the gap between students' interlanguage and the target form. The findings of the present study debunked Varnosfadrani and Basturkmen's (2008) argument that the more difficult rules have to be taught implicitly but rather explicitly. The construction of sentences when using preposition in the English language gives cognitive demands among ESL learners. The explicit approach facilitates to compensate for this deficiency by making the rules readily available. The present study argued that explicit approach works for difficult syntactic features like preposition because when the rules were made conscious among learners, the cognitive demand on using preposition declines. This adds to the utility of the explicit approach as a facilitating condition that ease learners' difficulty in using preposition. Moreover, syntactic rules such as using preposition, was directly provided with scaffold and learners assimilate them. This function of the explicit approach extended the original conceptual framework as merely presentation of information with a limited transmissive function. By looking at ESL learners' cognitive demands and difficulty of the acquisition, the explicit feedback's use was extended to be a scaffold and reliever.

Explicit approach turned to be more effective in developing awareness of preposition rules because learners became cognizant of the syntactic rules when presented as feedback. Explicit feedback worked to direct the learners' attention to the target syntactic form for them to become aware of the syntactic rules. When students are aware of the syntactic rules and the prepositions' correct usage, they will be able to use it more accurately in the sentence. However, if ESL learners remain unconscious of the syntactic rules through implicit feedback, there is a possibility that their syntactic errors will not be corrected and the target syntactic rules will never be acquired. Zheng and Park (2013) affirmed this argument in their explanation on how the fossilization of syntactic errors transpire. They articulated that errors are fossilized when they are not corrected immediately. Thus, it is important to make the learners aware of the syntactic rules of preposition for them to correct their errors when using it. The awareness can be better achieved through explicit feedback

since the syntactic forms are being presented to the learners explicitly.

The result of the present study where explicit feedback was utilized for the acquisition of preposition rules highlights how powerful feedback works to correct learners' syntactic errors. Hattie and Timperley (2007) presented a nomenclature of feedback but did not emphasize explicit approach as a feedback. The results supporting the effectiveness of the explicit approach suggest that this form of feedback deserves attention both in practice and theory. In terms of practice, teachers have to use explicit feedback when teaching the syntactic rules. More specifically, aside from pointing at the syntactic errors of the students, teachers also need to provide the syntactic rules to enhance the awareness of the learners. With regard to theory, scholars who will embark on classifications of feedback need to include the explicit approach as supported already by several studies that account for its effectiveness (Lopez, 2015; Nazari, 2013; Varnosfadrani & Basturkmen, 2008).

Meanwhile, when MS was controlled, the kind of approach in syntactic development did not matter anymore. It debunked the previous studies that emphasized the effectiveness of the two approaches (Aral, Dogan, & Oliver, 2016; Lopez, 2015; Nazari, 2013; Shintani & Ellis, 2013; Varnosfadrani & Basturkmen, 2008). This result provided a new perspective that when students use their metacognitive strategies, their syntactic awareness develops regardless of what approach they are exposed on. Hence, students with high MS becomes independent in their acquisition of the syntactic features. When the study controlled for the factor of MS, the results showed that the kind of approach had become insignificant. The students turned into independent learners who are aware and can monitor their own acquisition of the preposition rules.

It was highlighted by the present results how important learning strategies are in the development of preposition rules awareness. During the assessment, students were asked how they generated their answers and the most prominent reason that students pointed is that of memory strategy. Students articulated that their choice of preposition and the explanation that they provided are purely based on what they remembered during the feedback session. Moreover, aside from memory strategy, students also attributed their choice of

preposition to that of compensatory strategy (Oxford, 1989). This can be used by looking at context clues to compensate for the information that were missed. To cite an example, when students forget a certain preposition rule, they try to analyze the context of the sentence to accurately use a preposition. Hence, it is safe to claim that students were able to use prepositions accurately because of the learning strategies that they used. There are several studies that can attest to the effectiveness of learning strategies in language learning like those of Magno, Lajoma, and de Carvalho (2011), O'Malley et al. (1985), and Oxford (1989).

It was also found that the explicit and implicit approaches had no significant difference when MS was controlled. This finding implies that a teacher must give focus on developing different learning strategies among students for it will enhance their independence and control over their own learning. The present study argues that regardless of the approach, students will still be able to acquire the rules of preposition effectively when they become fully independent learners who monitor and evaluate their own learning. Hence, the focus of instruction should be shifted from the kind of approach to the development of various learning strategies. There are already studies that can support this present argument like those of O'Malley et al. (1985), Magno, Lajom, and de Carvalho (2011), and Oxford (1989). They likewise argued that language learning strategies are indeed important in language acquisition.

It was pointed how important explicit approach is in alleviating students' difficulty in acquiring the rules of preposition but it also greatly depends on the learning strategies that learners utilize to compensate the difficulty. Metacognitive learning strategies are executive skills that enable learners to learn difficult and complex tasks (Magno, 2010) such as the acquisition of preposition rules. The present findings emphasize that metacognitive strategies greatly account for acquiring preposition rules that happen to be difficult. Furthermore, aside from alleviating the difficulty of the task, it could also provide a scaffold in learning other syntactic features. Once students develop metacognitive strategies, there could be a possibility that they can also acquire other rules effectively since they have an autonomy in learning the language. Students can expose themselves to English

language then use learning strategies in able to acquire other syntactic features. The study of Magno, Lajoma, and de Carvalho (2011) accounts for this claim.

The present study debunked the question of the previous studies on simply comparing explicit or implicit approaches. When the two metacognitive factors are integrated as explained factors for preposition use, the effectiveness of each approach in syntactic development became dependent on which metacognitive factor is being controlled. This provides a direction for succeeding studies that the comparison of explicit and implicit approaches will depend on specific conditions controlled for in the acquisition of specific syntactic features. It can be noted that the specific metacognitive factors controlled for in the study are integral factors that contributes largely in the acquisition of syntactic rules. Further cognitive and metacognitive factors can be explored as controlling factors.

#### *Theoretical Implication*

The theoretical expansion that the present study contributed to the study of explicit and implicit approaches is the new finding that proved that it is not simply a question between explicit or implicit, as what the previous studies had pointed (Aral, Dogan, & Oliver, 2016; Lopez, 2015; Nazari, 2013; Shintani & Ellis, 2013; Varnosfadrani & Basturkmen, 2008) but rather explicit and implicit. The present findings suggested that when learners advance their metacognitive strategies, explicit, conscious instruction is no longer required to strategically acquire the rules of preposition for having high metacognitive strategies is adequate to master the preposition rules. However, metacognitive confidence judgment is not sufficient to master the rules of preposition, hence it requires an explicit approach. In the acquisition of preposition rules explicit approach has to be utilized first until the mastery is achieved. When students gain the mastery level, implicit approach becomes effective.

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