

ARTICLE

Preferences of Omani EFL Learners for Isolated and Integrated Form-Focused Instruction: A Partial Replication of Spada and Lima (2015)

Iryna Lenchuk ¹ , Amer M TH Ahmed ^{1*} , Shahd Hafidh Baabood ² , Shahla Hafeed Baabood ² 

¹ Department of English Language and Literature, Dhofar University, P.O. Box 2509, Salalah 211, The Sultanate of Oman

² Center for Preparatory Studies, Dhofar University, P.O. Box 2509, Salalah 211, The Sultanate of Oman

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the preferences of Omani EFL learners for isolated (ISO) and integrated (INT) form-focused instruction (FFI) through a partial replication of Spada and Lima's study. A total of 150 university students (125 females and 25 males) participated in the study. The participants were asked to complete a validated self-reported questionnaire that assessed their preferences for ISO and INT FFI. The results indicate that a statistically significant preference was observed for INT FFI although learners exhibited a balanced interest in both instructional approaches. Furthermore, the analysis reveals that the variables of gender and proficiency level significantly influenced these preferences. Specifically, female and beginner learners tended to favor INT FFI, whereas male and advanced learners showed a preference for ISO FFI. The findings of the study show that the participants viewed grammar as a communicative resource and expressed preferences for practicing language forms with other language skills and/ or communicative activities. The implications of the study are: (i) the reliability and generalizability of the study conducted by Spada and Lima are confirmed, and (ii) learners' preferences in the methodology and pedagogy of second and foreign language learning must be considered when designing instructional materials, (iii) the importance of timing of presenting language forms to learners in a communicative language classroom is highlighted.

Keywords: Form-Focused Instruction; Learners' Preferences; Approaches to Language Accuracy Development; Replication

*CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Amer M TH Ahmed, Department of English Language and Literature, Dhofar University, P.O. Box 2509, Salalah 211, The Sultanate of Oman;
Email: aahmed@du.edu.om

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 7 September 2025 | Revised: 30 September 2025 | Accepted: 9 October 2025 | Published Online: 21 November 2025
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v7i12.11983>

CITATION

Lenchuk, I., Ahmed, A.M.T.H., Baabood, S.H., et al., 2025. Preferences of Omani EFL Learners for Isolated and Integrated Form-Focused Instruction: A Partial Replication of Spada and Lima (2015). *Forum for Linguistic Studies*. 7(12): 1506–1516. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v7i12.11983>

COPYRIGHT

Copyright © 2025 by the author(s). Published by Bilingual Publishing Group. This is an open access article under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>).

1. Introduction: Replication Research in Second Language Acquisition

The present study replicates Spada and Lima^[1]. By doing so, it responds to the call for more replication research in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) (see e.g., Marsden et al.^[2], McManus^[3,4]). In this paper, a replication study is defined as a research method that, according to McManus^[5] (p. 1300), is “used to confirm, consolidate, and extend knowledge and understanding in empirical fields of study.”

Despite the importance of replication studies for the development of SLA theory and practice, the rate of replication research in SLA is extremely low compared to other disciplines, such as psychology and education. For example, Marsden et al.^[2] report that during the period from 1973 to 2017, only one out of 400 research articles is self-labeled as a replication article in those SLA publications that published replication research. According to McManus^[3,4], Spada et al.^[6], the low rate and speed with which replication studies are implemented can be partly attributed to the incorrect and misleading assumption that replication studies lack originality, innovation and creativity. For example, McManus^[3] points out that understanding the concepts of innovation and originality is sometimes misguided. Replication studies are conducted to advance knowledge and explore the problems and limitations of initial studies. Viewed from this perspective, replication studies should not be considered lacking in originality. McManus^[3] further states that innovation should not be interpreted as something entirely radical or new in research, as knowledge is cumulative and always built upon previous work. Since replication studies are grounded in earlier research, they cannot be deemed devoid of innovation. Despite the special issue dedicated to replication research in *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*^[7], there is still a need for more replication studies in the field of SLA.

Following Marsden et al.^[2] and McManus^[3,4], the present study is classified as an approximate replication, where two major variables (i.e. the context of the study and the study participants) have been intentionally modified. The

initial study by Spada and Lima^[1] focuses on the preferences of the ESL and EFL teachers and their learners for isolated (ISO) and integrated (INT) form-focused instruction (FFI). The replication study has been conducted within the context of EFL instruction in the Sultanate of Oman and it limits itself to the preferences of EFL learners for ISO FFI and INT FFI.

2. Rationale: Why it is Important to Replicate Spada and Lima’s 2015 Research

Following Marsden et al.^[2], the following 3 criteria of replicability is used in this paper to answer the question of why the study by Spada and Lima^[1] needs to be replicated. These criteria are:

- (i) high potential impact of the study and its theoretical and methodological significance.

Spada and Lima^[1] holds significant potential for advancing the theory and methodology of teaching ESL or EFL, as the study conceptualizes FFI as 2 types of instruction, i.e. ISO FFI and INT FFI. The study examines the preferences of ESL and EFL teachers and their learners for these 2 types of instructions.

- (ii) the importance of the study for informing the practice of L2 teaching and learning.

The study assists ESL and EFL teachers in understanding how FFI can be operationalized in the classroom as well as the preferences of their students for one type of instruction over the other. It also identifies the variables (e.g., the teaching context, level of language proficiency) that affect the preferences for ISO FFI and INT FFI.

- (iii) methodological transparency of the study and accessibility of study materials.

The study uses a questionnaire that is validated in Spada et al.^[8], which is easily accessible for future research.

It is important to note here that the term FFI, as conceptualized in Spada et al.^[6], does not refer to a type of instruction where the focus on language forms (e.g., sounds, vocab-

ulary, and grammatical structures) is implemented solely as a manipulation of those forms for their own sake, without developing learners' ability to use them effectively in communication. Instead, FFI is understood as a type of instruction that assists in developing linguistic competence as an integral part of communicative competence, the latter is defined as the ability to use language effectively in various communicative contexts. Over the years, several theoretical models which inform the pedagogy and methodology of the L2 teaching approach known as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) (Richards & Rodgers^[9]) have been proposed (see e.g., Canale and Swain^[10]; Celce-Murcia^[11]). The goal of CLT is the acquisition of communicative competence. What unites these models is the presence of linguistic or grammatical competence as an integral part of communicative competence. Thus, it has been recognized that knowledge of language forms and the ability to use them is essential for effective communication. These models serve as a foundation for developing frameworks of reference for language teaching and assessment (e.g., Center for Canadian Language Benchmarks^[12]; Council of Europe^[13]), which aim to establish independent standards that inform pedagogical practices in teaching and assessment. These frameworks emphasize the importance of FFI in developing the communicative abilities of ESL and EFL learners. Consequently, the present study has important implications for investigating the preferences of EFL learners for FFI, thus contributing to a better understanding and development of FFI. In fact, developing this type of instruction is found to be essential not only for ESL and EFL learners, but also for heritage language learners (HLL), who, according to the HLL literature (Kisselev et al.^[14]) often struggle with grammatical accuracy while they attempt to communicate meaning.

3. The Initial Study: Spada and Lima's 2015 Research

Spada and Lima^[1] investigates the preferences of ESL and EFL teachers and learners for ISO FFI and INT FFI. Both INT FFI and ISO FFI are defined as two types of instruction aimed at drawing learners' attention to language forms when communicating meaning. As conceptualized in Nassaji^[15], Spada and Lima^[1], Spada et al.^[6,16], the goal of FFI as a type of instruction is to draw learners' attention to form either

pre-emptively or spontaneously while practicing language skills or taking part in communicative activities. FFI can be implemented by providing learners with metalinguistic information, highlighting a target language form or providing learners with corrective feedback. The rationale behind FFI is to assist learners in developing accuracy when they try to communicate meaning.

Conceptually, FFI is divided into two types of instruction: ISO FFI and INT FFI. The difference between these two types of instruction is the time of drawing learners' attention to form, that is before, after or during communicative practice. ISO FFI involves isolating a language form from its communicative context, presenting it to the students, and then practicing it in multiple communicative activities. ISO FFI also implies that drawing learners' attention to the target language form can take place after a communicative activity. In contrast, INT FFI does not separate the form from its communicative context while presenting it to the students. The study by Spada and Lima^[1] investigates whether or not (i) ESL and EFL teachers show any preference for ISO FFI or INT FFI, and (ii) the feedback the participants provided following a lesson that included ISO FFI and INT FFI matched their ratings of the statements in the self-reported questionnaire.

To answer these questions, self-reported questionnaires validated in Spada et al.^[8] were distributed to 100 ESL and EFL teachers, and 469 ESL and EFL learners, respectively. The ESL learners were enrolled in credit and non-credit adult ESL courses designed for newcomers to Canada (e.g., immigrants and convention refugees), as well as international students, who were studying in Canada. EFL learners were enrolled in university credit programs in Brazil. The ESL and EFL teachers, who took part in the study, taught in these language programs. In the self-reported questionnaire, the statements were distributed equally to tap into teachers' and students' preferences for INT FFI and ISO FFI. A five-point Likert scale was used to show the participants' preferences for ISO FFI and INT FFI. For example, some participants strongly agreed with the statements that showed their preferences for teaching and learning language forms when they are integrated with communicative activities and/or other skills, i.e. INT FFI. In contrast, some strongly agreed with the statement that taps into their preferences for teaching and learning language forms in isolation from their commu-

nicative context, i.e., ISO FFI. Other statements included in the self-reported questionnaire were designed to assess learners' preferences for corrective feedback, which is also covered under FFI. The study participants were asked to indicate the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with the statements regarding the timing of corrective feedback, such as immediate (while being engaged in a communicative activity) or delayed (after a communicative activity), as well as their overall preferences for corrective feedback provided by teachers. The questionnaire also included background information questions about gender and language proficiency level. Additionally, a comment section was included in a self-reported questionnaire for participants to add any further information they wished to elaborate on.

The feedback study included 13 ESL and EFL teachers and 165 students that were asked to (i) provide feedback on a lesson that included ISO FFI and INT FFI and (ii) identify the participants' preferences for the ISO FFI or INT FFI part of this lesson.

The findings of the study by Spada and Lima^[1] indicate a preference among ESL and EFL teachers and their learners for INT FFI. However, the results also show that teachers and learners value ISO FFI, particularly within the ESL context. This is attributed to differences in the learning context. ESL learners have more opportunities to use the language communicatively outside the classroom and therefore, they believe they can use class time to improve their accuracy by isolating language forms. In contrast, EFL learners tend to prefer INT FFI due to their limited opportunities for using language forms in communicative contexts outside the classroom. Additionally, both teachers and learners noted that their preference for one type of instruction over the other depends on several factors: proficiency level, type of course (e.g., English for Academic Purposes or a community-based classroom), complexity of the grammatical form, learning style preferences, and specific learning goals and needs.

In the comment section of the questionnaire, ESL and EFL teachers and their students emphasized the importance of both types of instruction, which is in line with the theoretical conceptualization of FFI proposed in Spada and Lightbown^[17]. Both types of FFI (ISO and INT) hold educational value in developing language proficiency, as they tap into different types of knowledge: explicit for ISO and implicit for INT, as shown in Spada et al.^[16]. Therefore, ISO FFI and

INT FFI are complementary rather than mutually exclusive. The pedagogical choice between ISO FFI and INT FFI may depend on the type of knowledge being targeted (explicit or implicit), as well as variables such as educational context, language proficiency, and complexity of the target language form, to name just a few.

4. Literature Review

As stated in section 2 of this paper, grammatical or linguistic competence is included in many models of communicative competence. This means that the acquisition of communicative competence as a pre-requisite for effective communication is not possible without grammatical accuracy. There is an agreement among researchers and language teachers that there is a considerable difference between what students know about the grammar of a target language (i.e. explicit knowledge) and their ability to produce grammatically accurate sentences when they communicate meaning (i.e. implicit knowledge). According to Pawlak^[18], application of explicit grammatical knowledge in spontaneous, real-time communication constitutes a great challenge for L2 learners. The challenge arises because the successful acquisition of the L2 grammatical system involves more than just the explicit learning of grammatical rules. In addition to acquiring explicit knowledge, learners should demonstrate the ability to apply this knowledge for effective communication in their target language. Following Larsen-Freeman's approach (Larsen-Freeman^[19]) where grammar is viewed as an additional language skill and is referred to as "grammar-ing", the process of learning grammatical structures should include learning the form (i.e. the grammatical rules and their morphological realization), their meaning and use. Therefore, instruction should incorporate this form-meaning-use concept when teaching L2 grammatical systems.

Some of the studies on FFI explore the correlation between FFI and two types of knowledge, namely explicit knowledge and implicit knowledge. One of the empirical studies that investigates the relationship between explicit and implicit knowledge and their contribution to the development of communicative competences is Spada et al.^[16]. The position that is taken in this quasi-experimental study is that under some conditions, explicit knowledge about language can become implicit (See also DeKeyser^[20]; DeKeyser and

Suzuki^[21], where the term ‘declarative knowledge’ is used for explicit knowledge, and the term ‘procedural knowledge’ is used for implicit knowledge). The uniqueness of Spada et al.’s study^[16] is that it investigates the timing of FFI. The study raises the question: What is the optimal time to focus learners’ attention to form within a communicative lesson? To answer this question, two types of instruction, i.e. ISO FFI and INT FFI were proposed (see also Spada and Lightbown^[17]) and their contribution to the explicit and implicit knowledge was investigated. In ISO FFI, focus on form takes place when a language form is isolated from a communicative activity that can take place in teacher-led instruction, corrective feedback or enhanced input. In INT FFI, a language form is integrated into communicative activities or tasks and learners’ attention is not explicitly drawn to a targeted language form. 4 teachers and 109 intermediate adult L2 learners enrolled in a non-credit language program in Canada participated in the study. The experiment included providing instructions to 4 classes with 2 classes receiving ISO FFI and 2 other classes receiving INT FFI. The ISO FFI and INT FFI lessons shared the communicative theme of health; however, they were different in the timing of introducing the English passive to the learners. For the ISO FFI lesson, the English passive was separated from the theme-based, communicative activities, and for the INT FFI lesson, the form was integrated with the communicative context. An error correction task and an oral production task were used to investigate the effect of ISO FFI and INT FFI on the acquisition of the English passive and on the ability of the participants to effectively use the structure in the oral production task.

The findings of the study showed the effect of both types of instruction on the acquisition of the English passive with some different effects for ISO FFI and INT FFI. Specifically, the participants who received ISO FFI improved more on the decontextualized error correction task, while the participants who received INT FFI improved more on the oral production task. The findings showed that ISO FFI and INT FFI are not mutually exclusive, as both types of instruction contributed to 2 different types of knowledge. ISO FFI contributed to explicit knowledge about the English passive, and INT FFI to implicit knowledge, the latter is realized as the ability of successfully using the English passive in the oral production task. Spada et al.^[16] concluded that future

research is needed to investigate the effectiveness of ISO FFI and INT FFI, and their contribution to explicit and implicit knowledge. However, the initial step in this research lies in understanding learners’ preferences for learning grammar. Do learners prefer to learn grammar by itself, in isolation from the communicative context, or do they prefer to learn grammatical forms while they are working on the development of language skills and /or communicative tasks?

One such study that investigated learners’ preferences in learning grammar is the study conducted by Brown^[22]. In this study, the researcher examined the preferences of L2 teachers for teaching grammar and compared these with the preferences of ESL and EFL learners. ESL and EFL students were asked to rate 24 items on a Likert-scale questionnaire regarding their perceptions of effective strategies used by their teachers when teaching L2 grammar. The findings reveal a disparity between teachers’ and learners’ preferences for teaching and learning L2 grammar. L2 students show a preference for formal grammar instruction over communicative activities and value immediate error correction in speaking tasks. In contrast, their teachers show a preference for the communicative approach in teaching grammar. Based on the findings of this study, Brown argues that L2 teachers should actively seek the perspectives of L2 learners on their preferences for learning grammar and discuss the rationale behind communicative activities, emphasizing how these activities can benefit their language learning. This highlights the need for L2 teachers to engage their students in discussions about the instructional strategies being used in the classroom.

Another study investigating perceptions is that of Loewen et al.^[23], who investigated the beliefs of L2 learners regarding grammar instruction and error correction. A total of 754 L2 students enrolled in an American university completed a questionnaire consisting of 37 Likert-scale items and 4 open-ended prompts. Among learners, who studied English as a second language, and those, who studied an additional language as a foreign language (e.g., Chinese, Arabic, Spanish), varied beliefs about grammar instruction and error correction emerged. Several themes were identified in the qualitative part of the study. Many participants felt that learning grammar was central to mastering L2 and that learning grammar serves as a foundation for developing language proficiency. The participants of the study believed that grammar helps in language skill development (e.g., writing), and

it contributes to overall academic success. While many acknowledged that studying grammar is challenging, they also found the process of discovering patterns and understanding how a language works enjoyable. In terms of pedagogy, many learners expressed a preference for an instructional strategy that connects grammar to real-life tasks and creates a communicative context for presenting and practicing grammatical forms. Regarding error correction, learners preferred to be corrected. They also expressed a preference not to be left on their own when studying grammar, emphasizing the important role of the teacher and structured learning in their discovery of grammatical rules and how the rules can be applied to communicate meaning. Some participants provided negative feedback, describing learning grammar as confusing, boring, and monotonous.

Based on the discussed literature, L2 learners generally showed a preference for grammar instruction and valued its importance. They also expressed a preference for grammar instruction that is integrated into communicative tasks and activities. However, there is a need for more empirical studies that investigate the preferences of ESL and EFL learners in different educational settings. The present study aims to address this gap in the literature.

5. The Context of the Replication Study

This section discusses the context of the replication study and explains the importance of replicating the initial research conducted by Spada and Lima^[1] within the Omani EFL classroom.

Oman, one of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, recognizes English as an official foreign language, making it a mandatory subject in schools (on the status of English and other languages in Oman, see Al-Issa^[24]). Similar to the educational policies and practices of other GCC countries (Botha^[25]; Nasser^[26], English serves as a medium of instruction at the tertiary level in Oman. Additionally, with approximately 43% of the population being expatriates, English functions as a lingua franca for many diverse communities that reside in Oman (National Center for Statistics and Information^[27]). Therefore, high proficiency in English is essential for academic and professional success.

Despite the importance of English in Oman's socio-

economic landscape and ongoing educational reforms, the level of English proficiency among students remains low (Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi^[28]). The low proficiency in English is attributed to several issues related to teaching methods. Primarily, there is a heavy emphasis on memorization and simple information retrieval, which limits students' ability to engage with the language in a meaningful way. Additionally, there are insufficient efforts to promote communicative and task-based approaches to EFL learning. (Denman and Al-Mahrooqi^[29]).

Moreover, the teaching of language forms, such as grammar and vocabulary, often occurs in isolation from their communicative contexts. For example, a grammatical form is presented to the students not for the purpose of using it to communicate meaning, but rather for its own sake, as reflected in both teaching methods and assessment practices. To illustrate, multiple-choice questions (MCQs) are commonly used to assess grammatical knowledge without creating any opportunities for the students to show their ability to use language forms in communicative contexts. An example of one MCQ that assesses the knowledge of the simple present passive is illustrated in **Table 1**.

Table 1. MCQ sample to assess linguistic competence.

MCQ Prompt	He receives some information.
MCQ Options	A) Some information are received by him. B) Some information are being received by him. C) Some information is received by him. D) Some information have received.
Correct Answer	C) Some information is received by him.

The example in **Table 1** illustrates that the grammatical form is separated from its communicative context. In this case, EFL learners are assessed not on their ability to communicate meaning while using the English passive, but rather on their ability to manipulate the form for its own sake.

One reason EFL instructors may refrain from using communicative language teaching as a methodology is the assumption that students, who have previously been trained to manipulate language forms in the school system, may undervalue more communicative approaches to learning language forms. In this context, a replication study that investigates learners' preferences for specific types of instruction is essential. The findings of the study can provide evidence to support an instructional method that aligns with students' needs and preferences. Therefore, the research question the

replication study aims to investigate is whether Omani EFL learners prefer ISO FFI or INT FFI, as measured by a self-reported questionnaire.

6. Method: The Study Participants and the Self-Reported Questionnaire

The present study took place as part of the project titled *Balancing act: The effect of task design on foreign language learners' fluency and accuracy* that was funded by The Research Council of the Sultanate of Oman (TRC). The required ethical approval to recruit the participants for this project and carry on the proposed research was conducted within the framework of the TRC Project ID BFP/RGP/HER/19/131. 150 EFL students aged 18–22 were recruited for the study that took place in one university located in the Sultanate of Oman. Of these participants, 125 were female and 25 were male. The participants were asked to complete a self-reported questionnaire adapted from Spada and Lima^[1]. The questionnaire includes 20 items that target learners' preferences

for ISO FFI and INT FFI, respectively. The questionnaire was validated in Spada et al.^[8], as well as in the replication study (see the Results section) and therefore, it is considered to be a reliable measure of learners' preferences. The data obtained through the self-reported questionnaire were analyzed, and the results of the analysis are reported in the next section.

7. Results

Cronbach's Alpha was used to validate the statements included in the questionnaire, ensuring that they accurately measure the constructs underlying ISO FFI and INT FFI. The statistical measure of reliability was applied twice: first, to assess the reliability of the ISO and INT constructs separately, and second, to evaluate the reliability of all 20 statements included in the questionnaire.

As shown in **Table 2**, the reliability percentage of Test 1 and Test 2 exceeds 90%. This means that all items included in the questionnaire are considered valid. Consequently, the results obtained from the questionnaire are reliable as well.

Table 2. Cronbach's Alpha results.

Tests	Number of Items	Reliability
Test 1	2 (ISO and INT)	0.926
Test 2	20 (All statements included in the questionnaire)	0.924

The paired-sample *t*-test used in Spada and Lima^[1] was employed to analyze the findings, aiming to compare the means of the two dependent variables: learners' preferences for ISO FFI and INT FFI. As indicated in **Table 3** below, the learners showed a preference for INT FFI ($M = 4.10$) over ISO FFI ($M = 3.72$). The results demonstrate a statistically significant difference in students' preferences for

INT FFI over ISO FFI, with $t(74) = 3.09$, $p = 0.000$. Since the p -value is less than 0.05, the difference in preferences is considered to be statistically significant. A repeated measures ANOVA also confirmed students' preference for INT FFI over ISO FFI, yielding $F(1.74) \approx 9.50$, $p = 0.000$, $d = 0.38$.

The mean comparison tests were conducted to examine

Table 3. Paired Samples Statistics.

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	ISO FFI	3.72	75	0.74681	0.08623
	INT FFI	4.10	75	0.76164	0.08795

the effects of other variables, such as gender and level of English proficiency, on the dependent variables of ISO FFI

and INT FFI. The results are summarized in **Tables 4 and 5**, respectively.

Table 4. Gender Preferences for ISO FFI and INT FFI.

Gender		ISO FFI	INT FFI
Male	Mean	3.4250	3.4583
	N	10	15
	Std. Deviation	0.65629	0.92781
Female	Mean	3.6814	3.8148
	N	61	64
	Std. Deviation	0.72266	0.75185

Table 5. Language proficiency and learners' preferences for ISO FFI and INT FFI.

Level of English Proficiency		ISO FFI	INT FFI
Beginner	Mean	3.8083	3.8833
	N	12	12
	Std. Deviation	0.92879	0.77087
Intermediate	Mean	3.6625	3.8657
	N	32	35
	Std. Deviation	0.52471	0.67951
Advanced	Mean	3.5188	3.3842
	N	16	19
	Std. Deviation	0.76089	0.92692

Note: Please note that the total number of participants in **Table 5** is 126 rather than 150. This is because 24 out of 150 participants did not identify their level of English proficiency.

The findings in **Table 4** indicate that both genders prefer INT FFI over ISO FFI; however, female participants show a stronger preference for INT FFI compared to male participants. **Table 5**, which presents learners' preferences for ISO FFI and INT FFI taking into consideration their level of English proficiency, reveals that both beginners and interme-

diate learners favor INT FFI. In contrast, advanced students demonstrate a preference for ISO FFI over INT FFI, highlighting a divergence in preferences based on proficiency level.

8. Discussion

The present study is a partial replication of Spada and Lima^[1] that investigates the preferences of Omani EFL learners for ISO FFI and INT FFI, as measured through a self-reported questionnaire. The findings of the study are presented in the following table (**Table 6**):

Consistent with the findings of the initial study, this replication study found that

(a) Omani EFL learners showed an overall preference for INT FFI.

(b) With regards to gender and proficiency level, male and advanced learners showed a slight preference for ISO FFI, suggesting that they value pedagogical materials where language forms are first isolated from their communicative contexts, discussed with the students and then practiced in communicative activities.

(c) Female and beginner learners showed a preference for INT FFI, indicating a preference to learn language forms that are consistently embedded within their communicative contexts and practiced with language skills, such as reading, writing, listening and speaking.

Table 6. Study participants and their preferences.

Participants	Preferences for ISO FFI	Preferences for INT FFI
Participants: Omani EFL learners		✓
Gender: Males	✓	
Gender: Females		✓
Proficiency level: Beginner learners	✓	
Proficiency level: Advanced learners		✓

The results of the present replication study are significant in several crucial ways. First, they reveal that the findings of Spada and Lima^[1] are valid in that learners truly appreciate the learning of target language forms as an integral component of the ability to interact meaningfully in the target language. Second, the results lend further support to the generalizability of the findings in Spada and Lima^[1] in that EFL learners in Oman value the learning of language forms in the same way that EFL learners in Brazil or ESL

learners in Canada do. Third, and perhaps the single most significant finding of the present study is that it uncovers previously unreported correlations between EFL learners' preferences for ISO FFI and INT FFI and other variables, such as gender and language proficiency. In other words, the findings of the present study reveal that learners' preferences for ISO FFI and INT FFI do not only correlate with the type of learner (ESL vs. EFL), as was reported in Spada and Lima^[1], but also with gender and language proficiency

in the context of EFL learning in Oman. In the words of McManus^[5], the present replication study extends knowledge and understanding of the original study conducted in Spada and Lima^[1].

To interpret the correlation found in the present study between gender and language proficiency on the one hand, and learners' preference for ISO FFI and INT FFI on the other hand, one possible explanation of the differences in preferences for ISO FFI and INT FFI regarding gender is that males in Oman may have more opportunities for communicative practice outside the classroom in many different settings where English is used as a lingua franca (e.g., restaurants, coffee shops, airports). In contrast, females in Oman may face cultural and religious restrictions that limit their opportunities for communication in English. As a result, females might view the EFL classroom as a safe space to express themselves and share ideas freely, whereas males, who have greater access to communication outside the classroom, may prioritize developing their accuracy in language use. With regards to the language proficiency, beginners tend to seek tasks and activities where they can start developing their communication skills in English, hence their preference for INT FFI, whereas advanced learners are more concerned with the development of their accuracy, and less concerned with their ability to express themselves in real life meaningful encounters, hence their preference for ISO FFI. The implication of these findings is that lesson plans and instructional materials developed in the learning context of EFL should take into consideration these two variables.

Another significant finding of the present study is that EFL learners in Oman, similar to the L2 learners in the study conducted by Brown^[22], show a preference for immediate corrective feedback. Where the present study differs from that of Brown^[22], however, is in the finding that unlike the L2 learners in Brown^[22], EFL learners in Oman clearly show a preference for grammar instruction that is integrated with communicative activities or other language skills. In this respect, the findings of the present study are in line with those reported in Loewen et al.^[23].

On a local scale, the findings reported in the present replication study should inform the EFL instructors in Oman that the regrettably continuing practice of the teaching of language forms in isolation from their communicative contexts both in the secondary and in the tertiary education (see

Al-Issa and Al-Balushi^[28]; Denman and Mahrooqi^[29]) is supported neither by current SLA research nor by their own EFL learners.

On a broader scale, a significant finding of the present replication study is that it reveals an alignment between the literature on SLA, where grammatical competence is an integral part of a learner's communicative competence and EFL learners' awareness of the significance of grammatical competence in their learning experience.

This study has some limitations because it treats EFL learners' preferences as static. Learners' responses to the questionnaire represent a snapshot of their preferences at a specific moment of their learning process. To address this limitation, a future study may supplement questionnaire responses with observations of learners' actual behavior in class. The future study may examine whether learners' engagement with ISO FFI and INT FFI lessons is aligned with their questionnaire answers. According to Loewen et al.^[23], learners' judgements of the questionnaire statements might be different if the statements included the learning context or students' personal experiences with grammar instruction and corrective feedback. Future research is needed that can potentially integrate classroom observations and focus on change in learners' preferences and perceptions under specific learning conditions.

Another limitation of the present study is that it investigates EFL learners' preferences for ISO FFI and INT FFI to the exclusion of EFL instructors. An extension of the present study would therefore investigate whether the preferences of the two stakeholders (i.e., the learners and the instructors) align or not.

9. Conclusion

The replication study confirms learners' preferences for FFI, specifically INT FFI. The findings suggest the need for more contextually relevant instructional practices used in the Omani EFL classroom, encouraging a shift to communicative approaches to teaching language forms. Contrary to the beliefs held by their teachers, EFL learners recognize the importance of grammar as a communicative resource with a preference given to the type of instruction that does not separate language forms from their communicative contexts. The study has important implications, as it advocates for the

changes in the methodology of teaching with more emphasis on integrating language forms within multiple communicative activities. Future research can focus on conducting a full replication of Spada and Lima^[1] to support the evidence obtained from the self-reported questionnaire with the feedback data on a lesson that integrates both types of FFI, as well as teachers' preferences for ISO FFI and INT FFI.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, I.L. and A.M.T.H.A.; methodology, I.L.; validation, I.L., A.M.T.H.A., S.H.B. (Shahd Hafidh Baabood) and S.H.B. (Shahla Hafeed Baabood); formal analysis, I.L. and A.M.T.H.A.; investigation, A.M.T.H.A.; resources, I.L.; data curation, S.H.B. (Shahd Hafidh Baabood) and S.H.B. (Shahla Hafeed Baabood); writing—original draft preparation, S.H.B. (Shahd Hafidh Baabood) and S.H.B. (Shahla Hafeed Baabood); writing—review and editing, I.L.; visualization, A.M.T.H.A.; supervision, I.L.; project administration, I.L. and A.M.T.H.A.; funding acquisition, I.L. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding

The present study took place as part of the project titled “Balancing act: The effect of task design on foreign language learners’ fluency and accuracy” that was funded by The Research Council of the Sultanate of Oman.

Institutional Review Board Statement

The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the Institutional Review Board of The Research Council of the Sultanate of Oman, ID BFP/RGP/HER/19/131, date of approval: 02/12/2019.

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement

The data used in this study is unavailable due to privacy and ethical restrictions

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

- [1] Spada, N., Lima, M.S., 2015. Teacher and learner preferences for integrated and isolated form-focused instruction. In: Christison, M.A., Duff, P., Spada, N. (Eds.). *Teaching and Learning English Grammar: Research Findings and Future Directions*. Routledge: New York, USA. pp. 178–193. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315719016>
- [2] Marsden, E., Morgan-Short, K., Thompson, S., et al., 2018. Replication in second language research: Narrative and systematic reviews and recommendations for the field. *Language Learning*. 68(2), 321–391. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/lang.12286>
- [3] McManus, K., 2021. Are replication studies infrequent because of negative attitudes? Insights from a survey of attitudes and practices in second language research. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*. 44(5), 1410–1423. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263121000838>
- [4] McManus, K., 2023. How and why to conduct a replication study. In: Mackey, A., Gass, S.M. (Eds.). *Current Approaches in Second Language Acquisition Research: A Practical Guide*. Wiley: Hoboken, USA. pp. 334–351.
- [5] McManus, K., 2024. Replication studies in second language acquisition research: Definitions, issues, resources, and future directions: Introduction to the special issue. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*. 46(5), 1299–1319. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263124000652>
- [6] Spada, N., Ortega, Y., Banegas, D.L., 2017. Form-focused instruction: An interview with Nina Spada. *Argentinian Journal of Applied Linguistics*. 5(1), 1–17.
- [7] McManus, K., (Ed.), 2024. Volume 46 Issue 5: replication studies. In *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK. Available from: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/studies-in-second-language-acquisition/issue/77FE71AFCE117DDC84CB55F999F3B28>
- [8] Spada, N., Barkaoui, K., Peters, C., et al., 2009. Developing a questionnaire to investigate second language learners’ preferences for two types of form-focused instruction. *System*. 37(1), 70–81. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2008.06.002>
- [9] Richards, J.C., Rodgers, T.S., 2001. Communicative language teaching. In *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK. pp. 153–177.
- [10] Canale, M., Swain, M., 1980. Theoretical bases of com-

- municative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics*. 1, 1–47.
- [11] Celce-Murcia, M., 2007. Rethinking the role of communicative competence in language teaching. In: Soler, E.A., Jordà, M.S. (Eds.). *Intercultural Language Use and Language Learning*. Springer: Dordrecht, Netherlands. pp. 41–57. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-5639-0>
- [12] Center for Canadian Language Benchmarks, 2025. Canadian Language Benchmarks 2012: English as a Second Language. Available from: <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/ircc/migration/ircc/english/pdf/pub/language-benchmarks.pdf> (cited 10 September 2025).
- [13] Council of Europe, 2025. Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Available from: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages> (cited 4 September 2025).
- [14] Kisselev, O., Dubinina, I., Polinsky, M., 2020. Form-focused instruction in the heritage language classroom: Toward research-informed heritage language pedagogy. *Frontiers in Education*. 5(53), 1–10. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3389/educ.2020.00053>
- [15] Nassaji, H., 2016. Research timeline: Form-focused instruction and second language acquisition. *Language Teaching*. 49(1), 35–62. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444815000403>
- [16] Spada, N., Jessop, L., Tomita, Y., et al., 2014. Isolated and integrated form-focused instruction: Effects on different types of L2 knowledge. *Language Teaching Research*. 18(4), 453–473. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168813519883>
- [17] Spada, N., Lightbown, P.M., 2008. Form-focused instruction: Isolated or integrated? *TESOL Quarterly*. 42, 181–207. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1545-7249.2008.tb00115.x>
- [18] Pawlak, M., 2024. Grammar learning strategies: Towards a pedagogical intervention. *Language Teaching Research Quarterly*. 39, 174–191.
- [19] Larsen-Freeman, D., 2003. *Teaching Language: From Grammar to Grammaticalizing*. Heinle & Heinle Publishers: Boston, MA, USA.
- [20] DeKeyser, R., 2017. Knowledge and Skill in ISLA. In: Loewen, S., Sato, M. (Eds.). *The Routledge Handbook of Instructed Second Language Acquisition*. 1st ed. Routledge: New York, USA. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315676968>
- [21] DeKeyser, R., Suzuki, Y., 2025. Skill acquisition theory. In: VanPatten, B., Keating, G.D., Wulff, S. (Eds.). *Theories in Second Language Acquisition: An Introduction*, 4th ed. Routledge: New York, NY, USA. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003491118>
- [22] Brown, A., 2009. Students’ and teachers’ perceptions of effective foreign language teaching: A comparison of ideals. *Modern Language Journal*. 93(1), 46–60. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2009.00827.x>
- [23] Loewen, S., Li, S., Fei, F., et al., 2009. Second language learners’ beliefs about grammar instruction and error correction. *Modern Language Journal*. 93, 91–104. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2009.00830.x>
- [24] Al-Issa, A.S.M., 2020. The language planning situation in the Sultanate of Oman. *Current Issues in Language Planning*. 21(4), 347–414. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14664208.2020.1764729>
- [25] Botha, W., 2024. English-Medium instruction in higher education throughout the Middle East, North Africa, and sub-Saharan Africa. In: Bolton, K., Botha, W.B., Lin, B. (Eds.). *The Routledge Handbook of English-Medium Instruction in Higher Education*. Routledge: New York, NY, USA. pp. 237–245. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003011644>
- [26] Nasser, R., 2020. Educational reform in Oman: system and structural changes. In: Gilson, P. (Ed.). *Education Systems Around the World*. Intech Open: London, UK. DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.84913>
- [27] National Center for Statistics and Information, 2025. The State of the World Population 2025 Report. UNFPA: Muscat, Oman. Available from: <https://asiapacific.unfpa.org/en/publications/highlights-state-world-population-report-2025> (cited 23 August 2025).
- [28] Al-Issa, A.S.M., Al-Bulushi, A.H., 2012. English language teaching reform in the Sultanate of Oman: The case of theory and practice disparity. *Educational Research for Policy and Practice*. 11, 141–176. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10671-011-9110-0>
- [29] Denman, C., Al-Mahrooqi, R. (Eds.), 2019. *Handbook of Research on Curriculum Reform Initiatives in English Education*. IGI Global: Hershey, PA, USA. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-5225-5846-0>