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Explicit and implicit knowledge of English tenses in primary school EFL learners in Bosnia and Herzegovina

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The linguistic knowledge of foreign language learners appears to be partly implicit and partly explicit. Learners rely on implicit knowledge when involved in spontaneous everyday communication, while explicit knowledge enables them to reflect on language structures and recognise or use metalanguage. The present study investigated the explicit and implicit foreign language learners' knowledge of English tenses in the Bosnian context at the end of the first educational cycle, i.e., primary school, by means of a metalinguistic test, an untimed grammaticality judgement test and an elicited imitation test. The study aimed at exploring the variability in the quantity and quality of EFL learners' knowledge and the relationship between different types of knowledge based on three factors, namely gender, average grade, and starting age. While revealing quite limited knowledge of the target structures, the findings showed no significant difference between explicit and implicit knowledge, while the correlation coefficients between them were relatively high. Out of the three factors, a three-way ANOVA showed that only average grade proved to have a significant main effect on EFL knowledge. The interaction effect of gender and grade was significant on the participants' overall EFL knowledge and their explicit knowledge, whereas a significant interaction effect of all three factors was confirmed only on explicit knowledge.

Keywords: *foreign-language knowledge, explicit knowledge, implicit knowledge, age, gender, average grade*

1. INTRODUCTION

It has transpired that, in terms of language acquisition, not only does quantity matter, but also the quality of linguistic knowledge, which presents a determinant that exerts a profound impact on the use of knowledge. This seems to be illustrated in the attempts of researchers (e.g., Anderson, 1983; Bialystok, 1978; DeKeyser, 1997; Krashen, 1981) to name and analyse different types of linguistic knowledge, concerning the way in which the knowledge is gained, accessed, and used. One such dichotomous classification has been made between implicit and explicit knowledge (Ellis, 2005, p. 151), the former not being verbalizable, but seen in its actual use, implying only intuitive awareness of linguistic norms, no declarative knowledge of grammar rules, yet presenting systematic and easily accessed knowledge, and the latter being verbalizable, but entailing conscious awareness of linguistic norms, declarative knowledge marked by inconsistent responses, and slow and more difficult access.

While explicit focus on forms is believed to stimulate the development of explicit knowledge, spontaneous communication in the target language is most likely to aid the development of implicit knowledge (MacWhinney, 1997). If learners, while performing tasks, are just asked to use language, without being given time to reflect on language forms or without being encouraged to do so, they rely on their implicit knowledge, whereas when they are expected to analyse forms, to state why a certain structure is used incorrectly, or to recognise or provide metalanguage, they apply explicit knowledge (Ellis, 2005). Thus, from planning to evaluating the development of learners' linguistic knowledge, educators should be aware of its twofold character, i.e., they should know precisely which type of knowledge is targeted in all the activities and tasks students are to perform in the classroom and outside of it. When giving grades and making judgments about their learners' knowledge, teachers should be aware of whether they are placing a stronger emphasis on explicit or implicit knowledge, indirectly encouraging students to put more effort into the development of one or the other type of knowledge. In other words, they should know what they are preparing their students for: performance on fill-in-the-blank tasks or spontaneous communication in the target language. Although the latter is seen as the desired outcome of a language-learning process, it has been indicated that the context of second-, and particularly foreign-language acquisition, marked primarily by an explicit focus on language forms (Green & Hecht, 1992; Ur, 2011), leads mostly to the development of explicit knowledge.

Faced with a limited number of hours, teachers try to help their learners by drawing their attention to language regularities, instead of waiting for learners to notice and understand them on their own. It appears that language students may benefit from explicit knowledge gained in this way, its value being seen in the potential of explicit knowledge eventually fostering the development of implicit knowledge (Ellis, 1993; Ellis, N., 2005; Rebuschat & Williams, 2012). This presents the main idea promoted by the representatives of the weak interface position – namely, that there is a strong relationship between these two types of linguistic knowledge. However, this is a highly debatable issue in need of further empirical support, and the current study aims to contribute to our understanding of the matter.

This study was conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a country where English enjoys the status of the first foreign language in educational institutions (Dubravac & Brdarević-Čeljo, *in press*) and where language learning in the classroom is characterised by a strong presence of explicit focus on language forms (Dubravac, 2016; Habibić & Dubravac, 2016; Tankosić & Dubravac, 2016). However, learners also have access to various sources of out-of-school exposure to it (Dubravac & Skopljak, 2020). The findings will illustrate the outcome of such language learning at the end of primary school, examining both explicit and implicit EFL knowledge and the relationship that exists between these two types of knowledge. The subjects, a group of learners aged 14-15 years, were chosen because they were at the end of the first educational cycle, having been exposed to both formal and informal EFL learning for a considerable number of years. Therefore, the findings are expected to serve as a reliable indication of learners' EFL knowledge, in terms of both quantity and quality.

Moreover, since lately much research has been dedicated to the investigation of the impact of varied individual differences on second language learning success (Dornyei, 2005; Lightbown & Spada, 2013), this enquiry explored the differences observed in the level of knowledge as well as the strength of the relationship between different types of knowledge based on three factors – namely, gender, average grade, and starting age – the latter also implying differences in the duration of learning English. In addition to exploring the variability in the level of both explicit and implicit EFL knowledge with respect to these three factors individually, to show a more holistic picture of the matter, the study also addressed the combined impact of these factors on the level of the learners' overall knowledge as measured in this study as well as on their explicit and implicit knowledge separately.

No similar studies have been conducted in this learning context, and even elsewhere, the impact of individual differences has been mainly analysed in relation to the quantity of knowledge, not so often taking into account the variability in its quality. Therefore, this study is expected to reveal new findings that might suggest useful guidelines for other researchers and educators working in similar learning contexts.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Due to the characteristics of foreign-language learning in the studies comparing explicit and implicit knowledge (e.g., Bowles, 2011; Ellis, 2005; Zhang, 2015), it has been, in the main, confirmed that learners' explicit knowledge would prevail over their implicit knowledge. Nevertheless, slightly different conclusions were reached in the research (Dubravac, 2013) conducted in the Bosnian EFL context. In fact, upon analysing explicit and implicit knowledge of 206 EFL learners at the end of two educational cycles, namely, primary and secondary school, the author stated that, although both were far short of perfection, there was no significant difference between the learners' explicit and implicit knowledge. However, the learners' analysed explicit knowledge (i.e., knowledge characterised by an awareness of the rules but without the use of any technical terms) was significantly higher than their metalinguistic knowledge (i.e., knowledge involving the use of technical or semi-technical terms) and significantly lower than their implicit knowledge. These results were rather unexpected, since they indicated that, in this particular context, classroom language acquisition is still predominantly characterised by an explicit focus on language forms including numerous metalinguistic terms (Dubravac, 2011; Habibić & Dubravac, 2016; Tankosić & Dubravac, 2016). However, such findings might be assigned to another mode of language learning – a noninstitutional one. Learners in this country are exposed to English outside the classroom on a daily basis (Brdarević-Čeljo & Dubravac, 2022; Dubravac et al., 2018; Dubravac, 2016; Ribo & Dubravac, 2021), which might significantly contribute to their implicit knowledge development. This study will provide valuable new empirical evidence pointing to the results of such a dual process of language learning, in terms of the level of both types of knowledge and the relationship between them.

Although not confirming a causal relationship between explicit and implicit knowledge, previous research studies (Green & Hecht, 1992; Roehr, 2007; Sorace, 1985; White & Ranta, 2002) have revealed a positive correla-

tion between them. However, it tends to be stronger among older learners and those exposed to activities facilitating both explicit and implicit knowledge development. It appears, thus, that the development of one type does not directly lead to the other, but that favourable conditions in terms of the other knowledge development determine its acquisition. The relationship between explicit and implicit knowledge is also affected by the operationalisation of explicit knowledge: if metalanguage is considered important, the relationship seems to be weaker than when analysed knowledge is given primacy. Hence, it seems that there are two extremes – metalinguistic explicit knowledge and implicit knowledge, and that in between, we have analysed explicit knowledge. All three of these are investigated in the current paper. Moreover, to give a more thorough overview of the matter, the impact of several factors was taken into account.

An early start has generally been proved to be significant if the final aim is reaching native-like proficiency (Johnson & Newport, 1989; Patkovski, 1980), early starters showing better accuracy across different tasks (Montrul & Foote, 2014). Still, although it is generally expected that the earlier students start learning language, the more successful they will be, this is not always the case. Older learners are sometimes more efficient, taking advantage of their world and metalinguistic knowledge, memory strategies, problem-solving skills, etc. In fact, studies from various formal learning contexts (Antón-Méndez et al., 2015; Burstall, 1975b; Cepik & Sarandi, 2012; Fitzgerald et al., 2015; Muñoz, 2006; Muñoz & Singleton, 2011; Unsworth, 2016) have indicated that earlier is not always better, and that, before any conclusions are made, many factors should be considered, the most important of which include the following: overall exposure to the target language and total number of instruction hours, but also the length of learning language, socio-economic status, etc. Moreover, the way in which language proficiency is measured seems to be of crucial importance, as younger learners are believed to be better at implicit knowledge, and older learners at explicit knowledge development (DeKeyser, 2000; Ellis, 2005; Muñoz, 2006). Ellis (2005) explored the relationship between the starting age and duration of formal instruction and the two types of knowledge, measuring explicit knowledge by an untimed grammaticality judgement test and a metalinguistic knowledge test, and implicit knowledge by a timed grammaticality judgement test, an elicited imitation test, and an oral narrative test. The results showed only a negative correlation between starting age and the timed grammaticality judgement test results, and the years of formal instruction correlated significantly only with the untimed grammaticality

judgement test. On the other hand, Gotseva (2016) showed that starting age and overall duration of language exposure and learning are significant factors in terms of all the measures used in the study, namely, a timed and an untimed grammaticality judgement test, an oral elicited imitation test, and a metalinguistic test. Due to such conflicting findings, further studies seem necessary to provide additional insights into the matter.

Even though gender has not attracted immense research interest in terms of second-language acquisition (Ellis, 1994; Gass & Mackey, 2013), there is a widespread belief that female students tend to be more successful language learners (Saville-Troike, 2005). Research results appear to confirm this stance, with British female students of French outperforming their male peers (Burstall, 1975a; Davies, 2004), Korean female EFL learners showing better reading comprehension than their male counterparts (Pae, 2004), and Chinese female learners obtaining higher scores on a general English proficiency test when compared to male students (Boyle, 1987). However, no consensus has been reached on the question of what this might be attributed to. Various explanations have been suggested – that females tend to enjoy practicing more (Bernat & Lyoyd, 2007), that they express greater readiness to converse with target-language speakers (Siebert, 2003), that they are more motivated while learning a language (Ellis, 1994; Mori & Gobel, 2006), that they use more cognitive and metacognitive learning strategies than males (Green & Oxford, 1995), and that they generally share more positive attitudes towards learning a foreign language (Bacon & Finneman, 1992) – all of which might eventually contribute to their better results. Moreover, since these advantages involve higher levels of awareness, the difference might be seen in terms of explicit rather than implicit knowledge development.

In addition to these two variables, the current study investigates the variability in linguistic knowledge in relation to the average grade in English so as to check what kind of knowledge is taken into account when students' performance is evaluated, and also whether students with the highest grade demonstrate a comparable level of different types of linguistic knowledge, bearing in mind the strong emphasis on explicit teaching in language classes. With different target structures, it has been shown (Dubravac, 2018) that, although students with higher grades demonstrate higher explicit as well as implicit knowledge, they show greater explicit than implicit knowledge, while their explicit analysed knowledge comfortably surpasses their explicit metalinguistic knowledge.

3. THE STUDY

3.1. Research questions and hypotheses

Taking all the aforementioned into account, the study attempted to answer the following research questions:

RQ 1 Is the participants' EFL knowledge characterised by a predominance of explicit over implicit knowledge?

RQ 2 Is there a significant correlation between explicit and implicit knowledge? Does it vary with respect to the average grade and starting age?

RQ 3 Is there a significant main effect of gender, average grade, and starting age on the participants' EFL knowledge? Is there an interaction effect of these factors on the participants' EFL knowledge?

RQ 4 Is there a significant main effect of gender, grade, and starting age on the level of the participants' explicit and implicit linguistic knowledge. Is there an interaction effect of these factors on the level of the participants' explicit and implicit linguistic knowledge?

Based on the research questions, the following hypotheses were tested:

H1. The participants' EFL knowledge is characterised by a predominance of explicit over implicit knowledge.

H2. There is a significant correlation between explicit and implicit knowledge.

H4. The relationship between explicit and implicit knowledge varies with respect to the average grade and starting age.

H3. There is a significant main effect of gender, average grade, and starting age on the participants' EFL knowledge.

H4. There is a significant interaction effect of gender, average grade, and starting age on the participants' EFL knowledge.

H5. There is a significant main effect of gender, grade, and starting age on the level of the participants' explicit and implicit linguistic knowledge.

H6. There is a significant interaction effect of gender, grade, and starting age on the level of the participants' explicit and implicit linguistic knowledge.

3.2. Participants

The participants were 62 students (aged 14–15) at the end of primary school in Bosnia and Herzegovina: 25 male students (40.3%) and 37 female (59.7%) students. Thirty-two of them took part in the study in May 2011 at the end of the eighth grade after learning English for five years, and the rest (30 students) participated in the study in May 2017 at the end of the

ninth grade after learning English for seven years. It should be noted that the first group finished primary school before the implementation primary education reform in Bosnia and Herzegovina, while the second group finished primary school after the implementation of the reform. Thus, the first group attended eight years of primary school, started learning English in the 4th grade (at age 10), and had three classes per week for five years, whereas the second group started school at age 6, (rather than 7), attended nine years of primary school, started learning English in the 3rd grade (age 8), and had two classes per week during the first year of learning it, after which they had three classes per week in the fourth and fifth grade, and two classes per week during the following four grades. Although the second group of learners started learning English in the third grade, being two years younger than the first group, and learned it for two more years during primary school, the overall number of English classes did not vary considerably, the first group receiving in total 525 hours of instruction, and the second, 560. The participants from the first group were chosen from three classes, taking the average grade as a basis for selection. Since one of the aims of the current study was to show the relationship between explicit and implicit knowledge, the students with higher grades were selected, as they were expected to demonstrate a certain level of both types of knowledge. Thus, out of 32 students, 12 were male and 20 were female, while there were 23 students with an average grade of 5, and 9 with an average grade of 4. A comparable group of students were chosen as the second group of the participants. In this group, 13 students were male, 17 were female, 20 had an average grade of 5 in English, and 10 had an average grade of 4. Both groups of learners were taught by the same English teacher.

3.3. Target structures and instruments

The target structures were the following six tenses in English: the present simple tense, the present continuous tense, the past simple tense, the past continuous tense, the present perfect simple tense and the past perfect simple tense. These structures were chosen because a lot of attention is paid to their acquisition during formal education, and students as well as teachers worldwide consider them difficult (Riddle, 1986), including those in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Dubravac, 2011). Explicit knowledge was measured by a test of metalinguistic knowledge and a test of analysed explicit knowledge. For the purpose of this study, metalinguistic knowledge was defined as the students' ability to correct errors and provide the violated rules. It

was measured by means of a Metalinguistic Test (MLT) (*APPENDIX A*). This test comprised two parts with the same sentences used in both, and consisted of eighteen sentences, three for each structure, all the sentences being ungrammatical, and the errors underlined. In the first part, the students were asked to correct the error in each sentence, while in the second part, they were asked to state the violated grammatical rule. The students were instructed to use English, but were also allowed to use Bosnian if, and only if, they were incapable of explaining the rule in English. In the first part, students received 1 point for each corrected sentence, and the second part was scored on a scale of 0–3. The students were given 0 if they were unable to state the rule or gave the wrong one. One point was assigned to those who stated a partially correct rule, 2 to those who stated a correct rule, but used Bosnian or did not use appropriate technical language. If the students stated a completely correct rule using English and appropriate technical language, they were given 3 points. A percentage accuracy score was calculated for each participant.

The students' analysed explicit knowledge was measured by means of an untimed Grammaticality Judgement Test (GJT) (*APPENDIX B*). As it was not time pressured, it was supposed to tap into the students' analysed explicit knowledge (Bowles, 2011; Ellis, 2004, 2005). It consisted of thirty sentences, some of which were grammatically correct and some grammatically incorrect, with five sentences per structure. The errors were related to the form as well as to the use of specific tenses. The students were first asked to state whether the sentence was grammatically correct or incorrect, and if it was incorrect, they were expected to correct the error. If the sentence was grammatical, the students got 1 point for stating it was correct, and if it was ungrammatical the students got 1 point only if they, in addition to stating that it was ungrammatical, supplied the correct version of the sentence. A percentage accuracy score was again calculated for each participant.

To gather data about the students' implicit knowledge, an Elicited Imitation Test (EIT) was used as a suitable measure of implicit knowledge (Bowles, 2011; Ellis, 2004, 2005, 2008). This test included the same sentences as the GJT, so that a comparison could be made between the students' performance on the two tests. All sentences were audio recorded and played one at a time for the participants, who first (underlining the word "agree" or "disagree" on a separate worksheet) stated their opinion about the statement they had just heard, and then repeated the grammatically correct form of the statement as grammatically correct. They were informed that this test was supposed to reveal their opinion about certain

statements or their answers to certain questions. This was done in order to divert their attention from the grammatical analysis of the sentences and focus it on the meaning. The participants' responses were recorded and later analysed. Each sentence in which the target structure was correctly supplied received a score of 1, and each in which it was incorrectly supplied or avoided received a score of 0. The scores in this test were also expressed as the percentage of correctly repeated sentences.

3.4. Data collection procedures and analysis

Prior to distributing the instruments, we obtained adequate informed consent from the school administration and the participants' parents and the participants themselves upon clarification of anonymity, confidentiality, and the volunteer nature of the participation. Following the procedure of other, similar studies (Ellis, 2005), we first gave the participants the test measuring implicit knowledge (EIT), then, 7 to 10 days later, the test measuring explicit analysed knowledge (GJT), and finally, the test measuring explicit metalinguistic knowledge (MLT), the correction part preceding the explanation part. The oral test lasted approximately 7.5 minutes for each participant. The other tests were not time pressured, but the students needed approximately 20 minutes for the GJT and 15 minutes for the correction part of the MLT, while all the students finished the explanation part in 20 minutes.

The data analyses were performed in SPSS. Table 1 shows that all the tests were reliable, as the Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranged from $\alpha=.876$ (for the GJT) to $\alpha=.956$ (for the MLT total). Therefore, all the tests were internally consistent. The values for asymmetry and kurtosis were taken into consideration to prove normal distribution, with values between -2 and +2 for asymmetry and kurtosis considered acceptable in order to prove normal distribution (George & Mallery, 2010). Descriptive statistics were calculated first, and then a paired samples T-test to illustrate the difference between the different types of knowledge, and Pearson correlation coefficients to show the relationship between explicit and implicit knowledge, while the main and interaction effects of the aforementioned three factors on the participants' EFL knowledge were tested by a three-way ANOVA, and on the separate scores by a factorial MANOVA.

Table 1*Reliability coefficients for the tests***Tablica 1***Koeficijenti pouzdanosti za testove*

Test	Items	Participants	Reliability coefficient
All tests	96	62	$\alpha = .964$
EIT	30	62	$\alpha = .890$
GJT	30	62	$\alpha = .846$
MLTtotal	36	62	$\alpha = .946$
MLTcorrection	18	62	$\alpha = .876$
MLTexplanation	18	62	$\alpha = .944$

4. RESULTS

4.1. Explicit vs. implicit knowledge

Descriptive statistics, i.e., percentage accuracy scores on a scale from 0 to 100%, for the EIT, GJT, MLT and its subsections are presented in Table 2. The results show that the MLT ($M = 32.95\%$) was the most challenging for the students, particularly the explanation part ($M = 28.73\%$), while in the correction part, they demonstrated a considerably higher level of knowledge ($M = 48.48\%$). There was also greater variation in the students' metalinguistic knowledge than in the knowledge shown on the EIT and the GJT. Although both the scores on the EIT ($M = 38.49\%$) and all the tests measuring explicit knowledge ($M = 40.18\%$) were not excellent but rather average, a slightly higher score was obtained on the latter, primarily due to their performance on the GJT ($M = 57.52\%$). The explanation part mainly lacked appropriate terminology (see examples 1a, 1b, and 1c) although the participants showed the awareness of the regularities related to the use of specific target structures. Rare were those explanations (see example 2a, 2b, and 2c) that involved any terminology.

- (1a) There should be *gets*, not *get*
- (1b) *Get* in the sentence needs *s* at the end because *SHE* does that
- (1c) The word *had* needs to be in front of word *you*
- (2a) Order of words is wrong. It does not matter if verb *to have* is in past or present, it's always in front of subject
- (2b) because in sentence is used a inversion
- (2c) because on third person of singular we must put *es* or *s*

Table 2*Descriptive statistics for the tests (N= 62)***Tablica 2***Deskriptivna statistika za testove (N = 62)*

Pair of tests	T	df	P	d
EIT-GJT+MLT	-.862	61	.392	-.109
EIT- GJT	11.913	61	.000	1.513
GJT-MLT	14.404	61	.000	1.830
EIT- MLT	2.428	61	.018	.308
EIT-MLTcorr	-4.994	61	.000	-.634
GJT- MLTcorr	5.858	61	.000	.744
EIT-MLTexpl	3.675	61	.001	.462
GJT-MLTexpl	13.937	61	.000	1.732

A paired-samples T-test was performed to examine the differences between the scores obtained on different tests, and as the data indicate (Table 3) a significant difference was not observed only between the scores on the EIT and all the tests measuring explicit knowledge ($t(61) = -.862, p < .05, d = -.109$), This might be due to a higher score on the GJT and a much lower score on the MLT.

Table 3*Paired-samples T-test for the students' performance on different tests***Tablica 3***T-test zavisnih uzoraka između rezultata postignutih na različitim testovima*

Test	Min	Max	M	SD
EIT	3.33	90.00	38.49	20.07
GJT+MLT	6.86	96.08	40.18	21.47
GJT	20.00	93.33	57.52	16.98
MLTtotal	0.00	97.22	32.95	24.21
MLTcorrection	0.00	94.44	48.48	25.98
MLTexplanation	0.00	100.00	28.73	20.11
Total	7.58	92.42	39.72	20.11

4.2. Relationship between explicit and implicit knowledge

Pearson product correlation coefficients (Table 4) were calculated in order to investigate the relationship between the students' implicit, explicit, and metalinguistic knowledge. Following Cohen et al.'s (2003) guidelines, there seems to be a strong positive correlation between all the tests, including

the EIT and all the tests measuring explicit knowledge ($r = .727$, $p < 0.01$). As was expected, the correlation score was higher between the EIT and the GJT ($r = .782$, $p < 0.01$) than between the EIT and the MLT ($r = .685$; $p < 0.01$) with a particularly low, in comparison to others, correlation ($r = .610$; $p < 0.01$) between the explanation part of the MLT and the EIT. All scores for the correlation between different tests measuring explicit knowledge were very high, and a particularly high correlation coefficient ($r = .924$; $p < 0.01$) was observed between the GJT and the correction part of the MLT.

Table 4
Correlation matrix for the tests

Tablica 4
Matrica korelacija među testovima

Test	EIT	GJT + MLT	GJT	MLT correction	MLT explanation	MLT total
EIT	-	.727**	.782**	.796**	.610**	.685**
GJT + MLT	-	-	.904**	.884**	.966**	.992**
GJT	-	-	-	.924**	.775**	.884**
MLTcorrection	-	-	-	-	.748**	.841**
MLTexplanation	-	-	-	-	-	.987**

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

When the correlation between different tests was analysed for the groups based on starting age and overall years of learning English (Table 5), it was revealed that the relationship between the scores in the tests was stronger in the first group, the one with the later starting age, (ranging between $r = 670$ and $r = 988$, $p < .001$) than in the one that started learning English two years earlier (ranging from $r = 545$ to $r = 986$, $p < .001$). The correlation analyses for the students with the average grade 4 and average grade 5 are displayed in Table 6. Even though there was a strong positive correlation between the scores in both groups, the correlation between the results obtained on different tests was stronger among the students with the lower average grade, coefficients ranging from $r = 654$, $p < .001$, between the EIT and the MLT explanation part, to $r = 991$, $p < .001$, between the GJT and the MLT correction part.

Table 5

Correlation coefficients for the groups based on starting age

Tablica 5

Koeficijenti korelacija između grupa s obzirom na dob početka učenja

Test	GJT + MLT		GJT		MLT Correction		MLT Explanation		MLT total	
	Starting age		Starting age		Starting age		Starting age		Starting age	
	Group 1	Group 2	Group 1	Group 2	Group 1	Group 2	Group 1	Group 2	Group 1	Group 2
EIT	.784**	.664**	.858**	.637**	.838**	.713**	.670**	.545**	.741**	.612**
GJT + MLT			.931**	.849**	.912**	.837**	.970**	.959**	.994**	.988**
GJT					.950**	.870**	.824**	.683**	.886**	.760**
MLT correction							.795**	.674**	.877**	.782**
MLT ex- planation								.988**	.986**	

Table 6

Correlation coefficients for the groups based on average grade

Tablica 6

Koeficijenti korelacija između grupa s obzirom na prosječnu ocjenu

Test	GJT + MLT		GJT		MLT Correction		MLT Explanation		MLTtotal	
	Grade		grade		Grade		Grade		Grade	
	4	5	4	5	4	5	4	5	4	5
EIT	.702**	.627**	.764**	.695**	.825**	.699**	.654**	.503**	.654**	.580**
GJT + MLT			.886**	.873**	.903**	.830**	.969**	.961**	.991**	.991**
GJT					.902**	.899**	.756**	.720**	.815**	.799**
MLT correction							.791**	.662**	.865**	.774**
MLT expla- nation								.990**	.986**	

4.3. The main and interaction effects of gender, starting age, and average grade on the participants' overall EFL knowledge

A three-way ANOVA was conducted to investigate the main and interaction effects of gender, starting age and average grade on the participants' overall linguistic knowledge as measured in this study. The main effect of gender (Wilks' Lambda = .904, $F(4, 51) = 1.34$, $p = .263$, $\eta^2 = .096$) and start-

ing age (Wilks' Lambda = .917, $F(4, 51) = 1.16$ $p = .340$ $\eta^2 = .083$) on the overall dependent variables proved to be insignificant, whereas the main effect of grade (Wilks' Lambda = .667, $F(4, 51) = 6.07$ $p = .000$, $\eta^2 = .323$) was significant. The score on the overall test achieved by the students with an average English grade of 5 ($M = 46.41$) comfortably surpassed the one obtained by their peers with an average grade of 4 ($M = 24.60$). The interaction effects of grade X starting age ($p = .157$), gender X starting age ($p = .529$), and grade X gender X starting age ($p = .084$) on the combined dependent variables were insignificant, while the interaction effect of gender X grade (Wilks' Lambda = .772, $F(4, 51) = 3.77$ $p = .009$, $\eta^2 = .228$) on the combined variables proved to be statistically significant. In fact, male students with a grade of 4 ($M = 30.73$) surpassed female students ($M = 19.09$), while the opposite was true when students with an average grade of 5 were analysed, with ($M = 36.65$) for males and ($M = 52.19$) for females.

4.4. The main and interaction effects of gender, starting age, and average grade on the participants' explicit and implicit knowledge

A factorial MANOVA was conducted to check the main and interaction effects of gender, starting age and average grade on all the scores separately (Table 7). The effects of starting age and gender were insignificant on all the scores, all p values exceeding .05. However, the students with the higher average grade scored significantly better on all the tests, even though both groups found the MTL explanation part the most challenging test and the GJT the easiest test. Furthermore, the interaction effects of starting age X grade as well as of starting age X gender were insignificant on all the scores separately. However, the interaction effect of grade X gender was only insignificant on the EIT ($p = .198$, $\eta^2 = .031$), while its effect on the overall explicit knowledge test ($p = .002$, $\eta^2 = .166$) as well as on its parts – the GJT ($p = .009$, $\eta^2 = .118$), the MLT ($p = .002$, $\eta^2 = .166$), the MLT correction part ($p = .002$, $\eta^2 = .162$), and the MLT explanation part ($p = .004$, $\eta^2 = .147$) – was significant, the male students with a grade of 4 showing better knowledge than the female students with the same average grade, and the contrary being true among the participants with a grade of 5. The interaction effect of starting age X gender X grade was not significant on the EIT ($p = .164$), the GJT ($p = .275$) or on the MLT correction ($p = .068$), whereas its effect on the overall explicit knowledge score ($p = .033$, $\eta^2 = .082$) and the overall metalinguistic score ($p = .019$, $\eta^2 = .097$) as well as on the MLT explanation section ($p = .026$; $\eta^2 = .089$) proved significant. On

the overall explicit knowledge test among the students with a grade of 4 in both groups, the males showed better knowledge, while the score achieved by the females with a grade of 5 surpassed the score obtained by the males with the same grade. On the other two tests, the findings were the same among the students with an average grade of 5, but, while in group one the males showed better knowledge than the females among those with a grade of 4, the females surpassed the males' score in group two.

Table 7*Multivariate ANOVA between different groups of participants on all tests***Tablica 7***Multivarijantna ANOVA između različitih grupa ispitanika na svim testovima*

	Starting age				Gender				Grade			
	Group 1	Group 2	P	η^2	male	female	p	η^2	4	5	p	η^2
EIT+GJT+MLT	40.48	38.52	.340	.083	34.52	43.24	.263	.096	24.60	46.41	.000	.323
EIT	36.66	40.44	.147	.038	38.93	38.20	.278	.022	22.11	45.73	.000	.312
GJT+MLT	41.73	38.53	.998	.000	33.33	44.81	.480	.013	25.33	46.74	.000	.206
GJT	57.92	57.11	.447	.011	53.73	60.10	.840	.001	45.09	63.02	.000	.235
MLT Total	34.98	30.79	.816	.001	24.83	38.44	.411	.013	17.10	39.95	.001	.181
MLT corr.	48.09	48.88	.440	.011	43.33	51.95	.865	.001	28.66	57.49	.000	.260
MLT exp.	31.60	25.68	.606	.005	19.25	35.14	.271	.022	13.84	35.31	.006	.130

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Explicit vs. implicit knowledge

The present study results revealed that our participants, upon finishing their primary-school education, did not demonstrate a considerable knowledge of the target structures. When the quality of linguistic knowledge was investigated, the findings indicated that the first hypothesis might be refuted, as the participants' EFL knowledge was not characterised by a predominance of explicit over implicit knowledge. In fact, no significant difference was noticed between their implicit and explicit knowledge, but in line with the results reported in Dubravac (2013), their implicit knowledge was significantly greater than their metalinguistic knowledge and significantly lower than their analysed explicit knowledge. These results support the conclusion that students acquire metalanguage very slowly and with difficulty (Sorace, 1985) even though in foreign-language contexts formal

language acquisition is marked by the introduction of a lot of metalinguage (Dubravac, 2011; Habibić & Dubravac, 2016; Green & Hecht, 1992; Tankosić & Dubravac, 2016; Ur, 2011). The lowest mean was scored for the explanation part of the MLT, where the students were often incapable of providing the violated rule properly, although they were significantly more successful in the part where they were just asked to correct the incorrect sentences, thus proving that the ability to correct errors does not imply the ability to provide the rules (Alderson et al., 1997; Elder et al., 1997; Elder & Manwaring, 2004; Green & Hecht, 1992). What might further contribute to such results and a comparable level of explicit and implicit knowledge is the fact that English in Bosnia and Herzegovina enjoys the status of a global language, so learners appear to be exposed to it outside school (Brdarević-Čeljo & Dubravac, 2022; Dubravac, 2016; Dubravac & Skopljak, 2020; Ribo & Dubravac, 2021). This exposure possibly complements the exposure they receive within classrooms and leads to implicit knowledge development.

5.2. The relationship between explicit and implicit knowledge

Overall, limited exposure to the target language in class, good chances for out-of-school exposure to it, and an explicit focus on language forms well presented in school lessons eventually seem to contribute to the greatest analysed explicit knowledge, which might over some time lead to the development of implicit knowledge, as the correlation between these two types of knowledge appears to be strong and positive. As a matter of fact, all types of linguistic knowledge are strongly positively correlated, which confirmed our second hypothesis. Aligned with other studies (Green & Hecht, 1992; Roehr, 2007; Sorace, 1985; White & Ranta, 2002), this one confirmed that the correlation is strong if both types of knowledge are developed. Interestingly, when the correlation between the scores obtained on different tests was compared between the two groups based on the average grade, it was stronger among the students with the lower average grade, i.e., 4. On the lower levels of proficiency, learners might more often refer to explicit rules to overcome some obstacles in terms of language use. Once actual language use seems to be stabilised, they need less reference to explicit knowledge. However, due to the limited number of formal classes and the fact that, although exposed to it outside school, students still acquire English here as a foreign language, a lot of time needs to pass for implicit knowledge to develop and for this relationship to become less strong. This is supported

by Dubravac (2018), who showed that the correlation between the scores obtained in implicit and explicit knowledge measures for indefinite article, plural –s, and modal verbs was stronger among primary school students, expected to be at an A2 proficiency level, than among secondary school students, expected to be at a B1–B2 level of proficiency.

The correlation between the scores was noticeably stronger in the first group, the one with a later starting age and a shorter duration of learning English. This might indicate again that, after some time, the relationship between different types of knowledge becomes weaker. Initially, students rely on everything they know to produce the target structures in different contexts, but after some time, the production in a specific context becomes more proceduralised, and learners develop greater control over both types of knowledge (Ellis, 1993, 1994). Following the weak interface position, even conscious knowledge might lead to the ability to use language automatically (Ellis, 1993, p. 94) when learners are developmentally ready for it, and when they are involved in communicative activities through which they practice the target structures. Due to the limited exposure inside educational institutions, outside school exposure should be further examined and utilised, as it is a valuable source for students to use the language for real communication purposes.

5.3. The main and interaction effects of gender, starting age, and average grade on the participants' EFL knowledge as measured in this study

Despite the aforementioned variability in the learners' linguistic knowledge and the relationship between different types of it, when the impact of gender, starting age, and average grade was investigated, it was found that only average grade exerted a significant effect on the overall score, the students with the higher grade comfortably surpassing those with the lower grade on all the tests. Thus, the hypothesis stating that the main effect of gender, average grade, and starting age on the participants' EFL knowledge was only partially supported. Teachers, therefore, seem to take into account different types of knowledge when assessing their students' performance in the class, as those with a grade of 5 were better on all the tests than those with a grade of 4, although the difference between these two should be less profound. We did not take into consideration students with lower grades, but following the difference between those with the two highest grades, we might assume that the knowledge of the others is pretty low. However, it

should be pointed out that the current study's target structures are all complex and are considered difficult by learners worldwide, including Bosnian learners (Dubravac, 2011; Riddle, 1986).

Gender did not have any significant effect on the scores, even though the female students demonstrated a higher level of knowledge on almost all the scores, which might be attributable to the gender-based differences in language learning reported so far, female students enjoying practicing more (Bernat & Lyoyd, 2007), using more cognitive and metacognitive learning strategies than males (Green & Oxford, 1995), and sharing more positive attitude towards learning a foreign language (Bacon & Finneman, 1992). However, the interaction effect of gender and grade proved significant, with females being better than males in the group of students with a grade of 5, and the opposite being true among students with a grade of 4. It might be that to get a grade of 5, students are expected to put in more effort, to practice more, which is more common among girls than boys. Therefore, the fifth hypothesis, predicting a significant interaction effect of gender, starting age, and average grade on the participants' EFL knowledge was also only partially supported.

5.4. The main and interaction effects of gender, starting age, and average grade on the participants' explicit and implicit knowledge

All the aforementioned differences between male and female learners involving a rather high level of awareness might have affected rather explicit than implicit knowledge, which is visible in the greater difference between the males and females in the explicit, and in particular metalinguistic, knowledge measures. However, no significant difference was observed – perhaps due to equally great motivation to learn English as the global language, which has been already confirmed to exist among both male and female learners in this EFL context (Ahmetović et al., 2020; Dubravac & Latić, 2019).

When the two groups based on the starting age were compared, contrary to Ellis (2005) and Gotseva (2016), no significant differences whatsoever were observed between them, the group with the later starting age showing slightly better explicit, and in particular metalinguistic, knowledge, and the group with the earlier starting age demonstrating marginally better implicit knowledge. In line with other studies (Antón-Méndez et. al., 2015; Burstell, 1975b; Cepik & Sarandi, 2012; Fitzgerald et al., 2015; Muñoz, 2006; Muñoz & Singleton, 2011; Unsworth, 2016) this one indicates that earlier is

not necessarily better. If some improvement is to be made, then the overall exposure should be drastically increased, and not just slightly, as here. However, a slightly higher level of implicit knowledge might indicate that significant effects of earlier introduction and more years of formal learning might be visible only after a few more years, since the development of implicit knowledge is known to be a slow process (Ellis, N., 1993). Furthermore, even though the same teacher taught both groups, the second group demonstrated lower metalinguistic knowledge, which might imply at least a bit weaker emphasis on metalanguage within the formal lessons. Although still incorporating a lot of metalanguage in their lessons (Dubravac, 2011; Habibić & Dubravac, 2016) over time EFL teachers could be slowly changing their approach. Moreover, although metalanguage is included when teaching, its knowledge does not seem to be so much taken into account when grading students, as our participants, marked as the most successful learners, those with the highest English grades, did not show a great level of this knowledge.

The analysis of the interaction effects showed a significant effect of grade and gender on all the scores except the implicit knowledge measure. The female participants with an average grade of 5 were much better than their male counterparts, while mainly the opposite was true among the students with a grade of 4. It seems that the higher the grade, the more female students tend to practice and use the language, which is not the case with males. When the two groups based on starting age were compared, this was particularly true in the second group, indicating that, after longer periods of learning, female students might start devoting less effort to their foreign-language development. Thus, the interaction effect of all three variables was significant on all the measures of explicit knowledge, except on the MLTcorrection. Based on such results, we might say that the fifth and the sixth hypotheses are partially supported with a significant main effect of the average grade on all the measures, and a significant interaction effect of grade and gender as well as of grade, gender, and starting age on mainly explicit knowledge measures.

6. CONCLUSIONS, PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS, AND LIMITATIONS

Out of the types of knowledge measured in this study, the participants demonstrated the highest level of analysed explicit knowledge. They were capable of recognising incorrect structures and correcting them, although

their ability to provide the violated rules appeared to be highly limited. Similarly, they did not demonstrate great abilities in terms of using structures implicitly, which is necessary for spontaneous communication in the target language, which in turn is the aim of teaching and learning English nowadays. Developing implicit knowledge might appear slow and hardly achievable in a foreign-language context, but language acquisition should always be viewed as a process characterised by variability, not as a product, and both teachers and students should always be focused on the possible improvement of both the quantity and quality of linguistic knowledge. Whenever possible, they should focus on implicit linguistic knowledge development, or on those activities through which explicit linguistic knowledge might lead to the development of implicit linguistic knowledge. Although in-class exposure is limited, the learners' exposure outside school should be taken into account and used as much as possible. School lessons should not be focused on teaching metalanguage, firstly because, although taught, students acquire it very slowly, and secondly, even when acquired, this type of knowledge does not directly enable students to communicate in the target language. Moreover, even though the correlation between all types of knowledge in this context appears strong and positive, it is weakest between implicit and metalinguistic knowledge, in particular between the scores on the implicit knowledge test and the explanation part of the metalinguistic test. Thus, if language acquisition is seen as a road, at one end there is metalinguistic knowledge; at the other end, implicit linguistic knowledge; and somewhere in between, analysed explicit knowledge. The distance between analysed explicit and implicit knowledge seems to be much shorter, and implicit knowledge appears more easily achievable if we start from analysed explicit knowledge than from metalinguistic explicit knowledge, which is supported by the stronger correlation between implicit knowledge and analysed explicit knowledge.

Apparently, it is mainly this type of knowledge that is taken into account when students are graded, the score on the GJT exceeding all other scores. If we expect learners to develop this kind of knowledge, then the limited time we have at our disposal should not be used on teaching metalanguage. Also, no significant change is likely to be produced if a foreign language is introduced slightly earlier in educational institutions. Along with earlier introduction, a significant increase in the number of total hours of instruction, together with a different approach to teaching, is necessary. Although gender does not play a significant role in the overall results, there are some indications that female students devote more effort in developing expli-

cit, and in particular metalinguistic, knowledge. If this effort is directed towards implicit knowledge development or solely analysed explicit knowledge, their eventual learning success might be better.

This study is not without its limitations, some of which are its one sole instrument measuring implicit knowledge, its limited number of participants, and its limited number of target structures. Therefore, future studies might include a wider range of participants and target structures to get a more comprehensive overview of foreign-language acquisition in terms of different types of knowledge. Moreover, further research might investigate the impact of other factors on both the quantity and quality of learners' EFL knowledge.

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APPENDIX A

The Metalinguistic Test – Correction/Explanation part

Correction part instructions: All of the following sentences are grammatically incorrect. The incorrect parts are underlined. Try to correct the error in each sentence.

Explanation part instructions: All of the following sentences are grammatically incorrect. The incorrect parts are underlined. Try to give an explanation why each sentence is grammatically incorrect.

Some examples:

She made the cakes all last night.

She always get up early in the morning.

Where you have travelled so far?

Where you had been before you came there?

Where you went yesterday?

Nobody ever climbed this mountain.

What they watching right now?

By the time I got to the office the meeting has already begun without me.

He is buying newspapers every morning.

APPENDIX B

The Grammaticality Judgement Test (the same sentences were used in the Elicited Imitation Test).

Read carefully the following list of sentences. We want you to tell us for each one whether you think it sounds correct in English. So next to each you are going to write *C* if you think it is correct, and *not C* if you think it is not correct. For each sentence that you find incorrect, write the correct version.

Some examples:

	C/not C	Correct version of the sentence
I'm learning a lot these days.		
Where you had lived before you started school?		
I had more friends eight years ago than now.		
What you doing all last weekend?		
Which languages you have learnt till now?		
I argue with my parents these days.		
My parents haven't used computers before I was born.		
My best friend talk to me every day.		
I listening to music for a few hours yesterday.		
My mum doesn't make delicious cakes.		
Who you talking to right now?		
When you go to your friends?		
I had lived in Zavidovici since I was born.		
I have met many friends till now.		
I didn't went to Mostar last year.		

Eksplisitno i implicitno znanje glagolskih vremena učenika engleskoga kao stranoga jezika na nivou osnovne škole u Bosni i Hercegovini

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Čini se da je lingvističko znanje učenika djelimično implicitno i djelimično eksplisitno: prvo koje omogućava spontanu svakodnevnu komunikaciju i drugo na koje se oslanjamo kada se bavimo jezičnim oblicima, prepoznajemo ili koristimo meta jezik. Ovom studijom ispitivalo se eksplisitno i implicitno znanje glagolskih vremena u bosanskom kontekstu učenja engleskoga kao stranoga jezika na kraju prvoga ciklusa obrazovanja, tj. osnovne škole, uz korištenje sljedećih instrumenata: metalingvističkoga testa, vremenski neograničenoga testa procjene gramatičke ispravnosti i testa elicirane imitacije. Studija je imala za cilj ukazati na varijabilnost kvalitete i kvantiteta znanja engleskoga kao stranoga ajezika i odnosa između različitih vrsta znanja u ovisnosti o tri faktora: spola, prosječne ocjene i dobi u kojoj se počeo učiti engleski. Pokazujući poprilično ograničeno znanje ciljnih struktura, analiza je ukazala na nepostojanje statistički značajne razlike između eksplisitnoga i implicitnoga znanja, dok su faktori korelacije između njih bili poprilično visoki. Od tri navedena faktora, trosmjerna ANOVA pokazala je da je samo preočena ocjena imala značajan utjecaj na znanje engleskoga kao stranoga jezika. Pored toga, međuutjecaj spola i ocjene pokazao se značajnim na sveukupno znanje engleskoga kao stranoga jezika kao i na eksplisitno znanje, dok je međuutjecaj svih triju faktora bio značajan samo u odnosu na eksplisitno znanje.

Ključne riječi: *dob, eksplisitno znanje, implicitno znanje, prosječna ocjena, spol, usvajanje stranoga jezika*