



# International Journal of Innovative Research in Education



Volume 12, Issue 1, (2025) 50-58

[www.ijire.eu](http://www.ijire.eu)

## Promoting students' metalinguistic understanding: The implementation of genre-based pedagogy in grammar class

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### Suggested Citation:

Lestari, T., Widodo, P. & Andriyanti, E. (2025). Promoting students' metalinguistic understanding: The implementation of genre-based pedagogy in grammar class. *International Journal of Innovative Research in Education*, 11(2), 50-58. <https://doi.org/10.18844/ijire.v12i1.9805>

Received from January 2, 2025; revised from March 12, 2025; accepted from May 4, 2025.

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### Abstract

To become effective language users, learners require sufficient grammatical knowledge to structure words and messages meaningfully. However, grammar instruction often lacks a communicative and contextualized focus. This study addresses this gap by examining how English instructors implement genre-based pedagogy to enhance metalinguistic awareness and abstract thinking in grammar instruction. Using a qualitative case study approach, this research investigates the classroom practices of three instructors in higher education. Data were collected through interviews, questionnaires, and the analysis of instructional materials, including lesson plans, classroom tasks, and student work. The study employs a data analysis framework involving data collection, condensation, analysis, and conclusion drawing. Findings indicate that the instructors deliberately integrate genre texts to foster learners' ability to apply grammatical knowledge across the four language skills. These practices promote an understanding of textual structure and authorial intent, contributing to students' independence and informed linguistic choices. The study highlights the role of genre-based pedagogy in transforming grammar instruction into a more dynamic and functional component of language education.

**Keywords:** Genre-based pedagogy; grammar instruction; higher education; metalinguistic awareness; qualitative research.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In order to develop effective communicative competence in a foreign language, learners must acquire grammatical knowledge, as it facilitates the structuring of vocabulary and the construction of coherent and meaningful messages. A solid foundation in grammar enables students to enhance their comprehensive English proficiency and contributes to their overall language development. Mastery of grammar supports deeper language comprehension and has been described as an aesthetic element of language itself (Chowdhury, 2014). According to Mort and Drury (2012), learners exposed to grammar instruction outperform their peers who lack such training. Hwang et al. (2015) further assert that grammatical instruction constitutes a critical component of language mastery. Consequently, grammar education occupies a pivotal role in second and foreign language pedagogy.

The importance of grammar instruction has long been recognized within the field of language education, particularly in higher education, where the ability to accurately manipulate linguistic forms is central to effective language use. An accurate understanding of grammatical structures is fundamental to successful second language acquisition, underscoring the indispensable role of grammar in foreign language instruction.

As university-level education increasingly incorporates digital learning modalities, instructional strategies and resources must be adapted for virtual platforms. Online environments offer an inclusive and flexible means of accommodating a diverse student population, allowing learners to engage with content based on their schedules and needs. The integration of grammar instruction into communicative tasks within online settings has been shown to significantly improve both grammatical accuracy and learner interaction in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts (Schurz & Coumel, 2023).

When transitioning to digital modes of instruction, pedagogical approaches that foster interactive engagement with educational content become essential (Prosser & Trigwell, 1999; Mort & Drury, 2012). Digital grammar learning resources should be contextualized within relevant disciplinary content and aligned with assessment activities. Additionally, these materials must include scaffolded tasks and exemplars to support students in understanding the linguistic structures of academic genres. In light of this, foreign language educators should address the prevalent underemphasis on grammar instruction and explore innovative pedagogical approaches to enhance learners' English proficiency. Effective grammar instruction should aim not only at theoretical understanding but also at practical application across all language modalities, including listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translation (Ling, 2015; Wen et al., 2022).

There is an ongoing scholarly debate concerning the most effective methodology for grammar instruction. Context-based grammar teaching has demonstrated positive effects on learners' ability to accurately apply grammatical structures across language skills. Presenting grammatical concepts within authentic textual contexts allows learners to perceive how these forms function in real language use. Such contextualized approaches foster learners' understanding of linguistic structure and enhance language acquisition (Mart, 2013).

Teaching grammar within meaningful contexts enables learners to internalize grammatical forms more effectively. Exposure to contextually embedded grammatical structures enhances learners' ability to use these forms communicatively and functionally. When language is taught through contextualized examples, learners can better grasp its systemic and communicative nature.

Among the various approaches to grammar instruction, explicit and implicit methods remain prominent. Explicit instruction, which emphasizes direct focus on grammatical form, facilitates learners' metalinguistic awareness and structural recognition. However, its emphasis on accuracy may result in learners producing structurally correct sentences without achieving communicative fluency. In contrast, implicit instruction creates a dynamic and interactive learning environment, promoting student engagement and communicative competence through dialogic feedback. While implicit methods prioritize functional use of grammar, explicit instruction enhances learners' conscious recognition of language forms. The integration of both strategies, through a hybrid approach, yields more comprehensive gains in grammatical knowledge, retention, and learner self-assurance (Şahinkaya, 2024).

Rather than viewing explicit and implicit instruction as dichotomous, educators should consider them complementary. These approaches can be adapted flexibly to suit diverse learning contexts, instructional objectives, learner profiles, and language content. Optimal grammar pedagogy may involve the strategic combination of both methods, tailored to the specificities of the instructional environment.

Genre-based pedagogy presents another viable framework for grammar instruction (Wen et al., 2022). This approach integrates grammar teaching with the functional use of language through activities such as listening, reading, and speaking. Extensive reading, in particular, facilitates improvements in both grammatical competence and vocabulary acquisition (Matebie et al., 2025; Green et al., 2024). Speaking activities and communicative language teaching (CLT) emphasize interaction as the primary goal of language learning. In addition, writing-based instruction and teacher read-alouds help reinforce correct grammatical usage, as learners begin to incorporate accurate forms into their written production. Genre-based pedagogy is grounded in the principles of text, communicative purpose, contextual meaning, and linguistic choice (Nurlaelawati & Novianti, 2017).

In this pedagogical model, the development of explicit grammatical knowledge is linked to learners' capacity to use language meaningfully across various contexts (Herazo Rivera, 2012). Activities such as extensive reading, note-taking, and rewriting provide multiple opportunities for learners to consolidate and extend their grammatical understanding. These tasks also foster independent learning as students engage with technical discourse through academic assignments (Rose, 2018).

In light of the arguments outlined above, a balanced approach that synthesizes both explicit and implicit instructional methods appears to be the most effective strategy for grammar instruction. Implicit methods tend to encourage more dynamic classroom interactions and foster a more engaging learning atmosphere. However, both methods offer distinct advantages, and their integration should be informed by learners' needs, classroom contexts, and institutional realities.

Genre-based pedagogy aligns well with intentional grammar instruction within writing instruction. It supports students in developing a metalinguistic awareness of how written language is structured and produced. Under this model, grammar is viewed as a resource for understanding and producing text, thus enabling learners to become more autonomous and reflective writers (Myhill et al., 2020).

### **1.1. Purpose of study**

Accordingly, the present study examines how university educators in Yogyakarta incorporate grammar instruction into their teaching practices using a genre-based pedagogical framework. This approach not only reinforces students' grammatical knowledge but also strengthens their communicative abilities. In essence, it represents a functionally oriented model of grammar instruction that highlights the interconnectedness of linguistic form and meaning. The findings aim to inform educators on how to guide learners in applying grammatical knowledge across language skills and in critically analyzing and producing text, thereby cultivating metalinguistic competence.

## **2. METHOD AND MATERIAL**

### **2.1. Data collection instruments**

The present study employs a qualitative approach utilizing a case study method. Data were collected through multiple tools, including questionnaires completed by the participants, interviews conducted to gain deeper insights into their teaching practices, and the analysis of instructional documents such as lesson plans, task samples, and student work or project outputs. These tools provided a comprehensive view of grammar instruction practices and the strategies implemented to support learners' application of grammatical knowledge within a genre-based pedagogy framework.

### **2.2. Participants**

The participants in this study were three English instructors teaching in higher education. They contributed to the research by responding to questionnaires and engaging in in-depth interviews. Their experiences and instructional approaches were central to understanding how grammar teaching is enacted and supported in practice.

### **2.3. Data analysis technique**

Data analysis followed the qualitative model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), which includes the phases of data collection, data condensation, data analysis, and conclusion drawing. This analytical framework facilitated a systematic interpretation of the qualitative data, enabling the identification of patterns and themes relevant to the research focus.

## **3. RESULTS**

This section presents the outcomes of the study by addressing the research questions previously formulated. The data were collected through the participation of three university instructors, each of whom shared their instructional experiences with implementing genre-based pedagogy in grammar classrooms. The following discussion details the findings of the study.

All three participants adopted a consistent instructional framework rooted in the genre-based pedagogical model. Specifically, they followed the instructional sequence consisting of: building knowledge of the field, modeling of text, joint construction of text, and independent construction of text. These stages align with the genre-based teaching cycle as described by Kartika-Ningsih and Gunawan (2019), who outline three major phases—deconstruction (including both preparation and modeling), collaborative text construction, and independent composition. This cycle reflects the principles of a functionally oriented pedagogical approach, which emphasizes not only the content of writing but also how it is expressed. Through exposure to various grammatical alternatives, learners develop a heightened awareness of how their language choices influence the communicative effectiveness of their writing. Such explicit instruction fosters metalinguistic insight and enables educators to engage with learners' reflections on linguistic form and meaning in writing.

### **3.1. Case: Teacher 1**

The first participating instructor focused on the grammatical instruction of adverbs, adverbial phrases, and adverbial clauses by using procedural texts as the genre scaffold. Her teaching process adhered to the stages of the genre-based pedagogy model:

#### **3.1.1. Building knowledge of the field**

This introductory phase involved a sequence of lessons designed to establish the conceptual and linguistic foundation necessary for engaging with the target genre. This included instruction on topic-relevant vocabulary and grammatical structures, especially about the targeted adverbial forms. As Kartika-Ningsih and Gunawan (2019) note, this stage is characterized by two primary activities: (1) language development exercises and (2) the application of various teaching methods such as watching instructional videos, practicing impromptu speaking, and reading a variety of texts—even those outside the immediate genre to be produced. In this study, the teacher directed students' attention toward language form by presenting and analyzing examples of adverbial phrases and clauses. Instructional materials were visually supported to reinforce grammatical accuracy and clarity.

#### **3.1.2. Modelling of text**

The modeling stage involved presenting students with an exemplar of the genre and explicitly discussing its structural and linguistic features. This included introducing the communicative purpose, textual organization, and the TT7 colors to assist students in distinguishing between adverbs, adverbial phrases, and adverbial clauses.

### **Example Text: How to Make a Blended Iced Cappuccino**

**Ingredients:**

- whipped cream (optional)
- 1/2 cup strong coffee
- 3 tablespoons sugar
- 1 cup ice cubes
- 1/4 cup cream
- 2 cups skim milk

**Instructions:**

- First, brew a cup of coffee and let it cool.
- Then, put the ice cubes in the blender and pour the coffee over them.
- Next, add milk, sugar, and cream.
- After that, blend them all on medium speed until the ice is completely crushed.
- Next, pour the mixture into a glass.
- Finally, top it off with whipped cream.

This example was particularly useful in introducing students to different types of adverbial expressions. However, identifying and categorizing adverbial clauses proved more cognitively demanding for the learners.

**3.1.3. Joint construction of text**

In this collaborative phase, students were encouraged to apply their understanding of the modeled text by working with the instructor to develop a new procedural text. This stage, though flexible in its implementation, remains crucial in helping students internalize genre-specific grammar. To assess students' comprehension, the teacher designed a task requiring learners to complete a partially written procedural paragraph. The activity aimed to foster both lexical precision and procedural knowledge. Below is an excerpt from the exercise:

**Task Instruction: Fill the blanks:**

- (a) with an adverb,
- (b) with an adverb,
- (c) with an adverbial phrase.

**Incomplete Text: How to Rename Your File**

Select the file with a single click, pause for a second, and ... (a) click one more time. ... (b) the name is highlighted, type out a new name, and press Enter to ... (c).

This exercise required students to actively recall and apply grammatical forms in an authentic procedural context.

**3.1.4. Independent construction of the text**

The final phase of instruction involved an individual writing task, in which students were asked to independently compose or revise a procedural text. The focus of the task was the application of adverbs, adverbial phrases, and adverbial clauses. Students were instructed to label each form using a color-coding system: red for adverbs, green for adverbial phrases, and blue for adverbial clauses. The prompt permitted students to either create an original text or adapt an existing one, provided it was appropriately simplified for classroom purposes.

**Task Instruction:**

Compose a simple procedural text explaining how to do, make, or use something. Highlight the adverbs in

**red**, the adverbial phrases in **green**, and the adverbial clauses in **blue**. You may adapt content from external sources, but ensure the text remains accessible.

### **3.2. Teacher 2: Teaching past tenses through recount texts**

The second instructor selected a recount text as a pedagogical medium for teaching the past tense system, specifically focusing on the simple past, past continuous, and past perfect tenses. Her instructional implementation adhered closely to the established genre-based pedagogy framework.

#### **3.2.1. Building knowledge of the field**

In line with the approach adopted by the first instructor, Teacher 2 began by reinforcing students' foundational understanding of the structural patterns and distinct communicative functions associated with the various past tenses. Through this comparative analysis, students were guided in recognizing how different past tense forms convey temporality and narrative nuance in recounts.

#### **3.2.2. Modelling of text**

The instructor presented a carefully selected **recount text** that incorporated all three targeted tense forms. The text served as a model to illustrate the functional application of tense choices in narrative writing.

#### **Sample text: Very tiring day**

*Last Tuesday was a busy day for me. I spent my time doing a lot of my online activities. I almost had no time to take a rest. First, in the morning, I did some chores. After that, I had classes from 9 am until 3.00 pm. After that, I joined a webinar that I had registered for a week before. The webinar lasted for 2 hours. When I was having a fun discussion session, my friend called me and asked for help with his translation project. I was thinking it was a great opportunity for me to test my language proficiency. After the webinar, I helped my friend check his translation. When I would sleep, I remembered there was some homework that I had to do. I did them until 11.40 pm. Those activities made me tired and excited at the same time.*

The different verb tenses were highlighted using three colors to facilitate identification and comparative analysis. This visual strategy aimed to reduce student anxiety commonly associated with grammar instruction and sustain their interest. Insights from post-instruction interviews revealed that learners found grammar instruction embedded within continuous texts—such as recounts—less intimidating than exercises using isolated sentences. Furthermore, the guided textual discussion allowed learners to engage with the writer's grammatical decisions in a meaningful context involving narrative re-creation with altered characters, settings, and sequences (Rose, 2018).

#### **3.2.3. Joint construction of text**

During this collaborative writing stage, students were supported in constructing narrative sentences using the targeted tenses. The teacher employed guiding questions to scaffold student contributions and ensure syntactic variety. Some examples included:

- What happened?
- Where did it happen?
- When did you experience it?
- What were you doing when the moment happened?
- What had you done before the moment happened?

The instructor facilitated this process by eliciting and reformulating student responses, writing collaboratively on the board while offering feedback on tense selection and sentence structure. This collaborative effort mirrors the concept advanced by Kalali and Pishkar (2015), who emphasize that writing tasks serve to reinforce grammatical development through active usage.

#### **3.2.4. Independent construction of the text**



In the final stage of the pedagogical cycle, students were assigned an individual writing task. They were asked to recount a recent memorable experience, applying the full range of past tenses introduced in class. The task instructions specified the required use of:

- Simple past for sequencing main events,
- Past continuous for describing overlapping actions or background activities, and
- Past perfect for expressing actions completed before the main events.

#### **Task Instruction**

*Write about a recent exciting experience. Use the simple past tense to narrate main events, the past continuous tense to describe simultaneous activities, and past perfect tense to explain what had occurred before the event took place.*

This phase aimed to enable students to independently construct a narrative text adhering to the recount genre while integrating the grammatical features in focus. Students were expected to plan, draft, and revise their texts, with opportunities for feedback from both peers and the instructor. As the culminating stage of the genre-based pedagogy cycle, this task was designed to consolidate learning and encourage independent grammatical application within meaningful written discourse.

### **3.3. Teacher 3: Integrating passive voice through authentic report texts**

The third instructor introduced **passive voice constructions** using an authentic **report text** entitled "*Indonesia Receives Janssen Vaccine from The Netherlands and First Delivery from France's Dose-Sharing*". This approach emphasized contextual learning by exposing students to real-world discourse prior to formal grammar instruction.

The lesson began with a reading session, in which students read the report individually and listened to the teacher's read-aloud performance, which served as a model for pronunciation and intonation. Following the reading, the teacher facilitated a discussion on the passive voice, guiding students in identifying passive structures embedded within the text.

Although the use of authentic material created opportunities for meaningful language exposure, the instructor acknowledged certain limitations. Some students found the COVID-19-related topic less engaging due to overexposure, and the linguistic complexity of the authentic text necessitated simplification to improve accessibility. Nonetheless, the overall approach was considered more effective than decontextualized grammar drills. Allowing students to engage in reading and writing tasks anchored in authentic discourse fosters deeper grammatical awareness and enhances their communicative competence.

## **4. DISCUSSION**

Text and context are inherently interconnected. A text is never produced in isolation; it is shaped by, and in turn shapes, the context in which it is created. Context refers to the social, cultural, and situational environment surrounding a text, while the text itself serves specific communicative purposes within that environment. As Nurlaelawati and Novianti (2017) assert, every text carries a purpose, and its function cannot be fully understood without considering the context in which it was produced. This interrelation highlights that language is not simply a neutral medium for conveying information but a dynamic system that reflects the speaker or writer's intentions, audience expectations, and the broader cultural and social norms at play.

Data gathered from the three participants in this study further support this perspective. The students, guided by a genre-based approach to instruction, demonstrated an understanding of language as a system of choices used to fulfill particular communicative functions. Through their writing, they were able to express personal experiences, engage in social interaction, and construct coherent messages that aligned with the demands of different genres. This suggests that when writing is viewed as a social and cultural practice, learners become more aware of how language operates within context. They are not only learning

how to form grammatically correct sentences but also developing the ability to use language purposefully, according to the expectations of various contexts and audiences.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This research underscores the functional role of grammar within written discourse, diverging from traditional approaches that prioritize grammatical form, rule adherence, and syntactic precision. In contrast to form-focused paradigms, the study advocates for a meaning-oriented perspective that situates grammar as an essential tool for effective communication within texts. In this context, it is essential to critically re-evaluate the influence of prior instructional methodologies, acknowledging both their pedagogical contributions and inherent limitations.

Language-based pedagogy, by its nature, necessitates sustained collaboration with educators and close observation of its implementation within authentic classroom environments. One of the primary challenges in this approach is maintaining the authenticity, communicative value, and contextual relevance of instructional activities. These challenges are multifaceted, encompassing both teacher practices and student engagement. Therefore, there is a clear need for continued empirical inquiry into the ways grammar instruction is enacted in higher education settings, particularly to inform pedagogical improvements that enhance the overall quality of language learning experiences.

As previously suggested in the conclusion, further research should be directed toward exploring effective approaches to grammar instruction. Future studies would benefit from broader scopes, including large-scale investigations and the design of innovative grammar teaching models that align with contemporary communicative and contextual needs in language education.

**Conflict of interest:** No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

**Ethical Approval:** The study adheres to the ethical guidelines for conducting research.

**Funding:** This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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