

Impact of explicit grammar teaching on enhancing students' grammatical proficiency and academic success

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the effectiveness of explicit grammar instruction as a pedagogical intervention for improving grammatical proficiency and academic achievement among undergraduate students in Bohol, Philippines. Using a one-group pre-test-post-test quasi-experimental design, data were collected from 111 students ($n=111$) who participated in a five-session explicit grammar instruction program. Results indicated a statistically significant improvement in grammatical proficiency following the intervention ($M_{pre}=48.89$, $SD=10.00$; $M_{post}=55.20$, $SD=12.09$), $t(110)=10.52$, $p<0.001$, with a medium effect size (Cohen's $d=0.54$). Correlation analyses further revealed a significant positive relationship between grammatical proficiency and academic achievement in both pre-test and post-test measures ($p<0.001$), indicating that students with stronger grammar skills tended to perform better academically. These findings provide empirical support for the effectiveness of systematic, explicit grammar instruction in enhancing both language competence and broader academic outcomes. The study underscores the value of integrating structured grammar instruction into higher education curricula. It supports the institutionalization of language proficiency programs to address persistent grammatical challenges and promote academic success across disciplines.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Persistent concerns among educators and researchers in the Philippines highlight students' continuing difficulties with English grammar, particularly in academic writing [1], [2]. These challenges are evident across secondary and higher education institutions, including the present study's context, where recurring grammatical errors are frequently observed in students' essays, narratives, and research papers. Such difficulties undermine writing clarity, academic performance, and students' readiness for professional communication.

Despite early exposure to English grammar instruction, many learners struggle with core grammatical structures such as verb tenses and subject-verb agreement [3]. Studies have shown that these errors remain prevalent even at the tertiary level, indicating that prior instruction has not been sufficiently internalized or transferred to authentic language use [4], [5]. This persistent gap between grammatical knowledge and application suggests limitations in commonly employed instructional approaches, particularly those that rely heavily on implicit learning.

Explicit grammar instruction—characterized by systematic rule explanation, guided demonstration, and structured practice—has been proposed as a more effective alternative [6]. Research comparing

instructional approaches has shown that explicit teaching facilitates greater grammatical accuracy and improved writing outcomes than implicit strategies [7]. By clearly organizing grammatical concepts and reducing cognitive overload, explicit instruction supports learners in understanding, applying, and retaining grammatical rules, especially in academic contexts.

Although technological tools such as grammar checkers are increasingly used to support writing, they function primarily as supplementary aids and cannot replace foundational grammatical knowledge developed through instruction [8]. Overreliance on such tools may even obscure underlying language weaknesses. Consequently, the role of teacher-guided, explicit grammar instruction remains central to developing sustainable grammatical proficiency.

Academic achievement is influenced by multiple factors, including instructional quality and learning environment [9]. However, English language proficiency, particularly grammatical competence, consistently emerges as a strong predictor of academic success [10]. Clear and accurate writing enhances students' ability to express ideas, engage in academic discourse, and perform effectively across disciplines. Yet, relatively few studies have examined the impact of explicit grammar instruction on both grammatical proficiency and academic achievement in higher education, particularly within the Philippine context [11]. This gap in the literature underscores the need for focused empirical investigation.

This study is anchored in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, Sweller's cognitive load theory, and Piaget's constructivist theory, which collectively inform the design and implementation of the explicit grammar instruction employed in this research. Guided by Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development, grammar lessons emphasized teacher scaffolding, wherein grammatical rules were explained explicitly and practiced collaboratively to facilitate the internalization of complex linguistic structures [12]. Sweller's cognitive load theory informed the sequencing of instruction by segmenting grammatical concepts into manageable components, reducing extraneous cognitive load to help learners focus on essential syntax [13]. Furthermore, Piaget's constructivist theory shaped the learning sequence, encouraging students to actively construct grammatical knowledge through progressive practice and the transition from concrete examples to abstract application in academic writing [14].

In response to institutional observations, accrediting body recommendations, and gaps in existing research, this study investigates the impact of explicit grammar teaching on senior college students' grammatical proficiency and academic achievement. Specifically, it examines students' academic performance during the 2023-2024 academic year, their pre-test and post-test grammatical proficiency levels, the differences between these levels, and the relationship between grammatical proficiency and academic success. The findings aimed to contribute empirical evidence to inform instructional practices and enhance English language teaching in higher education.

2. METHOD

2.1. Research design

This study employed a quantitative one-group pre-test–post-test quasi-experimental design. In this method, a single group of participants is measured before and after an intervention, without using random assignment or a separate control group. The impact of the intervention is inferred from the difference between the pre-test and post-test results [15]. This design is commonly used when it is not feasible to assign participants randomly or implement a control group due to practical constraints.

2.2. Participants and setting

The study was conducted over five instructional sessions, each lasting approximately 90 minutes. It involved 111 out of 115 senior education students enrolled in the academic year 2023-2024. Participants were drawn from the three-degree programs at the researchers' institution, they are Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEEd); Bachelor of Secondary Education major in Mathematics (BSed-Math), and the Bachelor of Technology and Livelihood Education major in Home Economics (BTLEd-HE). Sessions were scheduled during the students' free time to ensure maximum participation.

2.3. Instrument

The study utilized the grammar inventory for teachers (GIFT), a standardized instrument developed by Belk and Thompson [16] to assess mastery of traditional grammar and standard English usage among pre-service educators. While the tool's foundational content validity and split-half reliability ($r=0.76$) were established by its original developers, contemporary scholarship continues to affirm its psychometric relevance. Specifically, Nagaño *et al.* [17] reaffirmed the GIFT as an effective diagnostic tool within the Philippine teacher-education context, citing its precision in identifying specific "least-learned" domains, such as sentence elements. Furthermore, its continued application in recent studies [18], [19] underscores its enduring utility as a benchmark for measuring grammatical proficiency in modern pedagogical research.

2.4. Procedure

The intervention was implemented separately for each course group, following a consistent schedule. On the first day, participants were administered a pre-test based on the GIFT tool to assess their initial grammatical proficiency. The pre-test was conducted under standardized conditions and retrieved within the hour. During the session, students exhibited signs of anxiety, confusion, and dissatisfaction, suggesting difficulty with the test items—an experience commonly observed when learners encounter unfamiliar or insufficiently taught grammatical structures. Such anxiety has been shown to significantly impact writing performance, as Farid [20] found a significant relationship between language anxiety and EFL students' achievement in expository essay writing. Then a brief Socratic dialogue was conducted to explore students' reactions and identify areas of struggle. Many students reported unfamiliarity with the grammatical content, noting that grammar had often been underemphasized in their previous instruction, a concern also documented in recent studies on gaps in explicit grammar teaching in Philippine and international contexts [21].

Following the pre-test, the intervention phase commenced. It consisted of explicit grammar instruction that systematically covered the content assessed by the GIFT tool. Instruction involved direct teaching methods, including demonstration, explanation, guided practice, and discussion, all focused on traditional grammar concepts and standard English usage. After five sessions of intervention, a post-test identical in structure to the pre-test was administered to all participants who completed the instructional period. Responses were collected and submitted for statistical analysis.

2.5. Data analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using the following statistical tools: percentage counts and weighted means for descriptive analysis, t-test for dependent samples to compare pre-test and post-test scores, and Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient to determine the relationship between grammatical proficiency and academic achievement. Regression analysis was used to examine the predictive value of grammar proficiency on academic performance.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results of the analysis on students' grammatical proficiency and academic achievement before and after explicit grammar instruction. Specifically, it examines: i) students' academic achievement levels; ii) pre-test and post-test grammatical proficiency across grammar subdomains; iii) the difference between pre-test and post-test performance; and iv) the relationship between grammar proficiency and academic achievement. Figure 1 shows that most students (67.57%) obtained a very satisfactory academic rating (1.3-1.5), while 32.43% were rated satisfactory (1.6-2.0). No students fell under the fair, good, or failed categories. This distribution indicates a generally high-performing cohort and is consistent with earlier findings reporting predominantly satisfactory to very satisfactory academic outcomes among college students [22]. Notably, no students achieved an excellent rating (1.1-1.2), which may reflect stringent grading standards or limited enrichment opportunities for high-performing learners. Overall, the results suggest stable academic performance supported by effective instruction and institutional academic support.

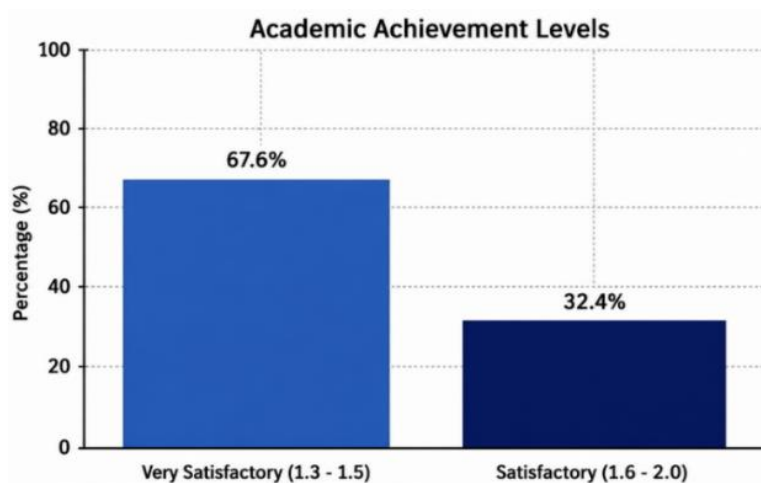


Figure 1. Students' academic achievement

Table 1 presents students' grammatical proficiency before the intervention across seven grammar subdomains. High failure rates were observed in core areas such as parts of speech, sentence elements, sentence structure, and pronoun usage. No students attained an excellent rating in these subdomains, indicating limited foundational grammatical competence at baseline. In contrast, students demonstrated relatively stronger performance in modifiers and subject-verb agreement, where some reached good to excellent levels. These findings suggest uneven grammatical development, with basic sentence-level structures posing greater difficulty than localized grammatical rules [23]–[25].

As shown in Table 2, post-test results indicate improvements across most grammatical subdomains. Failure rates decreased in verb usage, modifiers, and subject-verb agreement, while a small number of students achieved excellent ratings in sentence structure and pronoun usage—areas in which no excellence was recorded in the pre-test. Despite these gains, substantial failure rates persisted in sentence elements and pronoun usage, suggesting that these areas remain challenging even after instruction. Nonetheless, the emergence of higher proficiency levels in previously weak domains supports the positive impact of explicit grammar teaching, consistent with prior research emphasizing its effectiveness in addressing persistent grammatical difficulties among college learners [26]–[28].

Table 3 shows a statistically significant improvement in students' grammatical proficiency following the intervention. The post-test mean score ($M=55.20$, $SD=12.09$) was significantly higher than the pre-test means ($M=48.89$, $SD=10.00$), with a mean gain of 6.31 points. The paired-samples t-test revealed a significant difference, $t(110)=10.52$, $p<0.001$, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This finding corroborates prior studies demonstrating significant pre- to post-test gains through explicit grammar instruction [29]. The increased standard deviation in post-test scores suggests greater variability in student improvement, indicating that while most learners benefited from the intervention, gains differed in magnitude. This finding underscores the value of explicit grammar instruction while also highlighting the need for differentiated instructional approaches to address varying learner needs.

Table 1. Pre-test grammatical proficiency

Proficiency level	Assessing for grammar (scores)				Word usage (scores)		
	Part of speech N (%)	Sentence elements N (%)	Sentence structure N (%)	Correct use of verbs N (%)	Modifiers N (%)	Subject-verb agreement N (%)	Pronoun usage N (%)
Excellent	0	0	0	0	63 (56.76)	12 (10.81)	0
V-satisfactory	0	0	0	4 (3.60)	26 (23.42)	0	0
Satisfactory	2 (1.80)	0	5 (4.50)	19 (17.12)	15 (13.51)	41 (36.94)	10 (9.01)
Fair	12 (10.81)	1 (0.90)	9 (8.11)	26 (23.42)	4 (3.60)	0	0
Good	19 (17.12)	1 (0.90)	23 (20.72)	38 (34.23)	2 (1.80)	35 (31.53)	24 (21.62)
Failed	78 (70.27)	109 (98.20)	74 (66.67)	24 (21.62)	1 (0.90)	23 (20.72)	77 (69.37)
Mean Score	6.12	5.34	6.01	7.48	9.62	8.91	5.89

Table 2. Post-test grammatical proficiency

Proficiency level	Assessing for grammar (scores)				Word usage (scores)		
	Part of speech N (%)	Sentence elements N (%)	Sentence structure N (%)	Correct use of verbs N (%)	Modifiers N (%)	Subject-verb agreement N (%)	Pronoun usage N (%)
Excellent	0	0	1 (0.90)	1 (0.90)	63 (56.76)	30 (27.03)	2 (1.80)
V-satisfactory	3 (2.70)	0	4 (3.60)	8 (7.21)	28 (25.23)	0	0
Satisfactory	7 (6.31)	1 (0.90)	10 (9.01)	23 (20.72)	13 (11.71)	40 (36.04)	10 (9.01)
Fair	20 (18.02)	5 (4.50)	13 (11.71)	32 (28.83)	4 (3.60)	0	0
Good	23 (20.72)	5 (4.50)	16 (14.41)	18 (16.22)	2 (1.80)	33 (29.73)	41 (36.94)
Failed	58 (52.25)	100 (90.09)	67 (60.36)	29 (26.13)	1 (0.90)	8 (7.21)	58 (52.25)
Mean score	6.89	5.88	6.74	8.31	9.81	9.62	6.71

Table 3. Pre-test and post-test comparison

Proficiency level	Mean	Standard deviation (SD)	Df	t-value	p-value
Pre-test	48.89	10.00	110	10.52	<.001
Post-test	55.20	12.09	110		

Table 4 illustrates a statistically significant and stable relationship between grammar proficiency and academic achievement. At the baseline, the pre-test results reveal a moderate positive correlation ($r=0.4221$, $p<0.001$), suggesting that students with higher initial grammatical competence consistently achieved better academic ratings. Notably, this relationship remained remarkably steady in the post-test ($r=0.4195$, $p<0.001$),

even after the intervention period. The minimal variance between these two coefficients (<0.01) indicates that while the intervention may have shifted individual scores, grammar proficiency remains a reliable and constant predictor of academic success. These findings align with existing literature [30], [31], which identifies grammatical competence as a fundamental pillar of overall academic performance.

Table 4. Relationship between grammar proficiency and academic achievement

Variables	Df	r-value	p-value
Pre-test on academic achievement	109	.4221	$<.001$
Post-test on academic achievement	109	.4195	$<.001$

The findings of this study should be interpreted in light of several limitations. The use of a one-group pre-test–post-test design without randomization or a control group limits causal inference, as observed improvements may have been influenced by extraneous variables such as concurrent coursework or increased academic exposure. The relatively short intervention period of five sessions may also have constrained the depth and sustainability of grammatical gains, particularly for more complex language structures. Additionally, the possibility of a Hawthorne effect cannot be ruled out, as participants' awareness of being involved in a focused instructional study may have temporarily enhanced motivation and performance. Reliance on the same grammar assessment for both pre-test and post-test further introduced the potential for a test learning or familiarity (GIFT) effect. Finally, the absence of delayed post testing restricts conclusions regarding long-term retention and the transfer of grammatical knowledge to authentic academic tasks.

4. CONCLUSION

This study provides compelling evidence that explicit grammar instruction is not merely an instructional supplement but a foundational mechanism for strengthening both linguistic competence and academic performance among teacher education students. Beyond demonstrating statistical gains, the findings indicate that systematic grammar instruction functions as a cognitive scaffold that enables learners to process academic texts more accurately, construct clearer written discourse, and engage more effectively in higher-order learning tasks. In this sense, grammatical proficiency emerges as an enabling condition for academic success rather than an isolated language skill.

From a practical standpoint, the results suggest that teacher education programs should move beyond incidental or implicit approaches to grammar and adopt structured, outcome-driven grammar instruction embedded within content courses. Explicit focus on sentence structure, verb usage, and pronoun reference—identified as persistent problem areas—can directly improve students' academic writing, assessment performance, and classroom communication skills. For pre-service teachers, improved grammatical competence also enhances instructional clarity and professional credibility, which are essential for effective classroom practice.

At the policy level, the findings support the inclusion of explicit grammar competencies within teacher education standards, curriculum frameworks, and learning outcomes. Institutions responsible for teacher preparation may consider institutionalizing grammar-focused modules, diagnostic assessments, and targeted remediation programs, particularly for students entering higher education with limited grammatical foundations. Such policy-driven interventions can help ensure that graduates possess the language proficiency necessary for both academic rigor and professional teaching responsibilities.

Institutionally, explicit grammar instruction can be integrated through curriculum alignment, faculty development, and assessment reform. Embedding grammar instruction across disciplines, offering professional development for instructors on evidence-based grammar pedagogy, and linking grammar proficiency to academic performance indicators can create a coherent, sustainable model for language development. Rather than treating grammar as a standalone course, institutions are encouraged to adopt a cross-curricular approach that reinforces grammatical accuracy in authentic academic and professional tasks.

While the study's quasi-experimental design and short intervention period limit the generalizability of findings, the results provide a strong empirical basis for curricular reform and pedagogical innovation. Future research may extend this work by examining long-term instructional effects, implementation across diverse institutional contexts, and the transfer of grammatical competence to authentic academic writing and classroom teaching practices. Collectively, these efforts can further establish explicit grammar instruction as a core component of effective teacher education.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

This journal uses the Contributor Roles Taxonomy (CRediT) to recognize individual author contributions, reduce authorship disputes, and facilitate collaboration.

Name of Author	C	M	So	Va	Fo	I	R	D	O	E	Vi	Su	P	Fu
Ramil S. Bulilan	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
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C : Conceptualization

M : Methodology

So : Software

Va : Validation

Fo : Formal analysis

I : Investigation

R : Resources

D : Data Curation

O : Writing - Original Draft

E : Writing - Review & Editing

Vi : Visualization

Su : Supervision

P : Project administration

Fu : Funding acquisition

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflict of interest in this study. Funding support was provided by the main author's affiliated institution, Bohol Island State University-Clarin Campus, specifically for research presentations. Additionally, the authors acknowledge the use of AI tools for grammar checking and literature exploration, which did not influence the integrity or outcomes of the research.

INFORMED CONSENT

All participants gave their informed consent before their inclusion in the study. Institutional permission was also obtained from the Research Governing Board. Participants' identities and academic records, including their final grades, were treated with strict confidentiality and used solely for this research, with all data gathered only after explicit permission from the students themselves.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

The study received approval from the institution's Panel of Reviewers during the In-House Research Review and from the Research Colloquium. At the time of publication, the university's Research Ethics Review Committee (RERC) was still under formation, and thus, formal RERC clearance was not applicable but is anticipated for future studies.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The data supporting the findings of this study are available upon reasonable request to the corresponding author, [RSB]. Some data are not publicly available due to privacy considerations and restrictions involving the identity and academic records of participants. This manuscript does not include newly created or external datasets, and therefore, general data availability is limited to internal, original data.

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