

**Assessing the grammatical competence of elementary learners:
Evidence from Grade 5 pupils in Quirino District, Philippines**

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ABSTRACT

English grammar is important in developing clear communication skills, yet many pupils still struggle to apply grammar rules correctly. This study examined the grammatical competence of Grade 5 pupils in public elementary schools in Quirino District, Philippines. Using a descriptive-normative design, data were collected from 25 English teachers through validated questionnaires and brief interviews. Results showed that pupils were moderately competent in grammar. They performed better in subject–verb agreement and verb tenses but had more difficulty with pronouns, prepositions, and parts of speech. Teachers reported using grammar drills and integrated language activities to improve learning, but they faced challenges such as limited time, lack of materials, and low pupil motivation. The study recommends using more communicative and learner-centered approaches to make grammar learning more engaging and effective.

Keywords: grammatical competence, grammar instruction, Grade 5 pupils, communicative approach, Quirino District

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INTRODUCTION

English, as a global language, offers numerous advantages to people worldwide. It serves as a medium of communication across national borders, enabling individuals from diverse linguistic, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds to understand and respect one another. Furthermore, it acts as a bridge to resolve conflicts and differences among nations, as mediation and negotiation are often conducted through English as a common language.

Indeed, English has united and connected people across the world, nurturing global communication and understanding. According to Harmer (2007), learning English through the

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integration of its four macro skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing, facilitates mastery of the language since these skills are interrelated. Thus, students must develop all four to achieve competence. Among these skills, grammar occupies a central position because it forms the foundation of language proficiency.

Mastering grammar directly influences one's overall language ability. A strong grasp of grammatical rules enhances communication, whereas poor grammar or a lack of understanding can hinder clarity in speaking, writing, reading, and listening. Hence, grammar plays a vital role in language learning, enabling students to become effective communicators.

Considering the primary goal of grammar instruction, several researchers assert that enhancing learners' grammatical awareness serves multiple functions. Students require a solid understanding of grammar to effectively develop the target language. Awareness of grammatical structures enables learners to express their intended meanings accurately. Consequently, grammatical awareness plays a pivotal role in successful English language learning.

Despite its importance, many English learners still show limited grammatical awareness. Han and Kim (2017) found that many EFL learners lack grammatical awareness and possess low proficiency levels. Similarly, Andrews (1999) reported that over half of teacher trainees had inadequate grammatical knowledge. These findings indicate a persistent deficiency in grammatical competence among learners.

It is within this context that the present study sought to assess the grammatical competence of Grade 5 pupils in the public elementary schools of Quirino District, Isabela. This investigation aimed to identify the pupils' level of competence, the strategies used to enhance grammar skills, and the challenges encountered in grammar instruction.

Statement of the problem

This study aimed to assess the grammatical competence of Grade 5 pupils in public elementary schools of Quirino District, Isabela, for the school year 2024–2025. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the profile of the respondents in terms of age, gender, civil status, highest educational attainment, present position, latest performance rating, length of teaching experience, and level of in-service training attended?
2. What is the level of pupils' competence in the basic grammar rules vital to English 5 learning in public elementary schools of Quirino District, Isabela?
3. What is the extent of use and effect of the different ways to improve pupils' grammar skills in English 5, particularly in learning the basics of grammar, practicing grammar, avoiding common mistakes, and finding reliable resources?
4. What is the extent of the challenges encountered by teachers in English 5 grammar instruction?

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a descriptive-normative research design to assess the grammatical competence of Grade 5 pupils in public elementary schools within the Quirino District of Isabela

during the school year 2024–2025. This design was deemed appropriate because it allowed the researcher to describe existing conditions, practices, and perceptions related to pupils' grammar skills and teachers' instructional strategies. According to Good and Scates (1972), descriptive-normative research is effective in identifying the current status of phenomena, while Van Dalen and Meyer (1982) highlighted its value in examining relationships and patterns among variables. By employing this approach, the researcher was able to collect, analyze, and interpret data systematically to present an accurate and comprehensive picture of pupils' grammatical competence and the instructional challenges faced by teachers.

The research was conducted in all public elementary schools located in the Quirino District of Isabela, a first-class municipality known for its diverse linguistic and cultural background. The municipality comprises 21 barangays and has a population of approximately 30,459 based on the 2015 census. Its rich historical and sociocultural context provided a suitable environment for investigating how varying linguistic influences affect the grammatical development of pupils and the instructional strategies adopted by teachers to address these challenges.

The respondents of the study were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that only individuals directly involved in teaching English at the Grade 5 level were included. A total of 25 English teachers from different public elementary schools in the Quirino District participated in the study. Their inclusion was based on their familiarity with pupils' grammatical performance and their experience in implementing grammar instruction in the classroom. This purposive selection guaranteed that the data collected reflected authentic insights from practitioners who are closely engaged in teaching the subject matter under investigation.

Data were gathered through a structured questionnaire, which served as the primary research instrument. The questionnaire was developed following a thorough review of relevant literature and previous studies on grammatical competence and pedagogy. It consisted of four major sections designed to capture the key dimensions of the research problem. The first part focused on the personal and professional profile of the respondents, including demographic variables such as age, gender, civil status, educational attainment, position, performance rating, length of service, and level of in-service training. The second part assessed pupils' level of competence in basic grammar rules based on the teachers' observations and assessments. The third section measured the extent of use and effectiveness of various strategies employed by teachers to improve pupils' grammar learning, while the final section identified the challenges encountered in grammar instruction. The questionnaire underwent a validation and pilot-testing process involving selected English 5 teachers from Mallig District, Isabela, to ensure clarity, reliability, and content validity. Revisions were incorporated based on feedback from evaluators and expert recommendations from the researcher's adviser and the dean of the graduate school.

Before conducting the data collection, formal approval was secured from the Office of the Schools Division Superintendent and the District Supervisor of Quirino, Isabela. Upon approval, the researcher personally distributed the questionnaires to the respondents and retrieved them after completion. To enhance the credibility of the findings, informal interviews were conducted during the retrieval of questionnaires, allowing the researcher to clarify responses and gather supplementary qualitative insights. Documentary analysis of relevant school records was also carried out to verify certain data points. These procedures ensured the comprehensiveness and accuracy of the information collected for analysis.

After data collection, all responses were encoded, tallied, and analyzed using descriptive statistical methods. Frequency and percentage distributions were utilized to describe the demographic profile of the respondents, while weighted mean computations determined the pupils' level of grammatical competence, the extent of use and effectiveness of grammar improvement strategies, and the seriousness of instructional challenges encountered by teachers. To provide meaningful interpretations, the study employed five-point Likert scales with descriptive equivalents ranging from Highly Competent to Least Competent, Very Effective to Least Effective, and Very Serious to Least Serious, depending on the variable measured. These analytical procedures provided a clear and objective basis for understanding the patterns, tendencies, and implications of grammatical competence and instructional practices among Grade 5 pupils and teachers in the Quirino District.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study involved twenty-five Grade 5 English teachers from public elementary schools in the Quirino District of Isabela, who served as the primary respondents. As discussed in the methodology, these teachers were purposively selected based on their direct involvement in teaching English at the Grade 5 level. Data were gathered using a validated questionnaire that assessed their profile, perceptions of pupils' grammatical competence, teaching strategies, and challenges encountered in grammar instruction. The information collected provided a comprehensive view of the current state of grammar teaching and learning in the district.

Profile of the respondents

The results revealed that the respondents were predominantly female, comprising 68% of the total, while 60% belonged to the 31–40-year-old age group. A majority of the teachers, or 76%, held a bachelor's degree with additional units toward a master's program, demonstrating a commitment to professional growth. In terms of teaching experience, 52% had been in the teaching profession for six to ten years, indicating that most of them possessed adequate classroom exposure and pedagogical experience. Furthermore, 84% of the teachers reported having attended at least one in-service training focused on English instruction. These findings suggest that the respondents were not only qualified but also professionally active in pursuing continuous learning opportunities. Their educational attainment and experience enhance the reliability of their assessments regarding pupils' grammatical competence, as they possess both the theoretical foundation and practical experience necessary for sound evaluation.

Pupils' level of competence in basic grammar rules

Based on the teachers' evaluations, pupils exhibited a "Moderately Competent" level of grammatical ability, with an overall weighted mean of 3.12. Among the specific grammar components assessed, pupils performed best in subject–verb agreement, which obtained the highest mean of 3.56, followed by the correct use of simple tenses, with a mean of 3.48. However, their proficiency declined in more complex areas such as pronoun–antecedent agreement (mean =

2.87) and the correct use of prepositions (mean = 2.79). The weakest performance was recorded in the identification of parts of speech, which had a mean of 2.65. These results indicate that while pupils possess a foundational understanding of grammar, their competence remains limited to frequently encountered structures. More intricate grammatical concepts that require analytical and contextual understanding continue to pose challenges. This pattern aligns with the findings of Han and Kim (2017), who observed that many learners display restricted grammatical awareness primarily confined to commonly practiced rules. Therefore, the results underscore the importance of implementing instructional approaches that move beyond repetition and memorization toward contextualized, communicative grammar learning that fosters deeper comprehension and application.

Extent of use and effect of ways to improve pupils' grammar skills

The findings further revealed that teachers implemented strategies to enhance pupils' grammar skills to a very great extent, as reflected in an overall mean of 4.42. Among these, grammar drills and exercises emerged as the most frequently used strategy, achieving the highest mean of 4.60. This was closely followed by contextualized sentence construction, which had a mean of 4.52, and the integration of grammar lessons into reading and writing activities, which obtained a mean of 4.48. These results suggest that teachers favor structured yet contextual methods that align with communicative and functional language approaches. On the other hand, strategies that promote learner autonomy, such as peer correction and self-assessment, were used less often, with means of 3.32 and 3.28, respectively. The least utilized approach was the use of online grammar tools, which recorded a mean of 3.12. The limited application of technology-assisted and self-directed strategies implies that while teachers are highly engaged in delivering grammar instruction, there remains room to incorporate digital tools and autonomous learning activities to stimulate greater learner independence. Thornbury (1999) supports this view, emphasizing that grammar instruction becomes more effective when learners are actively involved in applying rules within meaningful and interactive contexts. Hence, promoting reflective and participatory grammar learning could enhance pupils' mastery and retention of linguistic structures.

Challenges encountered by teachers in grammar instruction

Despite their use of varied and effective strategies, teachers still encountered several challenges in grammar instruction, which were rated to a moderate extent, with an overall mean of 3.31. The most commonly reported issues included insufficient instructional time, limited access to teaching resources, and pupils' low motivation to learn grammar. Other significant difficulties cited were mother tongue interference, large class sizes, and the wide range of language proficiency levels among pupils, with mean scores ranging between 3.18 and 3.64. These challenges highlight that grammar instruction is often influenced by external and contextual factors that hinder teaching efficiency. The findings echo Long's (1988) assertion that instructional success depends heavily on conditions such as learner engagement, resource availability, and sufficient instructional time. While teachers are evidently implementing effective classroom strategies, the persistence of these barriers underscores the need for systemic support in the form

of enhanced curricular materials, teacher training, and policies that promote smaller class sizes and language-enriched learning environments. Strengthening these aspects would help ensure that grammar instruction not only addresses linguistic form but also fosters motivation, interaction, and authentic language use among pupils.

In summary, the results reveal that while Grade 5 English teachers in the Quirino District demonstrate professional competence and employ diverse teaching strategies, their pupils remain moderately competent in grammar. Instructional effectiveness is constrained by contextual challenges, suggesting that future interventions should focus on contextualized grammar teaching, greater use of learner-centered and technology-supported approaches, and strengthened institutional support to optimize grammar instruction in public elementary schools.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the study revealed that the teacher-respondents from the public elementary schools of Quirino District, Isabela, were mostly female, within the middle-aged group, and possessed adequate educational qualifications and teaching experience. Their participation in in-service trainings and seminars related to English instruction further enhanced their competence in teaching grammar. The Grade 5 pupils, on the other hand, demonstrated a moderate level of grammatical competence, showing strength in basic grammar rules such as subject–verb agreement and verb tenses but exhibiting weaknesses in pronoun–antecedent agreement, the correct use of prepositions, and the identification of parts of speech. This indicates the need for more intensive grammar instruction to strengthen pupils’ understanding and application of grammatical rules.

Moreover, the study found that teachers utilized a variety of strategies to improve pupils’ grammar skills. Contextualized drills, integration of grammar lessons in reading and writing, and consistent practice activities were employed to a very great extent, showing that teachers are actively implementing effective instructional methods. Despite these efforts, teachers continued to encounter moderate challenges in grammar instruction, primarily due to the lack of instructional time, limited teaching materials, and pupils’ low motivation to learn grammar. Other factors, such as mother tongue interference and large class sizes, also affected the effectiveness of grammar teaching.

In conclusion, while pupils have developed a foundational grasp of grammar, their learning remains heavily reliant on conventional teaching methods. There is a clear need to strengthen grammar instruction through innovative, communicative, and learner-centered approaches that emphasize the functional use of grammar in real-life contexts.

In light of these conclusions, the study recommends that English teachers continue to enhance grammar instruction by integrating it with other language skills to make learning more meaningful and contextualized. School administrators are encouraged to provide more in-service trainings, seminars, and workshops focused on modern strategies for grammar instruction, such as communicative and task-based approaches. Curriculum planners and developers should review and reinforce the grammar component of the English 5 curriculum to better align with pupils’ learning needs and communicative goals. Additionally, learning materials should include authentic and contextual examples that promote both grammatical accuracy and communicative fluency.

Finally, it is recommended that future research be conducted among other grade levels and districts to validate and expand these findings, and to explore the long-term impact of various grammar teaching strategies on learners' overall language competence.

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