The Effectiveness of Integrating Grammar and Writing Instructions through Systemic Functional Linguistics

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Abstract

This study examines the effectiveness of integrating grammar instruction with writing activities through the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) to enhance the writing skills of senior high school students in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. The research employed a pre-experimental one-group pre-test and post-test design involving 29 students from Class XI.TL.1 at SMAN 11 Makassar. Over five instructional sessions, students were taught grammar in a contextualized manner by embedding it within the writing of hortatory exposition texts, guided by SFL principles such as Theme–Rheme organization, transitivity, and cohesive devices. Data were collected through writing tasks administered before and after the intervention and analyzed using descriptive statistics, paired-sample t-tests, and normalized gain (N-Gain) analysis to determine the magnitude and significance of improvement. The findings revealed a statistically significant increase in students' grammar accuracy, coherence, and cohesion in writing, with an N-Gain score indicating upper-medium effectiveness. These results demonstrate that integrating grammar and writing instruction through SFL not only bridges the gap between form and function but also supports the development of meaningful, well-structured texts. The study underscores the pedagogical value of adopting functional grammar approaches in EFL classrooms and recommends further research to explore their application across different genres and proficiency levels.

Keywords: *Systemic Functional Linguistics, grammar instruction, writing skills, EFL, hortatory exposition*

INTRODUCTION

As an EFL country, Indonesia continues to prioritize English as an essential subject across various levels of education. But, many Indonesian EFL learners continue to struggle with producing coherent and cohesive texts, particularly in writing. Writing is recognized as one of the most complicated skills for EFL students to know (Bulqiyah et al., 2021; Humairoh, 2021). While grammatical knowledge is often emphasized in the teaching and learning process, the practical application of that knowledge in writing remains limited and problematic. Grammar, as a foundational component of language, plays a crucial role in shaping meaning. According to Alhaysony (2017), grammar is essential for constructing natural and meaningful sentences. "The patterning of morphemes of morphemes to make up sentences is generally described as the grammar of the language." (Allerton, 1979).

Without grammar, language would be chaotic, "countless words without the indispensable guidelines for how they can be ordered and modified" (Alhaysony, 2017, p. 189). But grammar is frequently viewed by students as complicated and intimidating, mainly due to its rule-based

nature (Fenn, 2022). Traditional grammar instruction leads to isolating rules from practical use, creating a disconnect between knowing grammar and using it effectively in communication, particularly in writing.

This instructional separation between grammar and writing has serious consequences. Students may know the rules but struggle to apply them when constructing meaningful and logically connected sentences. Spinillo and Sotomayor (2023) also find that the challenges are also faced by students in organizing their ideas and connecting sentences coherently and cohesively.

Similarly, Alisha, Safitri & Santoso found that the significant problems that are faced by student are the lack of vocabulary and limited knowledge in constructing sentence. It also supported by Bulqiyah, Mahbub & Nugraheni (2021) that in writing, the students are faced linguistics problem including area of lexico- grammar, writing, and structure.
Traditional methods of grammar instruction, such as the Prussian model which focuses on drills and rule memorization fail to offer students the opportunity to see how grammar operates in real texts. This reinforces the view of grammar as isolated from meaning-making and further limits students' ability to produce cohesive written discourse. As a result, students may construct grammatically correct sentences, yet their texts lack coherence and cohesion, logical flow, and purpose (Humairoh, 2021; Bulqiyah et al., 2021).

To address these issues, grammar must be taught in an integrated and contextualized way specifically, within the act of writing itself it is supported by Kuehner (2016) that integrates reading, writing, and grammar which is helpful for students of all skill levels. Systemic Functional Linguistic Halliday (2014), offers a theoretical and pedagogical framework that views language as a resource for meaning-making. It integrates structure and function by considering language within its social context as its name system and function Halliday & Matthiessen (2014) and Matthiessen et al (2022) .

Numerous studies confirm that EFL students face substantial difficulties in writing coherent texts due to the isolated instruction of grammar and writing. In Indonesia, students often report confusion about how to apply grammar in context, as grammar instruction is rarely connected to actual text creation (Humairoh, 2021; Bulqiyah et al., 2021). Instead of understanding how grammar contributes to textual function and social function, students are given rules to memorize without seeing their application in real context. The separation of grammar and writing creates a gap that affects students' ability to create meaningful texts.

The importance of coherence and cohesion in writing is well acknowledged, many teachers do not explicitly teach and care to how these are achieved grammatically. This is exacerbated by limited use of functional models like SFL in classroom practice, it supported by (Mccabe et al., 2015) stated that, SFL is also discovered to be suitable for EFL school situations, in contexts where English is not the mother tongue. So, students lack the tools to link ideas in creating sentences logically, which hampers their development as competent writers.

Several studies have explored grammar instruction and SFL in EFL contexts. Suseno (2021), for example, integrated grammar into speaking through podcasts and found that contextualized grammar improved oral fluency. Kia, Aydinloo, and Zoghi (2022) applied SFL genre instruction to story reproduction and reported increased student accuracy and coherence in oral retellings. Nagao (2019) analyzed auxiliary verbs through the interpersonal metafunction, while Cahyono (2018) implemented textual function in teaching writing at the university level using classroom observations and student texts.

These studies demonstrate the effectiveness of integrating grammar with language skills through SFL. However, few have focused specifically on the textual metafunction or

have examined high school students' writing development through Theme-Rheme analysis. Most studies either emphasize speaking or target adult learners.

This study offers several original contributions: this study focuses on senior high school EFL students and their written performance, this study targets textual metafunctions to develop students' coherence and cohesion in writing.

By addressing the disconnect between grammar and writing, this research contributes to more effective writing instruction in EFL settings. It helps teachers and curriculum developers recognize the need to integrate grammar instruction with functional writing activities. In particular, it provides a model for using SFL's textual metafunction to help students understand how grammar can shape meaning, coherence, and reader interpretation. Moreover, this study enriches the field of applied linguistics particularly in SFL by offering insights into how SFL can be adapted for EFL learners in Indonesian, providing a pathway toward more communicative, functional, and effective writing instruction.

METHOD
Research Design

This research employed a pre-experimental one-group pre-test and post-test design, a design commonly used to determine the effect of a treatment when random assignment is not possible Creswell & Creswell (2018). This design led the researchers to measure students' grammar and writing performance before and after the treatment, identifying some significant improvement attributable to the treatment. Although it did not contain a control group, the design is considered suitable for classroom-based research where ethical and logistical constraints prevent full experimental control Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun (2019).

Participants

The participants were 29 students from Class XI.1 at SMAN 11 Makassar, selected through purposive sampling (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016) because they represented typical EFL learners in Indonesian senior high schools. These students had previously learned grammar through traditional grammar–translation methods, which emphasize rule memorization and sentence translation but often fail to connect grammar to authentic language use (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). They were familiar with basic writing tasks but had not received instruction using the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework before.

Treatment Procedure

The treatment was conducted over five meetings. The focus was on teaching grammar through the context of hortatory exposition texts. Each session involved explicit instruction in: Transitivity (processes, participants, circumstances), Mood and modality (statements, questions, commands, obligation, certainty), Theme-rheme structure and cohesion (conjunctions, reference, lexical cohesion), Students analysed model texts, engaged in guided writing tasks, and revised their writing using SFL principles. The treatment was conducted, following text based integrated approach (TBIA) informed by the SFL framework in Halliday & Matthiessen (2014).

Instrumentation and Scoring

Students were asked to write hortatory exposition texts before and after the treatment. Their texts were scored using a rubric assessing grammar accuracy, cohesion, coherence, and genre structure. Scores were categorised, averaged, and statistically analysed. Students

conducted a writing task both before and after the treatment, producing hortatory exposition texts. These texts were assessed using an analytic rubric adapted from Brown (2004)

Data Analysis

Data analysis involved descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) to summarize performance. Paired-sample t-test to determine whether score differences between pre-test and post-test were statistically significant (Pallant, 2020). Normalized gain (N-Gain) scores to evaluate the effectiveness of the treatment based on Hake's (1998) classification, which categorizes gains as high (>0.7), medium (0.3–0.7), or low (<0.3).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The experimental intervention was conducted over five instructional meetings with an additional session for post-testing. The participants were Class XI.TL1 students at SMAN 11 Makassar. Before instruction, the researchers introduced the lesson objectives and linked the materials to real-life contexts and the *Profil Pelajar Pancasila* values global diversity, collaboration, independence, critical thinking, and creativity.

During the first meeting, students were engaged through contextual questions related to their daily habits, which led to the introduction of *Hortatory Exposition Text* and its generic structure. Basic concepts of SFL, particularly Theme–Rheme organization, were introduced to promote cohesion and coherence in writing. The second meeting focused on grammar, sentence structure, and expressions for expressing opinions and making suggestions, reinforced through small-group discussions. In the third meeting, students practiced writing sentences containing opinions and suggestions, receiving direct feedback on grammatical accuracy, sentence structure, and cohesion. The fourth meeting guided students to develop a complete hortatory exposition, applying Theme–Rheme and transitional devices. In the fifth meeting, students revised and expanded their work, using health-related topics sourced from the internet to integrate research skills with grammar and SFL-based writing strategies. A final meeting was dedicated to administering the post-test.

Score Classification

Table 1 The Frequency and Percentage of Students' Pre- test and Post-test Scores

No	Classification	Range	Pre-test	Percentage	Post-test	Percentage
1	Excellent	98–100	0	0.00%	2	6.90%
2	Very Good	87–97	1	3.44%	18	62.07%
3	Good	76–86	6	20.69%	6	20.69%
4	Average	65-75	14	48.28%	1	3.44%
5	Poor	<65	8	27.59%	2	6.90%
	Total		**29**	**100%**	**29**	**100%**

Pre-test results reveal that almost half of the students (48.28%) fell into the Average category, and over one-quarter (27.59%) were in the Poor category. Only one student (3.44%) achieved a Very Good score, and no student reached the Excellent level. These results are consistent with the initial observation that the students' grammar and writing proficiency, before SFL-based instruction, were limited, particularly in aspects of cohesion, genre structure, and accurate grammar use.

Post-test results demonstrate substantial improvement following the treatment. The proportion of students in the Very Good category rose dramatically from 3.44% to 62.07%, and 6.90% achieved the Excellent category an achievement that was absent in the pre-test.

Meanwhile, the Average category dropped sharply from 48.28% to 3.44%, and the Poor category decreased from 27.59% to only 6.90%. The Good category remained constant at 20.69%, suggesting that while many students moved upward to Very Good or Excellent, a smaller proportion maintained solid but not exceptional improvement.

This categorical shift provides qualitative confirmation of the quantitative findings from the paired-sample t-test ($p < 0.001$) and the N-Gain score (mean = 0.5910). It indicates that SFL-based instruction not only improved mean scores but also elevated a significant portion of students into higher achievement brackets, which is considered a robust sign of instructional success Cohen (2013).

The data above shows a positive improvement of students' performance after the treatment. The result of the pre-test was in line with what the researchers expected because mostly students achieved average category moreover the post-test is seen showing improvement of students' scores

Mean and Standard Deviation

Table 2. The Mean Score and Standard Deviation of The Students'Pre-test and Post-test

Test	Mean Scores	Standard Deviation
Pre-test	70.03	8.822
Post-test	86.83	10.018

. In pre-test, the mean score of students is 70.03 and in the post test is 86.83. It can be said that the increasing of students learning ability from pre-test to post test is 16,8. Beside that, standard deviation of pre-test is 8.822 and 10.018 for post-test. The mean score and standard deviation of students' post test are higher than the mean score and standard deviation of students' pre-test which shows significant improvement.

Hypothesis Testing

Table 3. The Significance Value

Test	Significant Value	Significant Level
Pre-test- Post-test	<,001	0.05

The significance value (p-value) is contained in the paired-sample t-test was less than 0.001, which is lower than the predetermined alpha level ($\alpha = 0.05$). According to statistical decision rules; Pallant (2020), when the p-value is less than α, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis (H_1) is accepted.

In this study, the null hypothesis stated that *there is no significant difference between the students' pre-test and post-test scores*. The alternative hypothesis stated that *there is a significant improvement in students' grammar and writing performance after receiving SFL-based instruction*. The statistical result therefore confirms that the improvement observed was not due to chance but rather a direct effect of the treatment.

The magnitude of the p-value ($< .001$) also indicates a very strong level of significance, suggesting that the probability of obtaining these results if the null hypothesis were true is less than 0.1%. In applied linguistics research, such a small p-value is considered compelling evidence for the effectiveness of the instructional intervention (Cohen, 2013).

These findings align with previous research showing that Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)-based pedagogy, when integrated into genre-based writing instruction, can lead to substantial improvements in learners' control over grammar, cohesion, and coherence in writing In this present study, the positive statistical outcome is consistent with the N-Gain analysis, which showed a mean gain of 0.5910 (upper-medium category), reinforcing that the SFL-based approach provided a meaningful pedagogical benefit for the participants.

The data indicates that there is a significant difference between the results of students' pre- and post-tests. Based on the hypothesis, if the significance value is less than the significance level, the null hypothesis (H0) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H1) is accepted, which means that integrating grammar and writing through Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is effective in improving the grammar and writing abilities of class XI. 1 student at SMAN 11 Makassar

N-Gain Score

The N-Gain score was analysed by Hake's Classification (1998) as follows:

Table 4. Hake's Classification (1998)

N-gain Range	Effectiveness Category
≥ 0.76	Very High
0.56 ≤ - < 0.76	High
0.41 ≤ -< 0.56	Medium
≤ 0.40	Low

Based on the classification above, the percentage of improvement can be counted, and it can be decided how significant the progress is.

Table 5. N- Gain Score

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
N- Gain Score	29	-05	1.00	0.5910
N-Gain Percent	29	-5.26	100.00	59.0961%

Although the table description in your draft mentioned "High," according to Hake's widely accepted benchmark, 0.5910 is categorized as Medium effectiveness. However, it is upper-medium, approaching the threshold of high effectiveness, indicating a substantial improvement in students' performance after the SFL-based intervention.

The maximum N-Gain score of 1.00 (100%) shows that some students achieved perfect improvement from their pre-test to post-test scores, meaning they reached the highest possible score after treatment. Conversely, the minimum score of -0.05 (-5.26%) reflects that one or two students showed a slight decline in performance. This is not unusual in short-period of treatment, as individual factors such as motivation, attendance, or test anxiety might influence results (Slavin, 2021).

The overall average gain of 59.10% suggests that the integration of grammar and writing through SFL was pedagogically effective. This aligns with Hake's (1998) argument that medium-to-high gains show strong instructional impact, especially in educational innovations where students are actively engaged in contextualized, meaningful tasks. The use of hortatory exposition texts, Theme–Rheme structuring, and cohesive device instruction likely contributed to this gain by making grammar functionally relevant rather than rule-based and abstract Halliday & Matthiessen (2014).

In addition, these findings are support earlier studies in EFL contexts where functional grammar integration led to medium-to-high learning gains Suseno (2021) and Kia et al (2022), reinforcing the value of teaching grammar within genre-based writing instruction.

Discussion

The results of this study clearly show that integrating grammar and writing through Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), specifically focusing on the textual metafunction, had a significant positive effect on students' writing performance and grammar mastery. The improvement from the pre-test mean score of 70.03 to the post-test mean score of 86.83, alongside the statistical significance ($p < 0.001$), confirms that the instructional approach was effective.

This finding supports previous research Humairoh (2021), Bulqiyah et al (2021) and Suseno, (2021) that contexStualized grammar instruction, when linked to meaningful language use, leads to better learning outcomes than isolated grammar teaching. By embedding grammar lessons within the writing of hortatory exposition texts, students were able to connect grammatical forms to their communicative functions, improving both accuracy and discourse organization.

The explicit teaching of Theme-Rheme structure, transitivity, mood, and modality enabled students to organize ideas coherently and express arguments more persuasively. This aligns with study by Cahyono's (2018) and Nagao's (2019) findings, showing that SFL not only enhances grammatical competence but also supports cohesive and coherent text production.

The post-test results, showing a marked shift toward the "Very Good" and "Excellent" categories, suggest that most students benefited from the approach. These findings strengthen the argument that integrating grammar and writing instruction is effective in teaching. SFL provides a pedagogical frame in teaching that connects language form, meaning, and social purpose, thereby equipping students with tools to produce coherent, cohesive, and purposeful writing. The next researchers are advised to explore SFL through Quasi-Experimental design

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that integrating grammar and writing instruction through Systemic Functional Linguistics, with an emphasis on the textual metafunction, is effective in improving senior high school students' grammar accuracy, cohesion, and coherence in hortatory exposition writing. The statistical analysis confirmed significant gains in students' post-test scores, reflecting the benefits of connecting grammatical instruction to functional, genre-based writing tasks.

Pedagogically, the findings of the suggest that EFL teachers should move beyond traditional rule-based grammar instruction or grammar translation method and adopt integrated approaches that present grammar as a resource for meaning-making in context. The SFL framework offers a practical, research-based method for achieving this integration.

Future research could extend the duration of the intervention or treatment, compare results with a control group, and explore the application of SFL-based grammar instruction in other text genres and language skills to broaden its pedagogical relevance.

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