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Exploring Teachers' Integration of Grammar Instruction in Teaching English Pre-Service Teachers at a Philippine State University

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the integration of grammar teaching across third-year Bachelor of Secondary Education major in English courses at Cebu Technological University–Main Campus during School Year 2025–2026, focusing on instructional strategies, perceived grammatical competency development, learning challenges, and preferred teaching approaches. A qualitative descriptive research design was employed, involving ten purposively selected pre-service English teachers with B2 and C1 proficiency levels identified through the British Council EnglishScore assessment. Data were gathered using a validated semi-structured interview guide and analyzed through a seven-step descriptive phenomenological framework. The findings revealed that contextualized instruction, deductive and inductive approaches, responsive corrective feedback, and cognitive scaffolding contributed to students' perceived improvements in grammatical awareness, writing precision, communicative fluency, confidence, and learner autonomy. However, emotional variability, cognitive overload, difficulty retaining complex grammatical rules, and inconsistencies in instructional delivery remained prominent challenges. Participants preferred explicit explanations, constructive feedback, contextualized communication, collaborative activities, gamification, and guided discovery. The study concluded that effective grammar integration requires balanced, contextually relevant, and learner-centered instructional approaches. Accordingly, the adoption, implementation, and systematic evaluation of the proposed Grammar Integration Teaching Toolkit are recommended to strengthen instructional consistency and grammatical competency development. The study was limited by its small, proficiency-specific sample, reliance on self-reported experiences, and the need for further toolkit evaluation. Its principal contribution is an empirically grounded instructional framework that may strengthen cross-curricular grammar integration, improve pedagogical practices, and support the linguistic and professional preparation of prospective English teachers.

Keywords: *Contextualized Instruction, Grammatical Competency, Grammar Integration, Instructional Strategies, Pre-Service Teachers, Qualitative Research, Teacher Education*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background and Context of the Study

Grammar constitutes a fundamental component of English language proficiency because it enables learners to organize ideas, interpret meaning, and communicate accurately and effectively across academic, social, and professional contexts. Grammatical competence supports the development of the four macro-skills of language learning: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Al-khresheh and Orak (2021) emphasized the importance of grammar instruction in developing English language proficiency, while Toth (2022) highlighted the value of explicit grammatical instruction in second-language development. Similarly, Liu and Qin (2024) demonstrated the pedagogical value of contextualized and cognitive approaches to language instruction. In the Philippine higher education context, Commission on Higher Education (CHED, 2017) Memorandum Order No. 75, series of 2017, establishes the policies, standards, and guidelines for the Bachelor of Secondary Education (BSEd) program. For prospective English teachers, grammatical competence extends beyond academic achievement because it constitutes an essential professional competency for effective classroom instruction. Cando et al. (2025) emphasized the importance of contextually relevant grammar instruction that connects linguistic knowledge with authentic language use across Southeast Asian educational settings.

The study was anchored in Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984), which emphasizes knowledge acquisition through experience, reflection, conceptualization, and application; Metacognitive Theory (Flavell, 1979), which highlights learners' awareness and regulation of their cognitive processes; and Curriculum Integration Theory (Beane, 1997), which emphasizes meaningful connections across subject areas. Annamalai and Bervell (2025) further demonstrated the relevance of experiential learning to contemporary grammar instruction. Collectively, these theoretical perspectives establish the importance of integrating grammar into different academic courses to reinforce linguistic knowledge, accommodate learners' instructional preferences, and strengthen the professional preparation of future English teachers.

1.2. Research Problem

Despite the recognized importance of grammatical competence in teacher education, difficulties in understanding and applying grammatical structures remain a concern among English language learners. Francisco and Buenaventura (2026) identified challenges in grammar micro-skills among Filipino learners of English as a second language. Similarly, Sestoso et al. (2025) reported that pre-service teachers in Cebu benefited from consistent language exposure, productive language practice, and constructive feedback in developing grammatical competence. These findings underscore the importance of providing meaningful opportunities for grammatical application throughout teacher preparation. Instructional delivery also influences students' experiences of grammar learning. Supriyanto (2022) found that learners preferred more engaging and accessible approaches to grammar instruction, whereas Guan (2026) reported that university learners recognized the value of both isolated and integrated grammar instruction, although they expressed stronger preferences for isolated instruction. These differing preferences emphasize the importance of examining instructional approaches within specific educational contexts. At Cebu Technological University–Main Campus, understanding how third-year BSEd English students experience grammar instruction across different courses is essential for identifying instructional strengths, learning difficulties, and pedagogical needs. However, the suitability of existing grammar integration strategies to students' learning preferences and perceived competency development requires further contextual investigation.

1.3. Research Gap

Previous studies have examined various approaches to grammar instruction, including data-driven learning, technology-supported instruction, and contextualized language activities. Boulton and Vyatkina (2021) reviewed the development of data-driven language learning, while Fauzan et al. (2022) investigated the application of online language resources in developing grammar mastery. Celik and Kara (2024) examined technology-integrated grammar instruction at the tertiary level, whereas Cape and Subillaga (2025) investigated grammar integration within Philippine literature lessons. Although these studies provided valuable insights, their emphasis on specific instructional approaches and learning contexts did not sufficiently explain how prospective English teachers experience grammar integration across multiple university courses. Manicio and Baetiong (2023) examined pre-service teachers' practicum experiences, while Pawlak and Kruk (2025) investigated university students' responses to grammar learning strategies. The present study addressed this contextual and practical gap by examining students' perceived competency development, instructional challenges, and preferred grammar integration strategies as the basis for developing a Grammar Integration Teaching Toolkit.

1.4. Purpose and Objectives of the Study

This study explored the integration of grammar teaching across third-year Bachelor of Secondary Education major in English courses at Cebu Technological University–Main Campus during School Year 2025–2026. Specifically, it sought to identify the strategies teachers employed in integrating grammar instruction as perceived by students, examine how these strategies contributed to their perceived grammatical competency development, determine the challenges students encountered during grammar integration, and identify the instructional strategies participants considered effective. Based on the findings, the study also sought to propose a Grammar Integration Teaching Toolkit designed to address students' learning needs and preferences while strengthening the integration of grammar instruction across academic courses.

1.5. Significance and Practical Contribution of the Study

The study contributes to English language teacher education by providing context-specific insights into students' experiences and perceptions of integrated grammar instruction. Its findings may assist Cebu Technological University administrators and English faculty in evaluating instructional practices, developing appropriate academic support, and adopting responsive teaching strategies that address students' grammatical learning needs. For prospective English teachers, the study promotes awareness of the importance of grammatical competence and its application across academic and professional contexts. Its principal practical contribution is the proposed Grammar Integration Teaching Toolkit, which serves as a potential instructional resource for strengthening contextualized grammar teaching. Furthermore, the study provides a foundation for subsequent investigations into integrated grammar pedagogy and teacher preparation.

1.6. Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Alignment

The study aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4): Quality Education, which promotes inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities. Specifically, it supports Target 4.c, which emphasizes increasing the availability of qualified teachers through appropriate teacher preparation and professional development (United Nations, 2025). By examining grammar integration across third-year BSEd English courses, the study contributes to strengthening the linguistic and pedagogical preparation of prospective secondary school English teachers. The proposed Grammar Integration Teaching Toolkit supports the development of responsive, learner-centered instructional practices that may

enhance grammatical competence, academic preparedness, and professional readiness, thereby contributing to the broader improvement of teacher education quality.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research Design

The study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to investigate the integration of grammar teaching across English courses in the Bachelor of Secondary Education (BSEd) Major in English program. Qualitative descriptive research facilitates a comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences, perceptions, and practices within a specific context (Hall & Liebenberg, 2024). The design was appropriate for examining grammar integration strategies, perceived effectiveness, and challenges encountered by students. The study also adopted the Input–Process–Output (IPO) model, with a proposed grammar teaching integration toolkit as its intended output.

2.2. Research Locale, Population, and Participants or Respondents

The study was conducted at Cebu Technological University–Main Campus, located at M.J. Cuenco Avenue corner R. Palma Street, Cebu City, Philippines. The target population comprised third-year BSEd Major in English students under the College of Education during the academic year 2025–2026. Initially, 34 students underwent grammar proficiency screening, from which ten pre-service English teachers were selected as the final participants. Their reported scores ranged from 400 to 599, corresponding to the B2 and C1 proficiency classifications based on the EnglishScore assessment.

2.3. Sampling Technique and Sample Determination

Purposive sampling was employed to select participants possessing characteristics and experiences directly relevant to the research objectives (Nikolopoulou, 2022). Participant selection was guided by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The 34 prospective participants completed grammar proficiency screening using the standardized Core Skills Test through the British Council EnglishScore mobile application. The assessment underwent validity and standard-setting studies to establish its alignment with the CEFR (EnglishScore, 2022a, 2022b). The ten students with the highest reported grammar scores were selected for in-depth qualitative inquiry.

2.4. Research Instrument and Validation

The primary research instrument was a validated researcher-made semi-structured interview guide containing open-ended questions that explored participants' experiences, perceptions, challenges, and preferences regarding grammar teaching integration. Semi-structured interviews facilitate comprehensive responses while allowing flexibility in investigating participants' perspectives (Buys et al., 2022). Core questions were consistently administered to all participants, while follow-up questions and probing techniques were employed to clarify responses, obtain deeper insights, and explore emerging themes.

2.5. Data Gathering Procedure

A transmittal letter was submitted to the Dean of the College of Education to secure permission. Following departmental approval, the researcher coordinated with the program coordinator or class adviser and conducted an online orientation. Informed consent was obtained before participant inclusion. Interviews were conducted through Zoom, lasted approximately one to two hours, and were audio-recorded with permission. Reflective memos were prepared to support researcher reflexivity (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023). Recordings were transcribed verbatim, and Cebuano responses were translated for analysis.

2.6. Data Analysis and Statistical Treatment

Data were analyzed using Colaizzi's (1978) seven-step descriptive phenomenological data analysis framework, a structured approach to interpreting participants' lived experiences (Shorey & Ng, 2022). The process involved familiarization with transcripts, extraction of significant statements, formulation of meanings, clustering of themes, development of an exhaustive description, identification of the fundamental structure, and validation through member checking. Emerging themes were compared against the original transcripts to maintain interpretive accuracy and minimize researcher bias. Findings were returned to participants to confirm that the interpretations reflected their experiences.

2.7. Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were observed through departmental permission, informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and anonymity. Participants received detailed explanations of the research purpose, participation requirements, and their right to withdraw at any time. They were given sufficient time to review consent forms and raise questions before signing. Explicit consent was obtained for audio recording, while pseudonyms were assigned during transcription to protect participants' identities and maintain confidentiality.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Perceived Strategies for Integrating Grammar Instruction

Six emergent themes reflected the instructional approaches employed by teachers to integrate grammar across English-related courses.

Contextualized Immersion Through Genre-Based Tasks. Grammar instruction was embedded in technical writing, formal letters, essays, dialogues, role-playing activities, and literary outputs. Participant P8-2 stated, "In some ways, these are context-based activities, such as role plays, dialogues, and writing essays." These experiences indicate that students understood grammar as a functional component of communication. Oyama and Kang (2024) examined the value of discourse-based grammar instruction in academic writing, supporting the integration of grammatical concepts into meaningful language tasks.

Explicit Deductive Instruction. Instructors introduced grammatical rules before presenting examples and facilitating independent application, particularly in Technical Writing. Participant P1-3 explained, "They explain first and then give an example." This approach provided students with a structured foundation for understanding grammatical concepts, consistent with Moranski and Zalbidea (2022) and Shirav and Nagai (2022), who examined the effectiveness of deductive instruction in second-language classrooms.

Inductive Discovery Method. Other instructors encouraged students to analyze examples, identify patterns, and formulate grammatical rules before receiving formal explanations. This approach promoted active participation and independent reasoning. Alsakaker (2025) reported better grammatical learning outcomes among university students exposed to inductive instruction, supporting its value as an alternative to rule-first teaching.

Immediate and Responsive Error Intervention. Teachers corrected grammatical errors during oral recitations, classroom reporting, written activities, and online discussions. Participants perceived immediate corrections and structural explanations as helpful in recognizing mistakes and improving language use. This finding agrees with Ha et al. (2021), who reported favorable learner perceptions of oral corrective feedback.

Affective-Sensitive and Non-Threatening Feedback. Instructors used humor, indirect comments, and general reminders to correct errors without embarrassing students. Participant P2-3 explained, "She doesn't make you feel embarrassed; it's casual and friendly, but it still draws attention to the mistake." This finding reflects Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, emphasizing the importance of emotional conditions in language acquisition.

Cognitive Scaffolding Through Critical Inquiry. Teachers used guided questioning to encourage students to recall rules, evaluate grammatical structures, and justify their answers before receiving explanations. This approach reflects guided inductive instruction, as examined by Moranski and Zalbidea (2022), wherein teacher support facilitates independent grammatical analysis.

Collectively, these strategies demonstrate that grammar integration extends beyond rule-based instruction by incorporating contextualized application, constructive feedback, emotional support, and cognitive engagement.

3.2. Perceived Enhancement of Students' Grammar Competency

Six emergent themes reflected students' perceived development in grammatical awareness, accuracy, fluency, confidence, and independent learning.

Evolution of Grammar Intuition and Internal Monitoring. Repeated exposure to grammatical structures helped participants recognize and correct errors independently. Some developed an intuitive awareness of incorrect sentences without immediately recalling specific rules. Participant P3-8 described this experience as, "This sounds wrong, something's off." These accounts reflect the importance of self-regulation in grammar learning, as examined by Truong (2022).

Structural Mastery and Writing Precision. Participants reported improvements in sentence construction, grammatical accuracy, organization, and proofreading. Writing was considered more manageable than speaking because it allowed time for reflection and revision. Participant P2-6 stated, "Sometimes, when I use tools like Grammarly, there are fewer corrections needed." This finding reflects Krashen's (1982) Monitor Hypothesis, which explains the role of consciously learned grammatical knowledge in refining language production.

Enhanced Fluency in Communication. Participants reported smoother oral delivery, improved organization of ideas, and reduced dependence on scripts during presentations. However, spontaneous speaking remained challenging because of the immediate demands of grammatical processing. Shirav and Nagai (2022) emphasized the relevance of combining grammatical instruction with communicative activities, supporting continued opportunities for practical language application.

Affective and Psychological Empowerment. Participants associated grammar integration with increased confidence in academic communication, professional correspondence, ESL teaching, and real-world English interactions. Familiarity with grammatical structures helped some students manage their fear of committing mistakes. These experiences are consistent with Krashen's (1982) emphasis on emotional readiness in language acquisition.

Multidimensional Growth in Grammar Competency. Participants perceived improvements in accuracy, fluency, and confidence across reflective writing, classroom reporting, teaching demonstrations, and lesson planning. Nevertheless, they acknowledged that grammatical mastery remained incomplete. Participant P8-8 stated, "All of the above, Miss. But maybe not 100%." This indicates that grammatical competency develops progressively and that its different dimensions may improve at varying rates.

Vicarious and Iterative Learning. Participants learned by observing classmates' mistakes, reviewing their written outputs, monitoring their speech, and consulting dictionaries and digital language tools. Scotland (2022) emphasized the contribution of collaborative dialogue to second-language learning, while Truong (2022) examined the relationship between grammatical self-efficacy and self-regulated learning.

Overall, grammar teaching integration was perceived to strengthen linguistic competence, communicative confidence, and learner autonomy. However, these improvements represent participants' lived experiences rather than independently measured proficiency gains.

3.3. Challenges Encountered During Grammar Teaching Integration

Three emergent themes reflected the emotional, cognitive, and pedagogical difficulties experienced by participants.

Affective Ambivalence and Emotional Variability in Grammar Learning. Participants experienced enthusiasm, boredom, anxiety, frustration, and self-doubt during grammar instruction. Repetitive discussions and prolonged explanations sometimes reduced engagement, particularly when topics were already familiar. Kruk et al. (2021) similarly identified monotony and predictability as contributors to boredom in language learning, emphasizing the need for instructional variety.

Cognitive Overload and Decay from Grammar Complexity. Participants encountered difficulties retaining and applying complex grammatical rules involving subject-verb agreement, verb tenses, conditional structures, parts of speech, and active and passive voice. Participant P3-14 explained, "However, miss, if I try to recall all of them together, I get confused." Van Rijt et al. (2024) examined the cognitive demands of grammatical reasoning among prospective language teachers. These findings highlight the importance of progressive instruction, reinforcement, and contextualized practice.

Dissonant Pedagogical Delivery and Instructional Mismatch. Excessive textbook dependence, insufficient explanations, limited teacher guidance, and unexpected grammatical discussions affected students' understanding and concentration. Participant P7-11 stated, "If they just make you read from the book, the content becomes more confusing, even harder, because there's no proper guidance." Moranski and Zalbidea (2022) highlighted the relevance of classroom conditions when evaluating instructional approaches.

These challenges emphasize the importance of balancing grammatical complexity, emotional readiness, instructional guidance, and appropriate teaching strategies to facilitate meaningful learning.

3.4. Preferred Strategies for Effective Grammar Teaching Integration

Six emergent themes reflected participants' preferred instructional approaches for developing grammatical competence.

Deductive Rule-to-Example Sequencing. Several participants preferred explicit explanations before examining examples and completing independent exercises. This approach provided a foundation for understanding unfamiliar grammatical concepts. Shirav and Nagai (2022) reported the benefits of deductive instruction alongside inductive approaches, supporting the use of structured explanations followed by practical application.

Expert-Led Feedback and Correction Cycle. Participants preferred immediate teacher corrections accompanied by concise explanations. They considered corrective feedback essential in recognizing errors and understanding appropriate grammatical structures. Ha and Nguyen (2021) similarly reported favorable learner perceptions of teacher-provided corrections, highlighting the importance of constructive feedback in language learning.

Contextualized Communicative Grammar Learning. Participants preferred integrating grammar into stories, dialogues, debates, presentations, role-playing, and writing activities across the four language macro-skills. Oyama and Kang (2024) and Shirav and Nagai (2022) provide relevant support for connecting grammatical instruction with meaningful language application.

Cooperative Dialogic Exchange. Participants valued face-to-face group activities, peer discussions, and collaborative exercises as opportunities to exchange ideas, correct errors, and reinforce grammatical understanding. Scotland (2022) emphasized the contribution of collaborative dialogue to developing second-language knowledge through shared problem-solving and interaction.

Gamified Collaborative Challenges. Participants preferred interactive, game-based activities that encouraged teamwork, engagement, and enjoyable grammatical practice. Participant P6-16 stated, "Gamification. Scoring type with groups. It's really nice, miss. It's more engaging, miss." Zhang and Hasim (2023) similarly identified the benefits of gamification in promoting motivation and engagement in English language learning.

Inductive Conceptual Exploration. Some participants preferred discovering grammatical rules through independent analysis rather than receiving explanations immediately. They perceived guided discovery as beneficial for critical thinking, knowledge retention, and autonomous learning. Alsakaker (2025) reported favorable outcomes associated with inductive grammar instruction among university students, supporting its inclusion alongside explicit teaching.

Overall, participants favored a flexible instructional approach combining explicit explanations, corrective feedback, contextualized communication, collaboration, gamification, and guided discovery. These findings emphasize that grammar integration encompasses linguistic accuracy, communicative fluency, cognitive engagement, emotional support, and learner autonomy, which are essential considerations in preparing pre-service English teachers.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concluded that the integration of grammar instruction across third-year BSED-English courses at Cebu Technological University–Main Campus plays a meaningful role in students' perceived grammatical development and application of language in academic and communicative contexts. Participants associated contextualized instruction, deductive and inductive approaches, responsive corrective feedback, and critical inquiry with improved grammatical awareness, writing precision, communicative fluency, confidence, and self-regulated learning. Despite these perceived benefits, emotional variability, cognitive overload, difficulty retaining complex grammatical rules, and inconsistencies in instructional delivery remained significant challenges. These findings emphasize that effective grammar integration requires a balanced combination of explicit instruction, guided discovery, authentic language application, and supportive learning experiences responsive to students' needs. Rather than treating grammar as an isolated instructional component, its integration across courses provides opportunities for meaningful and continuous language practice. Collectively, the findings established the empirical foundation for developing the proposed Grammar Integration Teaching Toolkit as a structured instructional resource for pre-service English teachers.

Based on the findings, English instructors and BSED-English faculty members are encouraged to adopt and implement the proposed Grammar Integration Teaching Toolkit, organized around the Pre-Grammar, While-Grammar, and Post-Grammar framework. Instructors should incorporate grammatical concepts into authentic speaking and writing activities while balancing explicit explanations with guided discovery, collaborative discussions, and gamified learning experiences. Timely, constructive, and non-threatening corrective feedback should be maintained to address grammatical difficulties while supporting students' confidence and participation. Complex grammatical concepts should be presented through manageable instructional sequences to minimize cognitive overload and facilitate knowledge retention. Program administrators should strengthen cross-curricular grammar integration through faculty development initiatives, instructional coordination, and the promotion of teaching practices responsive to students' learning needs and preferences. Furthermore, the proposed toolkit should undergo systematic implementation and evaluation to determine its practicality and effectiveness. These measures may promote greater instructional consistency, meaningful grammatical application, and sustained competency development among pre-service English teachers.

The study was limited to ten purposively selected third-year BSED-English students at Cebu Technological University–Main Campus who attained CEFR B2 and C1 grammatical proficiency levels. Consequently, the findings may not fully represent students with different proficiency levels or educational backgrounds. The qualitative descriptive design relied primarily on participants' reported experiences and perceptions rather than objective measurements of changes in grammatical competency. Additionally, the proposed toolkit remained an instructional output requiring further implementation and evaluation. Future studies may include more diverse participants, broader institutional settings, and quantitative or mixed-methods approaches to assess the toolkit's effectiveness and examine measurable improvements in grammatical competency.

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