A Systematic Approach to Plotting the Scope and Sequence of Grammar Instruction for Writing in a University English Programme

Steven Pattison[1], Darby McGrath[2], Nicholas Medley[3]

Abstract

This paper describes the process and outcomes of an evaluation of grammar for writing in a six-level English curriculum as part of an ongoing Assurance of Learning (AOL) project, at a university in Japan (see Blackwell, 2016). Across the writing component of the English curriculum, a lack of consistency in the method of evaluation of students' written work both within and between levels was recognised. Moreover, explicit grammar instruction was not part of the writing courses in some levels. As a consequence, the recommended range of grammatical points covered, the degree of overlap between levels, and the extent to which grammar instruction was provided, and in what sequence, were not sufficiently well understood. In the courses where grammar instruction was incorporated into writing instruction, the selection of grammar points had not been rigorously assessed to determine their relevance in terms of task fulfilment and students' needs more generally. Hence, the goal of the study described in this paper was to address the apparent absence of systematicity, clarity, and rigor in mapping out grammar for writing across the different levels of the English programme. It describes the approach taken to arrive at a clearer understanding of which grammar points should be taught, learned and assessed at which level(s) of the English programme, and for what purpose. The paper also offers practical suggestions for how to incorporate grammar instruction into a multi-level English programme.

Key words: Assurance of Learning (AOL), Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), English grammar, Scope and Sequence

1. Introduction

This paper describes an attempt to map the scope and sequence of grammar structures for the writing component of an English as a foreign language (EFL) programme at a university in Japan. The English curriculum consists of six levels, from Elementary to Advanced English 2, with academic writing tasks ranging from single paragraphs to argumentative essays. This process was undertaken from within the Center for Language Education as part of a university-wide Assurance of Learning (AOL) initiative (Blackwell, 2016, pp. 1-17). Prior to conducting the detailed survey of grammar for the writing component of the curriculum described in this paper, the primary focus had been on genre and the development of structure from the level of the basic paragraph to full-length essays. The concentration had been on helping learners to write comprehensible paragraphs in the lower levels, while in the higher levels of the programme, especially the two advanced levels, there had been

---

[1] Associate Professor, Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University (APU), Beppu, Japan.   Email: steven@apu.ac.jp
[2] Senior Lecturer, Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University (APU), Beppu, Japan.   Email: dmcg@apu.ac.jp
[3] Senior Lecturer, Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University (APU), Beppu, Japan.   Email: medley@apu.ac.jp

greater emphasis on the stylistic elements of writing to support the development of an academic writing voice, enabling students to present discussion of research and argumentation effectively.

Control of grammatical structures is fundamental to the learner's ability to produce clear, appropriate writing at any level of proficiency. As Ferris states, "students will be empowered if they have knowledge of and control over a broad range of language structures so that they can make appropriate choices for the specific rhetorical situation in which they are writing" (2016, p. 225). For the current study, the rhetorical situation is academic writing, with the end-point of the programme being the ability to write an academic essay. While feedback on grammar has been provided in each level of the programme and incorporated into the method of evaluation of students' written work, there was a lack of consistency in how this was managed within and between levels. Moreover, explicit grammar instruction was not part of the writing component of courses in certain levels of the English programme.

The absence of an adequately rigorous curriculum-wide method of incorporating grammar into the writing component of different courses meant that the recommended range of grammatical points covered, the degree of overlap between two or more programme levels (e.g., Pre-Intermediate and Intermediate), and the extent to which grammar instruction was provided on different grammar points were not sufficiently well understood. As a result, no systematic and principled progression in grammar instruction for writing from the lower to higher levels of the programme existed. Furthermore, the selection method for grammar points in most levels of the programme had not been rigorously assessed to determine the relevance of the structures identified for instruction in terms of task fulfilment and students' needs more generally.

As part of an overall Assurance of Learning (AOL) project for the English programme, the goal of conducting an evaluation of grammar for writing was directed towards addressing the following research questions:

1. Which grammar points for writing should be taught and assessed at different levels of the English curriculum?

This overarching question subsumes two related questions:

a. Which grammar points contribute to the effective completion of each writing task?
b. With which grammar points do students need explicit instructional support?

In this paper, we describe the systematic approach developed for analysing texts and selecting appropriate grammar structures, as well as the initial steps taken to incorporate grammar instruction into the English programme at the aforementioned university.

In the following section we provide an overview of previous studies concerning the role of grammar in writing curricula, which draw attention to important considerations for undertaking a systematic review of grammar for writing, including the different approaches taken. Section 3 describes the methodology developed for the present study, while sections 4 and 5 introduce the findings and discuss the overall outcomes of the research. Finally, we conclude by commenting on aspects of the approach described which could be modified for later studies of this kind, as well as future avenues for complementary research into grammar for writing.

2. An Overview of Grammar in L2 and FL Writing Curricula

2.1 Reasons for Focusing on Grammar for Academic Writing

Although it is just one aspect of writing, there are strong reasons for focusing on the contribution of grammar to good writing. Hinkel (2004, p. 34), in her research on L2 users of English in U.S. universities, observes that because they are competing with their L1 counterparts, grammatical accuracy plays an essential role in achieving comparable evaluations on written work. Richards (1985, p. 148) concurs with this opinion, stating that the centrality of grammar to communicative proficiency rests in its interaction with other language skills, of which writing is one: "its importance can be derived from and related to the proficiencies we plan as the outcomes of language curriculum" (1985, p. 157). Richards points out the fact that learners often lack sufficient contact with written forms of the target language (TL) which, he argues, limits their exposure to what Givon (1979, pp. 222-231) termed the *syntactic mode*, or the grammatical mode most closely associated with many forms of (academic) writing. This lack of exposure can hinder learner development "along the syntactic parameter" (Richards, 1985, p. 152). This is consistent with Hinkel's suggestion (2004, p. 38 and p. 45) that learners should receive explicit instruction on the grammar structures in which they need proficiency in order to produce clear, concise, and comprehensible academic writing.

2.2 Attending to Grammatical Features of Academic Writing

Given that the primary focus of the writing programme is academic registers, it is helpful to consider the role of grammar as it is characterized within the context of academic writing. According to Leech, Deuchar, and Hoogenraad (2006), perfect observation of the rules of grammar does not always lead to clear, comprehensible prose (p. 12). They observe that, since the addressee cannot immediately confirm their understanding of the written text with its author, it is the writer's responsibility to revise and redraft their work so that their grammatical choices work in service of the higher-order goals of appropriateness, effectiveness, and clarity and convey their message in the way intended (2006, p. 5, p. 11, and p. 204). The difficulty of rectifying misunderstandings is considered a chief reason why written discourse is more "attended to" than spoken discourse (Brookes & Grundy 1998, pp. 1-2). Indeed, the expectation that written discourse has been attended to is reflected in the 22 steps of the writing process they introduce, five of which involve grammar to some degree:

   i.   Writing a grammatical sentence
   ii. Writing a fluent sentence that reads well
   iii. Reading what we have written to see if it reads well
   iv. Reading what we have written with another reader in mind
   v. Deleting, adding or changing the text to suit the reader

<div align="right">(Brookes & Grundy 1998, pp. 7-8)</div>

A range of factors influence the way writers attend to grammar when writing. For instance, the transition from spoken to academic written structures can negatively affect the written register, especially when the learner has attained a certain level of competence with speaking (Weigle & Friginal, 2015; Johns, 1997). This could result in the overuse of idiomatic expressions, short sentences, and pronouns, for example, as well as the underuse of features of academic texts such as nominalisation and passive voice. In addition, Richards (1985, p. 152) notes that learners generally reach a point at which the demands of the target language outstrip the learner's grammatical accuracy, such as when CEFR A2 learners are tasked with speculating about the future in an academic essay (Richards, 1985; Hinkel, 2004, p. 35; Weigle & Friginal, 2015). Another factor affecting the writer's level of attention to grammatical accuracy is whether it is a planned or unplanned writing task. Moreover, information concerning the weighting given to grammar within the overall assessment criteria for the writing task affects the amount of attention learners pay to accuracy (Johns 1997, p. 102).

2.3 Selecting Grammar Structures
Different approaches are taken to determining which grammar structures warrant explicit instruction in a language programme. These approaches can be influenced by type of task, the weighting given to grammar in a particular writing task, the level of the learners, and the degree of reliance on previously developed lists of grammar points for instruction.

The selection of appropriate structures is a complex matter, but the limiting effects of the conventions of academic writing means there is some consensus on the essential list of grammatical features of academic texts (Hinkel, 2004, p.35-37; Johns, 1997, p. 58-9; Weigle & Friginal, 2015; Coxhead & Byrd, 2007, p. 131). These features of grammar for academic writing, such as that it tends to be noun-focused rather than verb-centric (Coxhead & Byrd, 2007, p. 134), can be used to inform the design of the grammar component of academic writing courses.

An alternative approach is to develop a list of grammatical points based on an empirical needs-based analysis of L2 writing. The differences in these two approaches are observable in the two lists shown in Table 1. Coxhead and Byrd's (2007) list offers a general grammar profile for academic writing compiled from the findings of earlier research, while the list formed by Staples and Reppen (2016) is contextually specific, being focused on two genres of writing (Argumentative and Rhetorical Analysis) by 120 first-year university students evenly distributed across three L1s (English, Arabic, and Chinese). Both lists present grammar points which might usefully form the basis of grammar instruction in an academic writing course, but Staples and Reppen's list is tailored to a particular learner group and task.

Table 1

Grammatical structures for academic writing

Staples and Reppen (2016)	Coxhead and Byrd (2007)
premodifying nouns	long complicated noun phrases with nouns more often followed by prepositional phrases than by relative clauses
attributive adjectives	simple present tense verbs in generalizations and statements of theory
noun complement clauses	a limited range of verbs with be, have, seem often repeated
verb complement clauses	frequent use of the passive voice (usually without a by-phrase)
adverbial subordinate clauses	use of adverbial phrases to indicate location inside the text (e.g., in the next chapter, etc.)

Task type influences the specific linguistic features of the writing (Hinkel, 2004, p. 35) and the outcomes of the writing course or curriculum entail a negotiation between the planned proficiencies manifest in the design of the writing task and the attendant limitations they exert on the writing task. A focus on grammatical requirements based on L2 responses to a writing task offers insights into differences across L1 background, across various genres, and in relation to language ratings (Staples & Reppen, 2016). Potentially, this affords the educator insights into the actual use of language to convey important functions in learners' essays and informs the selection of grammatical features to target in writing instruction. While it is important to recognise the limitations of focusing grammar instruction on the demands of a particular task, there are reasonable grounds for using specific tasks as long as the findings are not extrapolated to a representation of learners' general linguistic needs.

Consideration of differences between L1 and L2 usage for determining the sequencing of grammar instruction (Dubin & Olshtain, 1986, p. 108) can be understood in terms of errors and frequency of use. A focus on "egregious errors" in L2 writing can contribute to the selection of target grammar points for instruction (Hinkel, 2004, p. 48). For example, Hinkel points out the following candidates for instruction based on an analysis of L2 writing errors: word order; verb tense; word morphology. Tono (n.d., pp. 405-6) recorded the frequencies of overuse and underuse of grammatical items as examples of misuse potentially requiring instructional intervention. It has been argued, however, that in order to understand the grammar needs of learners for particular tasks, analysis of L2 writing should not be limited to errors since, "the notion of an L1 target is an idealized competence dependent on a consensus of "success"" (O'Keefe & Mark, 2017, p. 463). Rather, descriptions of learner grammar ought to take account both of competencies and errors (O'Keefe & Mark, 2017).

O'Keefe and Mark (2017) propose six criteria for basing grammar instruction on analysis of student responses to a writing task (see also Lu, 2010, who works with five measures of syntactic complexity).

Criterion 1: Frequency of use: Is there sufficient evidence of a structure at this level to warrant investigation?

Criterion 2: Rate of correct uses: Is there an adequate rate of correct uses?

Criterion 3: Range of users: Is the usage distributed across a range of individual users?

Criterion 4: Spread of first language families: Is the usage distributed across a range of first language families?

Criterion 5: Spread of contexts of use: Is the usage distributed across a range of contexts?

Criterion 6: Avoiding the effect of a task: Is the usage affected by a task? [note on display tactics and necessity]

(O'Keefe & Mark, 2017, p. 469)

Implementing a principled method of selecting from among the candidate grammar points is essential to two important tenets for maintaining standards within AOL: being systematic and being accountable. A final consideration when selecting and rejecting grammar structures for instruction is the appropriate proficiency level at which to introduce them to best address the learners' needs with respect to academic writing (see Pienemann, 1998, pp. 10-12 on *Processability Theory*).

2.4 Finalizing and Disseminating a List of Grammar Structures

In selecting the grammar points to be included in a given writing course or curriculum, prioritizing the problems present in the majority of students' writing should be favoured over attempts to address every problematic issue (Hinkel, 2004, p. 53). Hinkel stresses the importance of articulating the learning outcomes for all stakeholders, both for learner motivation, and in order for them to clearly understand the language-learning benefits which can be derived from the grammar points covered (2004, p. 55). The dissemination to stakeholders of the learning outcomes for grammar can be achieved through a framework employing CEFR-style descriptors (Nagai, Birch, Bower & Schmidt, 2020, pp. 77-9) to raise the awareness of stakeholders to the overall goal of the writing course, the subsidiary objectives, and the associated tasks learners must perform successfully to achieve the goal of the writing curriculum.

The instructional methods and materials are another crucial factor in the dissemination of findings to stakeholders. For instance, the practice of "noticing" the uses and meanings conveyed by different grammar structures in the contexts in which they appear can be an effective method of harnessing learner engagement (Hinkel, 2004, p. 40) and promoting effective learning (Hinkel, 2004; Ellis, 1994; Reinders & Ellis, 2009; Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005). This could, for instance, involve noticing the distinctions between conversational and formal written registers. For an instructional method to be effective, however, learners must have attained an appropriate level of language proficiency and have received adequate instruction. For example, three potential difficulties with the aforementioned "noticing" method are: (a) "learners need to know what specific text features they should notice"; (b) learners need to know "what about these features requires attention"; and (c) learners need to be aware that, "Noticing and identifying the functions of words and structures is a slow and laborious process" (Hinkel, 2004, p. 44).

2.5 Applying the Literature

In this section, we have outlined some of the major considerations involved in the selection and incorporation of grammar points for writing programmes. The purpose of this overview was to show how the literature informed the development of a systematic approach to reviewing grammar for writing. We chose to take an empirical approach based on learners' responses to specified tasks (Staples & Reppen, 2016; Hinkel, 2004), involving: (1) focus on frequency of error, including overuse and underuse relative to an idealized L1 writer (Hinkel, 2004; Tono, n.d.); (2) focus on the appropriateness of the grammatical structure (Pienemann, 1998; Leech et al. 2006) and the needs of the writing task used for evaluation in the curriculum. In so doing, we considered the level of the learner, the needs of the greatest number of students, and learner competence. Moreover, the dissemination of the findings through a structured framework of can-do descriptors was used (Nagai et al. 2020). These decisions, which were guided by the highly coordinated character of the six course levels in the English programme at the university in Japan where this study was conducted and the requirements of the AOL project this study was part of, are more fully explained in the following section.

3. Designing a Systematic Approach to Examining Grammar in Academic Writing

3.1 Research Questions

The motivation for this investigation was the observed need to address the apparent absence of systematicity, clarity, and rigor in mapping out grammar for writing across the different levels of an English programme. To this end, the basic guiding question was:

> (a) Which grammar points for writing should be taught and assessed at different levels of the English curriculum?

This overarching question subsumes two related questions:

> (b) Which grammar points contribute to the effective completion of each writing task?
> (c) With which grammar points do students need explicit instructional support?

These questions encompass the objectives of determining which grammar points are appropriate to be taught, learned, and assessed at each level of the English curriculum, and for what purpose. The systematic approach developed for analysing texts and selecting appropriate grammar structures is explained in the following section.

3.2 Developing a Methodology Producing Lists of Grammar Points

Reflecting the concerns, principles, and approaches outlined in Section 2, we aimed to devise a systematic approach to identifying a set of grammar points for writing at each of six levels of the English programme. Whilst acknowledging the limitations of focusing on a particular task (Kaplan & Grabe 2002), the academic writing tasks in each level were used as the basis of analysis to create the sets of grammatical structures for instruction. The text types for each course level are as follows.

a. **Elementary**: 2 paragraphs of 200 words (one descriptive paragraph, one comparison paragraph)
b. **Pre-Intermediate**: 2 paragraphs of up to 250 words (one comparison paragraph, one advantages and disadvantages paragraph)
c. **Intermediate**: 1 argumentative essay
d. **Upper-Intermediate**: 1 discussion essay
e. **Advanced 1**: 1 academic discussion essay
f. **Advanced 2**: 2 academic essays (one comparative essay, one argumentative essay)

Similar to the methods suggested by Dubin and Olshtain (1986) and O'Keefe and Mark (2017), the approach taken compared samples of learner writing with model texts produced by native speaker (NS) instructors familiar with teaching and evaluating the writing task. The comparison focused on correct and erroneous uses of grammar structures in learners' writing and the underuse and overuse of certain structures relative to the grammatical features of the model texts. This process led to the production of longer lists, which were subsequently reduced and refined in collaboration with course developers to produce sets of grammar points which were manageable in terms of instruction, most in need of attention in terms of learner errors and underuse, and judged to be most appropriate to successful completion of the given writing task. The same procedure was followed in each level of the programme, involving the following steps:

1. Produce a systematic method for sourcing and analyzing written texts.
   a. Source examples of written texts from students in each level of the programme;
   b. Produce models of written texts.
2. Present a step-by-step replicable methodology for use in the analysis of texts in each level of the programme.
3. Analyze written texts to determine:
   a. which grammar points are most frequently used in (i) the model samples and (ii) the student samples;
   b. which grammar points are most useful for fulfilling the writing tasks at each level;
   c. which grammar points are appropriate to teach and assess at each level, i.e., which grammar points students can realistically produce accurately and use appropriately.
   d. which grammar points should be recommended for inclusion (instruction, practice, and evaluation) in a particular level.
4. Plot the scope and sequence for written grammar across the six levels of the English curriculum.
5. Decide which grammar points to incorporate into writing lessons in each level.
6. Compare the different methods of grammar instruction developed for each level to arrive at a best-practice approach.

3.2.1 Testing an Initial Approach

Prior to focusing on written grammar, a series of writing can-do statements associated with writing tasks at different levels of the English programme had been established. The can-do statements used to explicate the objectives for writing specifically were largely sourced from Pearson's *GSE Teacher Toolkit* (n.d.). This provides a granular set of objective descriptors mapped against the Global Scale of English (GSE), which uses a numerical scale to represent different levels of proficiency ranging from GSE 10 to 90. The GSE descriptors used in the Pearson Teacher Toolkit are a combination of pre-existing can-do statements borrowed from CEFR and newly formulated can-do statements which have been rated by over 6,000 teachers worldwide. To illustrate the granularity of Pearson can-do statements, compare the following examples which describe writing proficiency at different GSE points on the scale:

GSE 29: Can tell when to use the present simple and when to use the present continuous.

GSE 39: Can use the present continuous to refer to temporary situations.

GSE 46: Can use the present continuous to refer to changing situations.

GSE 51: Can use the present continuous with 'always' and other adverbs of frequency to express negative attitude.

Within the Toolkit, most of the grammar can-do statements are accompanied by an associated list of can-do statements for speaking and writing. In order to generate an initial working list of grammar points, we attempted, through a process of cross-reference, to identify the grammar points associated with the writing objectives we had already established. We first organized all of the grammar points from the Pearson Toolkit by level into a spreadsheet, based on their CEFR and GSE ranges. These were sorted into two separate lists: one for speaking and one for writing. We then used each of the pre-selected writing can-do statements for our writing tasks to search for matches within the lists of writing can-do statements associated with the grammar points extracted from the Pearson Toolkit.

The goal of this work was to arrive at an initial selection of grammar points for each level to be used as the basis of comparison between model texts and samples of student writing. For example, a search using one of the Elementary writing task can-do statements, "Can write a structured text clearly signalling main points and supporting details", resulted in the identification of an associated grammar can-do statement, namely, "Can use subject personal pronouns" (A1 GSE 24) which itself is associated with the following writing can-do statements:

Can write emails/letters exchanging information, emphasising the most important point.

Can spell out their own name and address.

Can write their name, address and nationality.

Can describe a person's hobbies and activities using simple language.

Can write a structured text clearly signalling main points and supporting details.

Can describe what someone is wearing using a limited range of expressions.

Can complete a simple form asking for medical information.

Although this approach was somewhat successful in helping to identify appropriate grammar structures in the lower levels of the English programme, it proved to be an unreliable method in the higher levels, where the frequency of matches was extremely low between the writing can-do statements used in our curriculum and the list of grammar can-do statements. Indeed, even in the Elementary level, this method could not be relied on to retrieve all relevant grammar points. For instance, the statement "Can use regular nouns in the plural form" (A1 GSE 24), though relevant to the writing task in Elementary, has no associated writing can-do statements in the Pearson Toolkit.

The failures of this approach taught us that (a) it is challenging to establish reliable correspondences between grammar points and associated features of writing; (b) it was necessary to create grammatical characterisations of the writing tasks by conducting manual analyses. The systematic approach taken to conducting these analyses is described below.

3.2.2 Revising the Approach

Given the very limited successes achieved through reliance on cross-referencing through the Pearson Toolkit described above, a different method, which was text-based and as empirical as possible, was established. This revised approach was developed to produce a preliminary list of potential grammar points for writing for each level. A long-list of grammar points was created through evaluation of the entire list of grammar can-do statements from the Pearson Toolkit to identify those which are most relevant to writing. This list is referred to as the 'AOL Grammar Can-do List'.

To reduce the number of grammar can-do statements to a manageable number for each course and across the English programme, models of the writing tasks from each level were collected. These were analysed systematically to determine which grammar points were (a) prevalent and (b) important to the task. A single analytical tool was developed for this purpose and applied to each model (see Appendix A for modified example). This work involved breaking the model text down into clausal units and identifying their features. The grammatical features focused on were: sentence type, conjunctives (coordinating, subordinating, phrases), verb phrases (tense, non-finite, modality, phrasal verbs, passive voice), noun phrases (article, determiners, singular or plural, premodifiers, postmodifiers), pronouns, and others (e.g., superlatives). This list of features was considered to be sufficiently comprehensive, and bears comparison to the lists of features of academic writing shown in Table 1 and the 4 Dimensions as outlined in 2.3 (O'Keefe & Mark, 2017). After identifying the most commonly occurring grammatical features in the model texts, we returned to the 'AOL Grammar Can-do List' to find corresponding grammar can-do statements. Where these did not exist, we created our own grammar can-do statements.

The next step was to analyse students' writing to compare it with the models in terms of frequency of accurate occurrences. This was done in order to concentrate on the areas of greatest need for learners and make more reasoned, evidence-based judgements on which grammar points are incidental to and which are central to the completion of the writing task. This process led to the

further narrowing of the lists, which were recorded in the 'Grammar text-analysis' sheets. Table 2 shows an excerpt of a completed sheet, taken from the analysis of Elementary level writing.

Table 2

Sample of a completed grammar-text analysis sheet

Structure	Function	CEFR band	GSE level	Can-do	Status	Examples
Coordinating conjunctions	Addition	A1	25	Can use "and" to link nouns and noun phrases.	Not taught	She likes coffee and tea.
	Contrast	A1	28	Can use "but" to link clauses and sentences.	Taught	She likes coffee, but I like tea. She's good at maths but not English.
	Logical relation	A2	32	Can link clauses and sentences with a range of basic connectors.	Taught	I did the shopping and cleaned the house. It's the right size, but I don't like the colour. We can get the bus, or go there by train.

The results of this process were organised into a 'Selected grammar can-do statements' document for each course level. These were still rather unwieldy so were further refined in close consultation with course coordinators to arrive at a master list for each level. These decisions were based partly on what is already being taught and partly on what the text analysis seemed to reveal about grammar points demanding consideration for inclusion in future writing instruction.

The systematic approach described above involved a number of stages and multiple evaluators to arrive at the eventual lists of grammar points selected for each writing course in each level of the programme. Given that the process described was conducted under the auspices of an overarching AOL project, it was necessary to refine the lists in the way outlined above to be relevant to the task, beneficial to the students' language learning, reliable and principled in order to garner the support of stakeholders, and manageable in terms of instruction, both in regard to the level of the students and the time available. In the following section, the results of the grammar analysis are summarized. This is followed by a brief description of the dissemination of these results, including through teaching materials and methods.

4. Results of the Grammar Analysis

The lists of grammar points derived from the empirically motivated analysis of writing provide a task-appropriate set of can-do grammar statements for each course level in the English programme (see Appendix B). In combination, while they cannot profess to represent a comprehensive scope and sequence for grammar for general writing, it can be argued that they offer principled and realistic grammar objectives for different levels which address observable areas of need.

The differences in the grammar foci for different levels are a consequence of each level's particular writing task and the level of the learners, but may also be attributable, to some extent, to the model text and its method of creation, as well as some variation in the application of the analytical tool by different text analysts.

Although each level has its particular set of grammar points, there are also numerous points of overlap between different levels. These are shown in Table 3. The left-hand column indicates which two levels share one or more grammar can-do statement(s) as an objective of their writing course. The right-hand column shows the can-do statement(s) those levels have in common.

Table 3

Overlapping grammar can-do statements across levels of an English programme

Levels with overlapping grammar can-do statements	Grammar Can-do Statements
ELE and PIE	Can link clauses and sentences with a range of basic connectors. Can make comparisons with regular shorter adjectives + '-er'.
IE and UIE	Can speculate about the future using 'may/might/could' + infinitive. Can use 'who/that/which' in basic defining (restrictive) relative clauses. Can use 'by' with verbs and verb phrases to express the means or way of doing something.
UIE and AE2	Can use object relative clauses with relative pronouns to specify or define.
AE1 and AE2	Can refer to general concepts using plural nouns without articles.

The scope of the grammar covered in conjunction with the writing component of courses in each level of the English curriculum is shown in Appendix B. Overall, the scope is characterized by a focus on producing clear, well-structured sentences at the Elementary level and progressing to more sophisticated structures and task-specific aspects of grammar as learners move up through the levels. A salient feature of the texts in all levels of the English programme is the prevalence of simple present verbs.

Although Elementary covers 12 grammar points, the most of any level, many of these can be taught in combination. For example, three of the grammar points concern conjunction, two are concerned with noun forms, and a further two focus on writing grammatically accurate statements. Two of the grammar points for comparison are out-of-level (CEFR A2; GSE 36-7) objectives. These grammar points are task-specific, and instruction on them is extended in Pre-Intermediate where the majority of the seven grammar objectives are related to the comparative paragraph task in that level.

In the Intermediate level, there is a notable shift towards grammar structures more closely associated with academic writing. In particular, there is a concentration on subordination in four of the ten grammar points, while the majority of the others focus on future outcomes, grammatical structures which are integral to the successful completion of the writing task.

The Upper-Intermediate grammar points extend and develop the learner's ability to write academic prose using subordination (five of eight grammar points covered), while the other grammar points service the writing task in this level. The development of an academic writing voice is extended in the Advanced courses where subordination is attended to further. Moreover, attention is given to other features of academic texts, such as nominalization, cohesion, and the expression of abstract concepts across the writing components of the two Advanced-level courses.

The lists produced include numerous points of overlap with those introduced in Section 2.3. However, given the differences in the proficiency levels of the target learners and differences in the tasks and purpose of study of the learners, it is unsurprising that there are also numerous differences.

Having arrived at a series of sets of grammar points to be incorporated into the writing curriculum, it was important to give consideration to how to disseminate the outcomes of the analysis to stakeholders in the English programme. The means by which this was carried out are described in Section 5.

5. Disseminating the Results of the Grammar Analysis for Writing

The can-do grammar statements for writing were assembled in a shared AOL spreadsheet. Presenting all of the grammar points together in this sheet shows the scope and sequence for grammar for writing across the English programme. This spreadsheet also contains columns for recording textbook units where the grammar points are addressed, in-house writing lesson materials which provide instruction on the grammar points, the assessment(s) in which use of the grammar points is evaluated, the evaluation standards, and any external tests where assessment of the grammar points potentially occurs. Through the completion of this chart, course coordinators were able to identify gaps in instruction and consider the most suitable point at which to introduce those grammar points, taking into consideration their relation to other grammar points and, more particularly, their relevance to the writing task. The result of this is the development and revision of writing lessons to address the range of grammar can-do statements purported to be evaluated in one or more writing tasks. Explanation for the inclusion of the selected grammar points into the writing component of each course is given through course (or level) meetings. This includes coverage of the materials developed to provide instruction to students on the appropriate use of the grammar points for writing.

While this development work is ongoing in certain levels at the time of writing, there is extensive coverage of the grammar points in others. A review of grammar instruction in in-house writing lesson materials reveals that a range of different exercises have been included in writing lessons. It also highlights a relatively consistent approach to introducing, practicing and applying the grammar.

5.1 Grammar Instruction Methods

Coordinators of the six different courses in which writing is assessed made modifications to their writing materials to take account of the grammatical structures identified as being most useful to successful completion of their writing tasks. To guide this process, the following four questions were asked.

1. What stages and methodologies would your ideal grammar lesson for writing incorporate?

2. How can we effectively and efficiently fit additional grammar instruction/practice into our courses?

3. What are some useful resources that students and teachers can use to learn/practice grammar?

4. From the list of grammar points for your level, which ones do you think would be most worthwhile to focus on in class (and why)?

With the inclusion of more explicit grammar instruction into writing lessons in the different levels of the English programme, a range of different exercises and approaches have been introduced. Table 4 provides an overview of the different styles of exercise and the levels in which they feature. The general approach taken is to:

(a) have students identify or discover the grammar point;

(b) provide grammar instruction, including an explanation of how the grammar point is related to the writing task;

(c) conduct controlled practice;

(d) facilitate free practice with a written or pictorial prompt;

(e) provide error correction / editing practice;

(f) encourage revision of one's own writing applying key points of instruction.

Overall, to some extent this approach mirrors the process of writing drafts and revisions. In some levels, various grammar points are introduced to show how an aspect of the writing task can be realised in multiple ways. This emphasises the value placed on elegant variation; that is, the preference for avoiding repetition of the same phrase over and over when writing in English.

Table 4

Grammar Instruction Methods by Level

Method	ELE	PIE	IE	UIE	AE1	AE2
Free writing with prompt (picture, word)	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Explicit instruction and examples	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Textbook exercises	✓	✓		✓		✓
Explanation of link between grammar and writing task	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Error correction	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Revision of student's own work	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Grammar discovery / identification	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Proof-reading	✓			✓	✓	
Transformation		✓	✓		✓	
Gap fill	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Peer review	✓				✓	
Best alternative	✓		✓	✓		
Word order			✓			
Table completion					✓	
Labelling examples of grammar	✓				✓	
Grammar comprehension questions					✓	
Paragraph construction					✓	

Evaluation of the materials and methods used to provide students with instruction on the grammar points for writing in their courses and to explain their relevance to the type of writing task is ongoing. As such, it is too early to make any claims about the effectiveness of the approaches taken in each level in terms of learners' ability to use the target structures appropriately or the overall impact on the quality of writing produced.

6. Discussion

The grammar points for writing which should be taught and assessed at different levels of the English curriculum have been mapped out more clearly than previously as a result of the analytical process described above. This process of mapping out grammar points to be attended to in the English curriculum involved analysis of students' written work, which was in line with the empirical studies of students' work mentioned in Section 2 (Staples & Reppen, 2016; Tono, n.d.; Hinkel, 2004). As a result, it can be argued that the resulting lists address the needs of the majority of learners, which is consistent with outcomes of other studies (Hinkel, 2004; Richards, 1985; O'Keefe & Mark, 2017). Apart from Advanced English 2, the English programme does not have any courses dedicated to writing, and this skill is typically part of courses which also focus on speaking and listening. Given the limitations on instructional time, the focus on grammar for specific writing tasks rather than an extant list of more general grammar points, is perhaps justifiable.

Although the analysis of writing in each level up until the finalization of the grammar lists was conducted largely without reference to other levels, the resulting list of grammar structures provides a partial cycling between-level sequence (see O'Keefe & Mark, 2017) which is characterized by a shift towards grammatical structures associated with academic writing, such as subordination and the introduction of abstract concepts. To this end, the grammar component can be said to serve the fulfillment of the objectives for writing as expressed in the overarching AOL project, which are: "Can write an academic paragraph" in Elementary and "Can write an academic essay" in the other levels of the English programme. We can expect the grammar points chosen for instruction to contribute to the effective completion of each writing task and so benefit students in terms of providing appropriate and purposeful learning.

Since the analysis included tallying learner errors and underuse and/or overuse of grammar points, it was informative in regard to determining with which grammar structures students need explicit instructional support. Having this clear understanding of which grammar structures to focus on enables programme coordinators to develop tailored instructional materials. Moreover, it allows educators to provide focused feedback and evaluate learners' written work more precisely and efficiently. This gives cohesion to the courses which is likely to positively impact both students and teachers by strengthening their confidence in the course objectives and how they are achieved (Dornyei & Ushioda, 2011, p. 116).

7. Conclusion

This article described the process of evaluating, empirically, the grammar component of the writing courses in a university English curriculum in order to introduce a more principled scope and sequence to ensure instruction is targeting areas of need and that students are given appropriate support in the achievement of the stated objectives of the English curriculum. As such, the intention was to align this component with the overarching principles of accountability associated with AOL.

The sets of grammar points identified for each level were based on specific tasks and involved comparison of model writing samples with samples produced by students. Whilst

acknowledging that this process may have weaknesses related to analyser bias, the training and expertise of analysts, and the method of producing the model, the grammar points in Elementary up through Upper-Intermediate and the Advanced courses show a progression in terms of complexity, such as the use of subordination, which is typically found in academic writing courses. Given the limitations of time spent on writing in the curriculum, the tailored, task-focused approach to determining the grammar foci for each level is arguably justified.

Instructional and evaluation materials have been developed since the completion of the grammar analyses. From now, it is necessary to assess what impact the focus on grammar has on learners' successful completion of writing tasks in the curriculum and whether any methods can be considered more effective at different levels of the English programme. Moreover, the methods of disseminating information to stakeholders about this component of the course and its relevance should be addressed to ensure that its contribution to learning is sufficiently well understood.

References

Blackwell, J. (2016). Towards a quality culture in language education. *APU journal of language research, volume 7,* 1-17. https://doi.org/g85c

Brookes, A. & Grundy, P. (1998). *Beginning to write: Writing activities for elementary and intermediate learners.* Cambridge University Press.

Coxhead, A. & Byrd, P. (2007). Preparing writing teachers to teach the vocabulary and grammar of academic prose. *Journal of Second Language Writing 16* (2007). 129-147. https://doi.org/fnm2tx

Dornyei, Z. & Ushioda, E. (2011). *Teaching and researching motivation (2nd Ed.).* Routledge. https://doi.org/g4k4

Dubin, F. & Olshtain, E. (1986). *Course design.* Cambridge University Press.

Ellis, R. (1994). *The study of second language acquisition.* Oxford University Press.

Ellis, R. & Barkhuizen, G. (2005). *Analysing Learner Language.* Oxford University Press.

Ellis, R., Loewen, S., Elder, C., Erlam, R., Philp, J., & Reinders, H. (2009). *Implicit and explicit knowledge in second language learning, testing and teaching.* Multilingual Matters. https://doi.org/g4k5

Ferris, D. R. (2016). Promoting grammar and language development in the writing class: Why, what, how, and when. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Teaching English grammar to speakers of other languages* (222-245). Routledge.

Givon, T. (1979). *On understanding grammar.* Academic Press.

Hinkel, E. (2004). *Teaching academic esl writing: Practical techniques in vocabulary and grammar.* Routledge. https://doi.org/g4k6

Hinkel, E. (Ed.) (2016). *Teaching English grammar to speakers of other languages.* Routledge. https://doi.org/g4k7

Johns, A. M. (1997). *Text, role, and context: Developing academic literacies.* Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/g4k9

Kaplan, R. B. & Grabe, W. (2002). A modern history of written discourse analysis. Journal of *Second Language Writing.* 11 (2002) 191-223. https://doi.org/bjxtxf

Leech, G., Deuchar, M. & Hoogenraad, R. (2006). *English grammar for today: A new introduction (2nd Ed.)* Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/g4mb

Lu, X. (2010). Automatic analysis of syntactic complexity in second language writing. *International Journal of Corpus Linguistics.* 15 (4) 474-496. https://doi.org/fj36jz

Nagai, N., Birch, G. C., Bower, J. V. & Schmidt, M. G. (2020). *CEFR-informed learning, teaching and assessment: A practical guide.* Springer. https://doi.org/g4mc

O'Keeffe, A. & Mark, G. (2017). The English grammar profile of learner competence. *International Journal of Corpus Linguistics. 22 (4) 457-489.* https://doi.org/ghdh97

Pearson. (n.d.). *GSE teacher toolkit.* https://www.english.com/gse/teacher-toolkit/user/lo

Pienemann, M. (1998). *Language processing and second language development: Processability theory.* John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Reinders, H. & Ellis, R. (2009). The effects of two types of input on intake and the acquisition of implicit and explicit knowledge. In Ellis, R., Loewen, S., Elder, C., Erlam, R., Philp, J., & Reinders, H. (Eds.), *Implicit and explicit knowledge in second language learning, testing and teaching* (pp. 281-302) Multilingual Matters. https://doi.org/g847

Richards, J. C. (1985). *The context of language teaching.* Cambridge University Press.

Staples, S & Reppen, R. (2016). Understanding first-year L2 writing: A lexico-grammatical analysis across L1s, genres, and language ratings. *Journal of Second Language Writing. 32* (2016) 17-35. https://doi.org/gcpg7x

Tono, Y. (n.d.). Corpus approaches to L2 learner profiling research. *Reconceptualizing English language teaching and learning in the 21st century.*

Weigle, S. C. & Friginal, E. (2015). Linguistic dimensions of impromptu test essays compared with successful student disciplinary writing: Effects of language background, topic, and L2 proficiency. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes.* 18 (2015) 25-39. https://doi.org/g4md

Appendixes

Appendix A

Tool Used for Initial Grammar Analysis of All Texts

Sentence 1	
Text: Young people's lifestyles in Vietnam are busy and enjoyable.	
Sentence type: Simple sentence	
Conjunctives: coordinating	
Conjunctives: subordinating	
Conjunctives: phrases	
Verb phrases: tense	

Verb phrases: non-finite	
Verb phrases: modality	
Verb phrases: phrasal verbs	
Verb phrases: passive voice	
Noun phrase	
Noun phrases: article	
Noun phrases: determiners	
Noun phrases: singular or plural	
Noun phrases: premodifiers	
Noun phrases: postmodifers	
Pronouns	
Other	

Appendix B

Final Grammar Can-do Statements by Level

CEFR	GSE	Can Do Statement (The learner...)	Course
A1	28	Can use 'but' to link clauses and sentences.	ELEA
A2	32	Can link clauses and sentences with a range of basic connectors.	ELEA
A2	35	Can use plural countable nouns without an article or quantifier.	ELEA
A2	32	Can use the definite article to refer to a specific person, thing, or situation.	ELEA
A2+	37	Can generalise about persons, things, or situations using plural nouns/noun phrases with no (zero) article.	ELEA
A2	35	Can use 'because' with verb phrases to refer to causes and reasons.	ELEA
A1	24	Can make basic statements with subject + verb + object	ELEA
A1	26	Can make affirmative statements using the present simple without time reference.	ELEA
A2	31	Can place adjectives in the correct position (before nouns).	ELEA
A2	33	Can use a range of common adverbs of frequency.	ELEA
A2+	36	Can make comparisons with 'more' + longer adjectives.	ELEA
A2+	38	Can make comparisons with regular shorter adjectives + '-er'.	ELEA
A2	32	Can link clauses and sentences with a range of basic connectors (additive)	PIEA
A2+	36	Can make comparisons with 'more' or 'less' + longer adjectives.	PIEA
A2+	38	Can make comparisons with regular shorter adjectives + -er.	PIEA
A2+	40	Can use all forms of comparatives and superlatives of adjectives.	PIEA
B1	44	Can make comparisons using '(not) as...(as)' with adjectives and adverbs.	PIEA
B1	48	Can use 'both...and...' to connect two words or phrases.	PIEA
NA	NA	Can nominalise adjectives to discuss similarities and differences.	PIEA
A2+	40	Can make statements with the verb 'be' and adjectives with verbs in the infinitive.	IEA
A2+	42	Can express basic cause and effect with 'because of ...'	IEA

B1	43	Can use verb + '-ing' forms as the subject of a sentence.	IEA
B1	46	Can describe possible future outcomes of a present action or situation using the first conditional.	IEA
B1	46	Can speculate about the future using 'may/might/could' + infinitive.	IEA
B1	47	Can describe simple conditions where one event follows another.	IEA
B1	48	Can use 'who/that/which' in basic defining (restrictive) relative clauses.	IEA
B1	48	Can make statements and ask questions with 'know (that)' + complement clauses.	IEA
B1	48	Can use 'by' with verbs and verb phrases to express the means or way of doing something.	IEA
B1	48	Can use 'let/make/help' to refer to enabling, forcing, or allowing things to be done.	IEA
B1+	51	Can use object relative clauses with relative pronouns to specify or define.	UIEA
B1	48	Can use 'who/that/which' in basic defining (restrictive) relative clauses.	UIEA
B1+	57	Can use non-defining (non-restrictive) relative clauses to add information.	UIEA
NA	NA	Can use 'that' to form noun clauses.	UIEA
B1+	56	Can use 'though' and 'although' as conjunctions to express concession.	UIEA
B1+	58	Can express various degrees of likelihood and possibility using complement clauses.	UIEA
B1	46	Can speculate about the future using 'may/might/could' + infinitive.	UIEA
B1	48	Can use 'by' with verbs and verb phrases to express the means or way of doing something.	UIEA
B2	61	Can use non-defining (non-restrictive) relative clauses to make a comment.	AE1
NA	NA	Can use 'that' to form noun/complement clauses.	AE1
B2	64	Can use noun phrases in place of adjectives and verb phrases in formal written language.	AE1
NA	NA	Can use modal verbs and adverbs to express stance indirectly.	AE1
A2+	42	Can use a range of pronouns and abverbials for anaphoric (back) reference.	AE1
NA	NA	Can use a range of nouns, verbs and adjectives to express cause and effect.	AE1
B1	49	Can refer to general concepts using plural nouns without articles.	AE1
NA	NA	Can use past participle and present participle as adjectives	AE2B
B1	49	Can refer to general concepts using abstract nouns without articles.	AE2B
NA	NA	Can use that noun phrases/clauses	AE2B
B2	64	Can use noun phrases in place of verb phrases in formal written language.	AE2B
B1+	59	Can express alternative conditions with 'whether ... or not'.	AE2B
B1+	59	Can use verb phrases with 'to' + infinitive as subject and complement.	AE2B
B1+	60	Can correctly use defining (restrictive) and nondefining (non- restrictive) relative clauses.	AE2B
B1+	51	Can use embedded defining (restrictive) relative clauses.	AE2B
B1+	51	Can use object relative clauses with relative pronouns to specify or define.	AE2B