COMPETENCY-BASED GRAMMAR MASTERY: TEACHING PARTS OF SPEECH TO FRESHMAN EFL STUDENTS

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	In recent studies showed that freshman of English department of university have lack of understanding of grammar mastery especially the parts of speech. Parts of speech is important because it is essential to help learners recognize the words functions and the sentence structure. Freshman sometimes have difficulties the correct grammar and meaningful sentences. This study investigates the implementation of Competency-Based Education (CBE) for teaching the parts of speech to freshman EFL students in higher education. Addressing the urgent need for more effective grammar instruction, the research introduces a performance-based, learner-centered approach that links grammatical forms to authentic communication tasks. By integrating CBE principles—measurable outcomes, continuous assessment, and contextualized practice—the instruction moves beyond memorization toward demonstrable linguistic competence. Classroom observations, student outputs, and feedback reveal that CBE significantly increases learner engagement, autonomy, and mastery of basic grammatical categories. The findings highlight the novelty of applying CBE to foundational grammar, demonstrating its potential to strengthen students' accuracy and communicative competence early in their academic journey. The study contributes a practical framework for first-year EFL instruction, emphasizing that mastery of the parts of speech is essential for students' progression into advanced grammar and speaking performance in subsequent semesters. *This is an open access article under the <u>CC BY-SA</u> license.*

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BACKGROUND

The English language learning always emphasize of the communicative competence, autonomy of learners, and the use of contextual language, not just the memorization rules. It needs to increase instruction that integrates to grammar with meaningful communication. Thus, the implementing competency-based education of the first day class to the freshman students of English Education program

of higher education plays a crucial role in setting the foundation for students' linguistic awareness and motivation to learn. Implementing and introducing *parts of speech* at this early stage is essential because it serves as the building block for understanding English grammar and language structure.

As was mentioned that grammar has long been recognized as a fundamental component of language learning, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. Among its core elements, the Parts of Speech including nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, articles, prepositions, conjunctions, and interjections serve as the essential building blocks of English structure and communication. However, many freshman students in higher education continue to struggle with understanding and applying these grammatical categories effectively in coming semesters. According to Azar and Hagen (2017), grammar provides the framework that allows learners to form meaningful and accurate expressions, yet traditional grammar teaching often emphasizes rote memorization rather than practical usage.

The conventional methods of teaching grammar tend to focus on form rather than function, resulting in passive learning and limited communicative ability. . Purwanto and Agustin, (2022), argued that EFL students actively employ various grammar learning strategies and strongly acknowledge the important of grammar mastery. But Rusdi et al. (2025), recommended that incorporating self-assessment into grammar instruction leads to improve grammatical accuracy and learners autonomy. As a result, students often fail to transfer grammatical knowledge into real-life communication. seeing these challenges, educators and researchers have increasingly turned to Competency-Based Education (CBE) as an innovative and student-centered approach. CBE focuses on developing learners' ability to demonstrate specific competencies through measurable outcomes, performance-based assessment, and self-paced learning (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

By applying CBE principles in teaching grammar particularly the parts of speech enable instructors or lecturers to link grammatical knowledge with communicative competence. Students are encouraged not only to recognize the grammatical forms but also to use them meaningfully in spoken and written contexts. This approach aligns with Ellis's (2006) perspective that grammar instruction should be integrated with language use, allowing learners to notice, process, and internalize grammatical structures through active communication.

In higher education, integrating CBE in EFL instruction supports both linguistic accuracy and communicative fluency. It will encourage learners to take an active role in their learning process, promotes autonomy, and connects grammatical understanding to authentic tasks (Richards & Schmidt, 2010). Therefore, introducing parts of speech through a competency-based framework provides an effective pedagogical strategy to help freshman EFL students build a solid grammatical foundation and enhance their overall proficiency in academic and communicative English when coming to the next studies or semesters.

Comprehensively, **Competency-Based Education (CBE)** has gained attention as an alternative instructional framework that focuses on the **development of specific skills and competencies** rather than rote knowledge. In a CBE approach, learning outcomes are clearly defined, instruction is flexible, and assessment is based on demonstrated performance. To apply this approach to grammar instruction allows students not only to identify parts of speech but also to **use them meaningfully in authentic communicative contexts**. This shift encourages learners to engage actively with language through practice, reflection, and application. Gervais, J. (2016) explains that CBE focuses on students demonstrating **mastery of specific competencies** rather than progressing based on seat time or credits. These competencies include measurable knowledge, skills, abilities, and professional behaviors. The article identifies key components of effective CBE systems.

Since the teaching of English as the foreign language speaking for English students or learners at schools or higher education in an experiential way of the writer for more than three decades, he never found out that the students or learners of schools or higher education students that had taken English as their department of letters faculties or studies knew well of the basic foundation of the language, like English that has parts of speech. Parts of speech are not only the speech but also they need to know forms, kinds, types, number, gender, definite, indefinite, formation, and others. The unknowing this, made them why they had lack of basic English competency, lack of grammar that could not show the good competency in speaking by using correct grammar as well. Frank, (1972), parts of speech is word classification based on grammatical and lexical meaning, but Thomson & martinet, (1968), parts of speech in English determined by word in sentence and how the word relates to other words. Parts of speech is vital learning of the language; this is the basic knowledge of a language like English. Students may be able to speak batter grammar and speaking due to their understanding well of parts of speech. The competency-Based Education emphasizes the development of specific skills, knowledge, and attitudes that learners must demonstrate to achieve mastery in their field. In the context of an English Education program, introducing *parts of speech* aligns directly with the foundational linguistic competencies that future teachers are expected to master.

Understanding and applying the parts of speech is not merely a matter of memorization it reflects a learner's **linguistic and grammatical competence,** one of the key competencies outlined in CBE frameworks. Through CBE, students are expected to **demonstrate their abilities** to identify, classify, and use different parts of speech correctly in both oral and written communication. This competency supports higher-level language skills such as syntax analysis, sentence construction, and teaching grammar effectively in formal situation to others.

In short, implementing and introducing *parts of speech* earlier in the program serves as a gateway to developing *core* In **linguistic competencies** the essential skills that form the basis for more advanced communication and pedagogical abilities within the framework of Competency-Based Education.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This writing employed a Qualitative classroom-based action research design. The qualitative research will enable the researcher not only to explore phenomena or to understand meanings, but also experiences and perspectives from the participants view points. Qualitative research also always seeks to capture rich, descriptive data that always reveals how and why the good process and behaviors and the occurring perceptions. The purpose this is to explore how competency-based learning (CBL) can be effectively implemented to introduce parts of speech to EFL freshman students during their first day of English class in higher education. The writing emphasizes both teaching innovation and students' competency development in communication and grammar awareness.

Participants

The participants consist of the second and the fourth year EFL students enrolled at English department of Letters faculty University Muslim Indonesia Makassar. Where the writer also acts as the classroom lecturer.

Setting

The study takes place in a higher education EFL classroom faculty of letters University Muslim Indonesia (English Department) focusing in implementing parts of speech as a competency-based education and foundation for further language development under the CBL framework.

Instruments

Structured-interview is the single instrument used. the structured-interview was applied by giving the same questions to all participants.

Data Collection and Analysis

Qualitative Data: observation notes, student reflections, and interviews analysis to identify recurring patterns in engagement and competency development

DISCUSSIONS

The Importance of Studying and introducing Parts of Speech for Freshman Students in the English Department of the higher education

Implementing and understanding the Parts of Speech is a crucial foundation for mastering the English grammar and become the fundamental elements of grammar. Parts of speech such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, article, pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions, and interjections are the form the structural basis of communication. According to Azar and Hagen (2017), grammatical competence is essential for producing accurate and meaningful sentences in both spoken and written English. Without this knowledge, learners often face difficulties in expressing ideas clearly, analyzing sentence patterns, and comprehending academic texts.

The Freshman students are expected to develop their linguistic abilities beyond basic proficiency as they enter higher education. A solid understanding of parts of speech allows them to identify grammatical functions, analyze syntactic structures, and construct coherent sentences (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999). This competence directly supports academic writing, reading comprehension, and oral communication skills that are central to success in linguistics and literature courses. Furthermore, Ellis (2006) emphasizes that grammatical awareness enhances learners' ability to notice and internalize language patterns, thereby improving overall fluency and accuracy.

Learning From a pedagogical standpoint, implementing and introducing parts of speech early at the freshman level ensures a shared grammatical foundation and competency-based education among students with diverse language backgrounds. This shared knowledge base supports more advanced studies in syntax, morphology, and language teaching methodology later in their academic journey (Richards & Schmidt, 2010). When taught through a Competency-Based Education (CBE) framework, grammar instruction becomes more interactive, practical, and outcome-oriented. As Richards and Rodgers (2014) note, CBE emphasizes the development of measurable skills and communicative performance, enabling students to apply grammatical concepts in authentic use of language. Studying the parts of speech provides freshman English majors with the linguistic tools necessary for effective communication, academic achievement, and professional growth. It builds a strong grammatical foundation that supports their progress as language learners, analysts, and future English educators.

Why Competency-Based Education Needed in Implementing Parts of Speech?

By implementing Competency-Based Education (CBE) in teaching grammar, particularly the Parts of Speech, is essential for addressing the limitations of traditional language instruction in higher education. Conventional grammar teaching has often emphasized theoretical knowledge, rule memorization, and decontextualized exercises (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999). While such methods may help students identify grammatical categories, they frequently fail to promote the practical application of grammar in communication. As the result, many freshman EFL students possess declarative knowledge about grammar but lack the ability to use it functionally in writing and speaking tasks (Ellis, 2006).

Johnstone, at al, (2014), said, the role of developing technologies, institutional curriculum-design processes, and new delivery methods as keys to providing quality successful models demonstrate that CBE can fit into existing campus structures, if certain principles are followed: (1) the degree reflects robust and valid competencies; (2) students are able to learn at a variable pace and are supported in their learning; (3) effective learning resources are available any time and are reusable; and (4) assessments are secure and reliable

The Competency-Based Education provides a solution by shifting the focus from what students know to what they can do with their knowledge. This approach defines learning outcomes in terms of competencies observable and measurable skills that demonstrate mastery (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). In the context of grammar instruction, Competency-Based Education encourages students to actively apply

grammatical concepts in authentic communicative situations, thereby transforming abstract rules into meaningful linguistic performance. For instance, when they learn parts of speech, students are not only expected to identify nouns or verbs but also to use them appropriately in context through guided activities, role-plays, and writing tasks.

The Competency-Based Education has aligned well with the needs of higher education or EFL learners, who are expected to develop academic literacy, analytical thinking, and communicative competence. According to Richards and Schmidt (2010), language proficiency requires integrating grammatical accuracy with functional communication. So the CBE supports this integration by providing continuous assessment, individualized learning paths, and performance-based evaluations, which cater to students' varying levels of grammatical awareness and learning styles. In Competency-Based Education framework also fosters learner autonomy and motivation. As Azar and Hagen (2017) noted, grammar learning becomes more effective when students are active participants rather than passive recipients. CBE encourages self-directed learning through task-based performance, reflection, and mastery progression. This method is particularly beneficial for freshmen who are still adjusting to the demands of university-level English study, as it provides clear learning targets and opportunities for practical application.
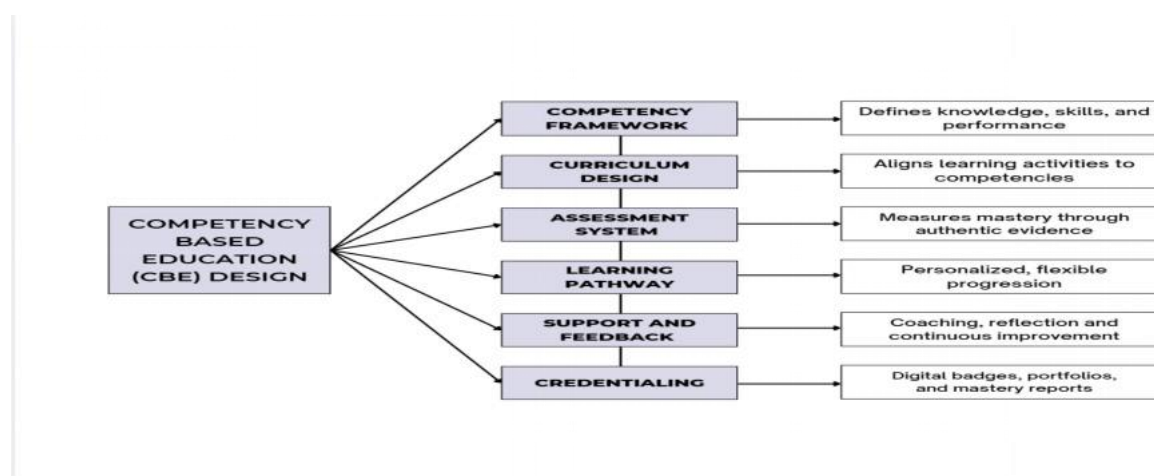
In additional way, in adopting CBE in teaching grammar contributes to educational quality assurance in higher education. Universities today emphasized outcome-based education and measurable learning achievements. By integrating CBE into EFL grammar instruction, institutions can ensure that students attain both theoretical understanding and practical competence in using English. This competency-oriented approach aligns with global trends in language education that prioritize communicative effectiveness, employability, and lifelong learning (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). The Competency-Based Education is needed because it transforms grammar instruction from a rule-centered process into a skill-oriented, performance-based, and learner-centered experience. It empowers freshman EFL students to internalize and apply parts of speech meaningfully, enhances their communicative competence, and aligns language learning with the broader goals of higher education in producing competent and confident language users. Kelchen, R. (2015), CBE programs allow students to progress by demonstrating mastery of competencies rather than accumulating classroom time. This approach appeals particularly to adult learners, working professionals, and students seeking flexible, affordable pathways.

This study revealed that integrating **Competency-Based Education (CBE)** into grammar instruction specifically in teaching the **Parts of Speech** has had a significant positive impact on students' grammatical competence, engagement, and communicative performance. Classroom observations and student feedback indicated that the competency-based approach allows learners to **actively construct knowledge, demonstrate understanding through performance**, and **apply grammar in authentic contexts.** Unlike traditional lecture-based instruction, CBE encourages continuous practice, reflection, and feedback, which contribute to a deeper and more functional understanding of grammar (Ellis, 2006). What to do is Firstly, students exhibited improved ability to identify and use different parts of speech accurately

in both written and spoken communication. This improvement can be attributed to the **task-based and performance-oriented nature of CBE**, which emphasizes doing over memorizing. Learners were more confident in applying grammatical rules in writing paragraphs, composing essays, and engaging in oral presentations. These results align with the principles of **Richards and Rodgers (2014),** who highlight that outcome-based education enhances linguistic performance through measurable skill acquisition. Second, the findings suggest that CBE fosters **greater learner autonomy and motivation**. Students reported feeling more responsible for their learning as they were given clear competencies to achieve and multiple opportunities to demonstrate mastery. The continuous assessment process and feedback mechanisms within CBE encouraged students to self-monitor their progress and seek improvement. This finding supports **Azar and Hagen's (2017)** argument that active engagement and self-directed learning are essential for grammar mastery. Third, the implementation of CBE has improved **teacher-student interaction** and overall classroom dynamics. The approach shifted the teacher's role from being a sole knowledge provider to a **facilitator and coach**, guiding learners toward achieving specific competencies. This transformation aligns with the learner-centered philosophy of modern higher education, which values collaboration, formative assessment, and contextualized learning (Richards & Schmidt, 2010).

From a broader perspective, the implications of this study are significant for **curriculum development and language policy** in higher education or university. Integrating CBE principles into grammar courses can lead more **to effective, engaging, and outcome-oriented English curriculum.** Institutions can design syllabus that specify grammatical competencies, develop authentic assessment tools, and provide opportunities for performance-based evaluation. Moreover, CBE aligns with the global movement toward **outcome-based education**, ensuring that graduates possess not only theoretical knowledge but also practical language competencies applicable in academic and professional contexts.

Competency-Based Education (CBE) Design

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Parts of Speech in a Brief

Parts of speech in English are the basic categories of words according to their function or role in a sentence. Parts of speech are in brief, Burhanuddin & Lusy Angraeni , (2025):

1. **Nouns**, according to Webster dictionary, Noun is the name of any person, any place, or thing.There are five approaches of nouns, (forms, types, numbers, and genders.

2. **Verbs**, is a part of speech that expresses action, being, or state of being.There are three approaches of Verbs, (usages, types, and kinds).

3. **Pronoun**, is a word used for or instead of a noun.There are three approaches of Pronoun (functions, positions, kinds).

4. **Adjectives**, is a word used with a noun to add something to its meanings.Theare are four approaches of Adjectives, (types, functions, positions, and forms).

5. **Articles**, is determiners or limiting adjectives.There are three approaches of Articles (types, special uses, and omission).

6. **Adverb**, is a word which adds something to the meaning of a verb, adjective, or another adverb.There are four approaches of Adverb (functions, types, forms, and positions).

7. **Preposition**, is a word used to show the relation of a noun, or pronoun to some other words in a sentence. There three approaches of Preposition (functions, forms, and uses).

8. **Conjunction**, is a word used to join or to connect words or sentences. There are three approaches of Conjunction (functions, classifications, and forms).

9. **Interjections,** is a sudden feeling that arises within us, whether we are surprised, happy, or shocked. Examples; Oh...I have lost my key!, Oh my God!, shut up!, hush....don't make so much noise! What a nice day! and etc.

The Lack of Students' Knowledge of Parts of Speech of the English Major Students of the Higher Education or University

The writer had participated in the classroom as a facilitator or lecturer to English education students of other courses at one of the higher educations or universities in Makassar, the courses were tourism, English for a tour guide, English for hospitality, and so on. All of these courses needed competency in speaking and writing. In a few recent years, the English students have had difficulties in using grammar or structural sentences in speaking and writing. The unknowing well the parts of speech as a competency-based education in English. Few students knew the parts of speech completely, lack of their knowledge in forms, kinds, types, numbers, genders of one part of speech of a Noun. When asking the forms, the kinds, the types, and the numbers of the parts of speech of nouns, they had difficulties in giving the correct answers.

The mastering parts of speech is one of the most fundamental aspects of learning English grammar. However, many freshman students at the university level still find it challenging to identify and apply these

grammatical elements in speaking and writing. To understand how parts of speech are implemented in the teaching and learning process at higher education, an interview was conducted by the writer when teaching English at Faculty of Letters of English Department UMI Makassar with ten students from the third semester, and ten students from the fifth semester that had learned parts of speech at the first semester in September 2025 with the structured-interview.

Here were the questions given in the structured-interview ; *a) do you know parts of speech?, (b) do you study parts of speech at the first semester ?, (c) do you know the forms, kinds, types, numbers, genders of a noun as a part of speech?, (d) do you study auxiliary verb, if you studied, what are tense, do, and modals?, (e) do you know relative pronoun, can you give examples?, (f) do you know adjective?, what is its function?, (g) do you have any idea what article is?*

Mostly he answers of the students that teaching parts of speech to freshman said *yes we do, we know, we studied, we did not know the forms, the kinds, the types, the numbers of a noun. Yes we do, we know auxiliary verb but we do not know tense auxiliary, do auxiliary, and modals auxiliary., and modals. We ever studied relative pronoun but we forgot what it was and we cannot give an example, we knew adjective but we did not its functions, and we could not explain what article was.*

Therefore, to master parts of speech requires a practical and interactive approach. The lecturers should explain at the beginning of the semester, students should be introduced well of the nine basic parts of speech like noun, pronoun, verb, adjective, adverb, article, preposition, conjunction, and interjection. The ought to know the forms, the kinds, the usages and forth. Not only focusing on introducing the main ones.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTION

Conclusion

Implementing **Competency-Based Education in teaching parts of speech of EFL students at the first semester of the higher education or university** is an effective framework in the EFL classroom. It must be promoted the active learning, enhances grammatical and communicative competence, and supports the holistic development of students as proficient users of English. The implications extend beyond grammar instruction, offering a model for competency-driven teaching practices across other areas of English language education in higher learning institutions.

Introducing parts of speech well earlier to freshman of English students of the higher education would become a strong foundation of EFL students of higher education to speak, to write, and to arrange and to form the sixteen tenses in English. Parts of speech seemed to be easy, but difficult in use at all when coming to practices.

SUGGESTIONS

1. To lecturers, both who teach grammar and speaking, they should implement the competence-based education well in teaching parts of speech to freshman of English students at the first semester of

an EFL students. They ought to introduce all related words in parts of speech earlier and give them exercises during the classroom activities.

2. To English learners, try to ask your lecturers of parts of speech and have them explain one speech in detail in every meeting.

3. To those who will learn and know more of English language, like; tour guides, hotels staff, waiter and waitress, air steward and stewardess, and those who need English communication in working, you have to learn parts of speech to have better English communication, not only that your English is communicable.

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