Investigating SFL-Based Genre Pedagogy and its Effect on EFL Learners' Oral Reproduction of Stories

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This study aimed to examine the effect of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)-based genre instruction on the oral reproduction of short stories by Iranian EFL learners, focusing specifically on complexity and content transfer. The study employed a quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test design with 38 intermediate-level EFL learners (19 in the experimental group and 19 in the control group) from a language institute in Tabriz, Iran. Homogeneity was ensured using the Oxford Placement Test (OPT). The experimental group received genre-based instruction rooted in SFL principles, involving three instructional phases: deconstruction, joint construction, and independent construction of short stories. The control group followed conventional instructional methods. Two short stories were used for oral reproduction tasks at pre- and post-intervention stages. Complexity was assessed using Bygate's (2001) framework of words per t-unit including content words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs), and content transfer was evaluated through a researcher-made checklist covering story events, sequence, and oral language. ANCOVA was applied to analyze differences between the groups while controlling for pre-test scores. The results revealed statistically significant differences in post-test performance between the experimental and control groups. In terms of complexity, ANCOVA showed that the experimental group significantly outperformed the control group $(F(1,35) = 279.604, p < 0.001,$ partial $\eta^2 = 0.889)$. Similarly, for content transfer, the experimental group achieved higher scores $(F(1,35) = 218.470, p < 0.001,$ partial $\eta^2 = 0.862)$. These results confirm the positive effect of SFL-based genre instruction on learners' oral story reproduction. SFL-informed genre pedagogy significantly enhances both the linguistic complexity and content coherence of EFL learners' oral performance, validating its implementation in language education to develop context-sensitive and functionally rich spoken discourse.

Keywords: *Systemic Functional Linguistics; genre-based instruction; oral reproduction; EFL learners; short stories; complexity; content transfer.*

1.   Introduction

The evolving demands of modern English as a Foreign Language (EFL) pedagogy have driven scholars and educators to seek methodologies that not only cultivate linguistic competence but also empower learners to effectively communicate within diverse social and academic contexts. Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), with its functional orientation towards language, has emerged as a particularly promising approach to meet these pedagogical needs (Eggins, 2004). Founded by Halliday, SFL conceptualizes language as a system of choices shaped by and serving social purposes, wherein each utterance is contextually motivated and functionally driven (Halliday, 1973, 1994). Within this framework, the teaching of language is not merely the transmission of grammatical forms but an engagement with meaning-making processes rooted in cultural and situational contexts (Christie, 1999; Martin, 1984).

Genre-based pedagogy, a derivative of the SFL tradition, situates language learning in the dynamic interplay between text, context, and function. It advocates for explicit instruction in the structure and function of texts to help learners produce contextually appropriate discourse (Hyland, 2003; Swales, 1990). This instructional model becomes particularly effective when integrated with literary texts, especially short stories, which offer a rich resource for exposing learners to authentic narrative genres and socio-discursive patterns. As argued by Martin, genres are staged, goal-oriented social processes that can be explicitly taught and learned (Martin, 1999). Consequently, the use of short stories within SFL-informed genre pedagogy may facilitate not only linguistic development but also critical engagement with texts, thereby enhancing learners' oral and written production in meaningful ways.

The integration of literature into language education has a long and dynamic history, tracing back to the Grammar-Translation Method, which emphasized the translation of canonical texts to develop reading skills and grammatical accuracy (Richards & Schmidt, 1993). However, this method often failed to consider the functional and communicative dimensions of language. Modern approaches have shifted the focus toward interactive and learner-centered models, wherein literature functions as a medium for cultural immersion, language exposure, and skill integration (Collie & Slater, 1987). Among the various literary forms, short stories hold a particularly strategic place due to their brevity, clarity, and thematic richness. They are accessible within limited instructional time and offer compact yet profound representations of cultural, emotional, and linguistic phenomena (Bobkina, 2014; Saka, 2014).

Short stories possess unique potential to enhance speaking skills by presenting learners with authentic linguistic input and structured discourse that mimics real-life communication. As Duysenbaeva (2023) highlights, the incorporation of short narratives into EFL instruction aids learners in developing coherent oral expression by engaging them in meaning negotiation, inferencing, and narrative reconstruction (Duysenbaeva, 2023). Similarly, Ompusunggu (2018) provides empirical evidence supporting the use of short stories to improve speaking fluency, particularly among intermediate learners (Ompusunggu, 2018). These findings align with earlier assertions by Pardede (2001), who underscored that storytelling fosters multiple language skills simultaneously, including vocabulary acquisition, syntactic fluency, and pragmatic awareness (Pardede, 2001).

In this context, the genre-based model proposed by Macken-Horarik (2002) becomes a valuable instructional scaffold. Her approach advocates for the explicit teaching of narrative structure—orientation, complication, resolution, and evaluation—paired with linguistic features such as lexical cohesion, modality, and voice (Macken-Horarik, 2002). This scaffolding is structured through the teaching-learning cycle: deconstruction, joint construction, and independent construction (Martin, 1999). Such pedagogical design mirrors Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which emphasizes the role of guided participation and scaffolding in advancing learners' Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978). Accordingly, learners internalize genre knowledge through collaborative practice and gradually become autonomous producers of meaningful, coherent narratives.

The pedagogical validity of SFL-based genre instruction is further corroborated by studies in multilingual and bilingual settings. Cahyono (2018), in his research on Indonesian EFL classrooms, found that systematic genre instruction based on SFL improved learners' writing fluency and structural coherence (Cahyono, 2018). Lirola (2010) similarly demonstrated the efficacy of SFL principles in bilingual education programs in the United States, where learners developed genre awareness and improved their academic writing skills (Lirola, 2010). These outcomes point to the transferability and adaptability of SFL pedagogy across various instructional contexts and learner demographics.

Moreover, the applicability of genre pedagogy is not confined to writing; it extends to speaking, particularly in activities that demand narrative competence such as story retelling and dramatization. As Pathan (2013) posits, short stories in EFL contexts serve multiple functions—they not only expose students to rich, meaningful content but also nurture sociocultural understanding, empathy, and imagination (Pathan, 2013). These affective and cognitive engagements culminate in improved oral performance as learners internalize thematic patterns, character perspectives, and narrative flow. Furthermore, the structured nature of short stories aligns well with genre theory, offering learners clear models of textual organization and stylistic conventions (Callaghan et al., 1993).

Importantly, the oral reproduction of short stories, when supported by genre-based scaffolding, fosters lexical diversity, syntactic complexity, and content coherence—three vital components of oral proficiency. The functional grammar framework developed by Halliday emphasizes how clause structures, thematic progression, and transitivity choices construct meaning in context (Halliday, 1994). Eggins (2004) expands on this by detailing the lexico-grammatical realizations of ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings, offering a concrete toolkit for language analysis and pedagogy (Eggins, 2004). In turn, these insights empower learners to produce narratives that are not only grammatically accurate but contextually and rhetorically effective.

Empirical support for the use of SFL-based genre instruction in enhancing oral narrative competence is also presented by Troya et al. (2022), who highlighted the effectiveness of SFL pedagogies in shaping learners' discourse skills across diverse educational environments (Troya et al., 2022). Complementing this, Iddings (2008) conducted a functional analysis of university-level student writing and affirmed that genre awareness, informed by SFL, correlates with improved syntactic sophistication and coherence (Iddings, 2008). These outcomes echo the earlier theoretical insights of Widdowson (1975), who emphasized the role of stylistic awareness in interpreting and reproducing literary texts (Widdowson, 1975).

The deliberate teaching of genre also addresses the recurring challenge in EFL settings of learners' limited exposure to authentic discourse and structured language input. As noted by Bayram and Tongur (2020), short stories provide a compact and potent genre through which teachers can engage students in deep linguistic and cultural analysis (Bayram & Tongur, 2020). They offer learners an opportunity to encounter idiomatic expressions, embedded clauses, narrative devices, and social nuances that textbooks often lack. Furthermore, the emotional and psychological dimensions of short stories—humor, suspense, conflict, resolution—enhance memory retention and promote sustained engagement (Bobkina, 2014; Saka, 2014).

Finally, the present study is also grounded in the foundational contributions of earlier scholars such as Martin (1984), who categorized types of writing in early education, and Swales (1990), who provided the classic genre definition as a class of communicative events with shared rhetorical purpose (Martin, 1984; Swales, 1990). These definitions have shaped how genre is taught and assessed, giving rise to pedagogies that explicitly link textual form with social function—a hallmark of the SFL tradition.

In light of these perspectives, the current investigation aims to evaluate the effectiveness of SFL-based genre instruction in enhancing the oral story reproduction of EFL learners. By emphasizing the structural, functional, and social aspects of narrative texts, this pedagogical approach seeks to foster not only linguistic accuracy but also contextual appropriateness and expressive fluency. Given the promising results of previous research and the theoretical alignment with sociocultural and functional models of language learning, the study anticipates that learners exposed to genre-based instruction will demonstrate higher complexity and more coherent content transfer in their oral reproductions compared to those receiving conventional instruction. In doing so, it contributes to the growing body of literature advocating for integrative, meaning-focused, and genre-informed language education.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

In this quasi-experimental study, the target population of the present study comprised 60 male and female EFL learners at intermediate proficiency level in Tabaelm Language Institute in Tabriz, selected through convenience sampling procedure. Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was directed to guarantee the learners' homogeneity. As a result, the study incorporated 38 participants (comprising 21 women and 17 men) who were picked based on their scores falling within one standard deviation from the mean. These individuals were then randomly distributed into two separate groups, with 19 learners apiece. All participants were between 18 to 25 years old.

2.2.   Measures

2.2.1.   OPT

This proficiency test was used to ensure the homogeneity of the participants. Each test version entails 60 items that assesse the ability of EFL learners in understanding grammatical structures and the meaning that they might convey in a context of use.

2.2.2.   The Pre-Test and the Post-Test

From the educational resources provided in the classroom, two short stories were chosen to be applied in the pre-test and post-test stages. The participants were expected to orally recount the short stories they had previously perused. Each participant's performance was gauged by analyzing the complexity and content transfer. This was done by counting the words within each t-unit, focusing solely on the utilization of nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs and a researcher-made checklist that included three subsections of story events, sequence, and oral language, respectively.

2.2.3.   Material

Oral Reproduction of Stories book (Vol. 1) was used as the main material of the study, which is assembled and edited by Abbas Ali Rezaei (2006). Each unit starts with a short story and then offers several strategies for oral reproduction and effective reading. These strategies help the readers be engaged in the stories. To keep away from the interruption of unknown words, they are written in bold font and its explanation is provided at the same page. In the finale of each part, several exercises and tasks are designed to assess the students' comprehension level.

2.3.   Procedure

The current study began by selecting homogeneous participants. Even though they were in the same level as designated by the standards of the institute, the proficiency test of OPT was directed to confirm the learners' homogeneity. Founded on their outcomes in the OPT, individuals scoring within one standard deviation above or below the mean were designated. Subsequently, they were allocated into two groups: one experimental and one control.

Both groups underwent an educational phase spanning eight sessions, each lasting an hour and a half, with the schedule distributing two sessions across each week.

In control and experimental groups, the participants were asked to read a particular short story at home and provide oral reproduction of it the following session, which was regarded as their pre-test. Considering the limited class time, two or three learners were asked to perform the oral reproduction of the story. The instructor offered essential insights, feedbacks and accounts addressing their misconceptions, mistakes and inaccuracies.

The learners in the control group received the conventional class processes including small-group discussions, class discussions, and pair work lacking any SFL-based genre instruction. That is to say, each class session a short story was allocated to the students and they were asked to read it at home and then reproduce it orally at the subsequent session. Every session, the instructor inquired a couple of students to reproduce the projected short story. Then, the participants actively participated in a discussion regarding their individual interpretations of the key components of the tale, as well as the meaning and implications they drew from it.

Conversely, within the experimental group, the instructor implemented an examination of the short stories using the approach founded on SFL genres. Thus, the approach suggested by Macken-Horarik (2002) has been utilized. Four features of narrative genre counting social purpose, schematic structure, social location, and schematic phase description were particularized. While delineating the schematic stages of the narrative, the instructor gauged the alignment, assessment, entanglement, denouement, and concluding remarks embodied within the short tale (Eggins, 2004; Macken-Horarik, 2002). With the aim of applying the SFL-based genre training in this class, the investigators seized the course of transitioning EFL students from collaborative construction to autonomous construction. It is worth noting that this procedure contains three phases of deconstruction, joint construction, and independent construction, which is called teaching-learning cycle (Martin, 1999). The word 'cycle' circuitously proposes that the phases stand recursive and flexible plus giving the students the chance for beginning from any favored phase and move backward and forward once they want. The mentioned model is exhibited in the following figure.

Figure 1

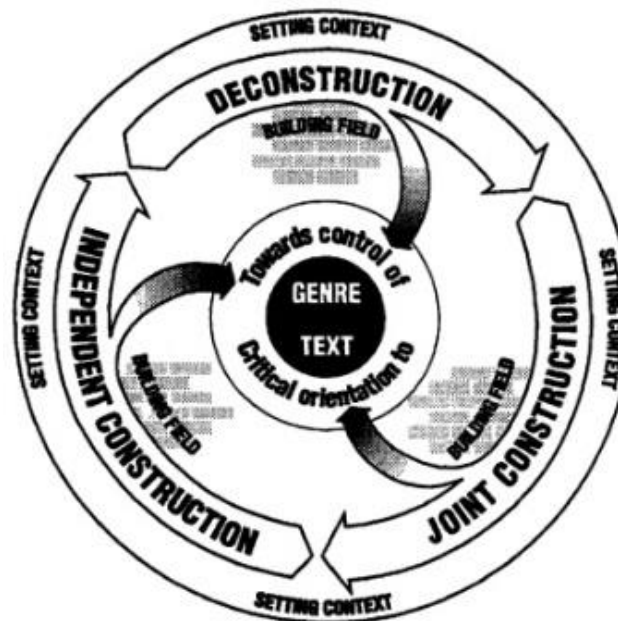*The Cycle of Teaching-Learning Adopted from Martin (1999)*

Figure 1 illustrates that *Setting Context* and *Building Field* are shared in entire phases. The purpose behind these initiatives is to heighten student awareness about the societal context and objectives embedded within the curriculum. This content includes specific details about the purpose of the genre, the situations in which it is typically employed, and the common lexicon as well as the connections between how it is communicated and those engaging with it.

In the deconstruction step, the students scrutinized a short story regarding its generic configuration. The narrative's use of persuasive language, vocabulary, and syntax sparked discussions. At this point, the instructor meticulously taught the key components of the short story, including the narrative structure, themes, and characters, to the students.

The educator assisted the students to change the short story using their own words, in the joint construction phase. As mentioned by Callaghan, Knapp, and Noble (1993), through his intermediation, the educator strove to guide the participants towards creating a text of matching quality. This negotiation was prepared founded on the common knowledge attained in the deconstruction phase. The educator rephrased the students' creations when needed and clarified the explanations for these alterations.

During the stage of independent construction, students recreated the narrative using their own phrasing. Instructed by the teacher, they reflected on the original tale's lexicon and syntactical structures. The emphasis here lay on the creating of fluent, precise, and elaborate sentences, emphasizing proper expression while aiming to capture the original story's essence to the greatest extent. Additionally, ensuring a smooth narrative progression was a priority, with the goal of incorporating as much of the original content as possible.

Upon conclusion of the treatment phase, participants from both study groups were assessed with a post-test—essentially the reproduction of a short story previously presented during classroom sessions. This reproduction was evaluated using the identical criteria employed for the initial pre-test assessment. The comparative analysis of these pre-test and post-test evaluations served to illuminate and assess the impact of teaching and implementing short stories through two distinct approaches. One embraced SFL-informed genre pedagogy, while the other adhered to a conventional instructional strategy, all with a focus on enhancing oral storytelling skills.

After collecting the data from all the participants, their expressions in equally pre- and post-test were copied out to be assessed and rated. The rating procedure was done by two independent raters and the inter-rater reliability for the two sets of scores was measured as 0.84 that is in the satisfactory array. The evaluation unit for the assessment of complexity and content transfer was t-unit. According to Richards and Schmidt (2010), t-unit consists "of one independent clause

together with whatever dependent clauses are attached to it" (p. 613).

Moreover, the complexity of the participants' oral performance was assessed in terms of the quantity of words per t-unit counting just verbs, adjectives, nouns, and adverbs (Bygate, 2001). The score of each participant for the complexity of their oral reproduction was determined by averaging the grades given by two separate evaluators.

Content transfer was scored using the checklist developed by the researcher. This checklist encompassed three subsections of *story events*, *sequence*, and *oral language*. Each of these subsections carried 15 scores and was evaluated based on one of the three ranges of *having difficulty* (0-5 scores), *developing* (6-10 scores), and *consistently evident* (0-5 scores). The whole score given to the participants' content transfer was calculated out of 45.

2.4. Data analysis

To scrutinize the gathered data, the researchers administered SPSS. The inferential and descriptive analyses were performed to arrange for a detailed indication of the collected data. The research questions had to be analyzed quantitatively. The data related to the stated research questions were explored through running Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) for each research question. According to Field (2018), ANCOVA is a statistical analysis that can be run on the scores of two or more groups in pre-test – post-test design and reduces the effects of probable pre-test differences, as the covariate, on the interpretation of the post-test scores of the groups.

3. Findings and Results

3.1. The Outcomes of Oxford Placement Test (OPT)

As it was specified in previous sections, OPT was used to assess the learners' homogeneity. In order to screen the participants, the researchers gave the OPT to all initial 60 students and those who scored in the range of one standard deviation below and above the mean were qualified. Table 1 displays the descriptive information of the participants' OPT scores.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics Related to the OPT Scores

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
OPT	60	7	60	36.28	15.226
Valid N (listwise)	60				

According to Table 1, the total mean score and standard deviation of the preliminary learners' scores in OPT were regarded to be 36.28 and 15.226, correspondingly. Out of the original group, 38 individuals with scores in the range of 22 to 51 were selected as learners.

3.2. The Outcomes Concerning the First Research Question

For answering the first research question, which investigated the influence of SFL-based genre training of short stories on the complexity of the story reproduction produced by EFL learners, the researchers used a set of descriptive and inferential statistics. Table 4.1 displays the descriptive statistics for the learners' oral reproduction scores in the control and experimental groups.

Table 2

Complexity Scores in the Control and Experimental Groups

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pre-Test Complexity in CG	19	2.42	4.13	3.2321	.57254
Post-Test Complexity in CG	19	2.91	5.34	4.1826	.82720
Pre-Test Complexity in EG	19	2.45	4.05	3.2637	.45737

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pre-Test Complexity in CG	19	2.42	4.13	3.2321	.57254
Post-Test Complexity in EG	19	3.85	5.81	4.9753	.62330
Valid N (listwise)	19				

As it is shown in Table 2, the learners' pre-test complexity mean score in the control group was 3.2321 by the standard deviation of 0.5725, and the post-test complexity mean score was found to be 4.1826 by the standard deviation of 0.8272. In the experimental group, the participants' pre-test complexity mean score was 3.2637 with the standard deviation of 0.4574 and their post-test complexity mean score was 4.9753 by the standard deviation of 0.6233.

To answer the first research question ANCOVA was run. Therefore, the necessary primary suppositions were tested one by one. The first supposition was the data distribution normality that was checked through running the test of One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov among four groups of the complexity of oral reproduction scores. Table 3 displays the outcomes .

Table 3

Results of One Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov for Complexity Scores in the Two Groups

		Pre-Test Complexity in CG	Post-Test Complexity in CG	Pre-Test Complexity in EG	Post-Test Complexity in EG
N		19	19	19	19
Normal Parameters[a,b]	Mean	3.2321	4.1826	3.2637	4.9753
	Std. Deviation	.57254	.82720	.45737	.62330
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.134	.144	.095	.116
	Positive	.134	.134	.095	.090
	Negative	-.114	-.144	-.079	-.116
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		.134	.144	.095	.116
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.200[c,d]	.200[c,d]	.200[c,d]	.200[c,d]

a. Normal Test distribution

b. Premeditated from data

c. Correction of Lilliefors Significance.

d. This is a minor bound of the true significance.

As depicted in Table 3, the p-value associated with each array of scores surpass the threshold of 0.05. Hence, the distribution of the four score sets aligns with normalcy, fulfilling the initial criterion necessary for conducting the parametric ANCOVA assessment.

The second assumption of the ANCOVA pertains to the equality of group variances. This equality was verified through the application of Levene's test. The outcomes demonstrating the test's verification of equal error variances are detailed in Table 4.

Table 4

Equality of Error Variances by Levene's Test in Complexity Scores

F	df1	df2	Sig.
.213	1	36	.647

a. Design: Intercept + Pre-Test Complexity + Groups

Table 4 designates that the fundamental equality assumption of error variances was seen. This was found by $F(1, 36) = 0.213$, $p = 0.647$ which is higher than 0.05.

For ensuring the parallelism of the groups in the study, the association between post-test complexity (the dependent variable) and pre-test complexity (the covariate), the regression lines homogeneity was verified, with the findings showcased in Table 5.

Table 5

Regression Homogeneity for Post-test Complexity in the Two Groups (Dependent Variable: Post-Test Complexity)

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	24.640[a]	3	8.213	437.743	.000
Intercept	.010	1	.010	.536	.469
Groups	.261	1	.261	13.919	.001
Pre-Test Complexity	17.423	1	17.423	928.598	.000
Groups * Pre-Test Complexity	.028	1	.028	1.499	.229
Error	.638	34	.019		
Total	822.015	38			
Corrected Total	25.278	37			

a. R Squared = .975 (Adjusted R Squared = .973)

The statistics presented in Table 5 reveals a p-value of 0.229, surpassing the threshold of 0.05. Thus, the analysis revealed that the influence of the independent variable, which was the type of instructional approach varied between SFL-based genre-focused teaching and traditional methods, showed no significant relationship when considered alongside the covariate of initial test complexity. Furthermore, the requisite condition for consistent variance across all stages of the independent variable, known as the homogeneity of regression supposition, was confirmed to be met. Hence, the ANCOVA can be implemented.

As the prerequisite assumptions were met, the researcher ran another ANCOVA to explore the null hypothesis one, that is, *there is not any significant dissimilarity between the effects of SFL-based genre instruction and conventional methodology on the complexity of EFL students' story reproduction*. Table 6 showcases the outcomes derived from the analysis.

Table 6

Results of ANCOVA for Complexity Scores (Dependent Variable: Post-Test Complexity)

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	24.612[a]	2	12.306	646.645	.000	.974
Intercept	.004	1	.004	.219	.643	.006
Pre-Test Complexity	18.644	1	18.644	979.665	.000	.966
Groups	5.321	1	5.321	279.604	.000	.889
Error	.666	35	.019			
Total	822.015	38				
Corrected Total	25.278	37				

a. R Squared = .974 (Adjusted R Squared = .972)

In Table 6, the first line highlighted reveals that the pre-test complexity was connected to their post-test complexity, significantly ($p < 0.05$) by the amount of 0.966. The subsequent track shows the main influence of the SFL-based genre training on the post-test complexity, which is the dependent variable. Subsequently the pretest scores were adjusted, showing that there existed a significant influence of the group, $F(1,35) = 279.604$, $p < 0.05$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.889$.

Since the significance level fell below the 0.05 threshold, it indicated a significant dissimilarity between the two groups. Hence, the third null hypothesis was rejected.

To establish the superior instructional approach—whether the SFL-grounded genre pedagogy or the conventional method—affects the learners' ability to orally reproduce short stories with considering the complexity of their performances, we confirmed a significant dissimilarity between the study groups. Following this validation, we equated the marginal means of marks in both groups, with the findings illustrated in Table 7.

Table 7

The Estimated Marginal Means of Complexity Scores Related to Two Groups

Groups	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
CG	4.205[a]	.032	4.140	4.269
EG	4.953[a]	.032	4.889	5.018

According to the data in Table 7, it is clear that the experimental group (EG) boasted a higher marginal mean than the control group (CG), with figures of 4.953 over 4.205. This implies that SFL genre approach surpassed the conventional methodology in enhancing the complexity of the participants'' spoken reproduction.

3.3. The Outcomes Concerning the Second Research Question

With the aim of investigating the second research question, which addressed the effect of SFL-based genre instruction of short stories on the content transfer of EFL students' oral story reproduction, the researcher used a set of descriptive and inferential statistics. Table 8 shows the descriptive statistics for the participants' oral reproduction marks in the two groups.

Table 8

Outcomes of the Content Transfer Scores in the Control and Experimental Groups

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pre-Test Content Transfer in CG	19	13	19	16.63	1.862
Post-Test Content Transfer in CG	19	22	34	26.58	3.656
Pre-Test Content Transfer in EG	19	14	20	16.63	1.802
Post-Test Content Transfer in EG	19	25	41	32.79	3.980
Valid N (listwise)	19				

As it is clear in Table 8, the learners' pre-test content transfer mean score in the control group was 16.63 by the standard deviation of 1.862, and their post-test content transfer mean score was 26.58 with the standard deviation of 3.656. In the experimental group, the participants' pre-test content transfer mean score was 16.63 by the standard deviation of 1.802 and their post-test content transfer mean score that was 32.79 by the standard deviation of 3.980.

ANCOVA showed to be administered on the content transfer marks of the students in the two groups with the purpose of finding response for the second research question the underlying assumptions of which were tested before running the analysis itself. Initially, the normality assumption of the distribution for all arrays of marks must be verified. To ensure the normal distribution of the content transfer scores in the groups, the researchers used the test of One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov among four collections of scores. The outcomes are displayed in Table.

Table 9

One Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test for Content Transfer Scores in the Two Groups

		Pre-Test Content Transfer in CG	Post-Test Content Transfer in CG	Pre-Test Content Transfer in EG	Post-Test Content Transfer in EG
N		19	19	19	19
Normal Parameters[a,b]	Mean	16.63	26.58	16.63	32.79
	Std. Deviation	1.862	3.656	1.802	3.980
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.157	.194	.186	.147
	Positive	.106	.194	.186	.147
	Negative	-.157	-.141	-.145	-.132
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		.157	.194	.186	.147
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.200[c,d]	.057[c]	.083[c]	.200[c,d]

a. Normal Test distribution

b. Premeditated from data.

c. Correction of Lilliefors Significance.

d. This is a minor bound of the true significance.

According to Table 9, the p-value for each group of marks is greater than 0.05, as a result, four collections of marks are distributed normally and the initial supposition for running the parametric test of ANCOVA was confirmed.

The second supposition of ANCOVA is the variances equality between experimental and control groups. Levene's test was used to find out if the variances in the two groups were equal or not. Table 10 displays the outcomes of Levene's test for error variances equality.

Table 10

Levene's Test of Equality for Error Variances in Content Transfer Scores

F	df1	df2	Sig.
2.206	1	36	.146

a. Design: Intercept + Pre-Test Content Transfer + Groups

Table 10 shows that the fundamental assumption of error variances equality was met. This was evidenced by $F(1, 36) = 2.206$, $p = 0.146$ which is higher than 0.05.

Since the association between the dependent variable and covariate must be comparable for both groups, the regression lines homogeneity was evaluated, and the findings are provided in Table 11.

Table 11

Homogeneity of Regression for Post-test Content Transfer in the Two Groups (Dependent Variable: Post-Test Content Transfer)

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	836.606[a]	3	278.869	170.517	.000
Intercept	4.152	1	4.152	2.539	.120
Groups	.084	1	.084	.051	.822
Pre-Test Content Transfer	469.095	1	469.095	286.833	.000
Groups * Pre-Test Content Transfer	3.098	1	3.098	1.894	.178
Error	55.605	34	1.635		
Total	34376.000	38			
Corrected Total	892.211	37			

a. R Squared = .938 (Adjusted R Squared = .932)

As is exposed in Table 11, the p-value is equal to 0.178 that is greater than 0.05, the relationship between the independent variable, which comprises two instructional methods (SFL-based genre and conventional), and the covariate (specifically, the pre-test concerning content transfer), turned out to be non-significant. Moreover, this finding confirms that the regressions across different groups are consistent, upholding the homogeneity of regression assumption. Hence, the ANCOVA could be used.

ANCOVA was applied to test the second null hypothesis of the current study, *there is not any significant dissimilarity between the effects of SFL-based genre instruction and conventional methodology on the content transfer of Iranian EFL learners in story reproduction*. Table 12 shows the results of ANCOVA analysis.

Table 12

Results of ANCOVA for Content Transfer Scores (Dependent Variable: Post-Test Content Transfer)

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	833.508[a]	2	416.754	248.479	.000	.934
Intercept	3.923	1	3.923	2.339	.135	.063
Pre-Test Content Transfer	467.087	1	467.087	278.489	.000	.888
Groups	366.421	1	366.421	218.470	.000	.862
Error	58.703	35	1.677			
Total	34376.000	38				
Corrected Total	892.211	37				

a. R Squared = .934 (Adjusted R Squared = .930)

According to Table 12, the pre-test of content transfer was significantly connected to the scores of post-test related to content transfer ($p < 0.05$) with the extent of 0.880. In addition, the focal influence of the SFL-based genre training on the dependent variable once regulating for pre-test scores was found to be significant. It means that the influence of the group, $F(1,35)= 218.470$, $p < 0.05$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.862$. Since the significance level fell below the threshold of 0.05, it was evident that the difference observed between the two groups was not due to random chance, but rather a statistically significant finding and the effect of SFL-based genre training on the post-test content transfer was evident. Hence, we dismissed the second null hypothesis.

After observing significant dissimilarity between the groups, it is necessary to consider the assessed marginal scores means in the groups to determine the group that showed a superior performance in terms of content transfer. Table 13 presents the results of this analysis.

Table 13

Estimated Marginal Mean Scores of Content Transfer Scores in the Two Groups

Groups	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
CG	26.579[a]	.297	25.976	27.182
EG	32.789[a]	.297	32.186	33.393

As presented in Table 13, comparison of the estimated marginal means of the groups who were taught by traditional and SFL-based genre methods indicated that the latter had a better development from pre-test to the post-test (32.789>26.579) in terms of the content transfer while orally reproducing the short stories.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study set out to investigate the effect of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)-based genre pedagogy on EFL learners' oral story reproduction, focusing specifically on two dimensions: complexity and content transfer. The findings derived from the pre-test and post-test comparisons, as well as ANCOVA analyses, revealed that the participants exposed to the SFL-based genre instruction outperformed those in the conventional teaching group in both aspects. These results offer strong empirical evidence supporting the pedagogical efficacy of integrating SFL genre theory into EFL oral production tasks.

With respect to the first research question, which examined the influence of SFL-based genre instruction on oral complexity, the results indicated a statistically significant improvement in the experimental group. The learners exposed to genre-based scaffolding exhibited enhanced syntactic and lexical complexity in their post-test performances, as evidenced by the significant difference in words per t-unit scores. This finding supports Halliday's foundational claim that grammar serves not only as a structural system but also as a meaning-making resource closely aligned with the context of use (Halliday, 1994). The learners' ability to expand their utterances using contextually appropriate grammatical structures can be attributed to the explicit modeling and deconstruction of genre stages—orientation, complication, resolution—during the instruction phase, as suggested in Macken-Horarik's genre cycle (Macken-Horarik, 2002). This type of scaffolded instruction enabled students to internalize linguistic patterns associated with narrative discourse and reproduce them with increased complexity.

These results are corroborated by prior empirical studies. Cahyono (2018), for instance, observed similar gains in grammatical sophistication among EFL learners trained under an SFL framework in writing instruction (Cahyono, 2018). Likewise, Lirola (2010) demonstrated that genre-based instruction based on SFL principles promoted syntactic elaboration and structural coherence in learners' academic texts in bilingual classrooms (Lirola, 2010). Although these studies focused primarily on writing, their alignment with the current study suggests that genre awareness, when cultivated through SFL-informed methods, can transfer across modalities, including speaking. Iddings (2008) further reinforced this assertion by showing that students' understanding of functional structures, such as clause complexes and thematic progression, leads to more cohesive and context-sensitive linguistic production in both written and oral formats (Iddings, 2008).

In regard to the second research question exploring content transfer, the experimental group again exhibited significantly higher performance than the control group. The learners receiving SFL-based training more effectively conveyed the narrative content of the short stories, preserving the sequence of events, capturing key thematic elements, and reconstructing character actions with higher fidelity. These findings lend strong support to the pedagogical premise that SFL genre instruction enhances learners' ability to identify and reproduce the communicative purpose and schematic structure of texts. This mirrors the arguments made by Hyland (2003), who emphasized that genre-based approaches empower learners to link textual form with social function, thus improving their comprehension and production of cohesive discourse (Hyland, 2003).

Moreover, these findings are in line with the work of Duysenbaeva (2023), who found that using short stories in B2-level EFL speaking classes significantly enhanced learners' ability to express content with clarity and coherence (Duysenbaeva, 2023). Ompusunggu (2018) similarly reported that short story-based instruction

facilitated improvement in students' content articulation and sequencing skills during oral tasks (Ompusunggu, 2018). The use of literary narratives provides a structured yet engaging context that stimulates learners' interpretive and expressive faculties. When this is combined with genre awareness training, as in the present study, learners gain the tools to navigate narrative structures with greater control and intentionality.

The effective content transfer observed in the experimental group also finds support in Pathan's (2013) conceptual analysis, where he posits that short stories provide learners with a contextually rich and emotionally engaging medium that supports meaning-making and oral reproduction (Pathan, 2013). The integration of genre awareness enables learners to internalize narrative logic, sequence, and voice, leading to enhanced oral storytelling. As learners progressed through the stages of the teaching-learning cycle—deconstruction, joint construction, and independent construction—they were gradually guided to notice, interpret, and reconstruct genre features such as conflict, resolution, and evaluation, thereby improving their story coherence and detail retention.

The results also reaffirm the theoretical underpinnings proposed by Vygotsky (1978), who emphasized that learning is socially mediated and context-sensitive (Vygotsky, 1978). The scaffolded instruction in the SFL-based pedagogy, which promoted dialogic interaction between teacher and learners during the joint construction phase, helped to raise learners' metalinguistic awareness and control over genre-specific discourse. The genre model employed in the study also reflects Martin's (1999) conception of "mentoring semogenesis," where learners are guided to master the social and functional dimensions of texts through explicit genre instruction (Martin, 1999). This theoretical framework effectively explains the gains in content transfer and complexity observed among the participants in the experimental group.

Additionally, the narrative genre is particularly well-suited for oral reproduction tasks due to its linear structure, emotional appeal, and familiarity. Scholars like Bayram and Tongur (2020) have emphasized the pedagogical value of short stories in EFL classrooms, noting that their compact structure and thematic accessibility make them ideal for oral and written reproduction tasks (Bayram & Tongur, 2020). The participants in the experimental group, guided by the SFL framework, were better able to understand and reconstruct the purpose and audience orientation of the stories, reflecting the insights articulated by Swales (1990),

who defined genre as a class of communicative events with shared rhetorical purposes (Swales, 1990).

Furthermore, the emotional engagement with characters and plotlines likely contributed to improved memorability and expressive performance. As Bobkina (2014) explains, literature activates both cognitive and affective domains, fostering deeper comprehension and greater expressive fluency (Bobkina, 2014). This engagement may also explain why the experimental group showed marked improvement in reconstructing story events and sequences during the post-test. Their enhanced performance illustrates how genre-based narrative instruction serves not merely as a linguistic exercise but as a holistic communicative act involving affect, cognition, and context.

The implications of these findings extend to broader curricular and methodological considerations in EFL education. The results clearly demonstrate that genre-based instruction grounded in SFL principles is not only viable but highly effective in fostering oral language development, particularly in narrative discourse. This is aligned with the work of Troya et al. (2022), who found that SFL pedagogies promote learners' agency and engagement in diverse language learning contexts (Troya et al., 2022). By providing learners with explicit models of genre and language function, educators can enable them to internalize and reproduce complex discourse patterns.

The overall findings of this study also harmonize with the foundational perspectives of Eggins (2004), who argued that meaning in language is systematically constructed through the interaction of ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions (Eggins, 2004). The learners in the experimental group demonstrated improvement across all three dimensions: their narratives reflected more nuanced ideas (ideational), better coherence and audience awareness (textual), and more appropriate modality and evaluative language (interpersonal). The study thus validates the pedagogical value of the SFL approach in integrating form, function, and context in language learning.

Despite the promising outcomes, the study is not without limitations. Firstly, the sample size was relatively small, consisting of only 38 intermediate-level learners from a single language institute. This limited scope may constrain the generalizability of the findings across broader EFL populations. Secondly, the instructional intervention was limited to a specific number of short stories and was delivered over only eight sessions. A more extended intervention with a broader variety of genres may have yielded additional insights into long-term retention and

transferability. Thirdly, the study focused solely on narrative genre and oral reproduction; it did not investigate writing or other spoken genres, such as exposition or argumentation. Lastly, external variables such as learners' prior exposure to storytelling, personality traits (e.g., shyness or extroversion), and intrinsic motivation may have influenced their performance but were not controlled in the study design.

Future research should aim to replicate and expand upon these findings by including a more diverse and larger population of EFL learners across different institutions and proficiency levels. Comparative studies involving other genres—such as procedural, persuasive, or descriptive texts—would help determine whether the observed benefits of SFL-based instruction extend beyond narrative forms. Longitudinal studies examining the retention of oral complexity and content transfer over time would also provide valuable insights into the sustainability of genre-based gains. Additionally, incorporating multimodal storytelling (e.g., digital storytelling) and peer-interaction frameworks could shed light on the role of technology and collaboration in genre pedagogy. Finally, exploring learners' perceptions and attitudes toward SFL-based instruction would enrich our understanding of its motivational and cognitive effects.

From a pedagogical perspective, the findings strongly support the integration of SFL-based genre pedagogy into EFL curricula, particularly when developing oral proficiency. Educators are encouraged to use short stories not just for passive reading or vocabulary practice, but as dynamic tools for genre analysis, speaking tasks, and narrative reconstruction. Lesson planning should incorporate the teaching-learning cycle, emphasizing deconstruction, joint construction, and independent construction phases. Teachers should provide explicit instruction on genre structure, lexico-grammatical choices, and contextual variables, thereby helping learners move beyond memorized reproduction toward purposeful communication. Teacher training programs should also equip educators with the theoretical knowledge and practical skills needed to apply SFL genre theory in classroom settings.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

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In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

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