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EDITED BY

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REVIEWED BY

Mohammad Zohrabi,
University of Tabriz, Iran
George Kwame Agbanyo,
Honghe University, China

*CORRESPONDENCE

Guliz Turgut Dost
✉ guliz.turgut@adu.edu.tr

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Exploring genre representation in English textbooks: implications for curriculum, textbook and literacy development

Guliz Turgut Dost*

Department of Foreign Language Education, School of Education, Aydın Adnan Menderes University, Aydın, Türkiye

Introduction: Textbooks are vital tools for exposing learners to diverse genres, allowing them to explore various texts formats and styles, and developing genre awareness through reading texts.

Methods: This qualitative study investigated the representation and frequency of genres within 7–12 grade English textbooks by situating its analysis within the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics. Utilizing document analysis, the study evaluated a total of 114 texts from the English textbooks published by Turkish Ministry of National Education.

Results: Findings reveal that report genre constitutes the most prominent genre, with descriptive reports being the most frequently encountered subcategory. Argumentation follows as the second most modeled genre, followed by recounts. However, macro genres, procedures, and narratives are underrepresented. Along with the underrepresented genres, there are also significant disparities in the exposure to genre subcategories, suggesting that while foundational genres are cultivated, there remains an over-reliance on specific genres at the expense of diversity. The results further reveal a gradual increase in genre complexity and diversity through grades, excluding a notable decline in diversity at the 9th and 10th grades.

Discussion: This study underscores the importance of diversifying genre representation in K-12 English textbooks and offers recommendations for curriculum developers and educators to enhance genre awareness and literacy skills among English language learners.

KEYWORDS

genre awareness, reading, textbooks, K-12, systemic functional linguistics (SFL), English language learners (ELL)

1 Introduction

Early exposure to different genres is reported to enhance reading comprehension, foster learner autonomy, and aid the development of mental models, all of which are necessary for effective literacy development (Devitt, 2004; Haria and Midgette, 2014; Johnson-Laird, 1980; van Lacum et al., 2012). Furthermore, interpretation of a text is stated to be directed by readers' expectations regarding the topic of the text and the author's commentary on it (Nystrand, 1986). Therefore, Johns (1997) argues that genre awareness is also essential for effective reading.

However, some genres demonstrate different characteristics across cultures (Brisk, 2014; Connor, 2002; Hinkel, 2002). Therefore, understanding the linguistic and structural features of genres can be challenging for English language learners (ELLs). As a result, exposing ELLs to genres in the target language becomes particularly vital to raise their genre awareness. Through such exposure ELLs could become aware of different communicative purposes genres serve, their stylistic features and cultural nuances. As a result, the genre approach has gained

significant attention in teaching English literacy skills and has been integrated into many nations' curricula, syllabi and course materials (Derewianka, 2015).

Despite the recognized significance and traction of the genre approach, a noticeable gap exists in the research focused on genre instruction in the K-12 English language education in Turkey. Extensive studies have been conducted at higher education concerning genre awareness and its influence on writing instruction (Almacioğlu and Okan, 2018; Sarıcaoğlu, 2022; Söğüt, 2023). Nevertheless, the investigation of genre within K-12 settings remains underexplored. Addressing this gap in literature, this study analyzed genres modeled to ELLs through reading texts within textbooks which are published by the Turkish Ministry of National Education (MoNE). The study aimed to elucidate the representation and distribution of genres specifically within the 7th to 12th grade English textbooks through Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). By investigating how genre exposure is operationalized in educational materials, this study displays the indispensable role textbooks have in English language literacy development in terms of raising genre awareness. The study further highlights the critical need for textbook and curriculum reform to deliberately and systematically integrate genre and genre approach into English language teaching (ELT).

1.1 Genre approach

Genre, a foundational concept in literacy education, can be defined simply as “abstract, socially recognized ways of using language” (Hyland, 2007, p. 149). More comprehensively, genre is recurrent configurations of language and forms of text employed in cultural writing practices to derive meaning and achieve specific social purposes (Brisk et al., 2021; Martin and Rose, 2008). Genre has evolved into one of the most influential concepts in language education since the late 1980s and 1990s (Hyland, 2004). Following its raising influence, the genre approach has emerged as a vital pedagogical method for literacy instruction, particularly in fostering awareness of various genres during the development of early literacy skills (Brisk, 2014).

The genre approach combines product and process approaches and values teaching various text types as well as use of language. Similar to the product approach, it considers literacy predominantly from a linguistic perspective (Badger and White, 2000). However, different from the product approach, its central aspect is the purpose of the written text and using language patterns appropriately to accomplish coherent, purposeful communication. The genre approach also mirrors the process approach by valuing collaborative learning experiences. It emphasizes developing awareness of various genres, which is argued to facilitate reading comprehension by directing reading practice (van Lacum et al., 2012), stimulating learner autonomy (Haria and Midgette, 2014), providing schematic structures (Devitt, 2004), and constructing mental models (Johnson-Laird, 1980).

The genre approach has been theorized and applied to pedagogies by various academic schools, including the New Rhetoric (NR), English for Specific Purposes (ESP), and Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) (Johns, 2008). NRS is based on ethnographic perspective (Hyon, 1996). Therefore, the NRG theorists focus on identifying the underpinning ideologies, political beliefs as well as cultural and social notions in texts and contexts (Freedman, 1999). It is concerned mainly with teaching rhetoric, composition studies, and

professional writing to native language speakers (Hyon, 1996). ESP relies on Swales (1990) genre analysis and considers genre as a tool for teaching ELLs the discipline-specific writing in academic and professional settings (Hyon, 1996). Finally, SFL is based on Halliday's (1978) theory of language and approaches to genre from a linguistic perspective.

SFL argues that genres are defined by culture and the register is defined by the context of situation (Gebhard and Martin, 2010; as cited in Brisk et al., 2011). Thus, it requires teachers to explicitly teach each genre's communicative purpose as well as structural and linguistic feature and scaffold ELLs for the appropriate use of the language required by each genre (Henry and Roseberry, 1998) to build their formal and linguistic schemata (Carrell, 1988; Carrell and Eisterhold, 1983; as cited in Hyon, 2002). Explicitly teaching genres to ELLs is also crucial due to the fact that when ELLs are left to discover the complexities of how language works in different genres for themselves, they are likely to be thrown back on the discourse conventions of their own cultures (Christie, 1999). Studies indicate that explicit instruction on genre enhances ELLs abilities and effectiveness in reading as well as reading speed (Carrell, 1985; Davis et al., 1988; Shih, 1992).

The genres commonly encountered in K-12 settings are presented in Appendix A. These genres include recounts, fictional narratives, procedures, reports, explanations, and expositions (Brisk, 2014). However, macro genres could also be created by integrating and synthesizing different genres (Martin and Rose, 2008). Finally, according to Brisk (2014), difficulty of genres vary due to their structural and linguistic demands. For instance, while teaching procedures at the beginning of the semester with low-proficient ELLs is appropriate, teaching fictional narratives should be done with ELLs who have higher proficiency in English and more developed cognitive skills.

1.2 Teaching and learning cycle

Teaching and Learning Cycle (TLC) (Rothery, 1996) is the instructional sequence used while teaching genres in the light of the SFL theory. Although it has various versions (e.g., Derewianka and Jones 2016; Gebhard 2019; as cited in Accurso and Gebhard, 2021), the common goal in all versions is;

for teachers to support students in expanding their meaning-making repertoires and developing deeper disciplinary understandings and independence by exploring ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings and how they are made not just with language, but across written texts, visuals, and performance pieces (Accurso and Gebhard, 2021, p. 405).

TLC is influenced by Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978), specifically concepts of scaffolding and Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Therefore, it emphasizes collaboration between learners and between teachers and learners. TLC has four phases: negotiation of field or developing content knowledge, deconstruction of text, joint construction of text, and independent construction of text (Rothery, 1996). During the negotiation of field, “students develop the content of knowledge of the particular discipline and topic they will be writing about and the language needed to express that knowledge” (Brisk, 2014, p. 9). In this phase, students engage in hands-on, dialogic experiences to prepare for specific disciplinary reading and/or writing

tasks. During the deconstruction of text, teachers help students deconstruct, or closely analyze, sample texts that illustrate the stages and the language features of the target genre. During the joint construction of text, “teachers collaborate with the students in their class to jointly construct the text on the basis of what they have learned through the deconstruction of mentor text” (Brisk, 2014, p. 9). In this phase, the crucial point is approaching the mentor text as writers, not readers, to learn how to write a similar text (Brisk, 2014). After building enough knowledge and acquiring enough experience about writing the genre in focus, students continue to the fourth phase, which is constructing text independently. At this phase, students receive feedback from their teachers and/or peers on meaning-focused issues such as purpose, language, audience, and cohesion, rather than structure-focused issues such as vocabulary, spelling, and punctuation errors (Derewianka, 1990). Teachers and/or students reduce scaffolding as students become more proficient readers, writers, analysts, and critics of disciplinary discourses (Rose and Martin, 2012). TLC is a nonlinear process in which the phases could be repeated (Rothery, 1994).

In summary, TLC provides students with “models, explicit instruction, and critical analyses of authors’ and their own semiotic choices as they learn to interpret and produce academic texts in school” (Gebhard and Harman, 2011, p. 49). Teachers scaffold or support their students within ZPD as they advance to the different phases of the TLC cycle.

1.3 The role of textbooks in genre instruction in Turkey

Curricula for all school subjects in Turkey are prepared by the Turkish MoNE. The latest English curricula for 2nd to 12th grades were prepared in 2018 (Ministry of National Education, 2018a, 2018b) based on the principles and descriptors of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001). Based on the curricula, textbooks are written and published again under the supervision of the MoNE.

It is widely known that textbooks play a central role in the learning process as they are the primary sources in schools that help teachers and students conduct the teaching and learning processes in line with the curriculum and its objectives (Anjaneyulu, 2016; Tomlinson, 2001). While valid for all contexts, in contexts where English is a foreign language, rather than second, educational settings and “coursebooks play a vital role in exposing the students to the English” (Zohrabi, 2010 p. 213). In particular, English textbooks expose ELLs to diverse genres through reading texts.

Therefore, the role of textbooks in modeling genres’ structural and linguistic features through reading texts is indispensable. Such modeling lays the groundwork for learners to become informed individuals who can recognize the distinct characteristics, structures, and purposes of different genres (Devitt, 2004; Johns, 2008; Millar, 2011) and can better anticipate the type of content and the context in which it is presented (Hyon, 2002). When associated with TLC, the modeling that reading texts do of genres corresponds to the second phase, deconstruction of text.

Studies conducted in Turkey on genre approach commonly target higher education and investigate topics such as genre-based approach

to writing instruction (Almacioğlu and Okan, 2018) and disciplinary writing (Saricaoğlu, 2022), knowledge of genre elements and recontextualization of genre awareness (Söğüt, 2023); genre-based reading instruction and its impact on critical literacy skills (Taspinar and Cubukcu, 2019), genre-based instruction and its impact on writing performance (Uzun, 2017; Uzun and Zehir Topkaya, 2019) and foreign language writing anxiety (Uzun and Zehir Topkaya, 2018).

There are not as many studies in K-12 education as there are in higher education. One of the studies that focuses on genre at K-12 level is a case study by Haq (2021), who conducted a composition focused analysis of the English curriculum for secondary school in Turkey. Results indicate that the curriculum offered multiple opportunities to develop competence in writing composition. Another study on genre at K-12 context is by Seban (2022), who investigated the effect of genre-specific strategy instruction on the writing achievement of fourth-grade students. However, this study was conducted for Turkish language, not English. Similarly, Bayram and Kara (2020) focused on genre and textbooks but in secondary school Turkish language textbooks. Finally, a study by Turgut Dost (2023) investigated whether genre is integrated into the reading objectives in the English curricula for 7th-12th grades, and how these objectives (if any) were reflected in the corresponding reading texts in the English textbooks (Turgut Dost, 2023). Results investigating the integration of genres into reading objectives in the curriculum reveal that out of 94 reading objectives only six objectives state genre explicitly within grades 7 through 12. Furthermore, results investigating the genres mentioned in these six reading objectives and their corresponding reading texts in the textbooks show that only three genres were represented correctly in the corresponding reading texts. The study further show that the reading texts in the textbooks expose ELLs to various genres and does some deconstruction of text through after-reading exercises in which students are asked about the structure of the text such as the title, thesis statement, supporting statements (Turgut Dost, 2023). This study is valuable for revealing that genre is greatly ignored in the curriculum and that the textbooks are misaligned with curriculum. Finally, this study is the first and only study, to the best knowledge of the author, investigating the English curriculum in relation to genre in the Turkish context, which is also the context and content of this current study.

Despite the acknowledged importance of genre instruction, it is evident that studies investigating genre at K-12 curricula and textbooks are rare within Turkey. Evaluating the textbooks is important in order to identify their weaknesses and improve them (Zohrabi, 2010). To fill this gap, this study analyzed the genres presented to ELLs as depicted in reading texts from textbooks published by the MoNE. The study has various unique contributions to the L2 English literacy at K-12 education. Firstly, it addresses a significant gap in the existing literature on genre pedagogy in Turkey’s K-12 education system and provides a much-needed focus on younger learners. Secondly, by examining the genres available in English textbooks, the study highlights how these materials contribute to raising awareness about genres among students. Furthermore, the MoE may find the study helpful in pinpointing the deficiencies in each grade’s instructional materials as well as the needs of each grade. Thus, findings of this study provides critical insights that underscore the necessity to reform textbooks and curricula, emphasizing the importance of genre awareness in enhancing English literacy skills. Overall, this study has implications for educational

policy as well as curriculum and textbook design to ultimately improve ELLs' experiences and outcomes in English language education.

2 Method

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the representation and distribution of genres that are modeled through reading texts in 7–12 grade English textbooks. The research questions were:

- 1 How is the overall distribution of genres and their subcategories at 7–12 grade textbooks?
- 2 How are the frequencies of genres and subcategories distributed among each grade level?

Using SFL as its theoretical framework, document analysis, a systematic process of reviewing and evaluating printed or electronic materials, was used for data collection (Bowen, 2009). In this respect, based on the genre categories given by Brisk (2014) (see Appendix A) English course books for 7th through 12th grades were analyzed (see Appendix B). The textbooks for 2nd through 6th grades were not analyzed because the English instruction starts at 2nd grade and the reading skill within grades 2 and 6 is identified as “very limited” or “limited.” While “very limited” is defined as short oral/written texts and materials that are limited to word level, “limited” is defined as no more than 25 words at a time (Ministry of National Education, 2018a). Thus, students are exposed to longer reading texts starting from 7th grade.

In order to address the validity and reliability of the study, inter-rater reliability was conducted. The researcher requested a colleague with a PhD degree in ELT and a minor degree in linguistics to be a rater. After reviewing the genres from Appendix A and clarifying confusions and questions, 5 texts from various English textbook publishers were selected and identified for their genre. After the initial practice, 6 texts randomly selected from different MoNE textbooks were analyzed. However, the initial agreement was weak (33%) (McHugh, 2012). Therefore, texts written in dialogue and interview forms were excluded from the analysis because each question asked in interviews change the purpose and dialogues do not serve as model texts to be deconstructed making identification and modeling of genre difficult (Humphrey et al., 2012; Martin and Rose, 2008 as cited in Brisk, 2014). Additionally, the sentences in these dialogues and interviews were short, which again makes the identification of the genre difficult due to lacking cohesion and cohesiveness. After this exclusion, another inter-rater reliability was conducted with 10 randomly selected text and the agreement was moderate (60%) (McHugh, 2012). Although identification of some genres were palpable, because texts belonged clearly to one type of genre or its subcategory, some genres were difficult to identify. For instance, in the 8th grade coursebook, a text had two paragraphs. The first paragraph told about a massive earthquake that happened in Van in the past, and hence, a historical recount. The second explained what causes an earthquake, for this reason it is a causal explanation. Such texts were categorized as macrogenres, meaning they were composed of various genres (Brisk, 2014). After this clarification, a final inter-rater reliability was conducted with 15 texts and the agreement was strong

(73%) (McHugh, 2012). After reaching a strong agreement, a total of 114 texts from 60 units were examined.

3 Results

The first research question investigated the overall distribution of genres and their subcategories in 7–12 grade textbooks. Addressing the first research question, Table 1 presents the frequency (f) and percentage (%) values of genres and their subcategories in the textbooks (for further details see Appendices C, D). The overall analysis reveals a diverse landscape of genres and their respective subcategories.

Reports stands out as the most prominent genre, accounting for 41.2% of the overall corpus. As for its three subcategories, descriptive reports are encountered more often ($f = 39$) followed by classifying reports ($f = 7$). Categorizational report is modeled only once through the reading texts among all grades ($f = 1$). Following reports, argument is the second most modeled genre (22%) in reading texts. However, exposure to its subcategories is distinctly unequal as evident by the frequencies of expository ($f = 22$) and discussion texts ($f = 3$). The third prominent genre is recount, comprising 17.5% of the overall corpus. Except for autobiography ($f = 1$), the subcategories of

TABLE 1 Frequencies and percentages of genres (and subcategories) in the 7–12 grade textbooks.

Genres	Subcategories	All Grades	
		f	%
Macro Genre		11	9.6
Procedure		2	1,8
Protocols		2	1,8
Report	Descriptive	39	83
	Categorizational	1	2
	Classifying	7	15
	Total	47	41.2
Explanation	Causal	1	25
	Factorial	3	75
	Total	4	3.5
Recount	Biography	7	35
	Autobiography	1	5
	Historical	4	20
	Personal	8	40
	Total	20	17.5
Narrative	Fabl	1	33
	Historical	1	33
	Short story	1	33
	Total	3	2.6
Argument	Discussion	3	12
	Expository	22	88
	Total	25	22
Grand total		114	100

recounts, which are personal, biographical, and historical recounts, hold a significant and somewhat balanced distribution ($f = 40, f = 35, f = 20$ respectively). Table 1 also reveals other genres, such as explanation (3.5%), narrative (2.6%), procedure (1.8%) and protocol (1.8%), albeit in smaller proportions. Finally, texts that combined various genres, namely macro genres, made 9.6% of all the reading texts.

The second research question investigated how the frequency of genres and their subcategories are distributed among each grade level. Table 2 demonstrates the results as frequencies and percentages (for further details see Appendices E, F, G, H, I, J). The grand total of texts shows that there are 17 texts in the 7th grade, 16 texts in the 8th, 15 in the 9th, 19 in the 10th, 23 in the 11th, and 24 in the 12th grade. The increase in the number of texts from 7th to 12th grade, except for the 9th grade which had the lowest amount of text, indicates a growing familiarity and complexity with various writing styles as student's progress through their education.

The results further reveal striking trends in the distribution of genres and subcategories among grades. The procedure and protocol genres are the least represented genres in textbooks across all grades. Only 2 texts are identified for each genre; 8th (6.3%) and 10th (5.3%) grades for procedure and 7th (5.9%) and 10th grades (5.3%) for protocols. In terms of macro genre, only a small percentage of students across all grades are exposed to it. The 7th grade has a representation of 2 macro genre texts (11.8%), while the 8th and 9th grade show an increase to 3 texts (19 and 20%, respectively). The 10th grade does not have any texts modeling macro genre. The 11th grade has 2 texts (8.7%) and the 12th grade conclude with 1 text modeling macro genre (4.2%). This indicates a gradual decrease, particularly noticeable in the 10th grade, in modeling of the macro genre texts as students progress through the grades.

Reports emerge as the most frequently modeled genre, specifically descriptive reports, which are illustrated predominantly across all grades. Descriptive reports show a particularly high frequency in 7th

TABLE 2 Frequencies and percentages of genres and their subcategories by grade levels.

Genres	Subcategories	7th Grade		8th Grade		9th Grade		10th Grade		11th Grade		12th Grade	
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Macro genre	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Total	2	11.8	3	19	3	20	-	-	2	8.7	1	4.2
Procedure	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Total	-	-	1	6.3	-	-	1	5.3	-	-	-	-
Protocols	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Total	1	5.9	-	-	-	-	1	5.3	-	-	-	-
Report	Descriptive	6	85	9	100	7	100	8	73	4	67	5	71
	Categorizational	1	15	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Classifying	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	27	2	33	2	29
	Total	7	41.2	9	56.3	7	46.7	11	57.9	6	26.1	7	29.2
Explanation	Causal	-	-	1	100	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Factorial	1	100	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	100
	Sequential	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Cyclical	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Systems	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Total	1	5.9	1	6.3	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	8.3
Recount	Biography	1	50	-	-	-	-	2	100	3	33	1	17
	Autobiography	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	11	-	-
	Historical	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	22	2	33
	Personal	1	50	1	100	-	-	-	-	3	33	3	50
	Total	2	11.8	1	6.3	-	-	2	10.5	9	39.1	6	25
Narrative	Fabl	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	100	-	-
	Historical	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	100
	Short story	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	100	-	-	-	-
	Total	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	5.3	1	4.3	1	4.2
Argument	Discussion	-	-	-	-	1	20	1	33	-	-	1	14
	Expository	4	100	1	100	4	80	2	67	5	100	6	86
	Total	4	23.5	1	6.3	5	33.3	3	15.8	5	21.7	7	29.2
Grand total		17	100	16	100	15	100	19	100	23	100	24	100

grade (85%), which peak in 8th and 9th grades (100%) but show a decline in 10th (73%) and 11th grades (67%) followed by a slightly increase in 12th grade (71%). On the other hand, classifying reports begin in the 10th grade (27%) and peak in 11th grade (33%), with a significant drop in the 12th grade (29%). Categorizational reports are observed only in the 7th grade (15%).

Texts modeling explanation exhibit a limited presence in textbooks. Causal and factorial explanations are the only categories recorded. The 8th grade features a single causal explanation and lacks texts in subsequent grades. On the other hand, factorial explanation is represented in the 7th grade with 1 text, which is later reintroduced in 12th grade with 2 texts. The total percentage of explanation (3.5%) across all grades remains low, signaling minimal modeling in comparison to other genres.

Frequency of recounts vary significantly among grades. In the 7th grade, only biography and personal recounts appear once in textbooks. In the 8th grade, only personal recount is modeled in 1 text. However, in the 9th grade there are not any texts written as a recount. In the 10th grade biography is reintroduced through 2 texts. The 11th grade is the only grade which expose students to all subcategories of recount genre with a stronger inclination toward historical recounts and biography (33% each). Similarly, the 12th grade model all subcategories of recount, except for autobiography, with an inclination toward personal recount (50%). These results suggest that 11th and 12th grades introduce a greater variety of recount subcategories at greater frequencies.

Narrative has a low representation (2.6%) across all grades. Narrative texts appear in the 10th grade with only 1 short story, in the 11th grade as 1 fabl and in the 12th grade as 1 historical narrative. This signifies a lack of emphasis on narrative genre, particularly through the middle school to early high school transition.

Arguments are modeled in all grade levels with the highest percentage in the 9th grade (33.3%) followed by the 12th (29.2%), 7th (23.5%) and 11th grade (21.7%). In arguments, expository texts emerge as the most frequent genre, especially reaching as high as 100% in both 7th, 8th, and 11th grades. However, it declines to 80% in the 9th grade and drops dramatically to 67% in the 10th grade but rebounds to 86% in the 12th grade, indicating a possible reminding of argumentative writing. Unlike expository texts, which are modeled in all grade levels, discussion texts are noted primarily in the 9th grade (20%), 10th (33%) and 12th (14%) grades. In summary, the argument genre shows some degree of consistency, with significant engagement in the form of expository writing. Modeling of the discussion, however, remains relatively low across grades.

In conclusion, the analysis of genre distribution in the reading texts reveals that reports are the most common genre of the overall corpus, with descriptive reports being particularly prevalent. The findings highlight an increasing complexity in genre exposure as students advance from 7th to 12th grade, suggesting a progressive familiarity with diverse writing styles. Although the argument genre ranks second, the disparity between the subcategories indicates a predominant emphasis on expository texts over discussions. Notably, the recount genre also shows varied representation, especially in the 11th and 12th grades, where a wider variety of subcategories is introduced. Other genres, such as explanations, narratives, procedures, and protocols, are less frequently modeled, revealing a potential gap in genre exposure across education levels. Finally, some genre subcategories in recount, explanation and fictional narrative are not

modelled at all in any grade level. In recount, procedural recount, imaginative recount and empathetic autobiography are not modeled. In explanation, sequential, cyclical and systems subcategories are not modeled at all. Overall, these results underscore the importance of understanding genre distribution and its implications for developing comprehensive literacy skills in students across different educational stages.

4 Discussion

This study examined the representation and frequency of genres in 7–12 grade textbooks. Overall, findings reveal several notable trends such as a growing familiarity and complexity with various genres as students progress through their education. The gradual increase in the number of genres and their subcategories from grade 7 to 12, with the exception of a slight dip in grade 9, suggests a growing complexity and exposure to diverse writing styles as students progress through their education (Dornbrack and Dixon, 2014). This aligns with the scholarly understanding that acquiring genre knowledge and control is a crucial component of developing writing competence, as students must learn to navigate and employ a range of genres to effectively communicate and engage with various rhetorical situations (Dornbrack and Dixon, 2014; Johns, 2008).

Reports, which account for a significant 41.2% of the total texts, was the most predominant genre in the textbooks. This highlights a strong emphasis on information-oriented texts in educational settings, which may reflect broader curricular priorities aimed at developing students' abilities to process and present factual information clearly and effectively. However, unequal exposure to the subcategories within the reports was irrefutable. While descriptive reports are prominently featured, classifying and categorizational reports are limited. Descriptive reports are notably prevalent in the 7th to 9th grades suggesting that early middle textbooks prioritize students' initial engagement with structured informational writing. However, its decline in 10th and 11th grades signifies a potential shift towards more complex writing forms. Interestingly, while classifying reports begin gaining traction in 10th grade, its subsequent peak in 11th grade indicates a curricular pivot towards comparative analysis and classification, which are essential skills for advanced academic writing. This suggests that as students become familiar with reports, they develop a more nuanced understanding of that genre and its associated categories, likely driven by increased exposure thorough reading texts and their coursework (Lemke, 1992). These findings align with broader trends in the development of academic literacy skills, which have emphasized the importance of cultivating genre awareness and the ability to adapt one's writing to suit different rhetorical contexts (Johns, 2008; Thaksanan and Chaturongakul, 2023). The emphasis on descriptive reports could be beneficial for developing students' foundational writing skills, but it may also lead to an overreliance on this genre at the expense of exposure to a more diverse range of writing styles (Thaksanan and Chaturongakul, 2023). Therefore, the unequal exposure to the subcategories within the reports is concerning as it may hinder students' abilities to analyze and synthesize information beyond mere descriptions, suggesting an imbalance in genre representation that educators may want to address.

The second prominent genre, argument, is woven into textbooks across all grades, indicating a strong focus on developing critical

thinking and persuasive skills. As for the subcategories, there is a notable presence of expository texts, particularly in lower grades, which demonstrates the emphasis given to the learning of expository skills at early grades. However, the significant drop observed during the 9th and 10th grades, followed by a resurgence in the 12th grade, could be related to the introduction of the discussion texts in the 9th and 10th grades. It's possible that the variation in expository text between the 9th and 10th grades is the consequence of deliberate and meticulous planning aimed at reducing the cognitive and linguistic strain that students could otherwise face from frequent exposure to both expository texts and debate. Thus, while students are initially saturated with expository writing, they gradually encounter discussion as they progress, reflecting their increasing sophistication in critical thinking. However, the unequal distribution of the subcategories, with expository texts far outnumbering discussion texts, suggests that there may be room for more balanced exposure to discussion texts, particularly since they lay the groundwork for higher-order thinking.

Recounts, as the third-most modeled genre, showcase a modest yet notable presence particularly in the latter stages of high school. The fact that 11th and 12th grades present a full range of recount subcategories implies that at this stage, textbooks are enhancing students' familiarity with diverse recount texts. Especially the increased exposure to personal and historical recounts in higher grades aligns with the developmental progression of adolescents, as they begin to engage more deeply with their own narratives and the broader historical context (Brisk, 2014). Such increased exposure could be a purposeful pedagogical strategy aimed at integrating personal voice and historical context into literacy, which are requisite skills for college readiness. However, the inconsistent representation of recounts in earlier grades warrants further examination, as it may limit students' opportunities to practice reflective and narrative writing earlier in their educational journey. The minimal representation of genres such as narrative, procedure, and protocol suggests a potential gap in genre exposure that may restrict students' abilities to express creativity and understand procedural discourse. Since the limited engagement in these genres indicates a missed opportunity for students to diversify their writing skills, the need for more comprehensive coverage of narrative, procedure, and protocol texts becomes more prominent.

Finally, the trends in macro genres reveal a concerning decline in exposure throughout the grades. The low representation of macro genres, especially its absence in the 10th grade, suggests that integrative approaches to writing—in which students synthesize various genres—is not adequately modeled in the textbooks. This may hinder students' ability to engage with and comprehend more complex and multi-layered genres (Jolliffe and Snaith, 2017). Therefore, the inclusion of macro genres should be encouraged to facilitate a more holistic approach to literacy, enabling students to develop a nuanced understanding of how different genres interact and complement one another. More exposure to macro genres could also provide a pathway for students to engage in interdisciplinary writing and critical synthesis, which could enhance their overall academic performance.

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be proposed to enhance the representation of genre in textbooks and raising genre awareness. Given that reports, particularly descriptive reports, dominate the genre landscape in current textbooks, there is a critical need to diversify the range of genres presented. Textbook developers should aim to incorporate a more balanced selection of

genres across grade levels, including greater representation of narrative, explanation, and procedural texts, to ensure a well-rounded literary education. Additionally, by deliberately recapping previously covered genres, genre awareness could be reinforced. Curriculum designers and textbook developers should prioritize students' age, English language proficiency and cognitive development for suitable integration of genres into curriculum and textbooks. As students progress from 7th to 12th grade, their familiarity and complexity in dealing with various genres should be enhanced. For instance, 7th and 8th graders could be exposed to cognitively and linguistically less demanding genres such as procedures, protocols or personal recounts, while 10th, 11th and 12th graders could be exposed more to macro genres, explanation and narrative genres that align with their advancing cognitive and language skills. Curriculum developers are encouraged to scaffold learning experiences, gradually introducing more complex genres and subcategories, particularly after the 9th grade, where a dip in text diversity is noted.

While ensuring a systematic and balanced distribution of genres across different grade levels, preventing monotony is vital. Therefore, textbooks should strive to include multiple examples of distinct genres, ensuring enough exposure to facilitate deeper genre awareness and reading comprehension (Ceylan et al., 2017). After designing curriculum and textbook contents, curriculum designers and textbook authors should collaborate closely with educators to review and refine the order and frequency of genre instruction within textbooks. This collaboration should focus on creating a coherent progression of genres that correspond with students' developmental as well as linguistic characteristics, thereby enhancing genre awareness and retention. Finally, one of the most important recommendations, which is for language teachers, is providing students with explicit instruction on genre conventions as argued in SFL and implemented through TLC. Such instruction will help students improve their genre awareness and literacy skills in English. Future research should investigate the implications of genre exposure and awareness on students' English literacy outcomes and the effectiveness of curricular interventions aimed at diversifying genre exposure across various grade levels for both academic and real-world contexts.

5 Conclusion

This study sheds light on the prominent genres and their relative frequencies in the reading texts used in 7th through 12th grade English textbooks. While foundational genres such as reports, arguments, and recounts are well represented, other genres, namely procedures, protocols and narrative texts, that contribute to a well-rounded literacy education are noticeably underrepresented. Furthermore, the dip in certain genres, particularly in 9th and 10th grades, poses important questions about textbook designs. The findings highlight the importance of designing textbooks that offer students a comprehensive, yet balanced range of genres. Given the considerable disparities in genres and their representation among grade levels, educational stakeholders should assess whether existing curricula and textbooks sufficiently prepare students for the demands of post-secondary English education and English literacy skills. This study could help the MoE determine the gaps in the instructional materials for each grade as well as the demands of each grade. Educators and

curriculum developers should collaborate to prepare ELLs for the complexities of English literacy skills by broadening the genre exposure in textbooks and ensuring a more balanced and comprehensive genre experience for students.

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Author contributions

GTD: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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Supplementary material

The Supplementary material for this article can be found online at: <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/feduc.2025.1543992/full#supplementary-material>

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