Innovations in Pedagogy and Technology
https://journals.niepublish.com/ipt

ARTICLE

Grammar and Writing Instruction in Indiana Public Schools: An Evaluation of the IDOE ELA Academic Standards (6–12)

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluates the Indiana Department of Education's (IDOE) English Language Arts (ELA) academic standards for grades 6–12 through a linguistic lens to determine their alignment with current research on grammar and writing instruction. Prompted by ongoing concerns about students' writing performance and college readiness, the paper examines whether the IDOE standards promote linguistically informed pedagogies shown to support writing development. Through a qualitative analysis of the standards, four key themes emerge: prescriptivism vs. descriptivism, the connection between spoken and written language, grammar instruction in isolation vs. in context, and writing as a long-term developmental process. Findings reveal that while the standards include isolated elements consistent with modern linguistic research, they overwhelmingly reflect a traditional, prescriptive approach to grammar and fail to make explicit connections between grammar, language diversity, and writing instruction. Additionally, the standards present a linear view of writing development that contrasts with contemporary understandings of writing as recursive and socially situated. The paper concludes that substantial revisions are needed for the standards to fully support linguistically informed grammar and writing instruction and to better equip Indiana students for academic success.

Keywords: English Language Arts; Grammar Instruction; Writing Instruction; Prescriptivism; Indiana Department of Education

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ARTICLE INFO
Received: 6 October 2025 | Revised: 25 November 2025 | Accepted: 3 December 2025 | Published Online: 11 December 2025
DOI: https://doi.org/10.63385/ipt.v2i1.67

CITATION
Dill, A., O'Neil, D., 2026. Grammar and Writing Instruction in Indiana Public Schools: An Evaluation of the IDOE ELA Academic Standards (6–12). Innovations in Pedagogy and Technology. 2(1): 1–13. DOI: https://doi.org/10.63385/ipt.v2i1.67

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1. Introduction

In October 2022, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reported a four-year national decline in fourth- and eighth-grade math and reading scores [1]. Much of this decline in general academic skills may be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to school closures and online teaching, but pre-pandemic scores were already less than ideal. Research from the last twenty years indicates many students were writing below grade level. In 2011, the NAEP released grade 12 writing assessment data that revealed roughly 70% of students were performing below the proficient level, with just over 25% performing below the basic level [2]. Further, at both community colleges and public four-year institutions, a large percentage of first-year and second-year students enroll in remedial or developmental courses, including writing courses, suggesting a lack of adequate preparation in secondary school instruction [3]. Consistent with these findings, ACT data have shown that a significant percentage of high school graduates are not meeting college readiness benchmarks in English and writing. In the 2022 ACT Profile Report, only 48% of test-takers met the college readiness benchmark in English, and even fewer demonstrated strong writing skills, indicating persistent gaps in academic preparedness [4].

This paper explores the role of grammar instruction in writing development in secondary education as reflected in the Indiana Academic Standards for English Language Arts (ELA). In 2010, Indiana became one of the first states to adopt the national Common Core State Standards, but in 2014 Indiana was also the first to back out of these national standards. Several of the newer Indiana standards and Common Core standards are similar in content, while others reveal slight differences in expectation. Also, some Indiana standards have no Common Core standard equivalent, and vice versa. The alignment between the two sets of standards for each grade level is provided on the Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) website in the Indiana Academic Standards/Common Core State Standards Correlation Guide [5]. In addition to providing the standards for each individual grade level, the IDOE also provides vertical articulation charts for kindergarten-grade 5 and grades 6–12. These charts illustrate the connection between standards across grade levels. While this paper considers the long-term trajectory of the ELA standards beginning from kindergarten, the focus is on the ELA vertical articulation chart for grades 6–12.

The qualitative study presented in this paper was guided by the following research question: Are the Indiana Academic Standards for English Language Arts (6–12) consistent with current research on linguistically informed grammar and writing instruction? More research is needed to find and develop effective pedagogical practices, but current evidence suggests that grammar and writing pedagogies informed by modern linguistic research and supported by metacognitive research can have a positive impact on students' understanding of language and on their writing performance. If explicit language does not exist in IDOE standards to promote pedagogies informed by current research, there is no accountability to equip educators in light of the knowledge gained from this research and to provide students with the tools they need to see positive academic gains. The results of the present study show that the IDOE standards for English Language Arts (6–12) contain some elements recommended by current linguistic research but that more revisions need to be made to the standards in order to encourage more robust linguistically oriented instruction in grammar and writing lessons in Indiana schools.

2. Literature Review

Over the last 50 years, a strong debate has taken place regarding the value of formal grammar instruction in the classroom. Much of the current research points to two events from the 1960s as the genesis of this debate. The first is the Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer [6] report in which the authors conclude that traditional grammar instruction has little value: "The teaching of formal grammar has a negligible or, because it usually displaces some instruction and practice in actual composition, even a harmful effect on the improvement of writing" (pp. 37– 38). This report significantly influenced the thinking of academics and educators at the time, including those involved in the 1966 Dartmouth Conference. The conference was convened to discuss the role of English in higher education, but the place of grammar instruction in the ELA curriculum received high attention. It was reported that many left feeling "(traditional) grammar teaching was 'a waste of time' " [7] (p. 4). This growing skep-

ticism toward grammar instruction was reinforced by later research, including Hillocks'[8] comprehensive meta-analysis, which concluded that traditional grammar instruction showed no significant impact on writing improvement. His findings supported earlier critiques and further influenced writing pedagogy away from formal grammar and toward process-based approaches. Negative feelings toward grammar instruction spread beyond the United States to Anglophone countries throughout the world, leading to "widespread abandoning of grammar teaching"[9] (p. 42).

Amid these discussions, linguistically informed approaches to language and grammar instruction were being developed. For example, some researchers experimented with sentence-combining exercises that sought to improve syntactic complexity. However, the general sense that grammar instruction yielded no significant positive results on student writing led to confusion and thus avoidance of any explicit language instruction in many classrooms throughout the U.S.[7]. This disconnect between linguistic theory and classroom practice has been documented in research emphasizing the missed opportunities when linguistically informed insights are ignored in curriculum design[10]. Myhill and Watson[9] note that there have emerged "two further strands in the grammar debate" that have become part of the regular cycle of discussion over the issue (p. 42). The first strand is comprised of politicians and members of the general public who believe that declining language standards are linked to the lack of attention to grammar. The second strand is comprised mostly of linguists who claim knowledge about language—not just knowledge of its parts but knowledge about how it is used in context and to create meaning—can benefit student learning and practice. Members of this strand believe effective pedagogical approaches can be discovered through research. They hold that when grammar instruction is meaningfully integrated into writing pedagogy, it can positively impact student outcomes[11], suggesting the need for more nuanced approaches rather than wholesale avoidance.

Linguistic scholars argue this research needs to be experimental and specific. Van Rijt et al.[12] critique general grammar education research in their literature review, concluding that most of this type of research is rather anecdotal and needs to improve in scientific rigor. The field of linguistics offers tools for more rigorous research into effective grammar and writing pedagogies. While educators have been skeptical for some time regarding the relevancy of linguistic research and study, criticizing the field as being too technical and irrelevant to education, there are linguists who advocate for greater cooperation between the fields of linguistics and education, "in which the school subject and the related academic discipline mutually benefit from one another"[12] (p. 623). Myhill[13] similarly emphasizes the importance of building a shared understanding between linguists and educators, calling for research that is not only methodologically sound but also pedagogically relevant. Locke[14] also argues for bridging this divide, encouraging educators to draw from linguistic insights while maintaining sensitivity to classroom realities. The two disciplines do not need to be at odds but can work together to develop research and implement findings into educational standards and curricula.

The research presented in this paper aims to participate in the discussion regarding the cooperation between linguistics and education. Recent scholarly literature on grammar instruction with linguistic underpinnings discusses four salient topics to consider when developing linguistically informed pedagogies:

1. Prescriptivism vs. Descriptivism
2. Connection Between Spoken and Written Language
3. Grammar Instruction in Isolation vs. Grammar Instruction in Context and
4. Writing as a Long-Term Developing Process.

These four topics are discussed in more detail in the remainder of the Literature Review under the corresponding numbered subheadings, and they guide the qualitative analysis of the IDOE academic standards for English Language Arts (6–12) presented under the Results and Discussion heading below.

2.1. Prescriptivism vs. Descriptivism

The word "grammar" has several meanings and must be defined carefully in discussions about grammar instruction[15]. The "grammar" that was principally rejected at the Dartmouth Conference was behaviorist in nature, "largely characterized by drills and exercises in labelling and identifying word classes and syntactical structures"[9] (p. 42). Chatterjee and Halder[15] describe this view of grammar as the prescriptive approach. The belief under this view is that

grammar skills can be learned and practiced in isolation and applied to various contexts as needed, working toward the use of a pure form of the language that can be known by all users if practiced enough[9].

Weaver[16] critiques this approach, arguing for a contextualized model in which grammar is understood as a tool for making meaning. Andrews[17] similarly emphasizes the need to clarify what we mean by "grammar" and move away from outdated instructional methods still found in some classrooms. In short, modern linguists aim to describe how a language is actually used instead of prescribing how it *ought* to be used. "Grammar" in the descriptive sense is not just a set of rules or parts of speech but is language as it functions to create and convey meaning according to various contexts[18]. As opposed to the more traditional prescriptive approach, that emphasizes form and error avoidance, the descriptive approach is focused on meaning and linguistic awareness. The descriptive approach does, however, entail elements of the prescriptive approach in that it promotes the study of "the entire interrelated system of structures: sounds, words, meanings, and sentences within a language"[15] (p. 2). The three linguistic frameworks that tend to promote the value of grammar instruction as it is understood within the descriptive approach are systemic functional linguistics (SFL), cognitive linguistics, and rhetorical grammar[15]. This paper focuses on SFL research and best practices with acknowledgement that cognitive theory and rhetorical grammar have influenced the development of academic thought within this framework.

2.2. Connection Between Spoken and Written Language

The SFL framework emphasizes the social function of language and the importance of context. The first context in which language is learned and used is the home, and this context is principally oral. It is important for grammar instruction to consider students' oral language as their foundation for writing because students draw on the knowledge of their spoken language for their written language[19]. Educators must recognize that students "do not enter the classroom as blank slates and likely come to the classroom with knowledge of writing gained through speech"[20] (p. 225).

According to the metacognitive model, students pass through a variety of stages while learning to associate the spoken word with the written word. This process reaches fruition when students learn how to read and to increase their vocabulary through reading and when they learn how to produce their own written word. In learning to write, students take their own thoughts and turn them into objects of thought for themselves and for others by making them visible through a written text[20]. As students advance from one grade level to the next, they are expected to develop greater complexity in their thinking about assigned readings and about their own thoughts that they record on paper. When editing their work, they are expected to manipulate their writing to form thoughtful, well-structured academic prose. The metacognitive model states that from the beginning of the writing process until a final product is produced, students should learn to monitor their own writing, which requires object-level and meta-level thinking. In addition, the academic language students are expected to use in their writing for school is less natural than their everyday spoken language, and so it is important for students to learn to identify the differences between their home dialect and the expected academic dialect and build upon preexisting language resources. The increasingly complex metacognitive demand on students throughout their education requires great help through explicit instruction centered around "socialization into a community of learners around academic texts"[21].

It is important to remember that Standard English, which is the privileged version of English in academic writing, is historically the dialect of white, middle-class, Midwestern families and that other legitimate dialects of English exist. Because these non-Standard dialects may vary significantly from the privileged variety, students from homes that speak these dialects face greater challenges in the classroom. For example, students might struggle to translate their thoughts into the standard dialect because it feels less natural, or they might develop negative identities as writers if their home dialects are only ever identified with "incorrect" usage[22, 23]. These students often experience a tension between their linguistic identity and the demands of academic language, a dynamic that schools must work to recognize and address with sensitivity and respect.

Instead, these other dialects of English need to be acknowledged as legitimate varieties. Students should be taught to identify and explain the features of their spoken dialect, and then that linguistic knowledge can be built upon to instruct students regarding translating their thoughts into the

academic written vernacular [24]. Recent research has gone so far as to explore the connection between L1 grammar instruction and L2 grammar instruction to identify helpful overlaps in pedagogy [12, 25]. The linguistic knowledge gained through a better understanding of their home dialect and how it differs from the privileged variety is more likely to empower students in the translation process. And further, acknowledging the legitimacy of students' spoken language and encouraging students as mature language users—as opposed to speakers of "correct" English or "incorrect" English—can potentially increase their motivation to write as far as this acknowledgement of legitimacy instills a sense of value and pride in their home language and encourages them to build positive identities as writers [19].

2.3. Grammar Instruction in Isolation vs. Grammar Instruction in Context

Some of the early linguistic research on grammar instruction showed a positive impact on student reading and writing when there was an integrated language arts experience in which listening, speaking, reading, and writing were combined to promote growth [15]. This led to research in more recent years that has sought to develop specific pedagogies and pedagogical timelines for contextualized grammar instruction. In this type of instruction, model texts are analyzed in order to discuss grammatical effects and to teach students how to transfer the discussed approaches to their own writing [25]. The emphasis of this research is on developing knowledge about language and increasing metalinguistic understanding. The goal is for students to become more aware of available language choices, more aware of the impact those choices have in various contexts and for various audiences, and more comfortable talking about their linguistic choices in their writing. As Hacker [20] notes, "A person of course may freely use language to great effect, even though he or she may have little or no knowledge of these components of language. However, knowledge of these components at the next level of language representation (i.e., metalinguistics) has been strongly associated with literacy development" (p. 229). Students learn to think more deeply about their own writing and, as a result, become better thinkers in general. They also grow in their ability to talk about linguistic choices and the impact of specific language on meaning, increasing literacy across all content areas of their education.

As stated above, the emphasis of prescriptive grammar is correctness or avoidance of error. Linguists who promote a descriptive approach do not completely reject the usefulness of prescriptive grammar instruction in as far as such instruction provides a common language for understanding and discussing parts of speech and the effect of usage on meaning [19, 26]. In order to talk about linguistic choices with greater complexity and understanding, students need to be equipped with grammatical language at the word, sentence, and text levels. However, the belief within the descriptive framework is that grammatical terms and concepts will be better understood when they are taught in context as opposed to being taught in isolation from texts through drilling-and-grilling and rote memorization [26]. Further, when students make grammatical errors in their writing, they need to be taught the reason behind their errors. According to Denham [7], these errors tend not to be "random but are instead indicative of systematic features of knowledge and use of language" (p. 12). If students can understand the reasons behind the errors they tend to make systematically, they can better monitor their writing, and feedback from their teachers will be more empowering.

A practical example of contextualized grammar instruction would be a lesson that uses mentor texts to highlight how professional authors employ sentence structures for effect. For instance, in a middle-grade novel such as *Because of Winn-Dixie* by Kate DiCamillo, the author frequently uses compound sentences joined with "and" to mimic a child's storytelling voice. A teacher could guide students in analyzing several passages where this structure creates a sense of rhythm or builds momentum. Together, the class would discuss how the grammar (compound sentences with coordinating conjunctions) shapes the tone and voice of the narrative. Students would then be invited to practice writing their own short narratives in which they intentionally experiment with joining ideas through different coordinating conjunctions, reflecting on how each choice influences the flow and mood of their writing. In this way, the grammatical focus (compound sentences and coordinating conjunctions) is not presented in isolation but emerges naturally from authentic reading and leads directly into purposeful writing. The grammatical discussion becomes part of meaning-making, rather than a detached exercise, which is the central principle of contextualized grammar instruction.

2.4. Writing as a Long-Term Developing Process

Finally, a linguistic framework acknowledges that writing is a complex skill that cannot be fully mastered by the end of students' secondary educations. As Myhill et al.[26] claim, "writing is perhaps the most complex activity learners undertake, drawing on cognitive, social and linguistic resources" (p. 6). Some standards and curricula imply a chronological progress from learning a grammatical concept to being able to apply it to writing, but there is no evidence to support this thinking[9]. Instead, as Graham[19] notes, writing development does not follow a straight line from learning about a concept to being able to apply it, and there is no one-size-fits-all approach:

> *[W]riting development is variable*, with no single path or end point (Bazerman et al., 2017). It is uneven, as students are better at some writing tasks than at others (Graham, Hebert, Sandbank, & Harris, 2016). It does not follow a steady progression from point A to point B, as students' growth can accelerate, plateau, or regress. It varies from one student to the next, because students' experiences as writers differ, as does their genetic and neurological makeup (Graham, 2018). There is no prespecified sequence of normal development in writing, just social norms of what might be expected … (p. 287)

Because every student has their own unique experience as a writer, they will process writing instruction differently from one another and will apply what they have learned about writing as their individual cognitive capacities allow. Further, as students grow as human beings or have setbacks and struggles, they will grow and struggle as writers, making mastery an elusive goal. Students will be better served in this life-long process if they are equipped with the tools to think about and communicate the impact of language choices on meaning as opposed to being given superficial checklists for errors.

A study by Myhill and Jones[27] found that many students lacked the metalinguistic knowledge to adequately express linguistic choices in their writing and that revision of student writing was more automatized than it was conscious. Scholars have expressed concern over this automation because what has been learned implicitly during early childhood development (i.e., language) is made explicit through grammar instruction for only a limited period of time in primary and secondary schools. Policymakers, administrators, and educators expect students either to master explicit grammar knowledge (which rarely happens, if ever) or to develop an implicit knowledge of grammar during the explicit phase of instruction that is then directly applied to student writing. However, scholars believe the expectation for grammar knowledge to become implicit is disempowering because it leads to students losing conscious control over the production of thought[20, 26]. Writing is often oversimplified as something that can be mastered just by teaching an ever-growing list of rules in order. Explicit instruction needs to continue so that students can keep and develop conscious control over the production of thought, and this needs to continue within a community of learners consisting of their peers and instructors[21].

3. Method

This study aims to answer the following question, as stated in the introduction: Are the Indiana Academic Standards for English Language Arts (6–12) consistent with current research on linguistically informed grammar and writing instruction? This section describes the methods used to answer this research question.

3.1. Coding Technique

The four main coding terms used in this study correspond to the main themes discussed in the Literature Review. These themes appear consistently throughout the scholarly literature as salient elements of a linguistically informed approach to grammar in writing instruction:

1. Prescriptivism vs. Descriptivism
2. Connection Between Spoken and Written Language
3. Grammar Instruction in Isolation vs. Grammar Instruction in Context and
4. Writing as a Long-Term Developing Process.

These coding themes were applied to a qualitative analysis of the 2020 Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) academic standards for English Language Arts (ELA) to

highlight and identify language promoting either more traditional, prescriptive approaches to grammar and writing instruction or more modern, linguistically informed descriptive approaches. The findings of this study are discussed below.

3.2. Indiana Academic Standards

The IDOE published its own academic standards that are separate from the Common Core standards. The most recent IDOE standards for ELA were published in December 2020. Teacher preparation programs in Indiana include the academic standards in their courses, and standard 8.1 of the IDOE Content Standards for Educators ELA states that, "English language arts teachers have a broad and comprehensive understanding of content-specific instruction and assessment in English language arts, including the Indiana Academic Standards and Core Standards for English/Language Arts"[28] (p. 6). The IDOE also strongly encourages administrators and teachers to understand and utilize the vertical articulation charts mentioned in the introduction of this paper, stating that a "deep understanding of the vertical articulation of the standards will enable educators to make the best instructional decisions"[29] (p. 2). The following study focuses on the 6-12 ELA Vertical Articulation Chart of the IDOE academic standards because the charts show trajectory across grade levels.

The 41-page 6–12 ELA Vertical Articulation Chart is comprised of six main sections, each with its own subsections:

- Reading: Literature (four subsections)
- Reading: Nonfiction (four subsections)
- Reading: Vocabulary (three subsections)
- Reading: Writing (six subsections)
- Speaking and Listening (four subsections)
- Media Literacy (two subsections).

The standards are laid out in grid form, and each standard is labeled by 1) the grade level, 2) the abbreviation of its main section, 3) the number of its subsection, and 4) the number of the standard within the subsection. For example, standard 8.RL.2.3 is an eighth-grade standard in the Reading: Literature section, subsection two ("Key Ideas and Textual Support"), and it is the third standard of the subsection.

As stated by the IDOE[29], the goal of the academic standards is to prepare students for college and career opportunities upon graduation. The standards are intended to be "complemented by robust, evidence-based instructional practices" and used in alignment with Indiana's Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) plan, a 178-page document outlining Indiana's academic achievement goals and graduation rate goals and the resources and types of accountabilities necessary for meeting these goals (p. 2). The ESSA plans from participating states are reviewed and approved by the U.S. Department of Education.

Limitations are acknowledged in the introduction to the Indiana vertical articulations, including the caveats that the standards are not an exhaustive list nor are they a curriculum. However, the standards identify "the academic content or skills that Indiana students need to be prepared for both college and career," and the IDOE[29] urges districts and schools to adopt "a strong standards-based approach to instruction" when choosing and implementing curricula (p. 2). Overall, in order to fully understand the standards and how best to implement them, a vast knowledge base is needed. This knowledge base is unrealistic for most of the educators, parents, students, and community members the standards claim to intend to inform. Also, while the grid form of the standards document is helpful for observing the trajectory of each standard across grade level, this format makes it complicated to determine how standards in different sections can inform and support one another. For example, it is difficult to track how the Reading: Literature standards might work together with the Reading: Writing standards.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Prescriptivism vs. Descriptivism

The aim of the analysis under this first theme is to determine how the IDOE understands and defines "grammar," that is, to evaluate the degree to which the IDOE adopts a more traditional prescriptive approach or a more modern linguistic descriptive approach. In the IDOE standards, the word "grammar" does not appear explicitly until Reading: Writing subsection six: "Conventions of Standard English" (6-12.W.6). The conventions listed in this subsection include:

- recognizing and properly using nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, pronouns, and their correspond-

ing phrases and clauses with increasing complexity from kindergarten to grade 12 (6-12.W.6.1A-C);

- learning the differences between simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences and properly using varying sentence patterns (6-12.W.6.1D-E);
- and knowing and properly using conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling (6-12.W.6.2A-C).

These conventions are referred to as "skills" in the description of the Writing section found in the standards document for each individual grade level [30] (p. 10). Students are expected to "demonstrate command" of these "skills" throughout their secondary education as seen in the repetition of the phrase "[d]emonstrate command of English grammar and usage" in standards 6-12.W.6.1 [29] (p. 33).

Writing subsection six appears in isolation from "The Writing Genres" and "The Writing Process" subsections (6-12.W.3 and 6-12.W.4), suggesting, as the prescriptive approach believes, that grammar can be learned and practiced in isolation and can be applied to various contexts as needed. Further, that students are expected to "demonstrate command" of grammar with increasing complexity as they progress through the grade levels suggests students are able to control their grammar and usage with a level of mastery by the time they graduate. There are grades at which "[m]astery" of specific conventions are explicitly expected, such as in standard 6.W.61C students should know how to write "sentences using relative adverbs (e.g., where, when) and explaining their functions in the sentence" by grade 4 [29] (p. 34). There is also an emphasis in the standards on correctness, which is an emphasis within the prescriptive approach. And finally, this subsection, "Conventions of Standard English," is the first and only part of the standards in which the word "grammar" appears. It is only used in reference to the rules of Standard English and labeling, identifying, and properly using the parts of speech.

These results suggest that the IDOE adheres to a more traditional, prescriptive definition of grammar. Based on the language use outlined above, grammar is associated with a checklist of skills. There is little to no connection between the grammar points and higher-order activities such as generating ideas, monitoring language use in the communication of these ideas, or analyzing literature or non-fiction texts. Placing grammar in an isolated subsection of the writing standards as it appears in the IDOE standards potentially positions grammar as secondary to wider issues of language and creativity in writing. This view can then be transferred to students if the curricula used by various school corporations do not help connect this more technical components of grammar to wider language issues and if teachers are not equipped with the appropriate linguistic knowledge, and current linguistic research has found that many educators are not adequately equipped with this knowledge [12, 15, 18, 21, 26]. Elements of a more linguistically-informed, descriptive definition of grammar do exist within the Indiana standards (discussed below). However, these elements do not seem to contribute to the IDOE's own understanding and definition of grammar, as shown by the isolated and limited use of the concept within the standards and the emphasis on correctness and mastery.

4.2. Connection Between Spoken and Written Language

The aim of the analysis under this theme is to determine if the IDOE standards acknowledge students' spoken language as the foundation for their written language and to evaluate if the IDOE acknowledges other dialects of English as legitimate varieties. In the IDOE [31] standards for ELA for grades K-5, students are expected to develop phonological awareness and to "recognize that written words are made up of sequences of letters" (K.RF.2.2) and to "recognize that words are combined to form sentences" (K.RF.2.3) (p. 4). That is, students are learning to recognize that the words they speak are represented in writing by these sequences of letters. Then they are learning to recognize that the thoughts they communicate through spoken syntax are represented through written words that are combined to form sentences. Students are taught how to sound out the letters they see as they learn how to read written words. They are also expected to attach meaning to the sounds, especially as the standards progress. For example, standard 3.RV.2.4 states students will "use a known word as a clue to the meaning of an unknown word with the same root …" [31] (p. 19). The connection between the spoken word and written word is mostly implicit, and the writing standards focus more on handwriting and building a foundation for what is to come in the standards for grades 6–12.

Throughout the IDOE [29] vertical articulation for

grades 6–12, the use of spoken language is also implied. In the reading standards, students are expected to recognize, analyze, and discuss specific literary points during the reading portions of class, and they are expected to develop their vocabulary. For example, standard 9-10.RL.1 states, "By the end of grade 9, students will interact with texts proficiently and independently at the low end of the range …" (p. 3). The form in which this interaction is meant to take is not specified here or throughout the Reading section of the standards, but in standard 9-10.W.1, the Writing section, it is stated that students are to "apply reading standards to support analysis, reflection, and research …" (p. 17). Also, standard 9-10.SL.2.1 in the Speaking and Listening section, states students will "initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions on grade-appropriate topics, texts, and issues …" (p. 38). The combination of these standards implies the reading standards are meant to be executed in the form of either the written word or the spoken word depending on the lesson.

The only place in which explicit reference is made to students' spoken language is in the Speaking and Listening standards. The "Guiding Principle" for this section—which is only included in the documents for individual grade levels and not in the vertical articulation—states that students will learn to communicate for a variety of purposes and in a variety of contexts and that they will "develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects"[30] (p. 15). However, there is no explicit guidance in the standards regarding the manner in which students are to gain an understanding of diverse language use, patterns, and dialects. There is more of a focus on students learning to understand and respect their peers' differing viewpoints as it pertains to class discussions. For example, standard 7.SL.2.5 states students will "acknowledge new information expressed by others, and consider it in relation to one's own views"[29] (p. 40).

While the IDOE English Language Arts standards contain important foundational elements regarding students' initial awareness of spoken language, especially as it pertains to reading, explicit instruction ceases after grade 5. No strong connection is made between students' spoken language and written language based on the use of implicit and vague wording mentioned above. The inclusion of language that acknowledges diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects appears superficial when there is no standard that includes specific details regarding how this understanding of diversity is to be acquired. Further, if teachers are not adequately equipped with linguistic subject knowledge, they will be less likely to engage in conversations with students about the influence of their spoken dialect on their writing and less likely to include lessons on linguistic diversity in their lesson plans. The IDOE fails to acknowledge other varieties of English as legitimate when in Writing subsection six, "Conventions of Standard English," the word "Standard" is dropped as an adjective for "English" in the first standard. It states that students will "[d]emonstrate command of English grammar and usage," suggesting only one form of correct English exists[29] (p. 33). That one form is the Standard English delineated in the rest of Writing subsection six.

4.3. Grammar Instruction in Isolation vs. Grammar Instruction in Context

The aim of the analysis under this theme is to evaluate the degree to which the IDOE encourages an integrated approach to grammar instruction by using reading, writing, and listening lessons to instruct students about available linguistic choices and the impact of their choices on meaning in writing. The IDOE[29] English Language Arts (6–12) standards do allow space for an integrated approach to grammar in implied ways. For example, in the learning outcomes for Reading: Literature and Reading: Nonfiction in sixth grade, one of the first standards states students will "analyze what a text says explicitly as well as draw inferences from the text through citing textual evidence" (6. RL.2.1) (p. 4). Word usage is likely to enter the conversation when analyzing what the text says explicitly. There is also room to explore the ambiguity of meaning or multiple layers of meaning expressed through word usage and structure when students draw inferences. The same is true for standards that require students to cite details to support their analysis of a text, to discuss the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, and to consider author choices concerning the structure of a text. For example, standard 9-10.RN.3.2 requires students to "[a]nalyze how an author's ideas or claims are developed and refined by particular sentences, paragraphs, or larger portions of a text"[29] (p. 10). Presumably, linguistic details are implied since ideas and claims are developed through language.

The subsection titled "Vocabulary in Literature and Nonfiction Texts" contains more explicit language promoting discussions about grammar in context from a descriptive approach. But the word "grammar" is never used to connect the idea of word meaning with grammatical structure, staying consistent with the analysis of the IDOE's definition of "grammar" above. One example is standard 9-10.RV.3.1 that states students will learn to "analyze the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in works of literature," allowing for discussions of linguistic choices in context. The same standard also states that students are expected to "analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings," again, including more specific discussion about linguistic choices and the impact of language and grammar use on communicating meaning [29] (p. 15). However, grammatical and linguistic terminology is not used at all in the language of the standard. The implication is that if curricula do not make these connections for teachers and if teachers are not adequately equipped to make these connections for themselves, they will also not be made for the students.

Additionally, there does not seem to be any expectation, at least explicitly, for student writing to be discussed as students are evaluating and analyzing literature and nonfiction texts. That is, there are no direct expectations for students to use the texts they read as models for their own writing. There is a connection between the reading and writing standards drawn in the "Learning Outcome for Writing" subsection, which states that students will "apply reading standards to support analysis, reflection, and research by drawing evidence from literature and nonfiction texts" (6-12.W.1) [29] (p. 17). However, this does not seem to mean that students will use the texts they read as models for their writing but that they will communicate what they learned through reading and analyzing texts in written form.

Within the writing standards specifically, there is no standard that requires students to learn how to monitor their own writing for meaning and structure. This might be assumed in "The Writing Process" subsection (6-12.W.4) in the revision, rewriting, and editing stages, but there is no requirement for teaching students how to monitor unless students are meant to apply the strategies they learned through reading analysis to their own writing. Again, this intention is never directly stated. There is also no explicit mention that grammar will be taught in the context of writing exercises. Though the "Conventions of Standard English" subsection is incorporated in the Writing section, these standards do not communicate any expectation for students to demonstrate the command of English grammar, usage, capitalization, punctuation, and spelling in the context of larger writing assignments. In "The Writing Genres" and "The Writing Process" subsections (6-12.W.3 and 6-12.W.4), the focus is more on vocabulary use, appropriate and varied transitions, language that is precise and concise, and cohesive (see, for example, standard 9-10.W.3.2). For example, standard 9-10.W.3.2 states that students will "[c]hoose language and content-specific vocabulary that express ideas precisely and concisely to manage the complexity of the topic, recognizing and eliminating wordiness and redundancy" [29] (p. 23). It is unclear how students are taught to "choose" the right kind of language and if it means that they are to directly apply grammatical knowledge to their writing since the word "grammar" is never equated with "language" in the standards.

In terms of expectations for students to learn to monitor their thoughts and practice conscious control during the writing process, the language in the standards is not very strong. In grades 6–8, students are expected to draft, revise, rewrite, try new approaches, and "edit to produce and strengthen writing that is clear and coherent" (6-8.W.4). The expectations increase in complexity in grades 9–12 with the additional requirement for students to address "what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience" within their writing (9-12.W.4) [29] (p. 29). It is unclear what sort of attention is given to linguistic elements when teaching students to make these choices. It is also unclear whether the language of these standards indicates students are monitoring their writing in a linguistic sense and what kind of feedback teachers are expected to give students to aid them in this process. Again, no direct connections are made between learning grammatical conventions and applying those conventions to the production of meaning in the writing process.

The IDOE standards do not explicitly require grammar points to be learned in isolation, but as discussed in the analysis above under the theme "Prescriptivism vs. Descriptivism," the IDOE holds a largely prescriptive view of grammar instruction and isolates grammar within the conventions subsection of the standards. There is room for grammar to be taught in context as demonstrated by

the standards mentioned above that demand analysis of the meanings of words and phrases in works of literature and authorial choices in the structure of texts. But as discussed under the theme "Connection Between Spoken and Written Language," if teachers lack sufficient linguistic subject knowledge, they will be unable to help students transfer what they learn from the analysis of other texts to their own writing. The IDOE standards do not make explicit, meaningful connections as far as encouraging students to apply monitoring strategies to their own writing that might have been learned while analyzing other texts.

4.4. Writing as a Long-Term Developing Process

The last category of analysis focuses on the trajectory of grammar instruction and the writing process as well as expectations for mastery in these two areas in the IDOE standards. A linguistic framework acknowledges that writing is a complex skill with no one-size-fits-all approach and that does not follow a steady progression of development. Also, it is a continuous process that takes place within a community of learners. In regard to the IDOE's [29] understanding of grammar, standards 6-12.W.6.1-2, the learning outcome is the same for all grades: "Demonstrate command of English grammar and usage, focusing on …" (p. 33). Of all the sections, this has the most columns shaded grey, which communicates the expectation that students will "build upon and continue applying conventions learned previously" (pp. 33–37). That students are not only expected to build upon previously learned conventions but that they are also expected to "continue applying" those conventions could suggest continued explicit instruction regarding grammar. Whether or not this is happening in schools would need to be determined at the local level.

The Indiana ELA (6–12) standards do suggest a chronological process of development in that students are expected to build on the skills learned in the previous years of their education. Students should be expected to handle increasingly complex tasks as they build on past knowledge and as they develop physically, mentally, and emotionally. But again, not enough explicit connections are made within the IDOE standards regarding expectations for the transfer of knowledge to application. The grid pattern of the standards and the compounding lists from one grade level to the next suggest writing development takes place in a steady progression, which is counter to the claims of current linguistic research.

Perhaps one of the most concerning features of the standards within this theme occurs in "The Writing Process" subsection (6-12.W.4) when the expectation that students will plan and develop their writing "with some guidance and support from peers and adults" stops after eighth grade [29] (p. 29). The standards for writing for grades 9–12 suggest that students can master the writing process and production of meaning independent of external help. While students should be expected to become increasingly independent, even students and academics at the highest levels depend on guidance and support from advisors and peers, especially when writing is considered a social act as it is within a linguistically informed framework. The steady progression communicated in the standards and the level of independent mastery expected demonstrate that the IDOE English Language Arts (6–12) standards are not consistent with current research on linguistically informed grammar and writing instruction under this theme.

5. Conclusions

While the IDOE claims that the ELA academic standards were developed using up-to-date research, they are not consistent with the modern linguistic research discussed in this paper. The understanding of grammar within the standards aligns more with the traditional, prescriptive approach. An attempt is made to promote awareness and acceptance of linguistic diversity in a social and cultural sense, but there is no clear delineation of how students' diverse linguistic backgrounds influence their view of grammar instruction and impact their application of language instruction to their writing. The segmented format of the standards and the lack of explicit language linking reading analysis to student writing (i.e., using texts as models for writing) encourages grammar instruction in isolation rather than in context. And the linear, compounding nature of expectations for writing combined with the removal of the explicit expectation for high school students to seek support from their peers and teachers in the writing process suggest a steady progression of writing development leading to mastery. Available data suggest many students are not reaching this level of skill by the time they graduate and enter college or the workforce [2, 3].

As mentioned above, the IDOE acknowledges that the standards "may be used as the basis for curriculum" but that they are not a curriculum on their own[29] (p. 2). There is also an acknowledgment that the identified academic content and skills in the standards are not exhaustive. These caveats are helpful, but without being in the room during the formation of the standards, curricula producers, school board members, administrators, and educators are left on their own to interpret expectations for application and integration. In order to receive a more complete picture of whether or not students are receiving an ELA education that is linguistically informed, a survey would need to be taken of the various curricula used by school corporations throughout the state. But the underlying assumption of this paper is that if no explicit language exists within the Indiana standards to promote greater linguistic understanding, there is little external motivation or accountability for school corporations to choose curricula with linguistically-informed approaches, for teachers to receive sufficient linguistic knowledge in their pre- and in-service trainings, and for teachers to then make these connections for students in the classroom.

Author Contributions

Both authors contributed equally to the conception, design, data collection, analysis, and writing of this study. Both authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding

This work received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement

Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement

The data used in this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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