

DESIGNING THE PROCEDURE FOR APPLYING THE LEARNING CORNERS METHODOLOGY TO ORGANIZE TEACHING WRITING SOCIAL ARGUMENTATIVE PARAGRAPHS FOR 11TH GRADERS

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Abstract. Teaching writing social argumentative (SA) paragraphs is an important content in the Vietnamese Literature curriculum for High school, contributing to the formation and development of students' writing ability in school. However, the reality shows that teachers often organize writing lessons in just one pattern: all students will write on the same topic with the same system of ideas developed, and as a result, it is difficult to find the students' imprint in each writing. In this article, we propose to design the procedure of organizing teaching writing of SA paragraphs by Learning Corners - a methodology aimed at allowing students to acquire knowledge according to different learning styles, ensuring students' deep learning and comfortable learning - as a measure to overcome the above-stated situation as well as promote the positivity, initiative, and creativity of students when participating in the writing process.

Keywords: learning corners, teaching writing social argumentative paragraphs, the writing process.

1. Introduction

Around the world, Learning Corners (LC) (also known as working in corners/learning in corners in which teachers will let learners study in groups at different corners) has been widely used in differentiated classrooms since the late twentieth century as an active teaching methodology to meet the needs of students according to different learning styles, facilitating them to learn as per their interests, strengths, and abilities so that they can learn deeply and comfortably (Tomlinson, C.A., 1999) [1]. Initially, this methodology was used mainly for preschool education and has been remarkably effective as it strongly promotes children's independence and joy of learning, allowing each child to have opportunities to explore, discover and challenge themselves through participating in their learning tasks at each corner (Gervilla, 2006) [2]. After that, LC was widely applied at higher education levels such as high school and university when it met the "student-centered" concept of modern education, allowing students to actively learn at their own pace, have the right to experience, and be willing to accept mistakes or failures, thereby drawing lessons from their own experiences as well as enhancing their sense of responsibility for their learning process (Coloma et al., 2008) [3]. The greatest value that LC brings to learners, according to José Salvador Blasco Magraner et al., (2019), is the

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continuous observation, interaction, and support of teachers for students; In addition, students are also given autonomy in learning when they - like “tourists” - are curious to visit different learning corners, observe and review the activities in each corner before having to consider and decide a corner to begin with [4].

In Vietnam, the LC methodology has been studied by some authors since 2003 through the Vietnam - Belgium project [5] and was initially applied in most subjects in high schools. As for Vietnamese and Literature subjects, there have been a number of studies that delve into the potential exploitation as well as show the effectiveness of the LC methodology in teaching reading comprehension such as the master's thesis named *Initially applying Learning Corners techniques to teaching reading comprehension in excerpts from Vu Nhu To plays - Truong Ba's Soul in the Butcher's Body - in high school* by Hua Thi Anh Thu [6]; the initiative report named *Application of Learning Corners in 5th grade reading subject* by Pham Thi Nhung [7]. As for teaching writing, especially teaching writing SA paragraphs, there is currently no work that mentions the use of the LC methodology to organize teaching. Most researchers approach teaching writing SA texts by process-based approach in teaching writing (Nguyen Thi Kim Hoa et al., 2019) [8], cooperative teaching (Pham Khanh Duong, 2019) [9], teaching integrated reading comprehension and writing (Tran Van Canh et al., 2019) [10] or communication methodology (Bui Thi Luyen, 2020) [11]. Consequently, with this study, we propose to design a procedure of organizing teaching writing SA paragraphs by the LC methodology to promote the activeness, initiative, and creativity of students when participating in the writing process, thus improving the quality of teaching and learning to write SA paragraphs in high schools.

2. Content

2.1. Some aspects of the Learning Corners methodology

2.1.1. The concept of Learning Corners

LC is an approach to organizing teaching according to the orientation of differentiation. According to Nguyen Tuyet Nga (2010), Learning Corners is a methodology in which teachers organize students to perform different tasks at specific positions in the classroom space to ensure deep and effective learning for students [12]. Similarly, Do Huong Tra et al., (2011) suggest that LC is a type of teaching organization in which students perform different tasks at specific positions in the classroom space but aim to occupy the same learning content [13]. And Nguyen Lang Binh et al., (2018) define as follows: learning corner is a methodology whereby students perform different tasks at defined positions in the classroom space but aim to occupy the same learning content as per different learning styles, ensuring students learn deeply and comfortably [14]. As a consequence, from the above definitions, we find that: LC is an active methodology that requires teachers to create a diverse learning environment to encourage, support, and motivate students to actively participate in learning activities.

2.1.2. The scientific basis of the Learning Corners methodology

The LC methodology is formed based on the following fundamental theories:

First, the Theory of Multiple Intelligences by Howard Gardner (1983) states that each person has some particular types of intelligence and abilities; Everyone is smart and intelligent in different fields, specifically: Linguistic-verbal, Logical-mathematical, Naturalistic, Bodily-kinesthetic, Musical-rhythmic and harmonic, Interpersonal, Intrapersonal, Visual-spatial. He especially emphasizes that human intelligence is not a constant, inherited from generation to generation, but can be improved through education [15]. Therefore, the teacher's task is to promote the strengths of students and facilitate them to be more successful in the path of knowledge acquisition.

Second, the theory of experiential learning by David Kolb (1984) states that: learning is the process by which knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. According to him, every learner must undergo four stages in his or her learning cycle, including Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualization, and Active Experimentation [16]. Therefore, in the process of organizing teaching, teachers need to create a learning environment with appropriate challenges so that students have the opportunity to overcome each stage.

Third, Neil Fleming's (1987) VARK model of learning styles addresses four learning styles that are common to most people, namely: Visual Learners, Aural/Auditory Learners, Reading and Writing Learners, Kinesthetic Learners [17]. According to him, each student can possess one or all four of the above-mentioned learning styles, and it is a tool to help teachers better understand how students learn as well as help students understand their learning styles. Subsequently, teachers may hold more basis to design learning tasks to meet the diversity of students and help them easily absorb the lesson.

As can be seen, each student has strengths in various intelligence, learning experiences as well as learning styles, so the learning activities in each student will take place differently. Therefore, the emergence of the LC methodology allows teachers to spend more time learning about their students, thereby making learning requirements and tasks suitable for them, helping them to be motivated and confident when participating in learning activities suitable to their strengths and abilities. This is also the basis to create the autonomy and activeness of students in the process of knowledge discovery.

2.1.3. Characteristics of the Learning Corners methodology

From the concept and scientific basis of LC, we believe that the LC methodology has the following basic characteristics:

Firstly, in the LC organization, the teaching content is approached in many different ways. There are many paths to knowledge rather than a single path – one-way transmission from teacher to student – as in traditional teaching; such as knowledge can be formed by students through reading - analyzing documents, doing experiments, debating, viewing - analyzing charts, images, videos, etc. However, not all knowledge content has such rich approaches; Therefore, to implement LC, teachers must first determine whether the teaching content can be exploited in many aspects or not.

Secondly, LC requires the classroom to have a large space for activities to take place flexibly. In other words, the classroom must be a safe environment in which students can be comfortable and free in the learning process, thereby stimulating curiosity as well as promoting the independence and responsibility of students.

Thirdly, the roles of teachers and students also shift when participating in LC, specifically: The teacher is the person who designs, organizes, instructs, advises, encourages, and helps students in the learning process; while students are actively seeking and mastering knowledge through participating in learning activities. The relationship between teachers and students is no longer monotonous, but there is reciprocal interaction and support in the teaching process.

2.1.4. Benefits of organizing Learning Corners

As mentioned above, LC is an active methodology that brings many benefits to learners. Students can learn deeply and sustainably; the personal interaction between teachers and students, students and students is significantly enhanced; In particular, average and weak students have more opportunities to approach the guidance of teachers in a detailed and specific way. Moreover, LC also responds to the differences in learning interests, styles, levels, and pace of each student, so that they feel more excited, comfortable, and confident when participating in the study practice. When participating in learning corners, each student has the opportunity to maximize their strengths and achieve academic success. This is also the basis for generating joy

and happiness for learners, serving as a foundation for building a happy classroom, a happy school that true education always aims at.

2.2. Assessing the ability to apply the learning corners methodology to organize teaching writing social argumentative paragraphs for 11th graders

2.2.1. Requirements to be met in teaching writing social argumentative texts for 11th graders in line with the Vietnamese General Education Curriculum in Literature (2018)

In line with the Vietnamese General Education Curriculum in Literature 2018, the teaching of writing SA texts for 11th graders must meet the following requirements: “Able to write an argumentative text on a social issue. The text requires i) clearly stating the point of view and system of theses; ii) being tightly structured with an impressive introduction and conclusion; iii) using persuasive arguments (real people and facts, statistics, quotes) and paying attention to the accuracy, reliability, relevance, and completeness of the arguments” [18; p.80]. Based on these guidelines, we can see that whether writing a text or a paragraph, students still have to ensure logic, individuality, and persuasion - which are the basic characteristics of SA essays. This is also the basis for the LC methodology to maximize its advantages when meeting the “personality” of students in the process of writing SA essays.

2.2.2. Characteristics of the activity of teaching writing social argumentative paragraphs

First of all, the special feature of argumentative paragraphs is that each argumentative issue can be approached from many different perspectives. As for SA texts, the diversity in approaches is even more obvious, for example, through the writer's attitude such as praising, criticizing, agreeing, opposing, objectively neutral; or through reasoning methods such as deductive, inductive, parallel, etc. In particular, in teaching writing paragraphs, teachers are not allowed to ask students to thoroughly solve the proposed problem by turning the paragraph into a miniature essay with all aspects of the problem, but can only ask students to choose and focus on a certain aspect of the proposed problem to solve, for example, the expression of the issue, the cause of the issue, the solution of the issue, the meaning of the issue, etc. Moreover, the process of finding ideas for writing is also quite flexible: Students can search for ideas by reading documents; they can also discuss in groups or simply brainstorm according to their perceptions. Therefore, this characteristic is very suitable for teaching writing paragraphs using the LC methodology.

In addition, the nature of the SA paragraph writing activity is that the writer must express his/her personal opinion, understanding, and assessment of the proposed issue through a system of arguments, theses, and appropriate evidence; thereby persuading others to believe that his/her judgment is valid. To do this, obviously, writers are always encouraged to be free, creative, and express their personal egos during writing. And like that, the flexible space provided by LC is perfectly suitable for promoting such things.

In addition, in the process of teaching writing SA paragraphs, students are the subject of writing activities; The teacher is only the one who suggests, supports, and guides the students. At the same time, with a small volume (paragraphs), the product of the writing process can be completed, edited, and evaluated right within the framework of a study session. Therefore, it is possible to implement teaching writing SA paragraphs in a class by the LC methodology.

2.2.3. Age characteristics of 11th graders

According to Educational Psychology, 11th graders are “on the way to adulthood”. They begin to form the ability to perceive, think critically, think abstractly independently and creatively. The ability to analyze, synthesize, compare, and abstract, etc., also begins to develop highly, helping them to be sharp in assessing and commenting on a social issue. The need to express an individual's identity, personality and thoughts is clearly revealed, plus the ability to

judge and solve problems is relatively flexible, so when participating in writing SA paragraphs according to the LC methodology, students will certainly be inspired and excited to write.

2.2.4. The current status of teaching writing SA paragraphs for 11 graders in high schools

Currently, the teaching of SA paragraph writing in high schools, in general, and for 11th graders, in particular, has made many positive changes. The teaching content of SA writing is quite rich whose topics are diverse, creative as well as associated with real-life, helping students to be able to relate when writing. In addition, teaching writing SA paragraphs has become popular and practical as in important exams (level transfer exam, National high school exam), the Literature exam always spends about 20% of the score on the SA paragraph writing. Thanks to that, the role of SA essays in students' perception somehow becomes clearly focused.

However, teachers' methodology in teaching SA paragraph writing is still quite inadequate. Although several teachers have initially paid attention to students' writing progress, most teachers still approach teaching writing in the manner of focusing on the final outcome. This is also the reason why the “sample paragraph” issue still lingers and affects the quality of teaching and learning to write SA paragraphs. In addition, students have not been facilitated nor encouraged to write in consonance with their own needs; they don't have many choices when participating in writing as there seems to be only one path set to default by the teacher. Therefore, the student's autonomy during the writing process is still limited. Therefore, to overcome this situation, we believe that LC is the solution.

2.3. Designing the procedure for applying the learning corners methodology to organize teaching writing social argumentative paragraphs for 11th graders

2.3.1. Determine the goal of the lesson; Teaching methodology and facilities

- Based on the present 11th-grade Literature curriculum, we choose the lesson content: Article 5 – Social argumentative essay to organize teaching writing SA paragraphs using the LC methodology. Execution duration: 2 lessons.

- By using the LC methodology to organize teaching writing SA paragraphs, students will gain:

+ Knowledge: know how to write a SA paragraph according to process; understand the concept of some social problems.

+ Skills: search for ideas using different ways; draft, edit, and self-assess written work.

+ Attitude: hold appropriate awareness, thought, and behavior against social issues in life.

- Main teaching methodology: learning corners; combined with cooperative (group) learning, process-based approach in teaching writing.

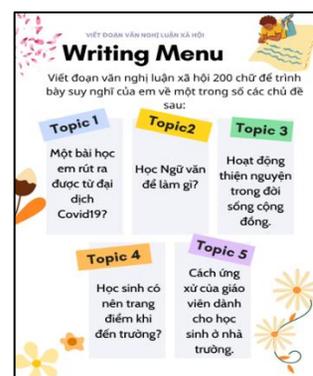
- Teaching facilities: televisions, computers with an internet connection, books, newspapers, dictionaries, study sheets.

2.3.2. Design a lesson plan

a. Activity 1: Instruct students to choose a topic to write about (5 minutes)

The teacher organizes a whole class study and introduces some topics for students to write about. In addition to some topics suggested by textbooks, teachers can expand on some other topics. The teacher will design a “Writing Menu” so that students may have the opportunity to choose. These menus will be displayed in all learning corners.

For example:



b. Activity 2: Develop learning corners with specific tasks (20 minutes)

- Material analysis corner:

+ Objectives: help students search for information related to the topic to be written through the resources suggested by the teacher. This corner is suitable for students who tend to learn through reading and analyzing documents.

+ Materials prepared by the teacher shall include writing menus, electronic devices with an internet connection for students to look up information; Vietnamese dictionaries, books, newspapers, magazines, videos that mention some topics in the given menu.

+ Students exploit information to serve to find ideas/evidence for the writing or learn how to write from books, newspapers, magazines, etc., by taking notes and completing the following study sheets:

Study sheet for Material Analysis Corner

Question 1: What is the argumentative topic you choose?

Question 2: Briefly describe the argumentative issue:

- Brief definition of the argumentative issue?
- Is this issue common in life? → Which evidence shows that?

Question 3: Which aspect of the argumentative issue do you intend to exploit in-depth?

- Cause
- Solution
- Meaning/Consequences
- Tasks/Missions/Lessons for oneself

Question 4: Brainstorm ideas for an aspect of the argumentative issue by answering one of the following sets of questions:

(1) Cause of the issue:

- What are the objective causes that lead to/cause the argumentative issue? (society, family, school, policy, politics, history, geography, culture, era, etc.)
- What is the subjective cause that leads to/causes the argumentative issue? (from each individual regarding cognitive ability, psychology, work, living situation, etc.)

(2) Solution to the issue:

- What can each individual do? (for example, sense of responsibility, raising awareness, taking concrete actions, constantly learning, etc.)
- What should the community do? (policies of the state, local government, the role of education/school/family, etc.; media system, etc.)

(3) Meaning/Consequence of the issue:

- Which object(s) is (are) affected by the argumentative issue?
- What results (consequences) do this issue brings about? (for the community, for each individual, for nature, etc./for the present, the future, etc.)

Tasks/Missions/Lessons for oneself

- Your personal assessment of the argumentative issue?
- What specific actions do you plan to take to reflect your perception of the argumentative issue?

- Debate corner:

+ Objectives: help students form their own opinions on the topic to be written through group debate. This corner is suitable for students who tend to learn through listening and speaking.

+ The teacher can choose an issue in the Writing Menu to set it up as a prompting question.

Designing the procedure for applying the learning corners methodology to organize teaching...

For example, With the question raised in topic 4: “Should students wear makeup when going to school?”, do you support or oppose, why?

+ Next, the teacher forms 2 small groups at the corner: the Supporting group and the Opposing group; Each student who comes to this corner will conduct thinking based on his/her point of view and select a group to participate in.

+ The teacher instructs students to discuss in groups based on the suggestions in the study sheet for that group:

Study sheet for groups in the Debate Corner
<p><u>Question 1:</u> Briefly describe the argumentative issue?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Definition:...- Characteristics/Manifestations: ...
<p><u>Question 2:</u> Give at least 2 reasons why you support or oppose the issue?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Reason 1: ...- Reason 2: ...- Reason 3: ...
<p><u>Question 3:</u> Is there any evidence to support your reasons? For example,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Statistics: ...- Scientific research results: ...- Expert opinions: ... <p>Information from materials: ...</p>
<p><u>Question 4:</u> The group's (expected) question for the opponent is:</p>

After the discussion, the representative of each group will present their results. Each group has 2 minutes to present. Teachers or students in the other group can ask critical questions so that the groups have the opportunity to debate and consider the argumentative issue from many perspectives.

+ During the debate, each student in this corner will actively listen and gather information for their writing based on individual notes:

Record sheet for individuals in the Debate Corner
<p><u>Question 1:</u> Briefly describe the argumentative issue?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Definition:...- Characteristics/Manifestations: ...
<p><u>Question 2:</u> The reasons why you support or oppose this issue are:</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>
<p><u>Question 3:</u> What evidence do you plan to use to support your argument?</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>
<p><u>Question 4:</u> What does the argumentative issue mean to you personally?? → Draw lessons of awareness and develop concrete actions.</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>

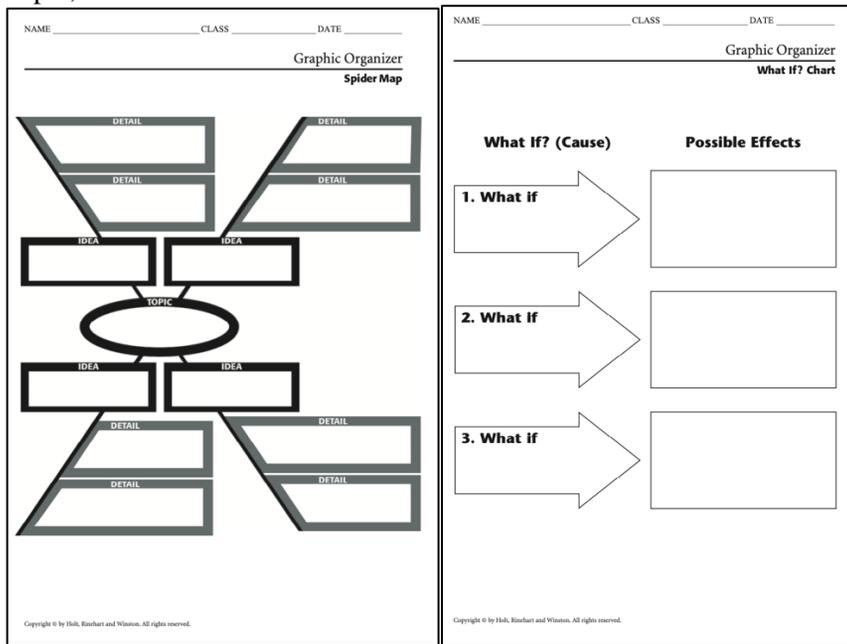
+ Notes: In addition to debating on the issues suggested by the teacher, students can also propose issues in the Writing Menu and ask questions to the teacher or students in the corner so that all can share their views; From there, each student will have the opportunity to be exposed to many different perspectives related to the issue of your interest, then learn, collect, reflect and draw their judgments. This is the basis for students to collect data before writing.

- Free corner:

+ Objectives: encourage, motivate and allow students to freely choose issues to write about – these issues are not included in the suggested Writing Menu, or students are also allowed to brainstorm and plan to write about one of the issues in the Writing Menu based on their way. This corner is suitable for students who tend to be creative, individualistic, and want to try their hand at coming up with topics for themselves to solve.

+ The teacher prepares in this corner some graphic samples to suggest for students to use as brainstorming tools.

For example,



[19]

c. Activity 3: The teacher organizes for students to write drafts. Each student has 30 minutes to write a draft of a 200-word SA paragraph according to the selected topic.

d. Activity 4: Design self-editing activities

Suggestion sheet for self-editing
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify the topic/concluding sentence that summarizes the main idea of the paragraph? 2. Which sentences are responsible for developing the issue stated in the topic sentence? 3. Is there a sentence that is repetitive or does not contribute to the clarity of the topic sentence? 4. Are the given citations accurate and true? 5. Put yourself in the position of the reader and review your writing. Do you think there are technical terms that will confuse the reader? If so, think about alternative wording options. 6. Are there any local/slang words used in the paragraph? If there are, please replace it with the words used by the whole people to ensure the objectivity and standards of the writing. 7. Is the form of a paragraph guaranteed?

8. Check for spelling errors in the writing by yourself.
9. Exchange your writing with your partner and help each other find out the unreasonable points in the writing so that both can make it better.

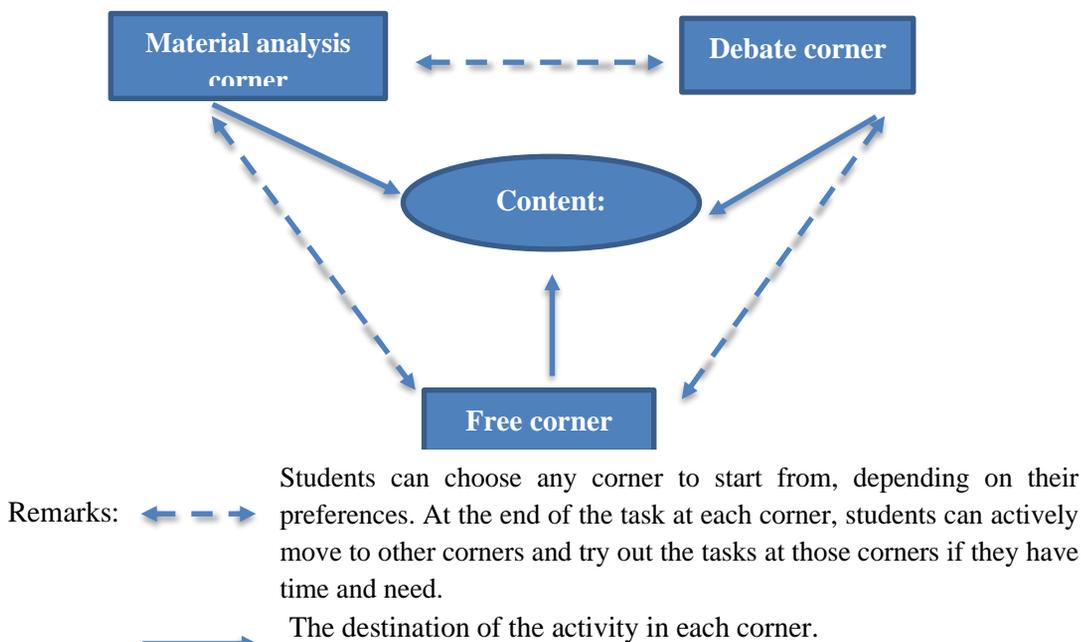
e. Activity 5: The teacher organizes for students to complete their writing after self-editing and evaluating each other. Each student has 15 minutes to complete their paragraph.

f. Activity 6: Design criteria for evaluating the writing for students and teachers to jointly participate in this activity. The score for the writing is the average result between the points self-graded by students and the points graded by the teacher.

Evaluation sheet for the writing										
Criteria	Scale for students' self-grading					Scale for teachers' grading				
The correct form of the paragraph (0.5 points)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Clearly describe the argumentative issue (1.5 points)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Thesis and arguments for clarifying the argumentative issue (5 points)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Writing style, spelling (1.5 points)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Creativity (1.5 points)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Total score: 10	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5

* Notes: the score level increases gradually from Fail (level 1 - 0 points)
 → Poor (level 2 – ¼ max points) → Fair (level 3 – ½ max points)
 → Good (level 4 – ¾ max points) → Excellent (level 5 – max points).

2.3.3. Organize teaching writing social argumentative paragraphs using the learning corners methodology in combination with the process-based approach in teaching writing



- The teacher prepares the learning materials as planned in the designed lesson plan.

- The teacher introduces the lessons, the learning corners methodology, tasks for corners, maximum time for students to perform tasks at corners. The teacher allows students to choose the starting corner according to their personal interests and needs. The corner layout is arranged as above.

- The teacher flexibly coordinates activities in the corners. At the same time, the teacher guides students in process-based writing as the designed lesson plan.

3. Conclusions

The procedure of applying LC to organize teaching writing SA paragraphs for 11th graders as designed above is one of the ways to form students' ability to write actively and creatively. Although LC makes teachers work harder when the workload is quite a lot, if you look at the benefits that students enjoy when learning to write the SA paragraphs in a corner, then teachers will certainly have the motivation to perform to improve and promote the quality of their teaching. We believe that the LC methodology will make a significant contribution to realizing the goals set out by the Vietnamese General Education Curriculum in Literature 2018, including the goal of developing writing abilities for students at high schools.

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