

PROTOTYPE LESSONS ON DEVELOPING TEXTUAL SKILLS OF FIRST YEAR COLLEGE STUDENTS OF THAI NGUYEN UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

Hoang Huong Ly

TNU - University of Technology

ARTICLE INFO		ABSTRACT
Received:	14/3/2022	The primary focus of the study was to assess the textual skills of first year college students of Thai Nguyen University System in order to provide prototype lessons to develop students' textual performance. The descriptive method of research with survey questionnaires and a teacher-made test were used in the study. Respondents of the study were the 326 first year basic English language students from selected universities in Thai Nguyen and 66 English teachers. The students' demographic profiles were gathered and analyzed. The students' answers to the teacher-made test on textual performance served as the source of the quantitative data that were analyzed statistically. Further, the hypotheses that there is no significant relationship between the students' textual skills performance in English and each of the profile variables, and there are no significant differences between the students' textual performance in English and the teachers' assessment scores were tested. The data gathered were analyzed using frequency distribution, percentage, weighted mean, standard deviation, and independent t-test. From the findings and conclusions, the study recommended that the prototype lessons may be presented to school administrators for their review and suggestions; that improvement of the designed prototype lessons should be made; and further studies may be conducted along this line in universities.
Revised:	31/3/2022	
Published:	31/3/2022	
KEYWORDS		
Textual skills		
Prototype lessons		
Teachers' assessment		
First year college students		
Descriptive method		

NHỮNG BÀI HỌC MẪU ĐỂ PHÁT TRIỂN KỸ NĂNG VIẾT CỦA SINH VIÊN NĂM THỨ NHẤT TẠI ĐẠI HỌC THÁI NGUYÊN

Hoàng Hương Ly

Trường Đại học Kỹ thuật Công nghiệp – ĐH Thái Nguyên

THÔNG TIN BÀI BÁO		TÓM TẮT
Ngày nhận bài:	14/3/2022	Trọng tâm chính của nghiên cứu là đánh giá kỹ năng viết của sinh viên đại học năm thứ nhất tại Đại học Thái Nguyên nhằm cung cấp các bài học mẫu để phát triển khả năng viết của sinh viên. Phương pháp nghiên cứu mô tả đã sử dụng bảng câu hỏi khảo sát và bài kiểm tra do giáo viên thiết kế. Đối tượng nghiên cứu là 326 sinh viên học tiếng Anh cơ bản năm thứ nhất tại các trường đại học được chọn ở Thái Nguyên và 66 giáo viên tiếng Anh. Hồ sơ nhân khẩu học của sinh viên được tổng hợp và phân tích. Các câu trả lời của sinh viên trong bài kiểm tra do giáo viên thiết kế là nguồn dữ liệu định lượng được phân tích thống kê. Thêm vào đó, nghiên cứu sẽ kiểm tra giả thuyết đặt ra là không có mối quan hệ đáng kể nào giữa việc thực hiện các kỹ năng viết bằng tiếng Anh của học sinh và từng biến số hồ sơ, và không có sự khác biệt đáng kể giữa kết quả học tập bằng tiếng Anh của học sinh và đánh giá của giáo viên. Dữ liệu thu thập được phân tích bằng cách sử dụng các thống kê sau: sự phân phối tần số, tỷ lệ phần trăm, bình quân trọng số, độ lệch chuẩn và kiểm định t. Từ những phát hiện và kết luận, nghiên cứu khuyến nghị rằng các bài học nguyên mẫu có thể được trình bày cho các nhà quản lý trường học để họ xem xét và đề xuất; cần cải tiến các bài học nguyên mẫu đã thiết kế; và các nghiên cứu sâu hơn có thể được tiến hành theo hướng này trong các trường đại học.
Ngày hoàn thiện:	31/3/2022	
Ngày đăng:	31/3/2022	
TỪ KHÓA		
Kỹ năng viết		
Bài học mẫu		
Đánh giá của giáo viên		
Sinh viên đại học năm thứ nhất		
Phương pháp nghiên cứu mô tả		

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34238/tnu-jst.5679>

Email: lyhoanghuong1982@gmail.com

1. Introduction

The English language is one of the foreign languages taught in various stages of the educational system, especially in countries that have adopted it as their second language. This asks learners of English to make great effort to use spoken English and written English, so they focus on developing macro skills that occur in sequential process including listening first, then speaking, followed by reading, and finally writing and micro skills that include grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and spelling. As can be seen in four skills, writing or textual skill is the most creative and difficult skill that learners at different levels of English especially elementary encounter because they need to gain basic knowledge of English in general as well as writing in particular. If they are taught textual skills thoroughly and often practice writing, they are able to use words and compound or complex sentences exactly and effectively to express their ideas logically. To achieve efficiency in the process of writing, it is necessary to have suitable and useful writing lessons with a variety of exercises for the learners to practise.

In the spectrum of the macro-linguistic skills of the first year college students, writing or textual skill will be evaluated. One reason for this choice is the apparent expectation that these students are in fact mature English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners and their years of exposure and use of the English language have gained their competence to tackle the advanced task of writing. Writing is learned through formal instructional environment and not in a naturally acquired skill. It needs conscious effort and practice. Students are taught the importance of stating assumptions through writing as well as creating texts and building relationships among words, sentences and paragraphs based on their experiences.

In the aspect of macro- skills, there is no other fitting choice but to examine the students' writing skills as these also mirror the kind of performance they have along this language component. There are identified writing problems which the students encountered. These include inconsistencies in spelling, punctuations and capitalizations, unnecessary shifting in the use of simple tenses, and wordiness. Students also have problems in sentence and paragraph coherence as well as word order and sentence structure.

Writing or textual performance while recognized to be a macro linguistic skill of importance is a concept of variability in point of view. Grabe and Kaplan (1996) and Matsuda (1997) asserted that writing is far from decontextualized because every writing task is situated in a rhetorical context, involving complex interrelationships among various elements of writing: the writer, the reader, the text and reality [1], [2]. Canale and Swain (1980) gave ideas about writing as manifestation of grammatical competence [3], and Tribble's view of writing as a language skill provides more rationale in the explanation regarding textual performance [4]. This is further enriched by the insights provided by Hedge [5]. For the discussion regarding the topic writing English composition, the concepts of Shaw on features of composition, Jackson's qualities of a good composition, Fernando's idea about unity in the whole theme provide very rich insights [6]-[8]. These are supplemented by the discussion of Cinco and Roberts [9].

Prototype is considered as an early sample, model or release of a product built to test a concept or process or to act as a thing to be replicated or learned from. It is a term used in a variety of context including semantics, design, electronics, and software programming. In some workflow models, creating prototype is the step between the formalization and the evaluation of an idea [10]. There are three benefits for the prototype model of expertise. These include prototype view that allows a richer, more descriptive and inclusive understanding of teacher expertise without making everyone a presumptive expert, provides a basis for understanding of general factors in teaching expertise, and further provides a basis for understanding and anticipating social judgments about teaching expertise.

There are three different kinds of activities within the design and development process where experienced prototyping is valuable. These are understanding the existing user experience and context, exploring and evaluating design ideas, and communicating ideas to an audience. Briton

(1989) identified three content based prototypes curriculum models on how to integrate learning of language to the learning of content [11]. The first is theme-based language instructions where a curriculum is developed around selected topics or themes drawn from content area. Materials in theme-based instruction are usually generated or adapted from outside sources. Another is the sheltered content instruction which uses a content curriculum adapted to accommodate students' limited proficiency in the language instruction. The third prototype is the adjunct language instruction where students are enrolled in two linked courses, one a content course and one language course, with both courses sharing the same content but differ in their focus or instruction. As for the topic prototype lessons as instructional materials, Brugman, Lakoff, and Sternberg provide many ideas and information [12]-[14].

Amer's study deals on the organizational patterns of comparison/contrast texts, as a major type of expository English, and EFL writing performance [15]; Paziraie carried out the research on the effect on the use of model essay on EFL learners' attention to four different aspects of writing, lexicon, grammar, discourse and content [16]; Chuenchaichon focused on the learners' English writing incorporating reading into EFL writing of 54 second year English major students and Lu covered the cognitive factors that influence Chinese EFL learners' argumentative essay writing in English [17], [18]; and Saeidi and Sahebkhair (2011) investigated the effect of the use of model essays on EFL learners' attention to four different aspects of writing, lexicon, grammar, discourse and content [19]. The present study on the other hand deals on the writing performance of first year college students in terms of combining sentences, constructing sentences, connecting ideas, using words effectively, and developing paragraph.

Thus, despite the similarities cited, the present study is not a duplication of the above mentioned studies and has a character of its own. The study assessed textual skills of first year college students of Thai Nguyen University System, Vietnam. Specifically, it sought answers to the following questions:

1. What is the demographic profile of students in terms of gender, parents' educational attainment, students' exposure to English media, place of origin, and school graduated from?
2. What is the respondents' textual skills performance in terms of combining sentences, constructing sentences, connecting ideas, using words effectively, and developing paragraph?
3. Are there significant relationships between the students' textual skills performance and their profile variables?
4. How do teachers assess the textual skills performance of students in English?
5. Are there significant differences on students' textual skills performance and teachers' assessment on the same areas?
6. What prototype lessons may be proposed to develop students' skills textual skills performance?

This study also tested the following hypotheses: There is no significant relationship between the students' textual skills performance in English and each of the profile variables, and there are no significant differences between the students' textual skills performance in English and the teachers' assessments on the same areas.

2. Methods

2.1. Research design

The study utilized the descriptive type of research to treat the data and characterize what is being studied [20]. Specifically, this research aimed to describe the present behavior or characteristics of a particular population. Moreover, the data were collected to describe persons, organizations, settings, or phenomena.

Another method appropriate for this study was the descriptive comparative method where the significance and difference of the two variables could normally be predicted by an investigator. In addition, two or more groups of participants could be described by the investigator to identify, analyze, and explain the similarities and differences. Two types of research instruments - the survey questionnaire for teacher respondents and teacher-made test for student respondents were used.

2.2. Subjects of the study

Respondents of the study comprised of 379 first year Basic English students and 66 first year English teachers from Thai Nguyen University System in Vietnam. The students were currently enrolled in a first year English course and were willing to reveal their demographic profiles. No randomization was done since the study was non-interventional.

2.3. Data collection instrument

Two sets of questionnaires were administered, one set for the students and another set for their corresponding English teachers. The questionnaires were designed following the WIDA model as well as the work of Sawir (2005) with modifications [21]. Standard methods were followed in gathering the responses such that the questions were designed to be more objective, certain and understandable to ensure ease in the collection of the desired information. Questionnaire validation was done with the help of three professors, experts of the field, to ensure that the instruments' contents are correct. Suggestions and corrections were included in the final version of the questionnaire prior to a dry run testing for the instruments' reliability.

2.4 Statistical Treatment of Data

The data gathered was analyzed using the Microsoft Excel statistical tools employing the following statistics: Frequency Distribution and Percentage were used to provide meaningful description of the respondents' level of English proficiency in the four modes of language performance. Weighted Mean was used to quantify the students' four modes of language performance and their English language micro-skills. Standard Deviation is the measure of variation or dispersion needed to fully describe a given set of data. This was used to determine the level of students' writing and reading. Independent t-test was used to test the significant difference between students' language proficiency performance and faculty assessment of students' English language micro skills.

3. Results and Discussion

The students' answers to items relating to textual performance and their demographic were gathered and analyzed, and the hypotheses were also tested. The data were analyzed using the following statistics: frequency distribution, percentage, weighted mean, standard deviation, and independent t-test. The study yielded the following findings:

3.1. Demographic Profile of the Student Respondents

The student respondents are described in terms of their gender composition as indicated in Table 1. Findings of the study revealed that in the student respondents' demographic profiles in relation to gender, there were 55.83 percent males and 44.17 percent females in the group with the males exceeding the females by 11.66 percent. This means that the population under study has an almost equal gender distribution and can be considered as gender-balanced.

Table 1. Gender Profile of the Student Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	182	55.83
Female	144	44.17
TOTAL	326	100.00

Since the employment status of the parents is most often dependent on the educational qualifications of the parents, the higher the educational status, the higher the literacy status and earning capability of the family. Furthermore, the parents' training and education are strong influencers and modifiers of the children's education. Parents with higher education can guide their children better and are able to support them achieved their goals. Table 2 shows the educational attainment of the students' parents.

Table 2. Parents' Education Profile of the Student Respondents

Parents' Education	Frequency	Percentage
Tertiary	303	92.94
Post Graduate	19	5.83
Others (Elementary or Non-formal education)	4	1.23
TOTAL	326	100.00

As to parents' educational attainment, out of 326 respondents there are 303 or 92.94 percent whose parents have tertiary education, which means that majority of the student respondents have well-educated parents.

With regards to exposure to English media, as shown in the table 3, it can be observed that more than half or 51.23 percent of the students had the least exposure to the English media, followed by 41.10 percent for moderate exposure and 7.67 percent for those with high exposure.

Table 3. Profile of Students' Exposure to English Media

Degree of Exposure	Frequency	Percentage
Low	167	51.23
Moderate	134	41.10
High	25	7.67
TOTAL	326	100.00

Further analysis of the type of English media exposure that the students had is shown in Table 4. It can be noted from the table that only two out of the eight types of media exposure had ratings of above 50 percent. These are the internet and books. All the rest were below 50 percent. This result is consistent with the results in Table 3 where the general trend is low exposure to the English media.

Table 4. Types of English Media Exposure

Types of Exposures	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
Radio	86	26.38	4
Television	127	38.96	3
Internet	232	71.17	2
Magazines	43	13.19	6
Books	243	74.54	1
Newspapers	72	22.09	5
Pamphlets	39	11.96	7
Others	19	5.83	8
Average	108	33.01	3

This result is interesting because it appears that books remain to be the major source of English media exposure and yet it did not get a 100 percent rating which means that some of the students did not have a chance to learn from books.

For place of origin, results showed that 188 out of 326 student respondents or 57.67 percent originated from urban areas in Vietnam which means that most of the respondents came from urban areas where they grew up and obtained their early education in areas close to cities where advanced learning technologies are available. Relative to school graduated majority of the student respondents or 98.77 percent had their high school education in public schools which means that most of the students pursued their secondary education in public schools availing of the standardized education program.

3.2. Students' Textual Skills Performance

In students' textual skills performance relative to combining sentences findings showed that the percent correct items of the students for combining sentences is 69.8 percent with a verbal equivalent of average which means that the student respondents have achieved a certain degree of skill in sentence combining. For constructing sentences, the percent correct items of the students

are 53.3 percent with a verbal equivalent of average which means that the student respondents find sentence construction as the most difficult component of textual performance and further implies that it doesn't mean that if the skill is more basic, it would be easier for the students. In connecting ideas, the percent correct items obtained by the students for connecting sentences are 62.0 percent with a verbal equivalent of average which means that the student respondents find combining sentences as one of the less difficult components of the textual skills.

Moreover, in using words effectively the percent of correct items of the students for using words effectively is 54.3 percent with a verbal equivalent of average which means that it is one of the more difficult components of the textual skills for the student respondents. In relation to developing paragraph, the percent of correct items of the students for using developing paragraphs is 59.5 percent with a verbal equivalent of average which means that in general the students do not find this skill to be very difficult nor too easy and further means that the students have developed a certain degree of paragraph construction skills despite of not fully mature but enough to support their continuing growth in their tertiary years.

The result of this assessment is summarized in Table 5.

Table 5. *Students' Performance in the Different Textual Skills*

Test Groups	No. of Items	No. of Correct Items	Percent of Correct Items	Verbal Interpretation
Combining Sentences	10	7	69.8	High Average
Constructing Sentences	10	5	53.3	Average
Connecting Ideas	10	6	62.0	Average
Using words effectively	10	5	54.3	Average
Developing Paragraphs	2	1	59.5	Average
Total	42	25	Mean=59.8	Average

3.3. Relationships between the Students' Textual Skills Performance and their Profile Variables

In relationships between the students' textual skills performance and their profile variables results indicated that for gender, the p-value for three out of five component skills is below 0.05 indicating that the performance of the male and the female students are significantly different which means that male students' performance in combining sentences, connecting ideas and developing paragraphs is different from the female students' performance.

Meanwhile, for the other two component skills pertaining to constructing sentences and using words effectively, the p-values are above 0.05 which means they are not significantly different. For Parents' Education, it can be noted that in three out of five component skills were the p-value is below 0.05 or significantly different, specifically in secondary vs. tertiary educated parents. For the degree of exposure to the English media, a p-value less than 0.05 was obtained only in connecting ideas for means involving least and moderate exposure and least vs. high exposure. This indicates that it was only in connecting ideas did the media exposure significantly affect the students' performance.

For place of origin, all the five component skills, the p-values were below 0.05 and are significantly different for urban and rural origin which means that demographic factor is important in the learning performance of the students. In the case of the type of High School, only in using words effectively that the p-value was below 0.05 indicating that performance of the students in this area is significantly different which means that education in the public schools is generally not different from private schools.

3.4. Differences of Teachers' Assessment of the Students' Textual Skills Performance in English

As for the teachers' assessment of the students' textual skills performance in English, findings revealed that all of the 11 items obtained an "agree" score of >50 percent which means that the teacher respondents unanimously consider all the listed items as pertinent items to assess the

performance skills of the freshman students. According to frequency of use by the students, results showed that seven out of the 11 items got ratings of 3.5 to 3.9 or equivalent to Often and five items out of 11 had a rating of 2.8 to 3.3 or equivalent to Sometimes which means that in general, the teachers perceived that the students are performing their textual skills often.

As regards degree of importance results showed 10 out of the 11 items had mean scores close to 4.0 or equivalent to moderately important, and one item had a score close to 5.0 or very important which indicates that the teacher respondents had a very high assessment of the degree of importance of the different items under the textual skills.

3.5. Differences of Teachers' Assessment and the Students' Textual Skills Performance in English

In the relationship of teachers' assessment and the students' textual performance in English findings revealed that the textual performance of the students in three out of five areas is significantly different from the frequency ratings of the teachers which implies that the students' performance in the areas of combining sentence, constructing sentences and connecting ideas are not related to the teachers' assessment. In contrast, the students' performance score in using words effectively and developing paragraphs are not significantly different from the teachers' assessment and are thus, related to each other. The relationship between the teachers' assessment and students' textual performance in English was evaluated through a t-test comparison of the mean rating and performance scores. The result of the test is shown in Table 6.

Table 6. *Students' Performance and Teachers' Assessment on the Students' Textual Skills*

Textual areas	Students' % Correct	Teachers' % Rating	p-value	Verbal Interpretation
Combining Sentences	69.79	78.48	0.000000	Significant
Constructing Sentences	53.25	73.03	0.000000	Significant
Connecting Ideas	61.99	78.79	0.000000	Significant
Using words effectively	54.26	57.58	0.074140	Not significant
Developing Paragraphs	59.51	56.06	0.192089	Not significant

The t-test results on the component skills pertaining to using words effectively and developing paragraphs demonstrate a linkage between the student's performance and the teacher assessment and thus could be predictable of each other. Hence, interventions pertinent to these areas that would be done by the teachers can be expected to influence the students' performance along these areas.

3.6. Proposed Prototype Lessons to develop Students' Textual Skills Performance

For the preparation of the proposed prototype lessons to develop students' textual skills performance, there are some elements considered for this particular group of Vietnamese teachers and students which include the following low performance score of the students in the component areas of the textual skills, meaningful relationship of the performance scores with the profile variables, and meaningful relationship of the performance scores with the teachers' assessment.

4. Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn: The college students had nearly equal gender distribution, well-educated parents, not well exposed to the English media, came from urban areas, and pursued their secondary education in public schools. They had skills in combining sentences with average performance in constructing sentences, connecting ideas, using words effectively and developing paragraph. Male students' performance in combining sentences, connecting ideas and developing paragraphs was different from the female students' performance. The students performed their textual skills in using words effectively and the students' performance in this area was significantly different. Besides, teachers considered all the component skills important for students to develop, their frequency of use often and degree of importance as moderately important. Students' performance in the areas

of combining and constructing sentences and connecting ideas were not related to the teachers' assessment. The prototype lessons were designed to provide a learning material that would address the inadequacies of the student population, this being part of the emerging trend of responsive and outcome -based language education. From the findings and conclusions, the study recommended that the prototype lessons may be presented to school administrators for their review and suggestions; that improvement of the designed prototype lessons should be made; and further studies may be conducted along this line in universities.

REFERENCES

- [1] W. Grabe and R. Kaplan, *Theory and Practice of Writing*. London: Addison Wesley Longman. 1996.
- [2] P. K. Matsuda, "Contrastive rhetoric in context: A dynamic model of L2 writing," *Journal of Second Language Writing*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 45-60, 1997.
- [3] M. Canale and M. Swain, "Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing," *Applied Linguistics*, no. 1, pp. 1-47, 1980.
- [4] C. Tribble, *Writing*. New York, Oxford University Press, 1996.
- [5] T. Hedge, *Teaching and Learning in the Language Classroom*. Oxford University Press, 2000.
- [6] S. Harry, *A Complete Course in Freshman English*. Harper and Row, York, 1979.
- [7] B. M. Jackson and V. Charles, *English Composition –Fundamental Principles of Effective Writing*. New York: Burns & Noble, Inc., 1968.
- [8] J. N. Fernando and P. I. Habana, *College English for Today*, Book 2, National Book Store, Inc. Philippines, 1988.
- [9] A. Cinco and J. N. Fernando, *College English for Today*, Book 1, National Book Store, Inc. Phillipines, 1988.
- [10] M. Soares and F. Rebelo, *Advance in Usability Evaluation*. CRC Press, 2012.
- [11] D. Briton, M. Snow, and M. Wesche, *Content- Based Second Language Instruction*. NY: Newbury House, 1989.
- [12] C. M. Brugman, *Story of Over*. Indiana, Indiana University Linguistic Club, 1983.
- [13] G. Lakoff, *Women, Fire and Dangerous Thing*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1987.
- [14] R. J. Stenberg and J. A. Horvath, *A Prototype View of Expert Teaching*, Educational Researcher, 1995.
- [15] M. Amer, "The Effect of Explicit Instruction in Expository Text Structure on the Writing Performance of ArabEFLUniversity Students," *AWEJ*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 224-238, 2013.
- [16] M. E. Paziraie, "The Effect of Textual Meta-function on the Iranian EFL Learners' Writing Performance," *English Language Teaching*, vol. 6, no. 2, pp. 71-83, 2013.
- [17] Y. Chuenchaichon, "Impact of Intensive Reading on the Written Performance of Thai University EFL Writers," *University of Reading Language Studies Working Papers*, vol. 3, pp. 3-14, 2011.
- [18] Y. Lu, "Cognitive Factors Contributing to Chinese EFL Learners' L2 Writing Performance in Timed Essay Writing," *Applied Linguistics and English as a Second Language Dissertations*, 2010, p. 13.
- [19] M. Saeidi and F. Sahebkhair "The Effect of Model Essays on Accuracy and Complexity of EFL Learners' Writing Performance," *Middle-East Journal of Scientific Research*, vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 130-137, 2011.
- [20] M. P. Ariola, *Principles and Methods of Research*. Manila, Philippines: REX Book Store, Inc, 2006.
- [21] E. Sawir, "Language difficulties of international students in Australia: The effects of prior learning experience," *International Education Journal*, vol. 6, no. 5, pp. 567-580, 2005.