

DEVELOPING ENGLISH SENTENCE-WRITING SKILLS FOR FOURTH GRADERS
THROUGH THE USE OF PICTURE DIARIES ID #2656

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INTRODUCTION

Under the 2018 General Education Program, English has become a mandatory subject in Vietnamese primary schools, focusing on developing communicative competence across listening, speaking, reading, and writing (MOET, 2018). For fourth graders, the writing skill is particularly crucial as they transition from simple word recognition to more structured linguistic thinking. However, implementing these curriculum goals in rural settings like Tan Hung Commune, Tay Ninh Province presents significant practical challenges. Many students struggle with limited vocabulary and a persistent fear of grammatical errors, leading to a phenomenon known as "writing anxiety". Traditional instructional methods, which often rely heavily on rote copying or repetitive drills, rarely provide these young learners with a meaningful context for expression. This "picture diary" initiative was launched to close the gap between curriculum expectations and classroom reality, transforming writing from a repetitive chore into a relatable, visual, and experiential journey.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- RQ1:** To what extent does the use of picture diaries improve the English sentence-writing proficiency of fourth-grade students?
- RQ2:** How does this pedagogical approach influence student engagement and overall learning attitudes toward the English language?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The pedagogical foundation of this study is primarily rooted in Allan Paivio's Dual Coding Theory (1986), which posits that human cognition consists of two independent but interconnected systems: one for processing verbal information and another for non-verbal images. By integrating these two channels, memory retention and information processing are significantly enhanced. In this framework, the "picture diary" serves as a "cognitive anchor," providing students with a concrete visual reference point that helps them activate thematic vocabulary and map it onto English sentence structures more effectively than through text alone.

The **MOET** (2018) curriculum and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001) promote learner-centered, competency-based instruction, which advocate for "learning by doing". By recording their daily lives and emotions through art and language, students utilize English as a functional medium for personal expression rather than a set of abstract rules, thereby reducing writing anxiety and fostering intrinsic motivation.

REFERENCES

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METHODOLOGY

This research utilized a quasi-experimental design involving **56** fourth-grade students (Classes 4A and 4B) over a period of **20 weeks**, spanning from **Week 10** to **Week 30**. The intervention followed a structured **3-stage** instructional model:

a. In the Pre-writing stage, teachers introduced thematic units from the English 4 curriculum, such as *"Daily Activities"* or *"Our Summer Holidays"*, providing linguistic tools and sentence models.

b. During the While-writing stage, students followed a three-step process: **(1)** drawing or pasting an image, **(2)** constructing descriptive sentences, and **(3)** performing a basic self-check for grammar and spelling. Tasks were tailored by level: beginners used basic patterns, while advanced students shared personal thoughts.

c. The Post-writing stage centered on celebratory sharing through *"Gallery Walks"* and classroom displays in the *"English Corner"*, where students received positive reinforcement and stickers to maintain long-term engagement.

KEY FINDINGS

RQ1 (Proficiency): The quantitative gains were substantial. The percentage of students meeting basic writing standards rose sharply from a baseline of **34%** to **91%** after the 20-week intervention. Furthermore, students achieving "Good completion" rose from **30%** to **46%**, while the number of students failing to meet subject requirements dropped to zero.

RQ2 (Attitude & Engagement): Qualitative observations revealed a vital shift in student attitudes. Students transitioned from being passive recipients of language to active storytellers. The fear of making mistakes was replaced by a sense of pride in their personalized diaries, leading to higher confidence during oral presentations and a more joyful classroom atmosphere.

Table 1. Students' sentence-writing proficiency

Class	Before Intervention	After Intervention
Class 4A (Total: 26)	12 students	27 students
Class 4B (Total: 30)	7 students	24 students
Total	19/56 (34%)	51/56 (91%)

Table 2. Overall English Academic Results

Assessment Phase	Class	Good completion	Completion	Incompletion
Mid-Term 1 (Pre-intervention)	4A	9	15	2
	4B	8	20	2
End of Year (Post-intervention)	4A	15	11	0
	4B	11	19	0

RECOMMENDATIONS

Teacher as Facilitator: Shift from traditional lecturing to active guidance. Use visual "cognitive anchors" to lower writing pressure and support students' independent learning.

Instructional Differentiation: Avoid a "one size fits all" approach by tailoring tasks to individual proficiency. Adjust requirements—from basic patterns to personal reflections—to ensure personal success.

Culture of Pride: Utilize "English Corners" to display student diaries. Showcasing personal artwork and sentences fosters individual confidence and nurtures a collaborative learning environment.

Digital Integration: Modernize the initiative by adopting user-friendly platforms like Canva or CapCut to create "Digital Picture Diaries".