

Reflecting Journal Writing and Primary Students' Writing Fluency

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ABSTRACT

This research attempted to investigate whether the reflective journal writing had an impact on the primary students in learning vocabulary and writing in Vinschool Central Park, HCM City, Vietnam. Participants in the study were 60 Level 3 primary students aged 8 to 10 years. Those 60 students were divided into supervisory (n=30) and experimental (n=30) schools. With the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach, both groups were taught, but after three months, the treatment group wrote reflective papers in the wrap-up process of each vocabulary session, while the control group started writing and writing on a regular basis. The research results showed that the RJW had great effects on students' writing fluency as well as reducing their writing error. The results present pedagogically important consequences for content designers, language teachers and students.

Keywords: Reflective journal writing; vocabulary acquisition; writing fluency; writing accuracy; writing errors.

1. INTRODUCTION

In Vietnam, teaching and learning English methods at primary schools still have several issues that need innovation. According to Pham and Nguyen [21], Grammar Translation Method (GTM) has dominated language teaching and learning in Vietnam for decades. Students are asked to compose an essay on a specific topic they may not be interested in or find inappropriate to write about. Besides, if vocabulary is implemented so that learners can only recall rather than understand, apply, examine, analyze or build as defined by Krathwohl [10], the vocabulary can easily fade away. The students only know the latest terms at the surface level for these purposes, without understanding how to use them in those ways. According to Silva [26], writing in a "purposeful and contextualized communicative interaction" should be composed. Salem [24] stated that the standard of writing could be adversely affected by writing anxiety. One of the ways to help learners develop their writing skills, according to Homstad and Thorson [7], is to allocate them to write journals.

As for the Vinschool Central Park, the average speaking and listening test point were 7.7 in the

English first-semester test, whereas the reading and writing scores were consistently lower. Spelling errors were related to one of the factors influencing the reading and writing grades. Reflective journal writing, an activity that the students had a chance to recall, reflect and think deeply, critically, and analytically about what they had learned [1], was used to encourage new memorization, use, and improvement of the use of these words and to enhance writing skills. The purpose of this exercise is to provide students with more time and space in which to remember their vocabulary, to improve their comprehension of meanings, and to personalize their word usage to improve their vocabulary and writing skills.

Two major factors, including writing fluency and writing accuracy, should be taken into account to determine students' writing output. In general, fluency is seen as a communication skill, or the ability to produce language in both spoken and written form with ease, smoothness, and versatility. Writing fluency in this research is defined in a limited amount of time as the number of words written in a paper [5], [23]. At the same time, precision refers to the accuracy of the language's output. Lambert and Kormos [11] claimed that writing accuracy is known as the units in the

writing object that are error-free. Fluency and precision are the main variables for assessing writing skills. The purpose of this research was to investigate the influence of Reflective Journal Writing (RJW) on the acquisition of vocabulary and writing skills of young learners at Vinschool Central Park. The research also aimed to find an alternative classroom approach for conventional vocabulary learning and writing practices.

Reflective journal writing has been demonstrated to have a substantial effect on the overall writing quality in terms of vocabulary attainment [11]. Students will pay more attention to the text's accuracy to share their journals with the whole community and work harder on their drafts to achieve the highest writing content. More precisely, Jones and Putncy [9] believed that Improvements in writing performance may emerge as a result of students' capacity to articulate their thoughts and ideas about grammatical structure, spelling, and word meanings via Reflective Journal Writing.

Man [15] conducted a study in Hong Kong employing journal writing to boost students' English proficiency and motivation in a secondary school and found that they were more interested in writing after spending eight months studying, and 69.5 percent of them found it a habit. Regarding writing results in a short period of time, students were able to write 3.5 percent faster and achieve 18.8 percent higher post-test scores, including progress in text length, precision, vocabulary usage, and the variety of phrase patterns. Specifically, with more examples, more complex vocabulary terms, and grammar structures, students could write richer material. While Chinglish was still written by students, there were fewer spelling errors, and the journals could be more easily understood.

Similarly, Laqaei and Mall-Amiri [12] found that The experimental group outperformed the control group in terms of language knowledge, writing competence, and capacity to think critically. It was discovered that those who kept reflective journals improved their vocabulary and writing abilities significantly. In the same year, Bel [2] conducted another study entitled "Teacher perspectives on Reflective Journal Writing" As a result, reflective journal writing also strengthens writing norms in addition to beneficial effects on students' confidence and trust. It was concluded that because students went through the practice and frequently spoke in their papers, they became excellent authors.

Recently, Cheng [3] used reflective journal writing to evaluate the effect of online automated feedback on the quality of students' reflective journals. The experimental group outperformed the control

group considerably in the final reflective journal writing, and the experimental group also displayed a significant improvement in scores across reflective journals. This research did not examine how to reduce writing mistakes.

Much has been done about the writing of the reflective journal as described above. Most agreed that vocabulary and writing success is positively influenced by Reflective Journal Writing (RJW). However, most previous researchers have researched secondary students, university students, and adults with or above intermediate English skills. Those students would know what the journal is and how they should publish a reflective journal. Moreover, studies carried out in the context of primary school, especially between the ages of 8 and 10 years, are still very scarce. Very few research studies have been relating to this field in applying the RJW to these kinds of young learners recently. The subjects of the present analysis were twofold. Second, it was an experiment to see whether RJW had any impact on students' vocabulary learning. Second, in terms of the number of words written in the text and the accuracy of the sum of spelling and grammatical errors, it sought to assess the student's fluency in writing.

1.1. Research Question

The following research question was formulated base on the study's objectives:

To what extent does Reflective Journal Writing affect the fluency of writing? Also, is there any reduction in writing errors in the written papers of the students?

2. METHODS

2.1 Setting and participants

The current study was conducted at the Vinschool, where the researcher/teacher was working for. The Vinschool ESL curriculum structure, being a private school, was greatly different from that of the MOET in terms of course-book uses and teaching activities. The Vinschool ESL program was designed to incorporate different elements, including the Cambridge ESL curriculum, the Standard European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), the English Scale of Cambridge (CES), the handbook on skills for the 21st century. From beginner to advanced levels of proficiency, the curriculum is split into 12 levels of English mastery.

The participants in this study were 60 primary students (out of 1.290 students) between the ages of 8 and 10. The convenient sampling method (two in-tact classes) was applied to this study. Summative and formative tests were employed to test the students'

English levels and then assign them to experimental and controlled groups. The two groups took the same textbooks during the treatments.

2.2 Procedure

Based on the proficiency test scores in stage 1, 60 students from level 3 classes were selected. A pre-test was held to reassure participating students who had equivalent vocabulary acquisition and writing performance. 2 raters checked the pre-test score to guarantee reliability.

Participating students took the treatments in the next stage. All 60 students had similar lessons with the same teacher, teaching, and learning method. Lessons were usually taught following the present-practice-produce model with various activities. A lesson lasted

collected were analyzed using SPSS vs. 22. Research findings were concluded from the statistics as well.

2.3 Reflective journals

Only experimental group students were expected to keep reflective notebooks. To prevent being misled, the reflective diary exercise was created with guiding questions. All students who participated received instruction on how to create a high-quality reflective journal. The training session would cover the following topics: what reflective journal writing is, why it should be done, how often it should be done, what sentence patterns they may use in their journals, and what they should pay attention to when writing.

Table 1. Students' writing fluency and written errors before and after the treatment of the control group

Writing fluency in terms of the number of words								
Variables	N	M	SD	Correlation	Mean difference	t	df	p
CG's writing fluency in the Pre-test	30	36.97	5.99	0.235	-2.13	-1.55	29	0.131
CG's writing fluency in the Post-test	30	39.1	10.66					
Writing errors								
CG's writing errors in the Pre-test	30	8.1	1.42	-0.008	2.367	3.23	29	0.003
CG's writing errors in the Post-test	30	5.73	3.74					

* Paired Sample t-test

35 minutes, in which the last 8 minutes were spent on practicing traditional spelling-writing worksheet or writing reflective journals. Both groups' notes were collected for feedback and returned in the next session. The researcher underlined or circled grammatical or spelling errors in the regular writing practice and the journal. Based on the teacher's feedback, students corrected the mistakes and kept them in their portfolios. These activities were the normal activities for all writing classes in the research context. The treatments were conducted in 3 months, and students had one vocabulary lesson per week, which made the total number of 12 treatment sessions.

After completing the 12 sessions, participating students of both groups took the post-test. Two raters scored post-tests just like the pre-test. Data were collected for analysis. In the last stage, the data

Following each session, these diaries were collected and examined for writing fluency and correctness using the star system. Each component of fluency and accuracy was graded independently in accordance with the precise specifications included in the writing rubrics. The reflecting journals' overall score was derived by averaging these two factors. For instance, if a student earns three stars for fluency and two stars for correctness, the journal will earn a total of 2.5 stars.

2.4 Data collection and analysis

At the end of each treatment session, all the students' writing papers in the experimental and controlled groups of the pre- vs. post-tests were

collected for assessment. All the writings were scored by two different raters using the scoring rubrics. The discrepancies of the two raters were averaged. In case the discrepancies of the two raters were over 1.0, the third rater was employed. If so, the final score would be the third rater's average and the score closest to it.

Each writing provided the researcher data on three factors: overall writing score, fluency, and accuracy. Specifically, based on the writing rubrics, fluency and accuracy of writing skills were rated from

closely reviewed during the interventions and post-test to examine how reflective journaling affects these variables. The post-test findings were then compared to the pre-test results using the pair t-test to ascertain whether or not the students got different treatments. The following can be listed in a full, thorough analysis of student fluency and written errors.

As shown in Table 1, a total of thirty student papers were given 37 pre-test words in each paper

Table 2. Students' writing fluency and writing errors before and after the treatment of the experimental group

Writing fluency in terms of the number of words								
Variables	N	M	SD	Correlation	Mean difference	t	df	p
EG's writing fluency in the Pre-test	30	35.83	6.24	0.588	-8.567	-7.466	29	0
EG's writing fluency in the Post-test	30	44.4	7.42					
Writing errors								
EG's writing errors in the Pre-test	30	8.07	1.57	0.353	4.6	2.705	29	0.011
EG's writing errors in the Post-test	30	3.47	2.05					

* Paired Sample t-test

1 to 3. The overall writing score was the average of fluency and accuracy score. For example, a student achieved three on the writing fluency and two on the writing accuracy; the overall score would be the average of 3 and 2, which was 2.5. The data collected were analyzed using SPSS version 22.

3. RESULTS/FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

3.1 Research question:

To what extent does Reflective Journal Writing affect the fluency of writing? In addition, is there any reduction in writing errors in the written papers of the students?

Again, at the conclusion of the vocabulary course, writing fluency is determined by the number of words written during an eight-minute wrap-up, and writing accuracy is determined by the number of orthographic and grammatical mistakes included within the same section. Clearly, both groups' fluidity and accuracy were equivalent prior to the treatments. Therefore, their writings have been collected and

during the pre-test period (M = 36.97; SD = 5.99), compared to a total of 39 words in the pre-test paper for each post-test period (M = 39.10; SD = 10.66). The mean difference was just 2.13. The Paired Sample t-test showed, however, that there was no statistically significant difference in the number of the word before and after the intervention ($t(29)=-1.55, p=.131, p>.05$). This indicates that students in the control group have not improved their writing fluency in terms of number-of-word length.

In terms of written mistake reduction, after 12 weeks of consistent writing, students in the control group were able to lower their error count from 8 (M=8.10, SD=1.4) to roughly 6 (M=5.73, SD=3.7) (Mean difference = 2.367). The p-value of 0.03 indicated a statistically significant difference in pre- and post-testing errors ($t(29)=3.23, p=.003, p<.05$). Students in the control group reduced their writing mistakes in order to enhance their writing abilities, despite the fact that they did not grow their writing skills.

Table 2 presents the relationship between writing

Table 3. Students' writing fluency and writing errors of the two groups in the post-tests

Writing fluency in terms of the number of words						
Variables	N	M	SD	t	df	p
EG's writing fluency in the post-test	30	44.1	7.19	2.13	58	0.037
CG's s writing fluency in the post-test	30	39.1	10.66			
Writing errors						
EG's writing errors in the Post-test	30	3.47	2.05	-2.91	44.93	0.006
CG's writing errors in the Post-test	30	5.73	3.74			

* Independent Sample t-test

fluency and writing errors in the experimental population in the pre-and post-test. As can be shown, experimental group students were able to write about 36 words on average ($M=35.83$, $SD=6.24$) before the treatment, while the number of words increased to about 44 ($M=44.40$, $SD=7.41$) after practicing 3-month reflective journals. There was a statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-reflective journal writing periods (Mean difference = -8.567). The Paired Sample t-test demonstrates that there was a statistically significant difference between pupils in the experimental group's pre- and post-test writing fluency ($t(29)=-7.47$, $p=.000$, $p<.05$).

Table 2 also revealed the number of errors made in writing by students. In the pre-test, students in the experimental group had a mean number of errors of about 8 ($M=8.07$, $SD=1.5$), which decreased after 12 weeks to almost 3 ($M=3.47$, $SD=2.0$). With these results, the Paired Sample t-test stated that in terms of error quantity, the post-test was better than the pre-test ($t(29)=2.705$, $p=.011$, $p<.05$). The findings shown in Table 7 show that after performing the reflective journal writing, the experimental group students were longer in their written papers and substantially decreased their writing errors, which helped improve their writing efficiency.

In the post-test, Table 3 summarizes the differences in writing fluency and written mistakes between the control and experimental groups. As indicated in the table, control group students could write an average of 39 words ($M=39.10$, $SD=10.6$), but experimental group students could write five more words ($M=44.10$, $SD=7.1$). The independent t-test revealed that the difference between the control and experimental groups was statistically significant ($t(58)= 2,130$; $p=.037$; $p<.05$). It shows that the students have become more fluent in writing after learning reflective journals than regular spelling and writing practices.

The errors were reported at the control and experimental population at 5.73 and 3.37 respectively ($M = 5.73$, $SD = 3.7$, and $M = 3.47$, $SD = 2.0$). Students who have written the post-test reflection journal have made three fewer errors than students of conventional spelling and writing. Independent sample t-tests ($t(44.93) = -2.91$, $p = 0.01$, $p<.05$) showed an important difference between student writing accuracy. In other words, the students made fewer writing errors when they practiced writing reflective journals than those who did traditional spelling and writing practices.

3.2 Discussion

The present research aims to investigate whether Reflective Journal Writing affected the fluency of writing and whether the students' written papers had any reduction in writing errors. The current study results showed that the RJW helped significantly increase the writing fluency of the students and significantly reduce writing errors. This seems like the more the students write, the better skills they become

[20], [8], [22]. In other words, when the students conducted more reflective journal writing, they had to use more vocabulary and structures to express their ideas. They could compose more fluently in their writing. Bel [2] clarified that when students frequently compose reflective journals, they are used to writing, arranging, and delivering a good text, so better writing conventions help improve fluency in writing. Man's [15], Sandell's [25], Holmes & Moulton [6], Larrotta [13], Orem [17], Peng [18] and Pham et al. [19] also agreed that since students could write in a stress-free atmosphere, journal writing could enhance writing efficiency. Since it is a chance for them to share their feelings, they will feel less anxious and more optimistic. Students are free to select their subject's ideas instead of only writing about the given ones that are often unrelated to their personal lives [4].

Furthermore, the current study results revealed that Reflective Journal Writing helped students reduce their writing errors. As can be seen from this report finds, the students could improve their choice of words and collocation by practicing reflective journals. As they did self-reflection or self-assessment, they could learn "right from wrong" by themselves; hence, they reduced written errors or mistakes. Writing the lesson in reflective journals is a really good activity, which helps the students use target terms in the real context of writing, thereby improving word use continuity. This result matched Luu's results [14] that students can build the right form of the compound and the complex sentences even when it comes to writing phrases. Martinez-Lage [16] has confirmed the important effect of reflective journal writing on the reduction of writing grammar errors, and the students would observe their common grammar errors to correct themselves in the following text. Peng [18] asserted that journal writing is a good practice in students' lexical understanding to use real and targeted vocabulary.

4. CONCLUSION

The current study's goal was to see whether Reflective Journal Writing (RJW) helped students improve their writing fluency and reduce written errors in writing. The study results showed that reflective journal writing helped students significantly develop their writing fluency and, at the same time, significantly reduce their writing mistakes. This could contribute to the students' standard of writing. The students were more active in communicating their ideas in some way. They should write longer phrases and provide clear examples. The current study filled in the literature gap that few previous studies have been investigated to help primary students improve their writing skills and vocabulary learning via the implementation of Reflective Journal Writing. This

result was important because young learners could use their critical thinking in the learning process.

The results emphasize the value of Reflective Journal Writing as a reflection activity in English instruction. It gives students with frequent exercise in recalling and reflecting on what they have learnt, and then writing it down. Reflective journal writing is considered a critical skill because it requires students to think critically and express their critical perspectives regarding personal life lessons. Additionally, by providing structured feedback after each writing assignment, students may become aware of their spelling and grammatical errors and rectify them the next time. Additionally, reflective journal writing may be utilized as a kind of self-evaluation, encouraging students to consider their own learning process, as well as their strengths and limitations. Knowing this, individuals may devise a strategy for enhancing their learning and gaining more learning autonomy.

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