

INTEGRATED APPROACH IN IMPROVING ENGLISH WRITING SKILL FOR THE FIRST YEAR STUDENTS AT THAI NGUYEN UNIVERSITY OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

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Abstract

This study is an experimental research which was conducted to evaluate the effect of the integrated approach in teaching writing skill for the first year students at Thai Nguyen University of Agriculture and Forestry.

This study utilized the experimental method of research to analyze the data. The pre-test and post-test were analyzed to determine the effects of using the Integrated approach in comparison with the Traditional approach in enhancing the writing ability of the students.

The data gathered were treated using mean and standard deviation to find the mean performance rating in the pre-test and post-test scores of the students of the two groups. The t-test for independent samples was used to compare the pretest mean of the two groups and post-test mean of the two groups.

Key words: *first year students, integrated approach, improving, Thai Nguyen University of Agriculture and Forestry, writing skill*

1. Introduction

We all know that Vietnam is a developing country and its educational system is gradually developing to meet the demand of the world. One of the main reasons which make the educational system of Vietnam more backward than that of the world is the inability of students to speak and write English language. Vietnamese students meet a lot of difficulties in writing and speaking English language. This has been the biggest constraint in conducting their researches as well as applying science and technology in the chosen world of work.

Since Vietnam implemented the opening policy, the need to learn English has become more imperative. Particularly, since Vietnam became a member of the World Trade Organization, English language has been very important and it has become an important tool for graduate students to find a good job. As a result, English language now is taught in most of secondary schools in Vietnam and it is one of the important subjects in all the schools today.

As stated above, the importance of English language within the entire school curriculum can not be over-emphasized. As well as being a major language of communication and commerce regionally and in the wider global context. It has significant importance in the field of education and functions as a medium in order to help the education of Vietnam approach the world education. It is also an access language in technology and information services. In addition, it facilitates the acquisition, creation and documentation of knowledge. It is the medium of instruction and the language through which a great deal of learning takes place.

However, teaching English now meets a lot of difficulties because it remained a foreign language in Vietnam. Obviously, Vietnamese students don't have chance to speak and write English language outside the classroom, which causes lots of difficulties for them to improve their language competencies.

It is the fact that when compared with other fundamental skills such as listening, speaking and reading, writing English is considered as the most difficult skill for language learners, because it requires a great deal of lexical and syntactic knowledge as well as principles of organization in the language to produce a good writing.

Richards and colleagues (2002) maintain that "writing is usually thought to be the most difficult skill to acquire". Ferrer shares the same view as well. He argues that "writing is a complex and difficult process, and that it takes time and effort to write effectively" (Ferrer, 2001: 49). Moreover, "teaching writing is a difficult task for teachers" (Stewart et al., 2003:180).

Writing, in short, is a complex process of creating text. It contains multiple components. In general, and when simplified, one must bare in mind that there is composition (contents, its development and forming) and there is

transcription (in linguistics transcription means to make a copy of what has been said in writing, using phonetic symbols), the latter being more connected the secretarial aspect. Punctuation is an important part of both, as it is connected with syntax and semantics (Allan, Miller 2001).

To assist language instructors to improve learners writing competencies and produce good writing, this paper aims to present the combination of the product, process and genre-based approaches in a writing class.

2. Research Design

This study employed the single-factor experimental design. Specifically, the experimental two-groups design to find out the effectiveness of using between integrated approach and the traditional approach in teaching writing skill. Two groups of the first year students were selected. The researcher handled the classes of both groups once a week, having fifty minutes session for each meeting which lasted for 15 weeks inclusive of administration of the pre-test and post-test. Two groups of forty students each composed the experimental and comparison groups. The experimental group was taught using the integrated approach while the comparison group was subjected to the traditional approach in teaching the writing skill.

Students from both groups were of the same age, sex, and mental ability as shown from the results of the final examination of the first semester.

The two groups were evaluated at the beginning (pre-test) and at the end (post-test) of the lessons to find out significant difference between two approaches which are primarily based on the performance of students in the examination. The difference between the mean score performance of the pre-test and post-test of the two group were computed and tested for significance.

3. Population and Sampling Procedure

The students were chosen using the random sampling techniques. A random selection was made by listing the names of the students in each class and then using students' record to check for similar gender and age, together with the result of English scores from the first term examination. Eighty students who have the same mental abilities were randomly assigned as the subject of the study. They were divided into two groups in which there were 40 sample students in each group. The two groups of students were both handled by the same teacher. The experiment was carried out during the first semester including the administration of the pre-test and the post-test.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Mean Rating in the pre-test of the two groups using the integrated approaches and traditional approach in teaching writing skill.

Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation in pre-test scores of the experimental group using the integrated approach and the control group using traditional approach.

The table showed the mean value in pre-test of students who are subjected to traditional approach is nearly equal to that of students who are subjected to integrated approach.

The difference between the mean scores and standard deviation of the experimental group and control group in pre-test is 0.025 and 0.036, which is negligible. The standard deviation of both groups revealed the closeness of scoring between groups.

Table 1
The Mean Rating in Pre-test of the Experimental group and the Control group

Groups	Mean	Standard deviation
Experimental group	5.35	1.291
Control group	5.325	1.327

4.2. Mean Rating in the post-test of the two groups using the integrated approach and traditional approach in teaching writing skill.

Table 2 shows the mean and standard deviation in post-test scores of the experimental group which was taught through the integrated approach and the control group which was taught through traditional approach.

Table 2

**Mean Rating in the posttest of the Experimental
(Integrated Approach) and Control Group (Traditional Approach)**

Groups	Mean	Standard deviation
Experimental group	6.6	1.392
Control group	5.375	1.254

The table showed the mean value in post-test of students in experimental group who are subjected to integrated writing approach is much higher than that of students in control group who are subjected to traditional approach.

The difference between the mean value and the standard deviation of students in experimental group with the traditional group is 1.225 and 0.138, respectively. The resulting value of 1.392 standard deviation for the experimental group indicated that a small number of students got higher marks which pulled the mean rating of 6.6 a bit higher than that of the control group.

4.3. Is there a significant difference on the pretest and posttest scores between the control and experimental groups?

Table 3 shows the t-test result of the pre-test and post-test mean scores of the control group being taught through the traditional approach

Table 3
Test of Difference on the pre-test and post-test of the Control group (which was taught using the control group)

Test	Mean scores	Mean difference	t-computed value	Critical t-value
Pre-test	5.325	0.05	0.34	2.042 NS
Post-test	5.375			

The data in Table 3 revealed that the computed t-value of 0.34 is less than the critical value of 2.042 at $n = 39$ and $\alpha = 0.05$ which affirm that there is no significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores of the control group which was taught using the traditional approach. Although the mean scores of the post-test is little higher compared to the mean scores of the pre-test, the test of difference confirmed the fact that using the Traditional approach, though popular does not make any difference at all to improve the writing skill of students.

Table 4 below shows the t-test result of the pre-test and post-test mean scores of the experimental group being taught through the integrated approach.

Table 4
Test of Difference on the pre-test and post-test of the Experimental groups (which was taught using the integrated approach)

Test	Mean scores	Mean difference	t-computed value	Critical value
Pre-test	5.35	1.25	7.64	2.042
Post-test	6.6			

* Significant at $\alpha = 0.05$

Table 4 showed that the computed t-value of 7.64 is much higher than critical value of 2.042, which means the post-test scores obtained by the students in experimental group significantly differ from their pre-test score. Moreover the post-test mean scores are higher than the pre-test mean scores. The result implies that the students performed better after attending the integrated writing approach. The approach he/she was exposed motivated him/her to improve for the better.

Table 5 below shows the t-test result of the pre-test mean score between the integrated approach and the traditional approach.

Table 5
Test of Difference on the Pretest between the two Groups

Groups	Mean scores	Mean difference	t-computed	t-tab
Experimental	5.35	0.25	0.087	1.96 NS
Control	5.325			

The table revealed the result of the t-test computation of significant difference of pre-test mean scores between the control and experimental groups. The computed t-value of 0.087 is lower than the tabulated value of 1.96. The result clearly indicate that the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in the pre-test mean scores between the control and experimental groups is supported in this study. Since $0.087 < 1.96$, so the null hypothesis is not rejected. This result in particular supported the preliminaries made during the random selection and assignment of the samples of the study. Because in the said selection, correct sampling was carefully done, seeing to it that the samples for both groups have equal ability.

Table 6 below shows the t-test result of the post-test mean scores between the experimental and control group.

Table 6
Test of difference on the Post test between two Groups

Groups	Mean scores	Mean difference	t-computed	t-tab
Experimental	6.6	1.225	4.2	1.96
Control	5.375			

* Significant at $\alpha = 0.05$

The computed t-value of 4.2 is higher than the tabulated value of 1.96. The result clearly indicates that there is significant difference in the post-test mean scores between the control and experimental groups. The significant difference in the posttest between groups implies the positive effect of using the integrated approach in teaching writing skills to the students

5. Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions are hereby made:

1. There was a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores of the students in experimental group. In the post-test, the students in experimental group performed better than they did in the pre-test, so the null hypothesis posited is rejected. There was no significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores of the students in control group, because the improvement of students in the control group who were taught using the traditional approach was little.

2. There is no significant difference in the pre-test scores between the two groups of sample. The null hypothesis is accepted.

3. Students' mean mark in the post-test of the experimental class, which was taught, using the integrated approach, was higher than that of the control class, which was taught using the traditional approach. So the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in post-test scores of the two groups of samples is rejected.

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