

The Effect of Keeping a Diary to Improve Writing Ability for English-Majored Sophomores at Tay Do University

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ABSTRACT

This experimental study was conducted in order to measure the effect of diary keeping on students' writing ability. Forty English-majored students from Tay Do University were selected to participate in the study. They were divided into two groups: experimental and control groups. The instruments consisted of pretest, posttest and questionnaire. The results of the research showed that diary keeping improved students' writing skill. Moreover, most of the students were interested in the diary-writing program. They highly evaluated that writing frequently could have a positive effect on their writing skill. However, just a few students thought diary could be used in their classroom leading to doubt in the application of diary writing in reality.

Keyword: *Writing diary, Diary writing, Keeping diary to improve writing ability*

1. INTRODUCTION

English has not been second language with Vietnamese students. In Vietnam, English majored students can only practice English in class with their classmates. They do not have any chance to practice English more. They mainly communicate each other around by Vietnamese including writing. Vietnamese students do not have a good pen pal right there to help them training making sentences, paragraphs, or at least making conversations by writing English down. Therefore, learning English is not easy in English environmental deficiency.

Studying a new language should have tips for learning language. For example, if the students want to be good at writing, they should practice it as much as they could. One of the effective ways to practice writing is keeping a diary every day. The students describe things happened around them, how they feel, what they think about life, social relationships, etc. Thanks to writing diary, the students' writing ability could improve day after day through their use of vocabulary, grammar as well as idea development. To find out how diary writing helps English-majored students improve their writing skill, the researcher decided to carry out this research on the effect of keeping a diary to improve writing ability for English-majored sophomores at Tay Do University.

Research question

This study was conducted in order to answer the following question:

To what extent does keeping a diary improve writing skill of English-majored sophomores in Tay Do University?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Definitions of diaries

When mentioning to the term "diary", there are many famous authors giving their opinion about this. Diaries have been used as a source of data for biographers and literary scholars for hundreds of years to document the events of people's lives (Lewis & Massey, 2004). As I. Wallace (1998) defined in his book "Action Research for Language Teacher", diaries are documents for privacies. The writers can express their deep secretes burying in their heart. Moreover, there are not people having right to take their eyes without agreement.

In addition, there are no "rules" in how to make a diary. Therefore, the writers can express whatever "thoughts" and "feelings" come to them (I. Wallace, 1998, p.62). The writers may design how their diaries look like. Some people like to make their diaries as much as colorful or some others like their diaries as simple as possible. Moreover, they can draw picture in spite of write letters on the papers to describe their daily activities.

He also presses that "diaries are often kept on a daily basis, and entries can vary from one day to the next, and be either short or long. They can be written immediately after a teaching event, when the details are fresh in the mind,

or at the end of the day, when may be more free time” (I. Wallace, 1998, p.62). Therefore, it is so convenient for who want to keep it. It does not take much time of the participants. They can write what and when they like such as time breaking, on the bus or train station, or in the park, and so on.

Moreover, diaries also attract the writers by its honesty and decision in the comments. There, people completely live with their nature. They can talk their truth emotions toward people, things aground directly and honestly without any worries that the person who is in the story know. Rainer (2004) also gives her opinion toward explanation of diary in her booklet. She thinks diary is only the form of writing that encourages the writers’ expressions generously.

2.2 The advantages and disadvantages of diaries

The advantages of diaries

There are many different points of view of scholars about the advantages of diaries. Brock, Yu, and Wong (1992) represent a number of sources and give their own experience to supply the valuable list of the advantages of diary studies. They consist of 10 benefits will be presented as follow:

- They provide an effective means of identifying variables that are important to individual teachers and learners.
- They serve as a means of generating questions and hypotheses about teaching and learning processes.
- They enhance awareness about the way a teacher teaches and a student learns.
- They are an excellent tool for reflection.
- They are simple to conduct.
- They provide a first-hand account of teaching and learning experiences.
- They are the most natural form of classroom research in that no formal correlations are tested and no outside observer enters the classroom dynamic.
- They provide an on-going record of classroom events and teacher and learner reflections.
- They enable the researcher to relate classroom events and examine trends emerging from the diaries.
- They promote the development of reflective teaching.

(Brock, Yu, and Wong, 1992:295)

After that, they also note the most general important idea in the advantage of diaries. They say this approach can provide the entrance to the hidden sentimental variability “that greatly influence the way teachers teach and students learn” is one of the most important of these beneficial features.

Disadvantages of diaries and its solutions

When keeping diary there are one major disadvantage. We cannot share or make the diary that consist our privacies in public. Therefore, “the sharing and joint-analysis is impossible” (I. Wallace, 1998, p.62). However, to get around this problem, we can follow some ways are given in examples.

A teacher may confidentially invite “a trusted colleague or fellow researcher” discussing the diary in the usual rules. Therefore, they can talk about the issues appearing from the diary. The discussion program can be determined by the diary-keeper, or by the collaborator, or both of them (I. Wallace, 1998, p.62).

The diary-keeper can give excerpts from the diary to others for making discussion. Sometimes, several classmates are keeping diary together, so giving a share of excerpts are a regular basis. Nevertheless, they can make a one-off meeting where the participants give insights from the diary.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research design

An experimental study was conducted in order to measure the influence of keeping diary on writing skill. The researcher designed the pretest-posttest to measure my participants’ writing ability. The participants of this research were 40 English-majored sophomores who were split into two groups. The experimental group got the treatment by keeping the diary during research time. Students were asked to write about what they liked or disliked, what happened with them in these days, or students could express their feeling on something such as their friends, their hometown, their family, etc. In contrast, the other group did not receive any similar treatment. I used the first and the last week of the research time to conduct the pretest and posttest for both two groups. Only the students in experimental group were delivered the questionnaire.

3.2 Participants

The participants were 40 English-majored sophomores studying at Tay Do University who were divided into two groups: experimental and controlled groups. They were both male and female at the same age about 18-20 and at the same level. They were Vietnamese and spoke English as a foreign language.

3.3 Instrument

In this study, test was used as an instrument to measure students' English writing ability, and questionnaire was also given to the students to get their feedback toward using diary to improve writing skill.

Test

The researcher measured the students' writing ability at the beginning and at the end of the research by two tests: pre-test and post-test. The two tests not only had similar time that is twenty minutes for each examination, but also had equivalent difficulty.

Questionnaire

This questionnaire was designed on the basic of the five-degree scales including *not at all*, *not very much*, *a little*, *much*, and *very much*. There were 12 items in the questionnaire containing three aspects such as the pleasant standards, the effectiveness and the practicality of diary writing. There were four items for each aspect. The pleasant standards of diary writing were the first one, and it contained questions number 1, 2, 3, and 4. The effect of the writing diary was second one. It consisted of Q5, Q6, Q7, and Q8. The last three questions checked the practicality of the diary writing in reality.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Results of tests

After collecting both of the tests, I scored and classified students' writing into five groups according to their marks: poor (from 5 to 6 marks), faire (from 7 to 8 marks), fairly good (from 9 to 10 marks), good (from 11 to 12 marks), and excellent (from 13 to 15 marks). For example, students' writing got six marks; their assignment will be evaluated poor writing. The statistics were changed to the percentage to show the development of the English majored students' writing skill easily through table below.

Table 1. The results of the retest and posttest

		poor (%)	faire (%)	fairly good (%)	good (%)	excellent (%)
Retest	Experimental group	40	35	15	10	
	Control group	45	40	15	5	
Posttest	Experimental group	15	25	25	20	15
	Control group	35	45	20		



Fig 1. The results of the pretest

Looking at the figure, we saw that the writing skill of the experimental and control group were not different much before the treatment. In addition, we can indicate that there was no important appearance of development.



Fig 2. The results of the posttest

In the posttest, a significant difference appeared between two groups. The result of control group got higher position at grade faire than experimental group. However, control group did not get any good and excellent writing as experimental group. Next, we compared the results of experimental group before and after the treatment. That showed the difference in this group evidently.



Fig 3. The comparison of the posttest results of experimental group

The figure showed that before the treatment, the number of students got poor and faire writings was higher than that after the treatment. In addition, we could clearly see that these fairly good, good, and excellent writings increased. Since the development of writing skill was partly greater than before the hypothesis that diary keeping motivates the writing skill of English majored sophomore was confirmed.

4.2 Results of the questionnaire

The results of the questionnaire were shown in the following table.

Table 2. The results of the questionnaire

Measurements	Not at all (%)	Not very much (%)	A little (%)	Much (%)	Very much (%)
Principles of diary writing					
The pleasant standards	1.25	7.5	38.75	40	12.5

The effect	2.5	7.5	11.25	43.75	35
The practicality	6.25	32.25	35	11.5	15

The calculated results showed the benefit of diary on writing skill. In the first principle, most of the students felt pleasant the diary program when they attended. 52.5 % of the students liked the diary-writing program. Only 1.25% of the students disliked the program. In the second aspect, most of the students thought diary writing could be effective on their writing skill. There were 78.75% of the students thought that diary writing could make writing skill improve while 2.5% of them thought diary keeping did not have an effect on their writing at all. In the last one, 26.5% of the students thought diary keeping had its practicality in reality. However, 38.5% of them thought that diary keeping was not very practical in English classroom.

5. CONCLUSION

Through the results of the research, it could be concluded that diary keeping improved writing skill of English-major sophomores. In addition, most of the students liked diary-writing program and pleased with it. They also thought writing frequently could have a good effect on their writing ability. However, just a small number of students thought diary could be used in their classroom, so the application of diary-writing program in reality seemed not to be feasible.

6. REFERENCES

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