



CREATIVE WRITING INSTRUCTION FOR PRIMARY STUDENTS: AN IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS IN THE CONTEXT OF CURRICULUM REFORM IN VIETNAM

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Abstract

In Vietnam's 2018 Literacy Education Curriculum Guideline, creative writing is a new requirement, emphasized for its goals of developing primary students' language competencies, critical thinking, and problem-solving. This new requirement offers teachers an opportunity to help students enhance their writing competencies and presents a challenge, as it requires them to have specific competencies, professional development, and specific guidelines. When it comes to the current situation of creative writing instruction in primary schools, it has many limitations and requires improvement. While instructional materials significantly influence teachers' instruction by establishing suitable educational objectives, methodologies, and contents, the coverage of contents on creative writing instruction in some reference materials is very limited, leading to confusion among teachers and ineffective practices in actual classrooms. Therefore, an in-depth analysis of some key reference documents is crucial to come up with suggestions to improve the quality of creative writing instruction in primary schools, which is the focus of this study. The findings revealed some problems with possible suggestions for the four following issues: (1) approaches for creative writing for primary students, (2) approaches for assessing students' creative writing competencies, (3) time allocation for creative writing instruction, and (4) contents on creative writing instruction in Vietnamese Textbooks.

Keywords: Creative writing instruction, primary students, curriculum reform, Vietnam.

INTRODUCTION

Creativity has been identified as one of the top competencies that future workers need to obtain to survive and work effectively (Uslu & Uslu, 2021). When it comes to young learners, creative writing instruction has a direct impact on the development of their critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Barton et al., 2023). Therefore, creative writing instruction for students is teachers' imperative task.

Due to the significance of creative writing instruction, there has been significant focus on creative writing practices in primary schools (Graham et al., 2012, revised 2018; Göçen, 2019; Barton et al., 2023). Besides several positive signals, several challenges have been recognized, which consist of teachers and students' misconception of creative writing, leading to ineffective pedagogy. Also, standardized testing and limited amount of instructional time have negatively impacted writing instruction, hindering students' creative writing development. Besides, there is a lack of quality professional development for creative writing instruction.

Since 2018, Vietnam has implemented curriculum reform from content approach to competence approach (MOET, 2018a). In this context, the 2018 Literacy Education Curriculum (LEC) Guideline



was established in 2018 and has been officially implemented since the 2020 – 2021 school year with an important task to help primary students build and develop their Vietnamese language competencies through four skills, namely listening, reading, writing, and speaking so that they can use Vietnamese as a tool to study well and conduct social communication effectively (MOET, 2018b). In comparison to the 2006 LEC Guideline, creative writing is a new requirement emphasized with the goals of fostering students' writing, critical, and creative thinking skills as well as their abilities to express their thoughts and emotions honestly (MOET, 2018b). This is both an opportunity for teachers to help their students develop their writing competencies and a challenge since it requires teachers to have several specific competencies, professional development, and specific guidelines.

In Vietnam, despite the importance of creative writing instruction for primary students, it has not received attention. While existing studies focused on the implementation of the 2018 LEC Guideline in general or reading instruction, only a few papers mentioned creative writing instruction for primary students (Le, 2018; Do, 2023). Do (2023) commented that the current situation of creative writing instruction in primary schools has many limitations and needs to be improved. One of the factors directly affecting teachers' instruction is instructional materials, which teachers mainly rely on to determine appropriate teaching goals, methods, and contents (Le, 2018; RGEP, 2020a; Do, 2023). However, contents related to creative writing in some key reference documents are limited, leading to confusion among teachers and ineffective practices in actual classrooms (Do, 2023). Thus, how creative writing instruction is guided in some key reference documents introduced in the MOET's online training modules for primary teachers needs to be analyzed to come up with suggestions to improve the quality of creative writing instruction, which is the focus of this study.

Literature Review

Theoretical basis of creative writing instruction and Perspectives on creative writing

Based on previous studies' views on "creativity" (Cropley, 2011), "writing" (Murray, 2009; Ulu, 2019; Göçen, 2019; Barton et al., 2023), and "creative writing" (Wang, 2019; Uslu & Uslu, 2021; Barton et al., 2023), in this study, "creative writing" is identified as the process of creating texts in which writers express their opinions, ideas, and feelings about new things or familiar things in a unique way to communicate with their target readers and the world around them.

Approaches for creative writing instruction for primary students

Up to now, creative writing instruction has been viewed different perspectives, but the four following approaches have been worth noting:

The writing process approach

Calkins Lucy (1994), Paul (2005), Murray (2009), Göçen (2019), Ulu (2019), Barton et al. (2023) argued that teaching creative writing is teaching a specific process. Murray (2009) argued that writing should be taught as a process where writers express their thoughts, experiences, and emotions with others through language. When it comes to the writing process, writers need to experience ideational stages, including prewriting, writing, rewriting (Paul, 2005; Murray, 2009). In these steps, correct spelling, grammar, punctuation, coherence and cohesion, suitable vocabulary and sentence usage are essential (Kellogg, Bascom, & Raulerson, 2007; as cited in Ulu, 2019). Therefore, to guide students to write, teachers need to give them opportunities to experience consecutive stages of the writing process, namely planning, drafting, sharing, revising, editing, evaluating, and publishing (Calkins Lucy, 1994; Murray, 2009; Graham et al., 2012, revised 2018). Furthermore, to motivate students to experience their writing process, teachers should respect and encourage students to share their ideas and emotions as well as attempt any form of writing they want to communicate with others (Calkins Lucy, 1994; Murray, 2009; Ulu, 2019).



Creative writing is a practical competence

Graham et al. (2012, revised 2018), NCTE (2016), Ulu (2019) appreciated the essential role of practice. NCTE (2016) argued that writing competencies develop through reflective practices because writers use their writing skills to transform their knowledge, experiences, and emotions to respond to their target readers, purpose of the writing task, genre and context, length, style, and format, from which they continuously develop writing skills throughout their writing lives, as they have to take on new tasks in new genres for new readers. Therefore, teachers need to provide adequate daily time for students to practice writing with various communication purposes (Graham et al., 2012, revised 2018).

Creative writing is to express students' imagination and emotions

Paul (2005), Cheung et al. (2013), Uslu and Uslu (2021), Barton et al. (2023) concentrated on the important role of students' imagination and emotions as main ingredients in creative writing. Paul (2005), Cheung et al. (2013) pointed out that imagination is the foundation for creative writing, followed by inspiration and original ideas. Therefore, students must have opportunities to make decisions about ideas, vocabulary, sentence, text structure, and forms to attract readers (Barton et al., 2023). In other words, creative writing only happens when students have opportunities to use their imagination to create unique writing. Hence, creative writing instruction is guiding students to express their experiences, imagination, and emotions through language.

Creative writing is to develop students' communicative competencies in language

Regarding MOET (2018b), the goal of language education is to help students develop their language competencies to study, work, and communicate including multimodal communication through the four main skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing. From this point of view, creative writing instruction not only focuses on guiding students in writing techniques, but also instructing them to write various genres with specific procedures to meet their communication purposes. Thus, teachers need to guide primary students to write some prominent text types, namely descriptive, narrative, and expository texts. Also, teachers should teach students to write several simple informational documents to meet communication needs in life such as autobiographies, messages, invitations, timetables, letters of inquiry, newspapers, short reports about group or class activities, written instructions for activities, and common forms. Through writing with various genres, students can communicate with diverse communication partners such as their families, teachers, and peers.

In summary, there are at least four strategies teachers need to apply to help primary students to become effective writers, including: (1) instruct them to use the writing process for various purposes; (2) provide adequate daily time for students to write; (3) instruct them to express their unique thoughts, experiences, and emotions; (4) create an engaged community of writers where students can be heard, share, and receive feedback on their writing.

Current situation on creative writing instruction for primary students in Vietnam

Current situation on creative writing instruction for primary students in general

Creative writing instruction for primary students has received a lot of attention (Graham et al., 2012, revised 2018; Göçen, 2019; Barton et al., 2023). Besides several positive signals, several challenges have been recognized, namely teachers and students' misconception of creative writing, leading to inappropriate strategies. Also, the negative impact of high stakes testing, and limited amount of instructional time have hindered students' writing development. A shortage of teachers' professional development about creative writing instruction are also typical difficulties. Moreover, the above international studies mainly focus on the current situation of developed countries, without an understanding of that in developing and underdeveloped countries, including Vietnam, which require further explorations.



Current situation on creative writing instruction for primary students in Vietnam

The implementation of the 2018 Literacy Education Curriculum Guideline

The 2018 LEC Guideline was approved by the MOET in 2018 and it has been carried out in 2020. As a result, it has been gradually being implemented year by year. The implementation timeline for the 2018 LEC Guideline is as follows: Grade 1 (2020–2021), Grade 2 (2021–2022), Grade 3 (2022–2023), Grade 4 (2023–2024), and Grade 5 (2024–2025).

The 2018 LEC Guideline was designed to help students build and develop their Vietnamese language competencies through four skills, including listening, reading, writing, and speaking so that they can use Vietnamese to study and communicate effectively (MOET, 2018b). Besides several main requirements about four main skills, the 2018 LEC Guideline emphasized that students need to have competencies to study and work with multimodal texts, which requires creative and innovative instructional strategies (MOE, 2018b).

Requirements for creative writing instruction for primary students

When it comes to requirements for writing skills, compared to the 2006 LEC Guideline, creative writing is a new requirement emphasized with the goals of helping primary students develop their holistic writing skills, critical, and creative thinking skills as well as their abilities to express their ideas and emotions (MOET, 2018b). This is both an opportunity for teachers to help their students develop their language competencies and a challenge since it requires them to have specific insights and skills.

The 2018 LEC Guideline determined two essential elements making up primary students' writing competencies, including writing techniques and text creation competences (MOET, 2018b). In this study, the author focuses on the second factor: Text creation competencies. MOET (2018b) emphasized that primary students need to have the ability to create a text reflecting a specific problem by synthesizing their knowledge and experiences and reflecting their own thoughts, feelings, and attitudes toward the issue mentioned in their texts. These are four important requirements for primary students' creative writing competencies:

Table 1. Requirements for primary students' creative writing competencies.

Creative writing requirements	Description
Text genres	- Students can write different text types, namely narrative, descriptive, expository, and simple informational texts.
Text creation competencies	- Students can carry out the writing process, starting from generating ideas and implementing them creatively. - Students can determine writing contents, collect materials; form ideas, write drafts, fix errors; edit written texts.
Contents	- Beside the content that the assignment requires, students need to demonstrate interpersonal contents such as their own views, feelings, and attitudes toward the problem and object of their writing. - From there, students gradually build for themselves a way of looking, thinking, and living reflecting their own personal styles.
Assessment	- Students can rely on comments and assessments from their teachers and friends to edit, supplement, and complete their writing.

Current situation on creative writing instruction for primary students.

Although creative writing instruction in primary school is essential, this era has just been mentioned in a few studies (Le, 2018; Do, 2023). In terms of the current situation of this era, Do (2023) indicated that it has many limitations and needs to be improved. While instructional materials significantly influence teachers' instruction in establishing educational objectives, methodologies, and contents (Le,



2018; RGEP, 2020a; Do, 2023), contents on creative writing instruction in some key reference materials are very limited, leading to teachers' confusion and ineffective practice in actual classrooms (Do, 2023). Thus, an in-depth analysis of key reference documents is crucial to come up with suggestions to improve the quality of creative writing instruction in primary schools.

Based on this context, this study focuses on how creative writing instruction is guided for implementation in some key instructional materials. The following research questions were proposed to guide the study:

1. How is creative writing instruction for primary students guided and directed in the 2018 Literacy Education Curriculum Guideline and Teacher Training Materials?
2. How are Vietnamese Textbooks designed to support creative writing instruction for primary students?

METHOD

According to Ary et al. (2010), Cohen et al. (2018), the document analysis approach can help researchers understand important characteristics of a phenomenon through studying certain documents. Therefore, this approach is employed in this study to find out how creative writing instruction for primary students is guided for implementation in some key reference documents.

In the context of educational reform, the MOET has organized many training modules to help teachers gain essential insights to implement 2018 curriculums. Each module relates to one specific topic and has specific training materials. When it comes to the 2018 LEC Guideline implementation, these three following important materials were introduced, namely:

- (1) The 2018 Literacy Education Curriculum Guideline (MOE, 2018b).
- (2) Teacher Training Material: Using Teaching and Education Methods to Develop Primary Students' Quality and Competencies in the Vietnamese Subject [TTMA] (RGEP, 2020a).
- (3) Teacher Training Material: Testing and Assessing Primary Students' Quality and Competencies in the Vietnamese Subject [TTMB] (RGEP, 2020b).
- (4) Vietnamese Textbooks 1, 2, 3 (Bui & Nguyen, 2020; Nguyen & Trinh, 2021; 2022).

The analysis mainly focuses on four following issues: (1) approaches for creative writing for primary students, (2) approaches for assessing primary students' creative writing competencies, (3) time allocation for creative writing instruction, (4) contents on creative writing instruction in Vietnamese Textbooks.

RESULTS, DISCUSSION, and CONCLUSION

Approaches for creative writing instruction for primary students

The 2018 LEC Guideline (MOET, 2018b) recommended an integrated teaching strategy for teaching writing: through learning to read, students can find a "model" to learn to write, they also need to have opportunities to develop their speaking competencies through presenting their writing. Simultaneously, the model practice method needs to be used to guide students to analyze and create texts of the same genre. Besides, compared to the 2006 LEC Guideline, teachers need to spend more time sharing, commenting, and correcting students' written products. However, the orientations of teaching writing in general and creative writing in particular mentioned in the 2018 LEC Guideline are somewhat unclear and not specific, as it did not mention the approaches and methods that can be applied for creative writing instruction. Also, compared to the orientations of teaching reading, those of teaching writing are much fainter.



The TTMA (RGEP, 2020a) emphasized that teachers need to focus on two stages of writing instruction: (1) guiding the writing process and (2) organizing practice activities for writing different genres. The teaching method in the first stage focuses on assigning tasks for students to perform step by step: (1) determine the purpose and content of writing; (2) collect documents, form ideas, and create an outline for the writing; (3) write a draft and then complete the writing; (4) based on rereading and comments from teachers and friends to edit the writing. This approach comes from the idea that through each writing lesson, if the teacher guides students know what to do by following each step in the process, they will have the habit of writing based on that process. In the second stage, the teacher should instruct students to practice writing each part and paragraph with prominent characteristics of text type:

Table 2. Instructional orientations for each text type in the training material.

Text genres	Instructions
Descriptive texts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teachers need to guide students to write descriptive paragraphs with images and feelings. - Teachers need to assign tasks to students to write a descriptive paragraph before writing the whole essay (write the introduction, write a paragraph describing the shape, write a paragraph describing activities, and write conclusion).
Narrative texts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teachers need to instruct students to write narrative paragraphs with attractive narration from the narrator or from the characters. - Teachers need to assign students the task of writing narrative paragraphs before writing the whole essay. In each storytelling, teachers need to ask students some suggestive questions: What event does the paragraph tell? What did the main character do and say? What were the results? (write the introduction, write some paragraphs telling important events, and write conclusion).
Expository texts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teachers need to assign students the task of writing an expository paragraph about an object. For example: Teachers can ask students to write paragraphs introducing a favorite toy with the following suggestions: (1) Name of the toy? When did you get it, who gave it to you?; (2) The shape and color of the toy and what material is it made of?; (3) How do you play with that toy? What do you find interesting about that toy?; (4) How does that toy help you, how do you take care of it?

However, the instructions mentioned in the TTMA (RGEP, 2020a) are still general and mainly use suggestive questions without really mentioning specific methods and techniques for each type of text. To summarize, RGEP (2020a) introduced the traditional way to teach writing for each type of text is analyzing sample paragraphs and essays, then practicing writing according to the sample, revising and editing the writings. Also, integrating reading and writing instruction is emphasized since reading texts are considered model texts for students to learn the characteristics of each text type as well as ways to express ideas and emotions so that they can create their own texts.

The TTMA (RGEP, 2020a) presented writing teaching orientations more clearly and specifically than the 2018 LEC Guideline (MOET, 2018b). Like the 2018 LEC Guideline, the TTMA emphasized the importance of integrating reading and writing instructions with the view that reading texts are models for students to practice writing. However, the document still mainly focused on instructing students to write to meet structural requirements and characteristics of each text genre rather than to express their imaginations, emotions, and attitudes. According to Barton, et al. (2023) creative writing only happens when students have opportunities to use their imagination to create unique writing. Thus, strategies to guide students to express their unique ideas, experiences, and emotions need to be presented more clearly in these documents.

In terms of teaching creative writing as a process, international literature review has emphasized that students need to go through consecutive stages of their writing, including planning, drafting, sharing, revising, editing, evaluating, and publishing (Calkins Lucy, 1994; Murray, 2009; Graham, et al., 2012, revised 2018; Ulu, 2019). However, these above materials only focus on guiding students in the step of writing, without paying attention to instructing them to rehearsal, present, evaluate, edit, and



publish their writing. According to Graham, et al. (2012, revised 2018), through presenting, sharing, and publishing writing texts, students begin to consider themselves as professional writers, which motivates and stimulates them to write more. Therefore, these reference documents need to complement additional guidelines on strategies, methods, and forms to guide students to present, edit, and publish their writings.

Another gap is that these documents mainly focused on teaching students to write by hand on paper, which does not meet the 2018 LEC Guideline’s requirements of developing their competencies to learn and work with multimodal texts (MOE, 2018b). This gap requires innovative strategies. Some international studies mentioned using picture books as a model for students to follow in terms of ideas, organization, vocabulary and sentence usage, and images (Pérez & Vargas-Daza, 2019; Wang & Lin, 2019). According to these studies, picture books function as a bridge supporting students to apply these certain writing qualities into their own writing. Furthermore, through picture books, students understand that they can express their ideas not only with written language but also with visual, aural, gestural, and spatial modes. This is a new strategy that educators in Vietnam should consider in creative writing instruction for primary students.

Approaches for assessing primary students’ creative writing competencies

In terms of assessing primary students’ language competencies, the 2018 LEC Guideline (MOET, 2018b) did not propose any method, technique, tool, or criteria to assess primary students’ creative writing, which may lead to limitations and ineffective practices in real classrooms. Meanwhile, the TMB (RGEP, 2020b) suggested some methods such as: (1) using written tests; (2) observation methods; (3) question-answer methods; (4) portfolio assessment methods with some tools like checklist and rubric. However, these tools mainly focus on elements of structure, content the assignment requires, grammar, spelling, and presentation, but do not pay attention to creative elements, while international studies (Ulu, 2019; Uslu & Uslu, 2021; Barton et al., 2023) emphasized that creative elements such as originality of ideas, fluency and flexibility of thoughts, emotions, word richness, and writing style need to be paid attention to. Hence, these key reference documents need to clearly offer guidelines on methods, tools, and forms of evaluating creative elements in students’ writings.

Time allocation for creative writing instruction for primary students

The time spent on teaching Vietnamese language in general and writing instruction in particular at each grade level is allocated as follows (MOET, 2018b):

Table 3. Time allocation for creative writing instruction.

Grade	Total lessons/ 35 weeks	Total lessons/ a week	Writing lessons/ a week	Writing time/ a week
1	420	12	1	30 minutes
2	350	10	1	35 minutes
3	245	7	1	40 minutes
4	245	7	2	40 minutes
5	245	7	2	40 minutes

In the first grade, a lesson lasts 30 minutes, in the second grade, it is 35 minutes, and 40 minutes belongs to grades 3 to 5 (MOET, 2018a). Notably, in the first grade, from week 21, teaching sentence writing is not separated into an independent lesson but is integrated into two lessons during the week. Specifically, after each lesson there is usually a writing requirement, which accounts for about 15 minutes.

Table 3 shows that primary students in general have limited time to practice writing in their classroom, notably under one hour per week for grades 1 to 3. Graham et al. (2012, revised 2018) suggested that students need to have enough daily time to write, at least one hour a day for writing, beginning in the first grade. The hour should include at least 30 minutes for guiding some writing strategies,



techniques, and skills appropriate to students' development. The remaining 30 minutes should be allocated for writing practice, where students apply what they just learnt from their teachers' instruction. Therefore, not having enough daily time for writing practice everyday will limit students' writing habits, motivation, and competencies. To resolve this issue, writing practice should be integrated in other areas such as in reading lessons or in other subjects such as Science or Math (Graham et al., 2012, revised 2018), which requires clear and specific guidelines in the instructional documents.

The contents on creative writing instruction in Vietnamese Textbooks

Textbooks are one of the main reference sources for teachers' instruction and the main learning materials for students, so the contents in textbooks have an influence on students' creative writing learning process (RGEP, 2020a, 2020b). The MOET allowed the use of many sets of textbooks. Based on the goals and requirements of the 2018 LEC Guideline, each set of textbooks was designed to instruct writing skills for students in a different way and process. Within the limitation of the study, the authors only mention contents on creative writing instruction for grades 1, 2, and 3 in the "Creative Horizon" Vietnamese Textbooks series, which have been chosen in most of primary schools in the South of Vietnam in general and in Ho Chi Minh City, a metropolitan city in Vietnam in particular.

Based on the perspective on "creative writing" mentioned in section 2.1.1, the article identifies contents on creative writing instruction as contents in which students have opportunities to conduct their writing to express their unique ideas, experiences, and emotions. The following criteria are given to identifies contents on creative writing instruction in Vietnamese Textbooks:

Criteria 1: The content provides space for students to do their own writing rather than copying or following a pre-given outline.

Criteria 2: In the writing activity, students have opportunities to express their own ideas, experiences, and emotions in various forms.

Based on these above criteria, the number of creative writing contents in textbooks for each class is identified as follows: Grade 1 (13 contents), Grade 2 (23 contents), and Grade 3 (28 contents).

The contents on creative writing instruction in the Vietnamese Textbook 1

In the Vietnamese Textbook 1 (Bui, H. M., Nguyen, K. T. L., 2020), after students learn all the sounds and rhymes in week 20, they will perform general practice exercises from week 21. From week 21, each week is divided into four lessons, writing contents are usually integrated in lesson 2, lesson 3. The paper identifies 13 topics creating spaces for students to conduct their creative writing. In general, these contents allow students to express their own ideas and emotions based on suggested images and questions, which make their sentences original, creative, and diverse. Another notable point is that these assignments integrate enhancing students' creative speaking competencies before writing, clearly demonstrating the concentration on integrating teaching language skills in a lesson of the 2018 LEC Guideline.

 Giới thiệu một đồ vật được tặng mà em thích theo các gợi ý sau:
– Đồ vật đó có tên là gì?
– Ai tặng đồ vật đó cho em?
– Vì sao em thích món đồ đó?



 Viết vào vở nội dung em vừa nói.

1) Introduce a gift that you like according to the following suggestions: What is that gift?; Who gave it to you?; Why do you like that gift?

2) Write in your notebook what you just said.

Figure 1. Lesson 3, week 26, page 78, Vietnamese Textbook 1, Volume 2.



According to the requirements of this topic, students are free to choose a gift they like, they have chances to express their thoughts and feelings about their gifts through their own original sentences. However, the number of creative writing contents is limited for first graders to develop their sentence writing skills in comparison to the level of writing activities students need to practice every day to develop their writing competencies (Graham et al., 2012, revised 2018).

The contents on creative writing instruction in the Vietnamese Textbook 2

The Vietnamese Textbook 2 (Nguyen & Trinh, 2021) has two lessons each week, the contents of speaking and writing is taught integrated together at the end of the second lesson of the week. 23 topics were identified as contents on creative writing instruction, which are mostly designed by using the modelling method, meaning the authors provide a sample text and students will analyze the sample with teachers' guidance. The Textbook either creates a framework for students to shape their writing or provide picture materials and asks students to write sentences describing, introducing, and sharing feelings about some familiar objects or write about a person and that person's story either as a witness or as a participant:



6. Practice introducing familiar objects (continued)

a. Speak from 4 to 5 sentences about a toy you like according to the following suggestions: Which toy do you like?; What notable features does that toy have? (shape, color, outstanding parts, activities); Your feelings for that toy.

b. Write from 4 to 5 sentences about what you just said.

Figure 2. Lesson 4, week 16, pages 145, Vietnamese Textbook 2, Volume 1.

Besides creative writing contents, some other writing contents set many limits or gives too detailed and specific suggestions, limiting students' creativity:

c. Viết đoạn văn 4 – 5 câu giới thiệu chiếc thước kẻ dựa vào tranh và từ ngữ gợi ý:



c. Write a paragraph from 4 to 5 sentences to introduce your ruler based on the suggested picture and words: centimeter graduations, rectangle, thin and flat, yellow, measure and draw.

Figure 3. Lesson 2, week 12, page 105, Vietnamese Textbook 2, Volume 1.

Instead of giving direct characteristics of the ruler in the picture, the Textbook should only give suggestions that direct students to observe to determine some outstanding characteristics of the rulers they are using. For example: *What shape is your ruler?; What special parts does your ruler have?; What is the color of your ruler?; What do you use your ruler for?.*

The contents on creative writing instruction in the Vietnamese Textbook 3

Continuing the Vietnamese Textbook 2, the writing contents designed in the Vietnamese Textbook 3 (Nguyen & Trinh, 2022) are clearly called “Creative Writing”. This is a huge step forward, demonstrating the book series' concentration on meeting the 2018 LEC Guideline's requirements for creative writing (MOE, 2018b). In terms of duration, the Vietnamese Textbook 3 allocates one lesson



(40 minutes) per week for creative writing topics. Regarding strengths, many topics still provide suggested pictures and mind maps that create opportunities and fulcrums for students to write. Although a specific process for writing paragraphs is not given, the mind maps in the Textbook are very effective in supporting students in finding and developing main ideas in their paragraphs:



Write a short paragraph from 6 to 8 sentences to share your feelings for your friends or your teachers according to the following suggestions: Who do you want to write about?; Describe that person’s appearance, interests, personality, and dreams; How do you feel about that person?

Figure 4. Lesson 2, week 10, page 81, Vietnamese Textbook 3, Volume 1.

Besides some common writing topics, the authors also help students become familiar with reading and writing emails, which meets the 2018 LEC Guideline’s requirements (MOE, 2018b) in developing students’ competencies to work with multimodal texts. These types of activities give students opportunities to apply their writing abilities to solve real-life problems, making their learning meaningful. However, like the Vietnamese Textbook 2, some writing contents in the Vietnamese Textbook 3 set many limits or gives too detailed directions, limiting students’ creativity:

2. Giúp bạn Vân Anh viết thư trả lời bạn Hồng Hạnh theo một trong hai tình huống sau:
- Lớp bạn Vân Anh hẹn cùng tham gia quyền góp sách vở với lớp bạn Hồng Hạnh.
 - Lớp bạn Vân Anh có kế hoạch khác.

Help Van Anh writing an email replying to Hong Hanh in one of two situations:



- Van Anh’s class make an appointment to donate books with Hong Hanh’s class.
- Van Anh’s class has other plans.

Suggest: How will you address yourself?; What content will you tell Hong Hanh?

Figure 5. Lesson 4, week 8, page 67, Vietnamese Textbook 3, Volume 1.

In this assignment, although students have chances to practice writing emails, they are placed in the situation of writing emails to solve another person’s specific problem, not their own actual problems. This cannot give students the motivation and force to write as well as limit their creativity because creative writing can only happen when students have opportunities to express who they are and what is happening around them (Cheung et al., 2013; Uslu and Uslu, 2021; Barton et al., 2023). Instead of doing the above assignment, students should have chances to write emails to fulfil a practical purpose that they desire such as writing emails to ask about the life of a relative, a teacher, or a friend they have not seen for a long time. Therefore, although the Vietnamese Textbook 3 allocates one lesson (40 minutes) per week for contents on creative writing, only 28 contents are identified as creative writing contents among the 34 contents mentioned in the Textbook.

Another limitation is some topics like “write a short paragraph expressing feelings and emotions about people and scenes” are taught for many weeks but the connection between weeks is weak because the arrangement of topics having same requirements is not consecutive but alternating, causing difficulties for learners since they do not have chances to practice with new and difficult content types regularly in a specific period. For instance, in the Vietnamese Textbook 3, Volume 2, in lesson 2, week 32, page



111, students learn to write a short paragraph giving reasons for liking or disliking a character in a story. However, in lesson 4, week 33, page 119, students learn to write to narrate an action that contributes to protecting the environment and in lesson 6, week 34, page 126, students practice again with the writing content of lesson 2, week 32.

Through analyzing the contents on writing instruction for primary students in the “Creative Horizon” Vietnamese Textbooks series, some ideas of creative writing instruction in the Textbooks were realized. Notably, the Vietnamese Textbook 3 names the writing contents “creative writing”, which is a prominent point. However, besides some topics creating spaces for students’ creativity, some are designed with many limits or give too detailed directions, limiting students’ original and unique elements. Also, in comparison to the amount of daily time students need to practice writing (Graham et al., 2012, revised 2018), the duration of writing contents in this Vietnamese Textbook series are still limited, which is not enough for students to develop their creative writing competencies, especially their writing habits. Therefore, the number of contents related to creative writing in textbooks needs to be increased and more integrated into other skill contents such as reading, listening, and speaking.

Conclusion

Creative writing instruction is a new requirement emphasized in the 2018 LEC Guideline. This study analyzed how creative writing instruction is mentioned and guided for implementation in four Vietnam’s essential reference documents, which teachers mainly rely on to conduct their daily instruction (Le, 2018; RGEP, 2020a; Do, 2023) to propose some suitable recommendations to increase the quality of creative writing instruction in primary schools.

The findings revealed that although some reference documents proposed several creative writing instruction ideas (MOE, 2018b; RGEP, 2020a; Le, 2018; Do, 2023), they mainly focus on teaching students to write to meet requirements about structure, grammar, and characteristics of each text genre rather than to express their thoughts, experiences, and emotions. These documents also focused solely on guiding students in the step of writing, overlooking crucial processes such as presenting, evaluating, editing, and publishing. Additionally, these documents only emphasize handwritten activities and assignments, not aligning with the 2018 LEC Guideline’s mandate to enhance students’ competencies to work with multimodal texts. To address these gaps, these materials should explicitly provide strategies and methods for guiding students in expressing their imagination and creativity in their texts, sharing and publishing their writings, as well as working with various forms of texts, especially picture books, which is proved to help students understand that they can express their ideas not only with linguistics but also with multimodal elements (Pérez & Vargas-Daza, 2019; Wang & Lin, 2019).

Besides, existing documents guide teachers to assess primary students’ creative writing competencies based on structural aspects, assignment content, grammar, spelling, and presentation (MOE, 2018b; RGEP, 2020a, 2020b), leading to a lack of emphasis on creative elements. Hence, outline guidelines for assessing creative aspects in primary students’ writings, consisting of methods, tools, and forms need to be complemented.

Also, the time allocation specified in the 2018 LEC Guideline (MOE, 2018b) as well as creative writing contents in Vietnamese Textbooks (Bui & Nguyen, 2020; Nguyen & Trinh, 2021; 2022) are limited, requiring guidelines for appropriate strategies such as integrating in other areas such as integrating writing instruction in other language skills lessons and subjects such as Science or Math.

Although the study has several essential contributions discussed above, several limitations need to be pointed out. Firstly, because of the limitation of this study, the authors only mention four main reference materials. To make more contributions, further studies should study more documents, namely teachers’ lesson plan reference books, students’ workbooks, and “Creative Horizon” Textbooks for grades 4 and 5 as well as textbooks from other publishers. Secondly, the authors



employed the document analysis approach, which only reflects to a certain extent the current situation on creative writing instruction for primary students on a theoretical level. Further studies should focus on teachers and students in actual classrooms for more practical data.

Ethics and Conflict of Interest

All requisite research ethics guidelines were meticulously followed during the study's execution. Furthermore, the authors affirm that no conflicts of interest exist among them about this article's research, publication or authorship.

Contribution Rate of Authors

The authors contributed equally to this article.

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