# ENHANCING 4TH GRADE STUDENTS' ENGLISH NARRATIVE WRITING SKILLS THROUGH SHORT SILENT ANIMATED VIDEOS: AN ACTION RESEARCH

## NÂNG CAO KỸ NĂNG VIẾT TƯỜNG THUẬT TIẾNG ANH CỦA HỌC SINH LỚP 4 THÔNG QUA VIDEO HOẠT HÌNH NGẮN KHÔNG LỜI: MỘT NGHIÊN CỨU HÀNH ĐỘNG

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**ABSTRACT**

This article reports the impact of six short silent animated videos on the English narrative writing skills of fourth-grade students. The research employed eight weeks of action research with eight students at the A1 Level (CEFR) to analyse vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure, spelling, and creative writing. The researcher collected data through pre-tests and post-tests, weekly writing tasks, teacher reflection, and semi-structured interviews. Based on the research results, all the writing components have improved significantly. Nevertheless, the students enhanced lexical richness, grammatical accuracy, text cohesion, and spelling. Modal animated videos with short silent visual content improved students' storytelling imagination while enabling creative writing in narrative pieces. The research demonstrates how integrating visual media into writing education helps students to develop their language and narrative skills while learning English as a second language. Further research is encouraged to examine how this approach works across different learner groups through additional studies and review its sustained impact on writing growth.

***Keywords***: Silent animated videos, narrative writing, A1 level, action research, language development.

**TÓM TẮT**

Mục đích của bài báo này là khảo sát ảnh hưởng của sáu video hoạt hình ngắn không lời đối với kỹ năng viết tường thuật tiếng Anh của học sinh lớp 4. Nghiên cứu này được tiến hành trong tám tuần bằng phương pháp nghiên cứu hành động với tám học sinh ở trình độ A1 (CEFR), tập trung phân tích từ vựng, ngữ pháp, cấu trúc câu, chính tả và khả năng viết sáng tạo. Dữ liệu được thu thập thông qua bài kiểm tra trước và sau can thiệp, các bài viết hằng tuần, nhật ký phản tư của giáo viên và phỏng vấn bán cấu trúc. Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy, tất cả các yếu tố cấu thành kỹ năng viết đều có sự cải thiện đáng kể. Trong đó, học sinh tiến bộ nhiều nhất ở khả năng sử dụng từ vựng phong phú và độ chính xác ngữ pháp, đồng thời cải thiện khả năng liên kết văn bản và chính tả. Các video hoạt hình ngắn không lời đã góp phần phát triển trí tưởng tượng kể chuyện, đồng thời thúc đẩy khả năng viết sáng tạo trong các bài tường thuật. Nghiên cứu này chứng minh rằng việc tích hợp phương tiện trực quan vào giảng dạy viết giúp học sinh phát triển kỹ năng ngôn ngữ và kỹ năng tường thuật trong quá trình học tiếng Anh như một ngoại ngữ. Các nghiên cứu tiếp theo được khuyến khích nhằm kiểm chứng cách tiếp cận này với các nhóm người học khác nhau, đồng thời đánh giá tác động lâu dài của nó đối với sự phát triển kỹ năng viết.

***Từ khóa***: Video hoạt hình không lời, viết tường thuật, trình độ A1, nghiên cứu hành động, phát triển ngôn ngữ.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The need to learn English has become more relevant than ever nowadays, particularly for children. In 2010, English became a compulsory subject in elementary schools in Vietnam to provide students with the rudiments of communication in English. However, teaching and assessing English proficiency among elementary students, particularly in writing, presents numerous challenges. Some learners continue to struggle with putting their thoughts into writing, particularly in creative writing, such as storytelling as a result of limited knowledge of words, poor understanding of syntax and sentence structures, or difficulty in generating and developing concepts. Moreover, the effectiveness of teaching the English language at the primary level is also due to the unavailability of teaching resources, which triggers interest in learning.

There is an urgent need to conduct research and apply innovative teaching methods for English. Such needs can be resolved through the development of educational technology, particularly animated videos and other visual materials. These tools can effectively develop the students' writing skills and make learning more interactive, promoting active learning and interest.

The primary objective of this research is to investigate the efficacy of short silent animated videos in improving the English narrative writing abilities of 4th-grade students. The study employed an action research methodology to explore potential enhancements in students' narrative structure, language competency, vocabulary, and spelling development when exposed to visual storytelling stimuli through short silent animated videos.

To achieve the outlined aim and objectives, the following overarching research questions have been put forward:

*1. How do short silent animated videos influence 4th-grade students' English narrative writing skills?*

*2. What are students' opinions on using short silent animated videos to enhance their narrative writing skills?*

## 2. METHODS

The research was held in a classroom at an English Center over eight weeks, with 60-minute bi-weekly lessons. The classroom was equipped with a projector, screen, and sound system, making it an ideal space for video presentations and other multimedia contents. The participants consisted of eight fourth-grade students, three boys and five girls, who were enrolled in English classes at the English Center. One participant dropped out of the study, and the analysis was conducted with seven students. All the students are at the A1 level on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), but their narrative writing skills remain below the expected level.

### 2.1. Design of the Study

This study employed action research methodology to assess the effectiveness of short silent animated videos in enhancing the narrative writing abilities of 4th-grade students in Haiphong, Vietnam. The research was conducted at an English language centre. Teachers at the English centre observed and facilitated the learning process, helping to maintain objectivity by conducting interviews with students.

Action research refers to an intervention research study aimed at improving educational practices by deliberate behavior and systematic reflection [11]. It is a spiral self-reflection process [10] that entails planning, action, observation, and a reflective cycle to foster change and understanding in a given environment. The interventional process used in this study is based on the Kemmis and McTaggart Action Research Spiral Model, as shown in Figure 1.
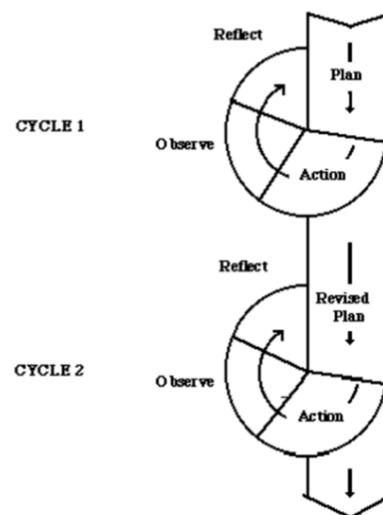


Figure 1. Kemmis & McTaggart Action Research Spiral Model

According to Kemmis and McTaggart's model [10], the research includes four stages:

• **Plan:** Define the problem, establish objectives, and outline the intervention and data collection strategy.

• **Action:** Implement or modify the intervention.

• **Observe:** Collect data through observations, interviews, and student outputs.

• **Reflect:** Analyse data to assess effectiveness and determine if another cycle is needed.

In Cycle 1, the researcher identified the low performance in writing through classroom observation and a pre-test, designed learning tools and materials, and implemented teaching using silent animated videos from the 3rd lesson onward. Teacher reflection and students ' pre- and post-writings were used for data analysis. A second cycle would only be applied if the results from the first were insufficient.

The study consisted of six short silent animated videos, arranged in order of increasing difficulty and length, with integrated activities that focused on vocabulary, grammar, spelling, creativity, and sentence structure. A mid-week test was conducted to adjust the video level and topic for the next cycle. Table 1 outlines the detailed criteria for evaluating and selecting six short, silent animated videos.

Table 1. Criteria Table for Selecting Videos

| Video | Criteria and Objectives |
|---|---|
| **The Present** | - **Vocabulary Building**<br>- **Objective**: Learn new words about feelings and friendship.<br>- Brief and simple story to be read out to 4th - place students.<br>- Tells students about the most basic aspects of a story: introduction, middle, and conclusion.<br>- Requires students to be imaginative when considering the story. |
| **Pip** | - **Simple Past Tense Grammar Practice**<br>- **Objective**: To practice the use of the simple past tense.<br>- Straightforward plot and lots of actions.<br>- Helps students retell events in order with past tense verbs.<br>- Supports learning about characters and actions. |
| **Ormie the Pig** | - **Better Story Structure**<br>- **Objective**: Practice the way in which to structure a story and utilize linking words.<br>- Fun and engaging story.<br>- Assists students in interpreting how to organize events.<br>- Teaches using linking words like "then," "but," "so" to connect ideas. |
| **Float** | - **Spelling Practice**<br>- **Objective**: Enhance spelling of common words.<br>- Touching story that draws the attention of students.<br>- Introduces vocabulary about family and behavior.<br>- Assists students in paying attention to the correct writing of words in their work. |
| **One Small Step** | - **Developing Creativity**<br>- **Objective**: Encourage creative writing and detailed descriptions.<br>- Inspiring story about dreams.<br>- Allows students to imagine and write their own ending.<br>- Assists students in using descriptive words and feelings. |
| **Catch It** | - **Reviewing All Skills**<br>- **Objective**: Apply the entire writing skills.<br>- Interesting story with many events.<br>- Students practice vocabulary, grammar, structure, spelling, and creativity.<br>- Provide the challenge to the students to write a complete and well-organized story. |

## 2.2. Data collection and analysis

Students were given a narrative writing test to determine their writing proficiency before the intervention started. In this test, the students were asked to write a brief paragraph based on a short silent animated video within 30 minutes. At the end of the intervention, the students also had a similar test to assess their progress. The tests will be graded on a standardised five-level scale (1 - poor, 2 - fair, 3 - good, 4 - very good, 5 - excellent) based on the following criteria: vocabulary, grammar, structure, spelling, and creative writing.

A scoring rubric was used to evaluate student progress. To achieve objectivity in scoring the writing process, the center's teacher and the researcher evaluate students' writings using the writing rubric. This process determined inter-rater reliability. Where discrepancies in scoring arose, both raters discussed them and agreed on the final score. This method improved the validity and reliability of the process evaluation. The results of the pre- and post-tests were compared to determine the improvement in each student's writing skills.

Throughout the study, students were required to write a short paragraph summarizing the content of the video after each lesson, which included short silent animated videos. Reflective writings were kept for each student to observe their progress in writing skills as learning progressed. In addition, semi-structured interviews (lasting 5-10 minutes) were conducted with each student after the intervention to gather their perceptions of the videos, attitudes towards the writing, and perceptions of personal improvement in the learning process.

While conducting the intervention, the researcher recorded observations and reflections on the changed

teaching strategies in a diary every week, focusing on the effectiveness of Teaching Methodologies, instructional issues, and revisions to the teaching strategy. Another colleague was also invited to observe the choice lessons and provide feedback, which would offer an additional perspective on instructional strategy and learning process.

The statistical measurement of quantitative data in pre-tests and post-tests was conducted. In addition, the thematic coding and analysis of qualitative data were done using writing samples, interviews, and teacher reflection.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1. Pre-test and Post-test outcomes

The pre-test and post-test outcomes showed that students' narrative writing abilities had improved significantly after six weeks of instruction using short silent animated videos. Table 2, Table 3, and Table 4 demonstrated that the average total score increased from the pre-test (12.06) to the post-test (18.57), indicating a significant difference of 6.51 points across all criteria.

The most improved categories were spelling (+1.66) and sentence structure (+1.46), with the least improvement in creative writing (+1.00). Students tended to have improved skills in vocabulary choice, grammatical correctness, sentence structure, and spelling. Nevertheless, students faced challenges, as some still struggled to generate innovative and original ideas and remained reliant on video content.

At the individual level, there were varied advances among pupils, reflecting differential effectiveness among learners. ST2 had the most significant overall improvement, with a 10-point rise. Spelling improved by three points, vocabulary by two points, sentence structure by two points, grammar by two points, and creative writing by one point. ST1 improved by nine points, achieving the highest post-test score; the improvements were evenly distributed, with two-point enhancements in sentence structure, grammar, spelling, and creative writing, and a one-point rise in vocabulary. ST5 increased by eight points, principally attributable to a three-point enhancement in spelling and a two-point increase in vocabulary, along with one-point improvements in other areas. ST7 rose by seven points,

Table 2. Students' Pre-test Scores

| Students | Vocabulary (5 points) | Sentence structure (5 points) | Grammar (5 points) | Spelling (5 points) | Creative Writing (5 points) | Total Score (25 points) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ST1 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 12 |
| ST2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 10 |
| ST3 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 14 |
| ST4 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 10 |
| ST5 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 10 |
| ST6 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 14 |
| ST7 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 12 |

Table 3. Students' Post-Test Scores

| Students | Vocabulary (5 points) | Sentence structure (5 points) | Grammar (5 points) | Spelling (5 points) | Creative Writing (5 points) | Total Score (25 points) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ST1 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 21 |
| ST2 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 20 |
| ST3 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 18 |
| ST4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 15 |
| ST5 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 3 | 18 |
| ST6 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 3 | 19 |
| ST7 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 19 |

including a two-point enhancement in grammar and a two-point improvement in spelling, along with one-point gains in the different categories. ST6 rose by five points; spelling improved by two points, vocabulary revealed no change, and the other criteria each rose by one point. ST4 had a five-point gain, with a consistent one-point rise across all requirements. ST3 showed the least improvement, with a four-point increase; grammar and spelling remained unchanged, but sentence structure improved.

Overall, the findings suggest that integrating short silent animated videos into instruction can effectively enhance multiple aspects of narrative writing. However, further pedagogical intervention is necessary to foster creativity and independence in students' written expression.

Table 4. Comparison of Average Scores between Pre-Test and Post-Test

| Criteria | Pre-Test Average | Post-Test Average | Improvement |
|---|---|---|---|
| Vocabulary (5 points) | 2.75 | 3.86 | +1.11 |
| Sentence Structure (5 points) | 2.25 | 3.71 | +1.46 |
| Grammar (5 points) | 2.14 | 3.43 | +1.29 |
| Spelling (5 points) | 2.63 | 4.29 | +1.66 |
| Creative Writing (5 points) | 2.29 | 3.29 | +1.00 |
| Overall (25 points) | 12.06 | 18.57 | +6.51 |

## 3.2. Students' interview results

To better understand students' perceptions, the seven participants (ST1-ST7) were interviewed (semi-structured) following the intervention. Regarding the preference for videos, students gave varying favourites in terms of emotional appeal and content engagement. ST1, ST2, and ST5 preferred 'Catch It' because of the humor and the fun storyline. ST1 said the video was funny and made her want to write more. ST3 liked The Present, saying it was "meaningful, exciting, and interesting." ST4 and ST6 chose Float because of its engaging and inspiring content, and ST7 chose One Small Step as the most impressive due to its touching and inspiring story.

Each of the seven students stated that the short silent animated videos helped them generate more ideas to write about. The visual material enabled them to visualize plots, making plotting and outlining their stories easier. ST3 said: "I had some pictures in my mind and I was ready to write something after watching the video".

Students also indicated vocabulary improvement. ST6 specifically noted learning new words, such as "witch" and "goat," through contextual exposure. ST5 shared that watching the videos helped them understand and apply the past tense more accurately in their writing: "Now I know how to use the past tense better when I write stories".

Students were generally positive about using short silent animated videos in writing lessons. The videos were fun and helpful towards the learning process, and they helped them to master their language and writing skills. The interviews affirmed that incorporating visual storytelling into the writing lesson increased student interest, vocabulary, and narrative coherence.

The researcher compared the effects of short silent animated videos on the narrative writing skills of 4th-grade students and assessed the students' perceptions of this instructional process. Pre-, mid-, and post-intervention assessments revealed improvements in vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure, spelling, and creative writing. The students' narratives were more cohesive, vocabulary was more elaborate, and the number of grammatical errors was reduced. Teachers testified to improvement in creativity, writing confidence, and competence.

The intervention included two phases:

• **Phase 1 (Weeks 1-3):** Focused on vocabulary, grammar, structure, and spelling.

• **Phase 2 (Weeks 4-6):** Emphasised advanced language and creativity.

The findings confirmed that short silent animated videos effectively improved narrative writing and student engagement.

Teacher reflections evaluated student progression weekly, revealed areas of strength and weakness, and guided instructional modifications. Observations demonstrated that integrating video into the writing process showed significant progress; however, further assisted practice in grammar, structure, and creativity would bring it to full bloom.

Some noteworthy results were documented during the intervention. Students felt more active and confident, especially from Week 3 onward, and created more organised and expressive narratives. From Week 2, students began using more descriptive language and action verbs, supported by visual input. By Week 3, many students had successfully employed linking words and

transition phrases, such as "however," "then," and "as a result," to create more cohesive stories.

However, there were difficulties, such as verb tense errors, which were prevalent in the past, particularly when using "go" and "went". Additionally, students in some writing assignments could not link paragraphs logically, even with the use of transitions. The idea of introducing mind-mapping techniques to help students organise their ideas more effectively was proposed by teachers. Moreover, although creativity was generally improved, some students still wrote summaries that lacked details and creativity. More activities that enhance originality and independent thinking are required.

The observations established that incorporating short silent animated videos aided the generation of ideas and organised writing. However, complete narrative competence is yet to be achieved without the prolonged assistance in grammar correctness, coherent reasoning, and text creativity.

The results of this study supported previous research. Prior studies [4, 5] have shown the beneficial impact of animated videos on sequencing the story, vocabulary use, and sentence structuring. In line with these findings, the students in this study improved their sentence structure and vocabulary range. Nonetheless, several students preferred to repeat video content rather than articulate it imaginatively, as seen in the previous research. This means that there is more to be done to promote originality. Silent short animated videos have been shown to encourage students to write stories by enhancing their imagination and reducing linguistic anxiety [9]. Visual storytelling tools have been reported to help young learners construct coherent narratives and increase their confidence in writing [2]. Furthermore, video-based instruction has been found to enhance linguistic features, such as vocabulary and sentence complexity, while simultaneously promoting student engagement and creative thinking [6]. This research, along with current results, supports the idea that short silent animated videos effectively facilitate idea formation, structure development, and learner motivation.

Additionally, two recent studies from Southeast Asia share similarities with the current research situation. The use of short animation videos in online EFL classes was found to improve narrative writing achievement among Indonesian secondary school learners, as they supported the development of ideas and sequencing [3]. Similarly,

animation-based activities were found to promote the use of descriptive vocabulary and increased motivation to write among elementary school students in Indonesia [7]. Combiners of these studies support the existing findings and demonstrate the potential for improving learners' creativity, structural accuracy, and engagement in narrative writing activities with the aid of short silent videos.

Consistent with the studies [1, 8], the current research showed that video can enhance vocabulary memory, grammatical application, and student engagement. The study's goal was not specifically articulated; instructors' comments indicated that students exhibited increased motivation. Thus, video-based learning may provide a low-stress and engaging writing experience.

## 4. CONCLUSION

The paper presents empirical support for the effectiveness of short silent animated videos in developing the narrative writing abilities of fourth-grade students. As a result of the intervention, the vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure, spelling, and creative writing showed significant improvement. Students also described increased levels of engagement, confidence, and motivation. These findings revive the pedagogic promise of implementing visual-based learning for early English language acquisition, specifically in generating ideas and forming writing fluency.

In considering these findings, primary teachers should design a systematic instructional framework that concurrently addresses the identified weaknesses through short, silent, animated videos. Teachers must maintain consistency in the past tense, especially with irregular verbs, through direct instruction and paragraph editing exercises; improve paragraph cohesion by directly teaching linking words and structural organization, including reordering and cohesion-enhancing activities; broaden topic-specific vocabulary utilizing a visual dictionary and a selected word bank, along with clear guidelines for the use of a specific amount of target expressions in student assignments; foster creative thinking while progressively decreasing dependence on videos through the use of mind mapping, the 5W1H question framework, and open-ended questions with various possible responses, while gradually removing instructional supports; and improve spelling and grammatical proficiency through immediate feedback, self-correction, peer review, and formative assessment directed by a comprehensive rubric.

Guidance must be customised for each student to improve their technical skills, creativity, autonomy, and writing competence.

In conclusion, young learners can be trained to develop narrative writing skills through short, silent animation videos. Some suggestions are proposed for future research to refine their application in different contexts, enhance further writing improvement, and foster learners' independence and grammatical correctness.

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