

An Open-Ended Writing Task System for Developing Creative Competence in Vietnamese Grade 5 Students

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ABSTRACT: Open-ended writing tasks enable students to develop independent thinking and rich imagination while expressing their emotions and individual personalities through diverse forms of expression, including storytelling, description, expressive writing, and argumentation. Writing in an open-ended format not only stimulates students' interest in learning but also enhances their problem-solving skills, interdisciplinary knowledge application, and use of real-life experiences. However, implementing open-ended tasks requires teachers to be capable of designing appropriate prompts, guiding students toward creative expression, and applying flexible evaluation criteria that focus on ideas and personal thinking. This is an effective solution for developing creativity – a core competence in today's primary education curriculum.

KEYWORDS: competence, creativity, primary education, Vietnamese language, Vietnam

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of an open-ended writing task system plays a vital role in fostering creative competence among Grade 5 students. In the Vietnamese language subject, writing holds a special position as it naturally follows various learning activities and helps students build the ability to construct texts. Writing is a practical activity that strongly reflects individual expression, thus requiring a high degree of creativity. Open-ended tasks have become an effective tool in the renewal of assessment practices, allowing for the identification and enhancement of students' creative thinking. Such tasks are particularly crucial for Grade 5 students, who are at a key transitional stage before entering lower secondary education. However, in practice, many teachers still lack a unified understanding of this concept. They also have limited skills in designing scientifically grounded open-ended prompts that align with the goal of developing learners' competencies. Building and implementing an open-ended writing task system is a necessary and appropriate trend to promote creativity. This approach serves to promote creativity, which is one of the core competencies in the new primary education curriculum. Furthermore, it contributes to nurturing creative, humane, and confident individuals who are prepared for future learning stages.

2. RESEARCH CONTENT

2.1 The Concept of Open-Ended Writing Tasks

Many Vietnamese educators have emphasized the important role of open-ended tasks in teaching writing and have encouraged their flexible and creative use to stimulate students' interest and foster independent thinking. An effective open-ended prompt not only sparks learners' curiosity and critical thinking but also clearly reflects the ideological orientation and core content of the writing.

Thi Hien Luong Nguyen (Vietnam Institute of Educational Sciences) stated:

“An open-ended writing task presents a topic at a general level, without imposing specific requirements, thereby allowing students to independently and flexibly propose solutions based on their personal viewpoints—as long as they are reasonable and aligned with the intended direction.” [1, pp. 29–34]

Associate Professor, Ph.D. Tri Nguyen stated that although there is not yet a unified definition, an open-ended writing task is a type of prompt that “creates opportunities for students to express their own opinions on the issues to be discussed, explained, or argued as stated in the prompt, and to present their personal perspectives in selecting the subject matter and the manner of expression.”[2]

Based on the above viewpoints, it can be seen that despite different ways of expression, researchers are consistent in emphasizing the unlimited, personalized, and open-ended nature of open-ended writing tasks. Depending on the instructional objectives, characteristics of learners, and assessment contexts, open-ended prompts can be designed with various degrees of flexibility to both ensure pedagogical orientation and promote students' creative capacities.

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In terms of content: Open-ended tasks are highly suggestive in nature and are not limited to a specific topic or fixed body of knowledge. The content may encompass broad issues, not necessarily confined within the official curriculum, thereby allowing students to apply interdisciplinary knowledge and explore topics from multiple perspectives. As a result, students are encouraged to express personal viewpoints, develop independent thinking, and reveal their individuality in writing.

In terms of form and assessment criteria: Open-ended tasks are often presented in creative formats—such as hypothetical scenarios or multi-layered prompts—designed to spark critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. These tasks are highly flexible, suitable for a wide range of students, and enable a comprehensive assessment of each learner's capacity for application and creativity.

2.2 Advantages of Open-Ended Writing Tasks in Developing Students' Creative Competence

In the context of educational reform, designing a system of open-ended writing tasks is a key solution to fostering creative competence in Grade 5 students. Unlike traditional prompts, open-ended tasks allow students to choose content and mode of expression, thereby stimulating interest, enhancing motivation to write, and encouraging the development of independent and critical thinking. Such tasks also expand the space for imagination, enabling students to experiment with diverse forms of expression such as poetry, drama, diaries, and letters. Moreover, open-ended writing requires students to draw upon their life experiences, interdisciplinary knowledge, and real-world understanding, thus improving their ability to apply learning in practical contexts. The freedom to express personal viewpoints helps build students' confidence, individual style, and unique voice in writing. However, implementing open-ended tasks also presents challenges: teachers need flexible pedagogical thinking, students require guidance to overcome initial unfamiliarity, and assessment practices must be adaptable—focusing more on ideas and creativity than on rigid form.

2.3 Demonstrations of Students' Creative Competence in Text Production

The 2018 General Education Curriculum for the subject of Literature identifies two prominent features of the subject: its instrumental function and its humanistic nature. Literature not only helps students develop communication competence—a key tool for learning across subjects—but also contributes to nurturing the soul, shaping healthy emotions, fostering humanistic values, and encouraging compassionate living. With these characteristics, Literature holds significant advantages in fostering students' creative competence. Writing is a distinct language skill that expresses thoughts and communicative purposes through written language, following textual conventions and functional styles. Therefore, developing writing skills is a top priority in the primary education curriculum. Writing is also an effective form of communication, requiring the writer to clearly define objectives and strategic expression.

In teaching text production, creative writing is considered a fundamental requirement in many developed countries. Similar to creative reading, creative writing contributes to the formation of creative competence—a core skill that enables learners to adapt to the constant challenges and changes of modern life.

According to Idrees Pate (2017), creative writing refers to any form of writing that reflects imagination and independent thinking, including novels, poetry, and creative nonfiction, with the purpose of expressing emotions, thoughts, and personal perspectives [3,101]

Author Thi Hien Luong Tran stated: “Anything we write that is not copied from others can be considered creative writing.” [4, p.360]

The essence of creative writing lies in its integrative nature: it combines reading comprehension, Vietnamese language knowledge, other subject areas, and personal life experiences to produce original language products. Creative writing not only helps learners refine their expressive abilities but also encourages deeper exploration of vocabulary and effective language use in composition.

In school practice, the concept of a “good essay” is still largely influenced by the subjective perception of the grader. Therefore, it is necessary to clarify the criteria for creative writing and develop training and assessment tools that are consistent, scientific, and objective.

Researchers agree that creative writing is a breakthrough competence, reflected in originality—no matter how small—in either content or expression. In language teaching, creative writing enables students to use language flexibly to express personal thinking, while enhancing their expressive skills and creative capacity.

However, developing creative writing competence in primary students still faces many challenges. This requires comprehensive solutions, such as increasing time for writing practice, identifying and nurturing talented students, innovating prompt design, updating teaching methods, and diversifying assessment forms.

2.4 Designing Open-Ended Writing Prompts to Develop Creative Competence for Grade 5 Students in Vietnam

2.4.1. Descriptive Writing Prompts

a. Requirements for Grade 5 Descriptive Writing

“Write a descriptive essay about a person or a landscape using similes, personification, and evocative language to highlight the characteristics of the subject.” [5, p.39]

A descriptive essay written by students should meet the following criteria:

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- *Content*: Clearly introduce the subject (person/landscape) to be described; organize ideas in a logical sequence of description; select significant details; each detail should be vividly and specifically depicted, reflecting observation through multiple senses; effectively use personification, similes, and vivid language to enhance expressiveness and appeal; include personal feelings or emotions toward the described subject, if appropriate.
- *Structure*: The essay must include three parts (introduction, body, and conclusion) and ensure the ideas are presented in a logical order.
- *Language and Expression*: Ensure cohesion between paragraphs; use a variety of adjectives and verbs to make the descriptive sentences lively; employ rhetorical devices such as repetition, similes, and personification.
- *Creativity*: Show originality in word choice, imagery, and reasoning.
- *Spelling and Presentation*: No spelling mistakes; neat and well-organized presentation.

b. Sample Prompts (Descriptive Writing)

Prompt 1: Over the years, we have walked along many different roads. Some may be dirt paths winding along hillsides. Some may be gravel roads. Others may be smooth asphalt streets lined with tall buildings, brightly lit at night. Yet, the road that carried our footsteps throughout childhood is one that no one can ever forget.

Describe the familiar road that once brought you to school.

Prompt 2: If nature could speak to you, choose your favorite natural scene (an old tree, a river, a field, a mountain, a familiar path...) and describe that scene, including what you imagine it might say to you.

Prompt 3: Your childhood is like a colorful fairy-tale garden, where you once encountered magical characters such as a fairy, a brave knight, or a clever boy. If a fairy-tale character stepped out of the pages and stood before you, what would you see? Use your imagination and feelings to describe that character.

Prompt 4: In the poem *"The Stork"*, poet Lan Vien Che wrote:

*"Even when grown, you are still your mother's child,
She follows you with her love for a life."*

On the journey to adulthood, a mother always watches over her child, protecting and strengthening them with her gentle love and silent sacrifices.

Describe your beloved mother using familiar and emotional imagery to express your love and gratitude for her.

2.4.2. Type of Writing Task: Expressing Feelings and Emotions

a. Requirements for Writing a Paragraph Expressing Personal Feelings and Emotions: "Write a paragraph expressing your personal feelings or emotions about an event, a poem, or a story." [3, p.39]

A paragraph expressing feelings and emotions should meet the following criteria:

- *Content*: Clearly introduce the event, the title of the story or poem, and the name of the author; Present general feelings and emotions toward the subject; Describe the event / briefly summarize the content of the story, and state what you liked about the story (characters, events, meanings); or highlight the beauty of the poem (language, imagery, characters, content, message...); Clearly express your own feelings, emotions, and impressions of the event / story / poem.
- *Structure*: The paragraph must include an opening, body, and conclusion, with ideas presented in a logical sequence.
- *Language and Expression*: Use appropriate words; know how to use words that convey feelings and emotions; write grammatically correct sentences; ensure coherence between sentences.
- *Creativity*: Demonstrate unique ideas in word choice, reasoning, and expression.
- *Spelling and Presentation*: No spelling errors; neat and clear presentation.

b. Sample Prompts

Prompt 1: Every fairy tale carries a meaningful message and memorable characters. Tell about a fairy tale that moved you or taught you a profound lesson, and share your feelings after reading it.

Prompt 2: Sometimes, a movie, a story, or a poem can teach you an important life lesson. Write a paragraph expressing your feelings about the valuable lesson you learned from the work that made you think the most.

Prompt 3: In life, even small acts of kindness can touch our hearts and teach us beautiful values. Have you ever witnessed such an act? Write a paragraph describing your feelings when you saw someone helping another person.

Prompt 4: Childhood is a sky full of innocent and lovely memories. Is there a memory that always makes you smile whenever you think of it? Write a paragraph sharing your feelings and emotions about a childhood memory you treasure the most.

2.4.3. Type of Writing Task: Expressing Opinions

a. Requirements for Writing an Opinion Paragraph: "Write a paragraph stating the reasons for agreeing or disagreeing with a meaningful phenomenon or event in life." [3, p.39]

An opinion paragraph, whether in support or opposition, should meet the following criteria:

- *Content*: The paragraph must clearly introduce the event or phenomenon and state the opinion (agree or disagree); provide several reasons explaining the stance taken. If agreeing: reasons should highlight the benefits or significance of the event or phenomenon.

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If disagreeing: reasons should address the harmful effects or risks of the event or phenomenon. Include relevant and typical evidence to support the argument; affirm the writer's personal stance toward the issue.

- *Structure*: The paragraph should have an opening, body, and conclusion, with ideas presented in a logical and coherent order.
- *Language and Expression*: Use words correctly and expressively; employ vocabulary that conveys emotions and attitudes; write grammatically correct sentences; ensure cohesion between sentences (use appropriate transitional words). Students should be able to use words that show agreement such as *support, agree, very meaningful, reasonable, beneficial, completely appropriate...* or disagreement such as *harmful, unacceptable, meaningless, inappropriate, needs reconsideration...*
- *Creativity*: Demonstrate original ideas in word choice, reasoning, and expression.
- *Spelling and Presentation*: No spelling errors; neat and well-organized presentation.

b. Sample Prompts

Prompt 1: Some students believe that outdoor classes help them connect with nature and enjoy more exciting experiences. Others think outdoor learning is time-consuming and makes it hard to concentrate. Do you agree with organizing outdoor classes for students? Write a paragraph stating your reasons for agreeing or disagreeing.

Prompt 2: Nowadays, some elderly people live with their children and grandchildren but are not well cared for. Some explain this by saying their children are too busy. Write a paragraph expressing your opinion on this situation.

Prompt 3: Have you ever seen someone litter in the schoolyard, a park, or on the street? How did you feel when witnessing that? Write a paragraph expressing your opposition to littering and explain why this behavior needs to change.

Prompt 4: During recess, while buying food, or participating in activities, have you ever seen someone pushing and not standing in line? How did that make you feel? Write a paragraph expressing your opinion against pushing and highlight the benefits of queuing in an orderly manner.

2.4.4. Type of Writing Task: Character Introduction

a. Requirements for Writing a Character Introduction Paragraph: "Write a paragraph introducing a character from a book or an animated film you have read or watched (appearance, gestures, actions, speech)." [3, p.39]

The character introduction paragraph should meet the following requirements:

- *Content*: Introduce the title of the book and the author, or the name of the animated film and the character; describe the character's outstanding features in terms of appearance, talents, and personality (as shown through actions, speech, thoughts, etc.); include supporting details from the story or film; express your own thoughts and feelings about the character.
- *Structure*: The paragraph should include an introduction, body, and conclusion; the ideas must be presented in a logical and coherent order.
- *Language and Expression*: No incorrect word usage; use vocabulary that conveys emotions and feelings; write grammatically correct sentences; ensure coherence between sentences (with appropriate transitions).
- *Creativity*: Demonstrate originality in word choice, reasoning, and expression.
- *Spelling and Presentation*: No spelling errors; neat and clear presentation.

b. Sample Prompts

Prompt 1: Is there a character from a book you've read that you truly admire, respect, or can never forget? It could be someone intelligent, brave, kind, or with a truly special quality. Write a paragraph introducing that character and explain why you like them so much.

Prompt 2: In the colorful world of animated films, there are many lovable and interesting characters. Is there a main character from an animated movie that you instantly liked the first time you saw them? Write a paragraph introducing that character and explain why they made such a strong impression on you.

Prompt 3: In the animated series *Doraemon*, Nobita is a character beloved by many for being clumsy yet sincere. Do you like Nobita? Write a paragraph introducing Nobita and explain what makes you feel connected to this character.

Prompt 4: Some characters step out from the pages of a book or the scenes of a movie and stay in your heart long after the story ends. Write a paragraph introducing a character who left a lasting impression on you.

2.4.5 Type of Writing Task: Creative Storytelling

a. Requirements for Writing a Creative Story: "Write a story based on one you have read or heard, incorporating creative details." [3, p.39]

A creative storytelling composition should meet the following criteria:

- *Content*: The story may be told in the first person ("I") or third person point of view. It should retell a known story, maintaining the core plot and essential events.
- + Students demonstrate creativity by rearranging events based on their own ideas while remaining true to character traits and the story's message; emphasizing the story's turning point; selectively adding imaginative details to describe the setting, dialogue, gestures, actions, appearance, psychology, and emotions of characters. The story must convey a clear and meaningful message.
- + The ending should reflect the storyteller's personal thoughts, feelings, or reflections.

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- *Structure*: The story should have a three-part structure (introduction, development, and conclusion); the introduction and conclusion can be presented flexibly (directly or indirectly; open or closed); events must follow a logical sequence.
- *Vocabulary, Sentence Writing, and Coherence*: Use vivid, expressive, and flexible language; apply rhetorical devices effectively; write grammatically correct Vietnamese sentences; mix narrative, descriptive, and emotional sentences; ensure coherence between paragraphs.
- *Creativity*: Demonstrate originality in the use of language, imagery, and reasoning.
- *Spelling and Handwriting*: Use correct spelling; present the writing clearly with neat, legible handwriting.

b. Sample Prompts

Prompt 1: Have you ever read a fairy tale, fable, or story that you will never forget? If you could become the author of that story, would you change the characters, events, or ending? Rewrite the story in your own creative way to make a unique and original version.

Prompt 2: The story of the Tortoise and the Hare has long taught us about perseverance and humility. But what if the Tortoise and the Hare didn't compete, and instead faced challenges together? Reimagine the story where both characters cooperate and succeed, then rewrite it using your own creative voice.

Prompt 3: Have you ever read a story about someone with a strong sense of honesty? Choose a character from that story and take on their role to retell the actions they took, the challenges they faced, and how they felt when they stayed true to their honesty.

Prompt 4: "In my pencil case, there's an old school supply item that no longer works, but I always carry it with me and take good care of it. It was a gift from my former teacher. It always reminds me of a beautiful memory with her. The story goes like this..."

That's the beginning of a story about a student's memory of their former teacher, connected to a school supply item. Continue writing the rest of the story.

General competence—and creative competence in particular—are inherently integrative constructs, in which the component elements are closely interconnected. Many of the open-ended prompts presented in this article have the potential to simultaneously develop a variety of student competencies: from thinking, language selection and usage, and argument presentation to the ability to express personal viewpoints confidently, passionately, and responsibly. To ensure these prompts achieve maximum effectiveness within the context of renewed teaching methods and assessment practices aimed at developing learner competencies in Vietnam, it is essential to adapt and supplement them appropriately based on different student groups and learning environments.

3. CONCLUSION

The development of an open-ended writing task system for Grade 5 students is not only a timely requirement in the context of educational reform but also an effective solution for fostering creative competence—one of the core competencies targeted by the new general education curriculum. Scientifically designed open-ended prompts, tailored to students' age characteristics, allow learners to freely express their thoughts, emotions, and individuality through language. At the same time, they stimulate interest in learning, nurture independent thinking, and enhance problem-solving abilities.

However, to maximize the effectiveness of open-ended tasks, teachers must be equipped with solid professional knowledge and flexible skills in task design and assessment tailored to different student groups. In addition, close coordination among schools, families, and society is essential to support students in developing creativity through writing activities. Effectively implementing an open-ended writing system will play a vital role in nurturing a generation of primary school students who are dynamic, creative, confident, and compassionate.

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