

Teaching Main Sentence Components to Grade 4 Students Towards A Competency-Based Approach

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ABSTRACT: This paper presents the theoretical framework and empirical findings regarding the development of an exercise system for teaching the main components of a sentence (subject and predicate) to Grade 4 primary school students oriented towards competency development. Based on the 2018 General Education Curriculum for the Vietnamese language and the cognitive-developmental characteristics of fourth-grade students, we propose an exercise system on main sentence components comprising four distinct groups: (1) Exercises for developing skills in identifying and recognizing main sentence components; (2) Exercises for developing sentence construction skills; (3) Exercises for developing error correction skills regarding main sentence components; and (4) Exercises for creative application. Through these pedagogical interventions, the study contributes to training linguistic thinking and enhancing the overall quality of Vietnamese language instruction in primary education.

KEYWORDS: Main sentence components, subject, predicate, exercise system, competency development, primary Vietnamese language education.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Vietnamese language occupies a position of extraordinary importance within the national general education curriculum. In primary education, Grade 4 constitutes a pivotal transitional milestone in students' Vietnamese language acquisition. Within the Grade 4 Vietnamese curriculum, the instructional content on "Main Components of a Sentence" (subject and predicate) serves as a core foundational knowledge unit. It equips students with a systematic understanding of syntactic structures and sentence formation rules in Vietnamese, thereby empowering them to construct grammatically sound, aesthetically refined, and coherent sentences. This knowledge directly fosters their capacity to articulate ideas with clarity and contributes to the comprehensive development of learners' communicative and linguistic competence.

However, actual teaching observations in several local primary schools reveal that fourth-grade students still commit numerous structural and syntactic errors. Common deficiencies include producing fragmented clauses, omitting essential subjects or predicates, and generating disjointed, incoherent expressions. Consequently, students encounter noticeable obstacles when expressing their thoughts, feelings, and intentions during daily communicative activities and writing tasks. Moreover, recent curriculum and textbook reforms under the 2018 General Education Program have left many primary educators uncertain about how to effectively organize grammar instruction in an integrated, learner-centered, and differentiated manner.

To address these practical challenges, this research pursues two primary objectives: (1) Systematizing the theoretical and practical rationales for teaching main sentence components based on a competency-development approach; and (2) Designing an exercise system on subjects and predicates aligned with the required learning outcomes of the Grade 4 Vietnamese Language Curriculum, ensuring systematic coherence, pedagogical differentiation, and high instructional feasibility.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts theoretical analysis integrated with practical pedagogical research methods. Specifically: Systematizing theoretical and empirical foundations concerning Vietnamese grammar instruction oriented towards competency development in primary education; Designing structured exercise groups characterized by rigorous internal logic, rich and culturally authentic linguistic materials, clear pedagogical differentiation tailored to diverse student abilities, and guaranteed applicability in actual classroom environments.

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III. RESEARCH RESULTS

A. Enhancing the Quality of Sentence Teaching Through the Development of an Exercise System

1. Concept of an Exercise System

An exercise system is conceptualized as an organized set of learning tasks constructed according to a coherent logical framework, closely interrelated, and sequenced in a rational progression from foundational to advanced levels to achieve specific educational outcomes.

2. The Role of the Exercise System in Teaching Main Sentence Components in Primary School

The exercise system provides multidimensional support for primary students:

- Assisting students in thoroughly mastering grammatical concepts, syntactic properties, and structural functions of sentence constituents.
- Cultivating logical reasoning, cognitive generalization, imaginative capacity, and a vivid, expressive style of verbal and written communication.
- Enhancing receptive and productive language skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening), while instilling consistent habits of clear, coherent, and standardized linguistic expression.

B. Designing an Exercise System on Main Sentence Components for Grade 4 Students

Based on curriculum standards and psychological characteristics of Grade 4 learners, the proposed exercise system is organized into four main groups as summarized in Table 1 below:

No.	Exercise Group	Content and Pedagogical Objectives
1	Developing skills in identifying and recognizing main sentence components	Training skills in identifying subjects and predicates; determining corresponding question patterns (Who? What thing? Which animal? / What is it? What does it do? How is it?); analyzing sentence structures within reading passages and texts.
2	Developing sentence construction skills	Training skills in constructing complete grammatical sentences based on given constituents; expanding subjects and predicates using modifiers to heighten expressiveness and vividness.
3	Developing error correction skills regarding main sentence components	Fostering critical grammatical thinking; identifying subjectless and predicateless sentence errors in written compositions and revising them into standard, complete grammatical sentences.
4	Creative application	Developing skills in creating short descriptive and narrative paragraphs; practicing oral and written communication across familiar everyday communicative situations.

1) Group 1: Exercises to Practice Identifying and Recognizing Main Sentence Components

a) Exercise Type: Recognizing Subject and Predicate in Isolated Sentences

Exercise 1: Identify the subject in the sentence: "Buổi sáng, các bạn học sinh xếp hàng ngay ngắn trước lớp." [In the morning, the students line up neatly in front of the classroom.]

- A. Buổi sáng [In the morning]
- B. các bạn học sinh [the students]
- C. các bạn học sinh xếp hàng ngay ngắn [the students line up neatly]
- D. xếp hàng ngay ngắn trước lớp [line up neatly in front of the classroom]

Exercise 2: Identify the subject in the sentence: "Trong lớp học, cô giáo đang giảng bài rất say sưa." [In the classroom, the teacher is enthusiastically delivering the lesson.]

- A. Trong lớp học [In the classroom]
- B. cô giáo [the teacher]
- C. cô giáo đang giảng bài [the teacher is delivering the lesson]
- D. đang giảng bài rất say sưa [is enthusiastically delivering the lesson]

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Exercise 3: Write the subject into the blank space for each of the following sentences:

- a) Những mái nhà ngói đỏ nằm san sát nhau bên dòng sông hiền hòa. [Red-tiled roofs lie close together beside the gentle river.]
→ Subject:
- b) Các bạn học sinh lớp 4A chăm chú lắng nghe thầy giáo giảng bài. [The students of Class 4A attentively listen to the teacher's lecture.]
→ Subject:
- c) Những hàng tre xanh rì ven làng nghiêng mình theo làn gió nhẹ. [The lush green bamboo rows along the village edge sway with the gentle breeze.]
→ Subject:
- d) Những chiếc thuyền nhỏ của ngư dân làng chài neo đậu sát bờ biển. [The small boats of the fishing village fishermen are anchored close to the seashore.]
→ Subject:

Exercise 4: Underline the subject in each sentence and determine which question pattern it answers (Ai? [Who?]/Cái gì? [What thing?]/Con gì? [Which animal?]):

- a) Mẹ em đang chăm cùi chuẩn bị bữa cơm tối trong căn bếp nhỏ. [My mother is diligently preparing dinner in the small kitchen.]
→ Subject answers the question:
- b) Trong khu vườn sau nhà, lũ gà con nháo nhác tìm mẹ. [In the backyard garden, the chicks are flurrying around looking for their mother.]
→ Subject answers the question:
- c) Những tia nắng đầu ngày len lỏi qua tán lá, chiếu xuống sân trường yên ả. [The early morning sunbeams filter through the leaves, shining down on the quiet schoolyard.]
→ Subject answers the question:
- d) Những chiếc thuyền nhỏ của ngư dân làng chài neo đậu sát bờ. [The small boats of the fishing village fishermen are anchored close to the shore.]
→ Subject answers the question:

Exercise 5: Identify the predicate in the sentence: "Buổi chiều, những cánh diều đủ màu bay lượn trên cánh đồng rộng." [In the afternoon, colorful kites soar over the vast field.]

- A. Buổi chiều [In the afternoon]
B. những cánh diều đủ màu [colorful kites]
C. trên cánh đồng rộng [over the vast field]
D. bay lượn trên cánh đồng rộng [soar over the vast field]

Exercise 6: Underline the predicate in each sentence and state which question pattern it answers (Là gì? [Is what?]/Làm gì? [Does what?]/Như thế nào? [How is it/What is it like?]):

- a) Bầy ong chăm chỉ bay đi tìm mật giữa vườn hoa. [The diligent swarm of bees flies off to gather nectar in the flower garden.]
→ Predicate answers the question:
- b) Dòng suối nhỏ róc rách chảy qua những phiến đá. [The small stream babbles over the stones.]
→ Predicate answers the question:
- c) Ngôi trường của em rất khang trang và sạch đẹp. [My school is very spacious and clean and beautiful.]
→ Predicate answers the question:
- d) Bạn Lan là lớp trưởng gương mẫu của lớp em. [Lan is the exemplary monitor of our class.]
→ Predicate answers the question:

b) Exercise Type: Identifying Subject and Predicate in Literary Texts and Passages

Exercise 7: Select the appropriate subject from the parentheses to fill in the blanks:

"Mùa xuân trở về. (1)..... ấm lên hẳn. (2)..... không còn ầm ào nữa. (3)..... khe khẽ hát những lời ca êm đềm. (4)..... bỗng ngừng kiếm ăn, ngẩn ngơ nhớ tới quê hương... "Nơi chôn rau cắt rốn" của chúng là thượng nguồn của dòng sông." [Spring has returned. (1)..... becomes noticeably warmer. (2)..... is no longer roaring. (3)..... softly sing sweet, tranquil melodies. (4)..... suddenly stop feeding, daydreaming of their homeland... Their birthplace is the upstream origin of the river.]
(Adapted from Dang Chuong Ngan)

Word bank: (Đàn cá hồi [The school of salmon], Nước biển [The seawater], Đại dương [The ocean], Những con sông [The rivers])

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Exercise 8: Select the appropriate predicate from the box to fill in the blanks:

Predicate options: (đi dự hội xuân [going to the spring festival], bay rập rờn [fluttering gently], cao và trong xanh [high and crystal-clear blue])

"Mùa xuân là mùa của lễ hội. Bầu trời (1)..... Những chị bướm trắng, bướm nâu (2)..... Những chú hoẵng khoác áo mới (3)....."

[Spring is the season of festivals. The sky (1)..... White and brown butterflies (2)..... Young barking deer wearing new coats (3).....]

(Adapted from Phan Phung Duy)

Exercise 9: Underline the subject of each sentence in the following passage:

"Thấy chẳng ăn thua gì, mấy anh nọ lại lảng đi như Rắn Mòng. Chỉ có đôi ba bác Cóc ngẩn ngơ đứng lại. Một Cóc tớp tép miệng, như tộp được mồi, vờ nhai cho đỡ thèm. Một Cóc khác bước ra, cất lên một giọng rất vẫn vẻ."

["Seeing that it was of no use, those fellows slipped away like water snakes. Only a few toads remained standing dazed. One toad smacked its lips as if catching prey, pretending to chew to satisfy its craving. Another toad stepped forward, speaking in a very eloquent, literary tone."]

(To Hoai)

Exercise 10: Underline the predicate of each sentence in the following passage:

"Một hôm thấy bọn Thỏ đi qua, Khi ngồi trên cây bẻ cành ném xuống. Bọn Vượn bắt chước làm theo. Bọn Thỏ hoảng hốt chạy tán loạn. Khi và Vượn thích thú nhảy nhót, reo hò đến chảy cả nước mắt."

["One day, seeing the rabbits passing by, the monkey sitting in the tree snapped branches and threw them down. The gibbons imitated and did the same. The rabbits panicked and scattered in all directions. The monkey and the gibbons gleefully hopped and cheered until tears came to their eyes."]

(Vo Quang)

2) Group 2: Exercises to Practice Sentence Construction with Complete Main Components

a) Exercise Type: Sentence Construction Based on Given Subjects or Predicates

Exercise 11: Complete the sentences based on the given subjects:

- a) Những giọt sương sớm [The morning dewdrops]
- b) Chiếc xe đạp của em [My bicycle]
- c) Bầu trời buổi chiều [The afternoon sky]
- d) Mấy chú vọc bạc [Several silver langurs]

Exercise 12: Construct complete sentences by adding suitable subjects to the given predicates:

- a) đang nở rực rỡ trong nắng sớm. [... is/are blooming brilliantly in the morning sunlight.]
- b) xây tổ trên cây cao chót vót. [... build(s) nests on the towering treetop.]

b) Exercise Type: Expanding Subjects and Predicates

Exercise 13: Expand the subject in each of the following sentences by adding appropriate modifiers:

- a) Chim hót líu lo trên cành cây. [Birds sing merrily on the branches.]
→ Expanded sentence:
- b) Sóng vỗ rì rào vào bờ cát. [Waves lap gently against the sandy shore.]
→ Expanded sentence:
- c) Cây phượng nở hoa đỏ rực. [The flamboyant tree blossoms in bright red.]
→ Expanded sentence:
- d) Con mèo nằm ngủ bên hiên nhà. [The cat lies sleeping on the veranda.]
→ Expanded sentence:

Exercise 14: Expand the predicate in each of the following sentences to make them more descriptive and vivid:

- a) Bác nông dân làm việc. [The farmer works.]
→ Expanded sentence:

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b) Những cánh buồm trắng lướt đi. [White sails glide along.]

→ Expanded sentence:

c) Đàn chim bay. [The flock of birds flies.]

→ Expanded sentence:

d) Các em học sinh đọc sách. [The pupils read books.]

→ Expanded sentence:

Exercise 15: Rewrite the following sentences by expanding both the subject and the predicate:

a) Mưa rơi. [Rain falls.]

→ Expanded sentence:

b) Trẻ em vui chơi. [Children play.]

→ Expanded sentence:

3) Group 3: Exercises to Practice Error Correction Regarding Main Sentence Components

a) Exercise Type: Detecting and Correcting Sentences Missing Subjects

Exercise 16: Read the following sentences and mark (✓) in the box preceding any sentence that lacks a subject:

[] Trong khu vườn mùa xuân, hoa nở khắp nơi. [In the spring garden, flowers bloom everywhere.]

[] Sau giờ ra chơi, chạy nhanh vào lớp học. [After recess, run quickly into the classroom.]

[] Những chú chim sẻ nhỏ đang chuyền cành. [The little sparrows are flitting from branch to branch.]

[] Trên bãi biển, đang vui đùa cùng những con sóng nhỏ. [On the beach, are playing with the small waves.]

Exercise 17: The following sentences lack a subject. Rewrite them into complete grammatical sentences:

a) Sau giờ ra chơi, chạy nhanh vào lớp học. [After recess, run quickly into the classroom.]

→ Corrected sentence:

b) Trong buổi sáng mùa xuân, vang lên líu lo. [On a spring morning, resounds melodiously.]

→ Corrected sentence:

c) Trên bãi biển, đang vui đùa cùng những con sóng nhỏ. [On the beach, are playing with the small waves.]

→ Corrected sentence:

d) Sau cơn mưa lớn, xuất hiện trên bầu trời. [After the heavy rain, appears in the sky.]

→ Corrected sentence:

Exercise 18: The following passage contains one sentence lacking a subject. Underline that sentence and rewrite it correctly:

"Buổi sáng ở làng quê thật yên bình. Những cánh đồng lúa xanh mướt trải dài đến tận chân trời. Ngoài sân, lũ trẻ đang vui vẻ nô đùa. Trên con đường làng nhỏ, đang thong thả đạp xe đi học."
["Morning in the countryside is very peaceful. The lush green rice fields stretch to the horizon. In the yard, the children are merrily playing. On the small village road, are leisurely riding bicycles to school."]

→ Corrected sentence:

Exercise 19: The following passage contains one sentence lacking a predicate. Underline that sentence and rewrite it correctly:

"Bình minh trên biển mang đến một khung cảnh yên bình và tươi sáng. Những con sóng bạc đầu xô vào bờ cát. Những chiếc thuyền đánh cá của ngư dân ngoài khơi xa. Từng đàn chim hải âu bay lượn trên bầu trời xanh."

["Dawn at sea brings a peaceful and bright scene. White-capped waves crash onto the sandy shore. The fishermen's fishing boats far offshore. Flocks of seagulls soar in the blue sky."]

→ Corrected sentence:

b) Exercise Type: Detecting and Correcting Sentences Missing Predicates

Exercise 20: Which of the following items is NOT a complete sentence (lacking a complete subject-predicate structure)?

A. Những cánh đồng lúa chín vàng óng dưới nắng. [The rice fields ripening golden in the sunshine.]

B. Những chú chim sẻ nhỏ trên cành cây trước sân nhà. [The little sparrows on the tree branch in the front yard.]

C. Những cánh diều nhiều màu sắc bay cao trên bầu trời. [Colorful kites fly high in the sky.]

D. Những con sóng bạc đầu xô vào bờ cát. [White-capped waves crash onto the sandy shore.]

Exercise 21: The following items lack a predicate. Rewrite them into complete grammatical sentences:

a. Những bông thược dược trong vườn. [The dahlia flowers in the garden.]

→

b. Đàn chim sẻ trên cành cây trước nhà. [The flock of sparrows on the tree branch in front of the house.]

→

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c. Những cánh buồm ngoài khơi xa. [The sails far offshore.]

→.....

d. Những tia nắng trên mặt biển. [The sunbeams on the sea surface.]

→.....

Exercise 22: Which of the following options is NOT a complete grammatical sentence?

A. Những cơn gió nhẹ thổi qua cánh đồng. [Gentle breezes blow across the field.]

B. Những hàng tre xanh rì ven làng. [The lush green bamboo rows along the village edge.]

C. Đàn trâu thông thả gặm cỏ trên bãi cỏ xanh. [The herd of water buffaloes leisurely grazes on the green pasture.]

D. Những chú chim én bay lượn trên bầu trời mùa xuân. [Swallows soar in the spring sky.]

4) Group 4: Exercises for Creative Application

a) Exercise Type: Writing Short Paragraphs Ensuring Complete Main Sentence Components

Exercise 23: Describe a plant or tree that you love in a short paragraph of 3 to 5 sentences. Requirement: Every sentence must contain a complete subject and predicate.

Exercise 24: Write a short paragraph of 3 to 5 sentences recounting an activity you enjoy participating in at school. Requirement: Every sentence must contain a complete subject and predicate.

Exercise 25: Write a short letter (5 to 7 sentences) to a loved one to ask after their health and share stories about your summer vacation. Underline the subject in each sentence you compose.

b) Exercise Type: Speaking and Writing in Familiar Communicative Situations

Exercise 26: Communicative Situation: You meet a classmate again after the summer break. Speak or write 2 to 3 sentences telling your friend about an engaging activity you took part in during the holiday. (Requirement: Each sentence must have a complete subject and predicate).

Exercise 27: Communicative Situation: During homeroom class, the teacher asks students to share ideas about keeping the school environment clean. Write 3 sentences describing an action you took to maintain a clean and beautiful classroom or schoolyard. (Requirement: Sentences must have clear subjects and predicates).

Exercise 28: Communicative Situation: You want to introduce a favorite dish to a friend. Write 3 to 4 sentences introducing that dish. (Requirement: Each sentence must contain a complete subject and predicate, with at least one sentence describing the flavor characteristics or color of the dish).

Exercise 29: Communicative Situation: A new classmate has just transferred to your class. Speak or write 3 sentences to introduce your classroom to them. (Requirement: Sentences must have clear subjects and predicates, with at least one sentence describing a regular class activity).

Exercise 30: Communicative Situation: You are telling a family member about a school excursion or picnic. Write 4 to 5 sentences recounting that event. (Requirement: Sentences must have clear subjects and predicates, with at least one sentence expressing your emotions regarding the activity or trip).

IV. DISCUSSION

The findings of this research demonstrate that designing an exercise system on main sentence components for Grade 4 students oriented towards competency development is both pedagogically essential and highly feasible in primary Vietnamese language teaching practice.

Firstly, the proposed exercise system directly tackles students' existing cognitive gaps in syntactic comprehension and overcomes their habit of producing fragmented sentences that lack essential core constituents—a pervasive phenomenon among fourth-grade learners. By systematically categorizing exercises into explicit error correction, sentence expansion, and contextual creation, students gradually develop metacognitive skills for self-monitoring, evaluating, and self-correcting their own linguistic output.

Secondly, the exercise system features marked pedagogical differentiation and closely reflects the contemporary landscape of primary education. Rather than confining learners to mechanical, rote-based identification drills, the tasks are strategically embedded within diverse communicative contexts (ranging from authentic excerpts of renowned literary authors such as To Hoai and Vo Quang to lively, relatable everyday situations). This pedagogical design flexibly accommodates heterogeneous learner profiles and promotes individualized learning paces within mixed-ability classrooms.

Finally, in contrast to earlier conventional studies that predominantly focused on passive, lecture-driven grammar instruction and abstract structural parsing, this study establishes an innovative pedagogical paradigm: teaching grammar through authentic communicative practice, adopting a student-centered methodology, and bridging grammatical principles seamlessly with text reception and text production activities.

V. CONCLUSION

The design of an exercise system for teaching the main components of a sentence to Grade 4 students towards competency development substantiates both its theoretical necessity and strong practical applicability in primary Vietnamese language instruction. The proposed system not only equips primary educators with a scientifically sound, pedagogically rich repository of instructional materials for curriculum delivery, but also creates an active, supportive learning environment where students can practice, experience, and internalize linguistic competence autonomously and dynamically.

In particular, structuring exercises through tiered differentiation, skill integration, and authentic communicative grounding effectively eliminates widespread sentence construction errors, fosters disciplined logical thinking habits, and cultivates lasting student interest in mastering the Vietnamese language. Consequently, the research results serve as a valuable reference resource for primary school teachers, curriculum developers, and educational administrators in realizing the overarching goals of fundamental and comprehensive educational reform stipulated by the 2018 General Education Program.

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