



## Writing activity book for remediating transfer errors in writing of first year engineering students

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### Abstract

This study aimed to determine level of the transfer errors in writing of first year engineering students with an end view of developing a writing activity book to remediate them. The study used the experimental method of research. The instrument included a writing test in the form of translation. The study involved currently enrolled 50 students of class K58TDH1. It was found that before the writing activity book, the frequency and percentage of transfer errors were quite high (638; 63.5%). However, after the use of the writing activity book with Direct Instruction, the frequency and percentage decreased to 336; 54.8%. In addition, there was improvement in the writing performance of the respondents. The mean score of the posttest is 6.12; while that of the pretest is 4.58. The null hypothesis that there is no significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores of the students was rejected. It was concluded that Direct Instruction as employed in the writing activity book was an effective strategy in remediating students' transfer errors in writing.

**Keywords:** Transfer errors, writing, activity book

### Introduction

English has become widely used in many fields of life. However for majority of people it is not a native language and it is hard to fully master a foreign language (Kochmar, 2011). One of the problems, according to many researches, is the influence of mother tongue or transfer errors in the process of second or foreign language acquisition. English has become widely used in many fields of life. However for the majority of people, it is not a native language and it is hard to fully master a foreign language (Kochmar, 2011). One of the problems, according to many researches, is the influence of mother tongue that results in transfer errors in the process of second or foreign language acquisition.

The influence of mother tongue when one acquires a second or foreign language is inevitable and it happens in productive skills like speaking and writing. However these errors should be identified to be avoided by both English learners and teachers especially in writing skills. As Tribble puts it, "writing is a language skill which is difficult to acquire" (Binh, 2009), it is the art of human beings which is used to communicate with people anywhere in the world, even people in the future. Human history and culture are stored in the great writings.

Therefore, the questions such as how mother tongue influences the writing process when one learns a foreign language, what the typical errors are as well as what we can do to help language learners overcome their transfer errors should be answered. In reality, many researches on language transfer have been conducted (George, 2004<sup>[6]</sup>; Lea, 2010; Daria, 2012; María, 2010; Wang, 2009)<sup>[12]</sup> but not many have focused on the Vietnamese - English transfer errors.

In Vietnam, there is a great demand for learning English to communicate. However the teaching and learning English seems to be not very successful. In particular, in the researcher's teaching context - Thai Nguyen University of Technology (TNUT) where most students are taught English for 3 semesters - the ability to communicate in English especially in writing is not good at all. Furthermore, most first year engineering students have low English proficiency so they apply much translation into their writings. That is

the reason why there are many transfer errors that need to be investigated and found cures for students at TNUT.

This study is concerned with the development and validation of a Writing Activity book using Direct Instruction for remediating transfer errors of first year engineering students at Thai Nguyen University of Technology. Specifically, the study aimed to achieve the following:

1. Identify the transfer errors usually committed by first year engineering students in writing;
2. Develop a writing activity book that can remediate transfer errors;
3. Find out if there is a significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores of the students.

### Material and methods

For clarity of concepts used in the study, the following terminologies are defined both conceptually and operationally.

**Direct Instruction:** Refers to an effective method of language teaching in which teachers can direct students to the problems and give reinforcement to help students overcome their problems. In this study, it refers to guided student practice used as strategy in developing workbook/writing activity book.

**Language transfer:** Refers to the translation from one language to another language based on the relevant items and structures between two languages. In this study, it refers to a language phenomenon from which transfer errors happen.

**Transfer errors:** Are defined as errors caused by translation from one language to another. In this study, they are errors made by students from the pretest including:

**Verb errors:** Refer to errors concerning with verb like verb tense, subject - verb agreement or omission of to be.

**Possessive errors:** Refer to errors by misusing the possessive adjective or possessive's.

**Adjective errors refer:** To the disorder of words in phrases, especially noun phrases formed by adjectives and nouns.

**Preposition errors:** Refer to errors of omitting or misusing prepositions.

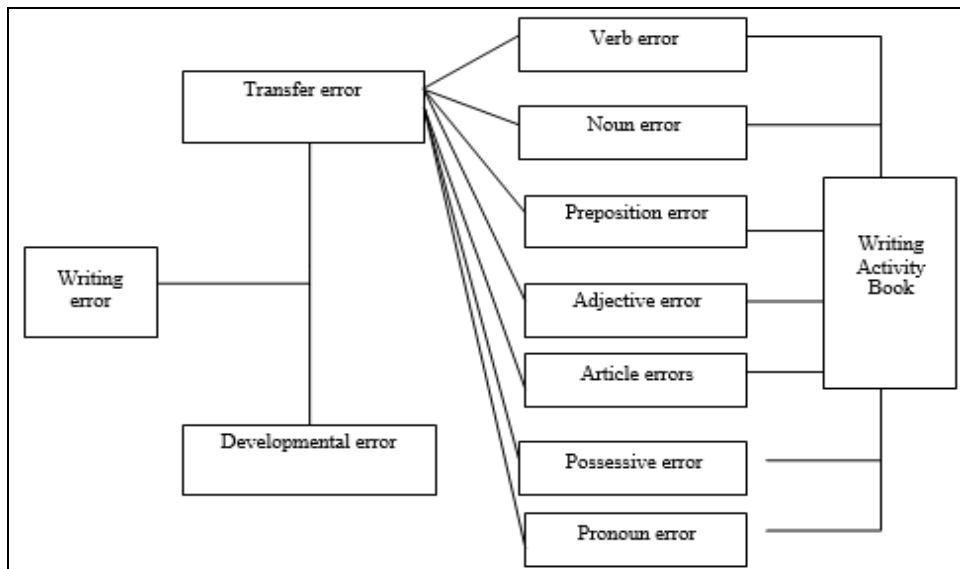
**Article/ Determiner errors:** Refer to errors caused by misuse of article or determiner like omission of indefinite articles.

**Pronoun errors refer:** To errors made by misuse of personal pronouns and personal objects.

**Noun errors:** Refer to the errors of singular or plural nouns.

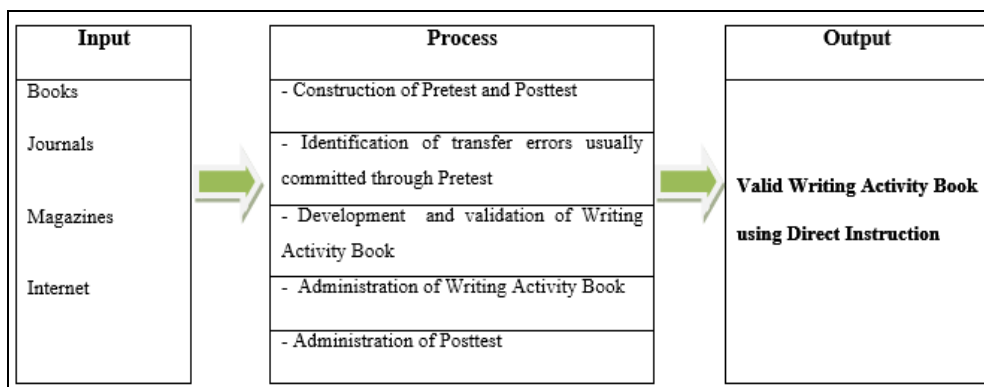
**Writing Activity Book:** Refers to the book developed to help students remediate the transfer errors in their writing using direct instruction.

**Conceptual framework**



**Fig 1:** A conceptual framework on the Development of the Writing Activity Book for Remediating Transfer Errors

**Research Paradigm**



**Fig 2:** A modified Input - Process - Output (IPO) Model on the Development of the Writing Activity Book for Remediating Transfer Errors

**Methodology**

**Research Design**

This study uses the descriptive method because it involves the construction of a Writing Activity Book using Direct Instruction. This study exhibits three - phase design. The first phase of the study involves the identification of the common transfer errors made by first year engineering students at TNUT. The second phase is the administration of the developed Writing Activity Book of use in the class. Third phase of this study includes the evaluation of the Writing Activity Book.

**Population and Sampling**

The population of this study will be more than 1000 freshmen of TNUT. The sample is chosen purposively since it is the class handled by the researcher, consisting of students.

**Description of Respondents**

The respondents of this study are consisted of first year students studying English 2 at TNUT for the academic year 2022-2023. Their major is engineering not English, therefore their English level as well as English background

is not very high. They are used as re- spondents as well as the subjects for the validation of a Writing Activity Book using Direct Instruction.

**Research Instrumentation**

To solve the questions proposed, the researcher utilizes a writing test and a Writing Activity Book based on Direct Instruction.

**Statistical Treatment of Data**

Firstly, to find the most common errors in the pretest made by the correspondents, the researcher identified and marked all the errors that she considered to be negative transfer (errors only by the translation process from Vietnamese to English because of the difference between two languages). She counted all the errors and then used frequency and percentage to treat the data.

Secondly, to determine the significant difference in the performance of the students before and after using the Direct Instruction based Writing Activity Book, T-test for Dependent Samples was utilized. The formula is shown below:

$$t = \frac{mD}{S_{Ex}}$$

$$mD = \frac{\sum D}{N}$$

$$S_{Ex} = \sqrt{\frac{\sum D^2 - (\sum D)^2 / N}{N(N-1)}}$$

Where

$mD$  = mean difference

$S_{Ex}$  = standard error of the mean difference

$\sum D$  = sum of difference

$N$  = number of respondent

**Results and discussions**

**1. Results**

**Respondents’ Level of Errors Prior to Writing Activity Book Exposure**

**Table 1:** Relative frequency and percentage distribution of writing errors by respondents prior the writing activity book

Type of writing error	Frequency	Percentage
Transfer error	638	63.5%
Developmental error	368	36.5%
Total	1006	100%

Table 1 shows the relative Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Writing Errors made by students before exposure to the Writing Activity Book. As shown in the table, there are two major kinds of writing errors. The transfer errors caused by translation have the frequency of 638 and percentage of 63.4% which is nearly as twice as the second kind - development errors with only 368 errors or 36.5%. Here, the developmental errors are errors which are not included by the negative transfer but by the variation of the English language. With this data, the researcher can prove her hypothesis that transfer errors are the most

common ones in writing of Vietnamese students because English and Vietnamese has more differences in grammar than some other languages.

**Table 2:** Relative frequency and percentage distribution of transfer errors by correspondents

Type of transfer error	Frequency (f)	Percentage
Verbs error	230	37.1%
Noun error	111	17.9%
Preposition error	110	17.74%
Adjective error	64	10.3%
Article and determiner error	48	7.74%
Possessive error	41	6.6%
Personal pronoun /object error	16	2.58%
Total	620	100%

Table 2 presents the Relative Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Transfer Errors by the students performed in the pretest. Among 620 grammatical transfer errors, the rank is shown as in the table with 230 verb errors, 111 noun errors, 110 preposition errors, 64 adjective errors, 48 article and determiner errors, 41 possessive errors and 16 personal pronoun/object errors. It means that the most common grammatical transfer error is verb error. *It is because the complexity of verb problems. At sentential level, frequency of verbs in sentences is higher than any parts of speech, so verb errors happens more frequently.* The second problem is noun error. The least one is personal pronoun or object. From this result, the researcher could focus on the most frequent problem and design the Writing Activity book suitably so that it can help remediate transfer errors in writing of her students.

**Table 3:** Pretest and posttest scores of the respondents

	Highest	Lowest	Mean	Sd
Pretest	8	0	4.58	1.97
Posttest	9	4	6.12	1.06

It could be seen that the students’ mean score in the pretest is 4.58 while that of the posttest is 6.12. This shows that students gain higher grades after being exposed to the writing activity book which only shows that it helped to remediate transfer errors. The standard deviation of 1.97 in the pretest scores is higher than that of 1.06 of the posttest. The findings reveal that the gap between students’ writing levels gets smaller after the conduct of writing activity book with the increase of both the highest and lowest scores.

**Table 4:** Summary of the values on the significant difference in pretest and posttest scores of the respondents before and after the writing activity book

t- computed	Df	Tabular value 0.05	Decision	Description
8.01	49	1.960	Reject	Significant

The result shown in table 4 demonstrates the computed t value of 8.01 which is higher than the tabular value of 1.906 at 49 degree of freedom. Therefore the null hypothesis that states that there is no significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores of the respondents is hereby rejected. This indicates that the pretest and posttest scores differ significantly. Based on the statistical findings, it can be inferred that there is improvement in the student’s writing level after they were exposed to the Writing Activity Book.

**Table 5:** Relative frequency and percentage distribution of writing errors by correspondents after the writing activity book

Type of writing error	Frequency	Percentage
Transfer error	336	54.8%
Developmental error	301	45.2%
Total	667	100%

As shown in the table, the number of transfer errors decreased nearly a half (336 errors compared with 638 errors) while the number of developmental errors almost remained. It means that the treatment has its positive effects. However, the percentage of transfer errors is still higher than developmental errors, 54.8% compared with 45.2%. It reveals that for Vietnamese students the transfer errors take place more often than other errors even when there is a remediation activity. Therefore, teachers of English should pay more attention to this kind of error when teaching structural writing at sentential level.

**Table 6:** Relative frequency and percentage distribution of transfer errors by correspondents after the writing activity book

Type of transfer error	Frequency (f)	Percentage
Verbs error	90	26.8%
Noun error	75	22.4%
Preposition error	70	20.8%
Adjective error	35	10.4%
Article and determiner error	40	11.9%
Possessive error	20	5.5%
Personal pronoun /object error	06	1.7%
Total	336	100%

Table 6 summarizes the frequency and percentage of different transfer errors at sentential level in students' writing. As illustrated in this table, the number of verb errors or other kind of transfer errors like noun errors, preposition error, etc. went down (the total error decreased from 1006 to 336) but the percentage of each kind of errors has nearly the same number. It means that the Activity Book helps reduce transfer errors in students' writing. However, it cannot help change the portion of each kind of error here. The leading one is still verb errors, followed by noun error and the final one is still personal pronoun and object errors.

**2. Findings**

Based on the data gathered, the following findings are noted

1. As to level of transfer errors in English writing of the correspondents, transfer errors have higher percentage (63.5%) than developmental error (36.5%). Of the observed transfer errors, verb errors happen the most frequently (37.1%) and the least is personal pronoun/object errors (2.58%).
2. A writing activity book using Direct Instructions was used in 8 main problems to help students lessen their transfer errors.
3. The mean score of the students in the pre - test is 0 with 1.97 Sd while the post - test is 9 with 1.06 Sd. The mean score of the students in the post - test is higher than that of the pre - test. The result reveals that there is a significant difference between pre - test and post - test scores of the students.
4. The level of transfer errors after the writing activity book is reduced (54.8%). However the Relative Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Transfer Errors do not change much.

**3. Conclusions**

Based on the findings, the following conclusions were drawn

1. The level of transfer errors in writing of first year engineering students is high.
2. Direct Instruction can be used to design a writing activity book to remediate students' transfer errors.
3. There is an improvement in the writing grades of the students after the use of writing activity book.
4. The level of transfer errors of the students after the writing activity book is reduced.

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