

# **An Evaluation on the Current Teaching Methods to Upgrade Writing Skill for B.A. First Year French Specialization Students of Mandalay University of Foreign Languages**

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## **Abstract**

This research aims to investigate the effectiveness of current teaching methodologies for writing skill, used for the first year French specialization students of Mandalay University of Foreign Languages, 2018-19 academic year, and to improve their writing skills by identifying their needs. Analytical method and descriptive method were applied. Evaluation on current prescribed textbook, current methods for developing writing skill, a set of questionnaires and the findings were described in this research. Students can upgrade their writing skill only when current teaching methods match their level. In this paper, it can be seen that current teaching methods are effective for first year French specialization students' writing, despite having some requirements.

**Key words:** current writing methods, prescribed textbook

## **Introduction**

The undergraduate course for French language was commenced at Mandalay University of Foreign Languages in 2000-2001 academic year. The course duration was three years for B.A (French) degree. From 2000 to 2010, NSF1 (Nouveau Sans Frontieres 1 ) was used as a prescribed textbook for first year French specialization students. Then, undergraduate degree in French was redesigned as four-year course to complete in 2010-2011 academic year and Latitudes 1, published by Didier Press, has been chosen as the course book since 2012-2013 academic year. The communicative approach is applied in that reader - Latitudes 1. Exercises and activities which emphasize on four language skills are implemented in the book. For the first semester and second semester, a total of 43 hours (200 minutes per week) is provided for reading and writing skill modules. In this research, the effectiveness of current teaching methods on writing skill and students' attitudes towards those methods are described.

## **Aim**

This research aims to explore students' needs to help improve their writing skill and to evaluate the effectiveness of current teaching methods on writing.

## **Research Questions**

1. Are the activities and exercises from current prescribed textbook really effective in upgrading students' writing skill?
2. What are the better ways to develop students' writing skill?

## **Literature Review**

According to Nunan (2003: 83), writing is the mental work of inventing ideas, thinking about how to express them, and organizing them into statements and paragraphs that will be clear to a reader.

According to Brown, (2001: 336), writing is a two-step process. The first process is figuring out the meaning and the second process is putting the meaning into language.

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In the M.A. thesis: “A Study on Teaching and Learning Writing Skills of Third Year B.A. Students,” by Daw Phyu Phyu Khin of French Language Department of Yangon University of Foreign Languages, the suggestions on the learning process of descriptive and informative text for third year B.A French Specialization students were expressed.

Daw Khin Theingi Tun pointed out third year French specialization students’ improvement in writing skills in the research paper, “Assessment of the Improvement in the Writing Skills of Third Year B.A. French Specialization Students” which was described in YUFL journal 2018, Vol 1, No.1. In this paper, Third Year B.A. French Specialization Students’ improvement in writing skills were evaluated through the usage of different types of sentence structures (simple, complex and compound), and conducting pre-tests and post-tests.

### **Research Methodology**

Analytical method and descriptive method are applied in this research paper. This research was conducted through a survey questionnaire participated by first year French specialization students, class of 2018-2019 academic year, and evaluation on the present prescribed textbook and current teaching methods on promoting writing skill.

### **The Study**

#### **Current Prescribed Textbook**

NSF1 (Nouveau Sans Frontieres 1) printed by Paris: CLE International Publishing House in 1992 was selected as a prescribed textbook for B.A. first year French specialization students, starting from (2000-2001) academic year to (2010-2011) academic year. One advantage of that course book was that the dialogues were designed to study only after vocabularies and grammatical patterns have been taught. Then, it was followed by exercises and activities and students found it easier to practise writing as they had already studied the new words from the text. However, Latitudes 1 which was published by Didier Press in 2008, has been chosen as the course book since 2012-2013 academic year. One weakness of the current book is that students face difficulty in their writing as the related vocabularies from the text are not provided. One advantage of the book is the accessibility of appropriate exercises which students can self-practise after each lesson. Moreover, “dialogues, songs, interview and activities for phonetics” are provided in audio files so students can also develop their listening skill, spelling and proper writing.

#### **Authentic Materials for Teaching Writing Skill**

The authentic materials which can be used for teaching writing skills are:

- postcards
- invitation cards
- visiting cards
- photos (or) pictures
- whiteboard
- English – French dictionary
- online dictionary

#### **Writing Skill Exercises**

The followings can be used as writing skill exercises.

- Making own sentences

- Writing the ending parts of sentences
- Essay writing ( e.g: Myself, My Home, My Family)
- Letter Writing ( e.g: Dinner invitation, Invitation Acceptance Letter, Decline an Invitation Letter)

### Writing Skill Activities

Writing skill activities included:

- Individual Work ( e.g Writing about a person he/she admires )
- Pair Work ( e.g Telling one's daily routine and writing by another peer )
- Group Work ( e.g Group Discussion on one topic and writing them down)

### Difficulties for the teachers

Teachers find difficulty in conducting group work activities as the benches in the class are attached to desks and it is not easy to move around.

Teachers have to teach additional exercises for their modules since only one textbook is used and they have to teach their assigned chapter.

### Teachers' Feedback on Writing Assignments

Teachers note the common mistakes of students and write them on the whiteboard, followed by explanation and discussion.

The questionnaire was conducted to investigate students' attitudes towards current writing methodologies. There were altogether 47 participants attending first year for B.A French at MUFL during 2018-2019 academic year.

Question ( 1 ): Which aspect of four language skills is the most difficult in French Language learning?

Sr	Language Skills	Number of Students	%
1.	Listening Skill	45/47	95%
2.	Speaking Skill	15/47	32%
3.	Reading Skill	5/47	11%
4.	Writing Skill	10/47	21%

Listening skill was thought to be the most difficult in learning French by 95% of the students. 32% of the participants assumed that speaking skill is the most challenging while 11% chose reading skill. 21% of the students thought that writing skill is the most difficult.

Question ( 2 ): Have you ever learned French Language before you entered this university? If yes, where did you learn?

	Number of Students	%
Yes	0/47	0%
No	47/47	100%

According to their responses, none of the students has learned French before they attended the university.

Question ( 3 ): Where do you study French for additional practice apart from MUFL?

	<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes	0/47	0%
No	47/47	100%

As shown in the table, none of the students attends other French Language classes, except studying at MUFL.

Question ( 4 ): Do you like to practice writing skill in class? Or do you enjoy practicing at home/ hostel? Why?

	<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>%</b>
Home/Hostel	27/47	57%
Classroom	20/47	43%

As seen in the table above, 57% of the participants preferred to do writing skill practice at home/hostel because it is quiet, being able to imagine privately and being able to write freely. 43% of the students liked to write in class because they can ask questions and discuss with teachers and other classmates.

Question ( 5 ): What types of writing activities do you prefer?

<b>Sr.</b>	<b>Types of works</b>	<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>%</b>
1.	Individual Work	14/47	30%
2.	Pair Work	13/47	28%
3.	Group Work	20/47	42%

According to their feedback, most of the students prioritized group work while some enjoy pair work and individual work.

Question ( 6 ): What kind of writing exercises do you prefer in learning writing?

<b>Sr.no</b>	<b>Types of exercise</b>	<b>Number of students</b>	<b>%</b>
1	Making own sentences	20/47	43%
2	Writing ending parts of sentences	25/47	53%
3	Essay writing	10/47	21%
4	Free creative writing	35/47	74%
5	Letter writing	12/47	26%

The results show that 74% of the learners enjoy free creative writing and they like to imagine and create their own piece of writing. 53% of the students like to write the ending

parts of sentences while 43% prefer making own sentences. 26% of the participants love letter writing and only 21% like to write essays.

Question ( 7 ): What kind of difficulties do you have in practicing writing?

Sr no.		Number of students	%
1	Being weak in imagination	8/47	17%
2	Limited knowledge in vocabulary	40/47	85%
3	Limited knowledge in grammar	10/47	21%
4	Limited knowledge in usage	5/47	10%

The findings indicate that the most difficult part in writing is due to their limited knowledge in vocabulary. The second most difficult aspect is 'being weak in grammar' and it was followed by 'being weak in imagination.' 'Being weak in usage' is found to be the least difficult.

Question ( 8 ): What do you think on having two periods of fifty minutes a week for writing skill practice?

	Number of students	%
Enough	42/47	90%
Not enough	5/47	10%

As shown in the above table, 91% of the students assumed that having two-50 minutes periods a week for writing skill practice is enough. However, 10% of the learners thought that the time given is limited to discuss with the teachers.

Question ( 9 ): Are you satisfied with your teachers' feedback on your writing assignments?

	Number of students	%
Satisfied	42/47	90%
Not satisfied	5/47	10%

According to their feedback, 89% of the students were satisfied with their teachers' feedback and explanations of their mistakes in their writing assignments. However, 10% of the students found it difficult to reach their turn *and* receive feedback as there are 47 students in the class.

Question ( 10 ): Are you satisfied with writing skill assignments and activities?

	Number of students	%
Enough	43/47	91%
Not enough	5/47	10%

According to their answers, 91% of the students found the writing tasks and activities are satisfactory. 10% of the participants were not contented with those tasks because of their inadequate proficiency in target language.

### Findings

Through the analysis and evaluation of the participants' feedback, the main area of difficulty they encounter is due to their insufficient knowledge of vocabulary. Therefore, teachers should provide assistance to students in many ways such as installing French Language Dictionaries and applications into their mobile phones, and guiding to use free websites for further practices. It can also be assumed that writing skill can be upgraded through group work and pair work. It can also be considered that most of the students enjoy free creative writing since 74% of the participants prioritized free creative writing among other kinds of writing assignments.

### Conclusion

This research intends to provide help to certain extent in French Language teaching and learning process as it investigated the current teaching methods for first year French specialization students of Mandalay University of Foreign Languages. Writing skill, which is the key area in language learning, can be upgraded by conducting writing skill assignments and activities for students. It can be concluded that self-study and practice play important roles to develop writing skill as well as learning in class. The researcher will continue conducting research in other areas of languages- listening skill, reading skill and speaking skills so as to promote students' language proficiency.

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