

Designing Idiom and Proverb Crossword Puzzles for Primary School Students in Vietnam

Le Thi Lan Anh*

Primary Education Faculty, Hanoi Pedagogical University 2, Xuan Hoa, Phuc Yen, Vinh Phuc, Vietnam

*Corresponding author: lethilananh@hpu2.edu.vn

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Abstract Originated from the customs, practices, habits and events of a society, idioms and proverbs are special features and the beauty of that culture. They characterize the language of each nation so they must be preserved by every ethnic group and country. This study is conducted to clarify primary school students' knowledge of idioms and proverbs (300 students in three provinces of Vinh Phuc, Hai Duong and Bac Ninh); the reality of teachers' designing and using crosswords to develop their knowledge of idioms and proverbs (592 teachers in Vinh Phuc, Hai Duong, Bac Ninh, Hanoi, Bac Giang, Lao Cai, Yen Bai and Ha Giang). Firstly, the research shows that students' knowledge of idioms and proverbs is limited. Secondly, teachers are well aware of the role and effect of crosswords, but they fail to actively design crosswords and to use them effectively. In order that teachers can create highly appealing and effective crosswords, it is essential for them to have a clear and explicit procedure of designing crosswords. The procedure is proposed in this article with an end goal of enriching the national language for students when they enter primary school.

Keywords: *crossword puzzles, idioms, proverbs, primary schools*

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1. Introduction

The most exciting activity to students of all ages is probably games, especially which have interesting, useful content and suitable to their level. These activities must boost their thinking ability and develop their language. Crossword puzzles are one of the games meeting those requirements. Having low level of concentration, primary school students enjoy games and always want to acquire knowledge in an easy and happy way.

Idioms are fixed expressions while proverbs are a folk literature genre. They summarize the experience and knowledge of the people in the form of brief, concise, rhythmic, easy-to-remember and easy-to-convey sentences. They often reflect experiences of production and record social-historical phenomena or express philosophy of a nation [1].

In Vietnam, crossword puzzles appear on newspapers and television programs with various contents and forms. With over 200 crossword puzzles, Pham Van Tinh is known as the author of the highest number of crosswords. 99 puzzles were introduced in his book "Vietnamese Journey through the Crossword" [2]. In the book "Having fun learning Vietnamese", Nguyen Thi Thuy and Le Thi Minh Thu defined games as the means and learning as the aim. There were some crosswords in their book, including one proverb crossword (with 10 proverbs) [3]. Huynh Kim

Tuong Vi studied the role of idiom and proverb crossword puzzles in expanding vocabulary in primary schools. She believed that many idioms and proverbs can visualize. Using idioms and proverbs to organize games in teaching as well as extracurricular activities can stimulate students to enjoy learning [4].

In the world, many researches work on the effect of crosswords in teaching various areas such as medicine, economics, general education, but the crossword for primary school students seems overlooked. According to W. Orawiwtanakul, one of the best ways to improve students' vocabulary is crosswords. Learning motivation can be increased if the teacher can make an interesting learning environment [5]. Feliciano dos Santos and his colleagues stated that crosswords are one of the solutions to improve vocabulary for students with limited vocabulary. Learning vocabulary through crosswords is a very interesting start because students can find the relevant meaning of words through words in the puzzle [6]. M Alemi discovered a lot of potential of crosswords, which can be applied in EFL classes. They can establish close cooperation between teachers and students. They also worked as an effective tool to improve the ability to recall content, deduce meaning, better understand and develop communication skills [7]. N Gaikwad believed that pharmacological crossword puzzles are a useful self-study tool for learners. Crosswords are an entertaining tool and a positive learning strategy to promote self-study [8]. Through scientific experiment, RA Tambun found out a

huge impact of crossword puzzles on students' vocabulary proficiency even when English is their second language [9]. An interesting finding by Tricia M. Davis, Brooke Shepherd and Tara Zwiefelhofer was that crosswords could become more effective when students were allowed to develop crosswords to challenge their classmates. In this way, students have to study and understand the resources so that they are able to find a meaningful connection to the crossword puzzles. The authors also clearly saw their effects in students' learning process and in revision and exam preparation [10]. According to CMZ Jaramillo and BM Losada, students found designing crosswords not only a useful and creative activity but also an exciting opportunity to self-assess their learning. Students were aware of the improvement in their knowledge using crossword puzzles as a learning tool. It is also beneficial in learning theoretical knowledge, making the classroom experience more enjoyable. Teachers gave university students instructions on using crossword puzzles to enhance their learning [11]. A Syarif and F Fitriwati studied the use of crossword puzzles in language teaching for grade 2 students. To make it easier for students to learn vocabulary, the writers propose a special vocabulary-teaching strategy which is a half-crossword puzzle. The research showed that the game was very interesting because students can learn vocabulary and play games at the same time. Also, the activity teaches students how to work collaboratively. However, it will not be highly effective if there are more than twenty students in the classroom [12]. M Annisa and L Marlina found out that the crossword is a very useful tool to write descriptions, which is taught through three stages: pre-teaching, while-teaching and post-teaching [13]. Similarly, A. Maududi, E. Purwanto, A. Awalya analyzed the impact of crossword puzzles on mastering vocabulary and initial writing skills of primary school students (grade 1) [14]. Researches on crosswords were categorized in two directions: using crosswords as a teaching tool [7,8,10,11,14] and identifying the value and role of crosswords [5-9,14].

The roles, effects and the designing of crosswords in teaching different subjects, especially teaching vocabulary, are discussed in many studies. Idioms and proverbs are indispensable elements in learning vocabulary of a language. However, there are few articles and researches on crosswords in primary schools. It even seems that there is no research on idiom and proverb crosswords. The designing procedure of idiom and proverb crosswords has not been proposed in any studies.

Therefore, in this paper, we will study theoretical and practical basis, propose some types of idiom and proverb crosswords for primary school students and a designing procedure of idiom and proverb crossword puzzles.

2. Content

2.1. Idiom and Proverb Crossword Puzzles

Idiom and proverb crossword puzzles are those with empty crosswords which are idioms and proverbs. With their knowledge, players find words containing those letters to fill the crosswords.

Using idiom and proverb puzzles, first of all, is to develop vocabulary for students, to strengthen their knowledge and develop their language and thinking skills. In other words, it is to form communication capacity, linguistic competence for each individual right from the primary level. It will be very effective when idioms and proverbs seep into students' language in a natural and exciting way.

2.2. Primary School Students' Knowledge of Idioms and Proverbs and the Designing and Using of Idiom and Proverb Crossword Puzzles

2.2.1. Overview

Objectives: 1. To examine teachers' use of crossword puzzles to develop senior students' idiom and proverb knowledge at primary schools of teachers. 2. To propose the procedure of designing and using idiom and proverb crossword puzzles for primary school students.

Contents: (1) Grade 4 and 5 students' knowledge of idioms and proverbs; (2) Teachers' perception of idiom and proverb crossword puzzles; (3) Teachers' current use of idiom and proverb crossword puzzles.

Methodology and tools: (1) Questionnaire: The questionnaire was given to 102 primary school teachers to examine their perception, their use of idiom and proverb crossword puzzles, their advantages and disadvantages (no personal information); (2) Observation: Observe classes to record the organization process; (3) Interview: Use the in-depth interview form to interview teachers on the current situation, the roles and the factors affecting the use of crosswords (4) Data analysis: Data is processed statistically, from which discussions, analysis and conclusions are made (5) Evaluation criteria of students' idiom and proverb knowledge: the ability to memorize idioms and proverbs; the ability to find idioms and proverbs in accordance with the meaning description, the ability to understand idioms and proverbs' meanings. Assessment is made through observation and activity organization.

Participants and schools: 300 students in 3 primary schools: Xuan Hoa Primary School (Vinh Phuc), Thach Khoi Primary School (Hai Duong), and Ho Town No.1 Primary School (Thuan Thanh - Bac Ninh). The survey is mainly carried out in 3 primary schools with 102 teachers. A number of primary school teachers in the continuous professional development program given by HPU2 are unofficial participants (Bac Giang: 100 teachers; Lao Cai: 75 teachers, Yen Bai: 55 teachers, Hanoi: 50 teachers, Ha Giang: 90 teachers, Bac Ninh: 120 teachers). Total: 592 teachers.

2.2.2. Findings and Discussions

2.2.2.1. Primary school students' knowledge of idioms and proverbs

As mentioned in the beginning, students, especially primary ones, are not interested in idioms and proverbs. The study was conducted in three primary schools, with the participation of 300 grade 4 and 5 students (randomly taken from each school) in Xuan Hoa Primary School (Phuc Yen town, Vinh Phuc province), Thach Khoi

Primary School (Hai Duong City) and Ho Town No.1 Primary School (Thuan Thanh - Bac Ninh).

First, we used the exact idioms and proverbs (139) in primary textbooks of Vietnamese to examine students. Students' knowledge of idioms and proverbs is categorized into 3 levels (good, fair, average) (Table 1).

1. Read 10 idioms and proverbs you know.

2. Fill in the blank in idioms and proverbs. (20 sentences)

3. Find words/phrases equivalent to the following idioms (10 idioms)

4. What do the following proverbs imply? (10 sentences)

The research indicates that: Primary school students could not differentiate folk songs with idioms and proverbs. While very few students could remember 9 or more idioms or proverbs (22.6%), they were better at filling in the blanks (Good - 127 (42.3%), Fair - 130 (43.3%)). As they could not memorize a lot of idioms and proverbs, some mistakes were made, for example: Nước lã mà ... **đỏ** ... (vã lên hồ, Ao liền ruộng ... **lúa** ... (cả). Finding words equivalent to idioms is the most difficult requirement for them, only 10, 3% of students did it right and 6.3% of students did it wrong. Discovering the meaning of proverbs and idioms was difficult to some students. Although the use of idioms and proverbs in communication was not examined, initially it was found that students' knowledge of idioms and proverbs was limited.

Table 1. Students' knowledge of idioms and proverbs

		Xuan Hoa	Ho Town	Thach Khoi	Sum
Memorizing	Good	20	30	18	68 (22,6%)
	Fair	42	45	43	130 (43,3%)
	Average	38	25	39	102 (34,1%)
Filling in the blank	Good	40	42	45	127 (42,3%)
	Fair	43	45	42	130 (43,3%)
	Average	17	13	13	43 (14,3%)
Finding equivalent words/phrases	Good	10	11	10	31 (10,3%)
	Fair	30	28	29	87 (29,0%)
	Average	55	55	53	163 (54,3%)
	Poor	5	6	8	19 (6,3%)
Discovering the meaning of idioms and proverbs	Good	15	12	14	41 (13,6%)
	Fair	38	40	41	119 (39,6%)
	Average	40	39	35	114 (38%)
	Poor	7	9	10	26 (8,6%)

Idioms and proverbs must be taught continuously at primary schools. The findings and discussions above show important tasks and requirements for teaching idioms and proverbs in primary schools. Furthermore, measures to support teachers must be taken so as to improve the teaching and learning of idioms and proverbs.

2.2.2.2. The use of crossword puzzles in teaching Vietnamese in primary schools and students' interest in crossword puzzles

592 teachers were asked to judge how necessary crossword puzzles were in teaching Vietnamese. Three levels of necessity were: (i) Very necessary; (ii) Necessary and (iii) Not necessary. The result is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. The necessity of using crossword puzzles

Levels of necessity	No. of teachers	Percentage of teachers (%)
Very necessary	428	72,3
Necessary	161	27,2
Not necessary	3	0,5

It is clear that most of the primary school teachers find it important to use crossword puzzles. The result is appropriate because each game is suitable to a different activity, so the level of necessity varies.

Table 3. Purposes of using crosswords in primary schools

No.	Criteria	Teachers, Administrators	
		No.	Percentage (%)
1	To contribute to the teaching methodology innovation	592	100
2	To motivate students, to change the classroom atmosphere	592	100
3	To help students apply what they have learned	435	73
4	To help students master the knowledge and build up skills	412	70
5	To integrate different areas of knowledge	322	54

Table 3 shows that most of the teachers and administrators are aware that the purpose of using crossword puzzles is to contribute to the teaching methodology innovation and to motivate students.

Table 4. Factors affecting the use of crosswords in teaching

No.	Reasons	Teachers, Administrators	
		No.	Percentage (%)
1	There is a lack of facilities.	338	57
2	Classes have a large number of students.	256	43
3	Crossword puzzles are not designed systematically.	524	88
4	Teachers lack skills of organizing the crossword activity.	273	46
5	It takes much time to design a lesson.	356	60

As shown in Table 4, the main reason why teachers do not often use crosswords in teaching is that they are not designed systematically. The activity does not have a proper name. It is organized in an emotional manner. The organizing procedure is not consistent.

Table 5. Activities using crosswords

Activities	Frequency (%)		
	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely
Teaching, reviewing Vietnamese	96	4	0
Teaching, reviewing Natural – Social subjects	98	2	0
Teaching, reviewing Maths	2	5	93
Teaching, reviewing other subjects	3	5	92
Extracurricular activities	95	5	0

Data from interviews is as following (Table 5):

- Students' excitement when playing crosswords:
- + With physiological and psychological characteristics of young age, students love to learn through playing.
- + Crossword is an intellectual game so many students try to learn to participate.
- Teachers' difficulties when organizing crossword activities:
- + There is no available system of crosswords for different purposes.
- + Teachers do not know how to design crossword contents.
- + Teachers are not good at information technology.
- + Teachers lack skills of organizing the crossword activity.

Some conclusions could be made as follows.

Most administrators and teachers realize the importance of using crosswords in teaching, especially in developing students' knowledge of idioms and proverbs. They appreciate the role of crosswords in teaching in general and teaching Vietnamese in particular.

Despite that crossword puzzles are appreciated as an effective learning activity; they are not applied frequently in most of the primary schools. In fact, teachers do not invest enough time in designing and organizing the activity. There are no pre-designed crosswords. Teachers lack skills of organizing the crossword activity. They want to use ready-made crosswords.

All the above factors motivate the author to study the designing of idiom and proverb crossword puzzles for primary school students.

2.3. Designing Idiom and Proverb Crossword Puzzles

2.3.1. Basic Requirements in Designing Idiom and Proverb Crossword Puzzles

Crossword puzzles must be purposeful (It is to expand and develop primary school students' knowledge of idioms and proverbs). They must be suitable for the physiological - psychological features of students. The crosswords must be beautifully designed. The crossword design must be feasible.

2.3.2. Types of Idiom and Proverb Crossword Puzzles

On a theoretical and practical basis, we have designed 2 categories including 6 sub-types of idiom and proverb word puzzles as presented in Figure 1.

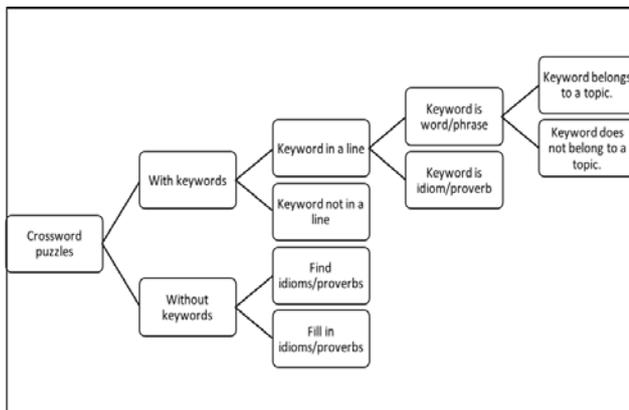


Figure 1. Types of idiom and proverb crossword puzzles

2.3.3. Idiom and Proverb Crossword Puzzle Designing Procedure

2.3.3.1. Puzzles with keywords (Type 1)

Step 1: Choose keywords/sentences which are suitable to the topics at primary level.

Example 1: Keywords: siêng năng, chăm chỉ, học tập.

Example 2: Keywords/sentences are idioms or proverbs: Có chí thì nên, Học thầy không tày học bạn

Step 2: Put the keyword in a vertical crossword, put each letter in a box (or a whole word in a box if the keyword/sentence is long).

S	I	Ê	N	G	N	Ã	N	G
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

CÓ	CHÍ	THÌ	NÊN
----	-----	-----	-----

Step 3: Find idioms, proverbs having letters or words of the keyword/sentence

Step 4: Draw crosswords, organize boxes as long as the keyword is put vertically (Apply IT: Powerpoint, Violet or MacroMedia Flash, etc)

Step 5: Replace the puzzle letters/words (in the answer) with (...)

Step 6: Check the content, format and level of difficulty of the crosswords

2.3.3.2. Puzzles without Keywords

* Square type (Type 2.1)

Step 1: Choose idioms, proverbs which are suitable to the topics at primary level.

Step 2: Write the letters of the idioms, proverbs into the adjacent boxes in the vertical, horizontal, and diagonal lines as long as each idiom/proverb is on a straight line.

Step 3: Draw a big square containing all the boxes with idioms and proverbs.

Step 4: Check the content, format and level of difficulty of the crosswords

* Knitting type (Type 2.2)

Step 1: Choose an idiom or a proverb, write in the horizontal boxes.

Step 2: Find some idioms and proverbs containing letters of the horizontal words (as chosen in Step 1) and write them in vertical boxes.

Step 3: Find some idioms and proverbs containing letters of a number of vertical words to weave into horizontal ones.

Step 4: Draw the blank crosswords as designed in Step 3.

Step 5: Make suggestions which are the content and meaning of each idiom and proverb.

Step 6: Check the content, format and level of difficulty of the crosswords.

2.4. Pedagogical experiment

2.4.1. Experiment background information

a. Aims: To examine the facility of the designing procedure of idiom and proverbs crossword puzzles and teachers' ability of designing puzzles

b. Participants: 32 teachers at three mentioned-above schools and 36 senior students of Primary Education Faculty, Hanoi Pedagogical University 2 (random sampling)

c. *Content*: How teachers and senior students design puzzles

d. *Methodology*: Worksheet, Observation, Interview

e. *Marking scale*: Within 180 minutes, they can design:

5-6 types of crossword puzzles (3 points)

3-4 types of crossword puzzles (2 points)

1-2 types of crossword puzzles (1 points)

2.4.2. Experiment Procedure

- Primary school teachers and senior students are guided how to design crossword puzzles.

- Discussions are frequently made during the designing process.

2.4.3. Result

When designing, teachers and students must use their knowledge of idioms and proverbs and look up at Vietnamese idioms and proverbs. Both of the participants were very excited and designed a large number of crossword types (over 83%). They all agree that designing puzzles help them to quickly expand their knowledge of idioms, proverbs and culture. It is noticeable that the knitting type (2.1) can be designed by only 7% teachers and students because it is very difficult, requiring a lot of designing skills. With the average value ($\bar{x} > 2$), the feasibility of the idiom and proverb designing procedure for primary school students can be proved (Table 6).

Table 6. Teachers and students' designing idiom and proverb crossword puzzles

Type	Teachers (n=32)		Students (n=36)		Sum	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1.1.1.1	32	100	36	100	68	100
1.1.1.2	32	100	36	100	68	100
1.1.2	32	100	36	100	68	100
1.2	31	96	35	97	66	97
2.1	31	96	36	100	67	98
2.2	2	6	3	8	5	7
Sum	160	83	182	84	342	83
\bar{x}	2,06		2,08		2,07	

2.5. Some Examples of Idiom and Proverb Crossword Puzzles

In this paper, we would like to introduce three simple types of crossword puzzles which for primary students.

* **Type 1: Puzzles with keywords**

Type 1.1: The keyword is one word

Hàng ngang:

1 ... như tét.

2. Đông như ...

3 ... nhỏ nghĩa lớn.

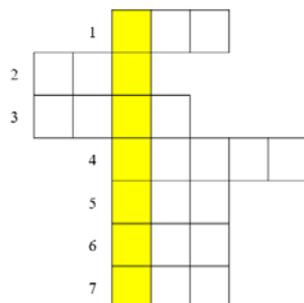
4 ... với nước, hiểu với dân.

5 ... xanh nước biển.

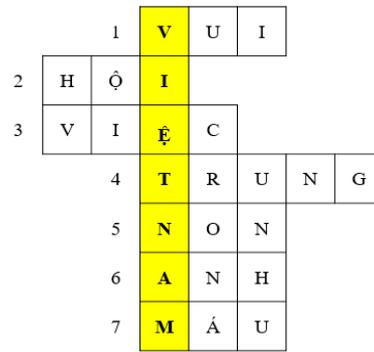
6 ... em như thỏ chân tay.

7 ... chày ruột mềm.

Hàng dọc: Tên nước ta.



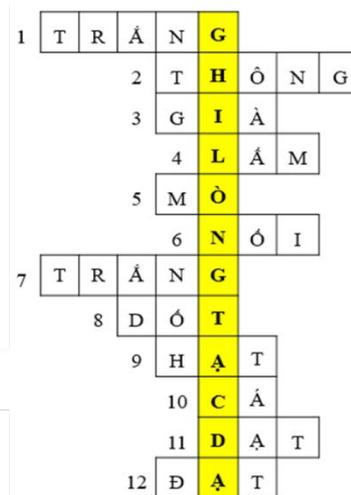
KEY



Type 1.2: The keyword is an idiom (or a proverb)

1. Đồi ... thay đen	1	□	□	□	□	□	□
2. Bác cò ... kim	2	□	□	□	□	□	□
3. ... néo đứt dây	3	□	□	□	□	□	□
4. Chân ... tay bùn	4	□	□	□	□	□	□
5. ... kim đáy bể	5	□	□	□	□	□	□
6. Bạn ... khó	6	□	□	□	□	□	□
7. Lo bò ... răng	7	□	□	□	□	□	□
8. ... hay nói chữ	8	□	□	□	□	□	□
9. ... gạo cần đòi	9	□	□	□	□	□	□
10. Lấy đầu ... vá đầu tôm	10	□	□	□	□	□	□
11. Hoa trôi bèo ...	11	□	□	□	□	□	□
12. Dục tốc bất ...	12	□	□	□	□	□	□

KEY



Type 1.3: The keyword is a topic

1. Work hard
2. Lack of knowledge
3. Try to give advice but it is not received by listeners.
4. Deliberately try to find out others' mistakes.
5. To be lazy, just wait for luck.
6. Similar to row 3.
7. To be dishonest, make up stories, completely slander.
8. To be greedy

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