

CHAPTER 9

LUMOS-EXPRESS: A WRITING TOOL TO IMPROVE ESL LEARNERS' MOTIVATION IN DESCRIPTIVE WRITING

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ABSTRACT

Creating art through technology is gratitude. Expressing thoughts and feelings of depiction through written words is one of the purest forms of art. Using both in writing is creating creative fusion. In general, Malaysian schools teach English as a second language. Therefore, it is crucial for students to be competent in the language to cope with the globalisation era. This refers to the ability to master all the four skills, Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. However, the mastery in Writing has always been an obstacle. Multi-national organisations in Malaysia need citizens who are proficient not only in spoken English but writing skills need to be mastered as well, which was the purpose of the study being conducted. This study applied the qualitative method design, document analysis, observations and interviews. This research described a project for ESL learners who struggled and were demotivated in writing. The current study aimed to determine whether this technology-integrated project which applied the use of an application called Tayasui Sketches under a project named, Lumos-Express, helped in improving the motivation in descriptive writing skills among ESL learners. This Lumos-Express project hopes to prepare the next generation of ESL learners for an increasingly competitive global learner. Thus, technology must be at the front and centre of our practice especially in writing. Therefore, this experimental study attempts to investigate the use of pictures through technology to motivate writing. The research involved 10 students whereby 5 were from an urban school in Johor Bahru and 5 were from a rural school in Baram. The result showed positive result from the participants. They also agreed that teachers should incorporate technology and visual in descriptive writing.

Key Words: English Language, writing, pictures, motivation, technology

1. INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic has been difficult for the world. Almost every sector was affected and education was no exception. The education system had to take extensive measures and divert to online learning. In the official Malaysian education system, the English Language in Malaysia is taught in Primary and Secondary schools for a total of 11 years accumulatively. Acquiring the target language is no doubt vital as to enable the citizens to compete globally. According to researches, writing is the hardest skill to master. Despite being teachable, the writing skills require immense complementary skills. Thus, various techniques have been conducted in the formal classroom to help improve the writing skills among second language learners. One of the techniques is known as Lumos-Express, which is the use of visuals as in pictures, as stimulus to enhance descriptive writing skills. Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to explore the use of pictures as a stimulus to enhance students' descriptive writing skills.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Descriptive Writing

Being competent in descriptive writing can enhance a student's language learning. Descriptive writing is the most basic element of writing (Suriyanti & Yacoob, 2016). Teaching students to write more descriptively is a way to engage students to gradually improve their writing skills. Udit & Hashim (2020) emphasize that writing gives opportunities for the pupils to share their knowledge and ideas in order to learn better. When students are familiar with the concept of descriptive writing, they will be able to practice more with writing activities and this will help them to improve their writing skills in time.

2.2 The Use of Pictures in Writing

Illustrations have been widely applied in lessons to improve learning. Pictures are frequently applied as visual triggers to capture the attention of students, motivate and facilitate the development of their analytical thinking skills (Duchastel & Waller, 1979; Levie, 1987; Winn, 1982) as cited in Lee (1996). Through illustrations, students will be stimulated to write compared to writing without images. Pictures help pupils to write with creativity (Yusnita et al., 2012; Asrifan, 2015; Agustawati, 2018). As descriptive writing is important in learning to write among ESL learners, pictures can be something worthwhile to describe.

2.3 The Use of Pictures in Writing

Growing access to the internet and technology has improved the students' learning environment. The incorporation of technology in teaching and learning has made the learning process more interactive and collaborative (Yunus et al, 2021). Previous researches proved that ICT use in learning enhances the overall process and brings students' active engagement in learning to the highest level (Finger & Trinidad, 2002; Jamieson-Procter et al., 2013). Therefore, it is essential for students and teachers to be

equipped with technology skills to be competent for life-long learning and teaching in this globalized era.

2.4 Scaffolding in Writing

In the learning and teaching environment, scaffolding is defined as a teacher assisting and supporting a student. Past studies have shown positive impact of using scaffolding strategy in teaching descriptive writing among ESL classrooms (Pilu,2015; Prabandan,2016). Scaffolding guides students to improve their competency, not just with acquired skills, but with the ones a learner would possibly gain during the scaffolding process.

2.5 Motivation in Writing

Learners need to be well motivated when acquiring a language (Pazilah et al., 2019). Motivation is crucial in a child learning process as it helps the child to develop positive behaviours and performance in language learning. Student's attitude is impacted by the way writing taught and distinguished (Graham et al.,2013,p222). The way students think of the writing task can influence their motivation towards the task. It contributes to student's engagement toward the task.

3. METHODOLOGY

This research procedure was based on the ADDIE model of instructional system design developed by B. Seel and Z. Glasgow (Wiphasith et al.,2016). This model covers the phases of analysis, design, development, implementation and evaluation.10 students were involved in this study. The instruments were entries using sketches app to write, observations and interviews. Data were triangulated through document analysis, observations and interviews. Participants were asked to produce a piece of writing without guidance and the topics were standardized by the researchers. The first entry without guidance were kept for analysis. Then, they were introduced to the Lumos-express project using Sketches to write. They were guided for the first 3 entries. Students worked independently from fifth entries onward and submit their entries for feedbacks through constructive criticism every week. Evaluation was done through observations and document analysis. These were recorded during pre, while and post. These were done to evaluate the effectiveness of Sketches app to motivate ESL learners in writing. Interviews were recorded after students completed their last entries.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings were fascinating considering this was the first time any of the students were introduced to the use of technology and visuals in writing. The objective of this project was to observe the improvements in the students' descriptive writing skills and to explore the technique of using technology and pictures in enhancing descriptive writing skills. A

free writing entry using the Tayasui Sketches application started the Lumos-Express project. This particular entry was used as a tool to compare the end product.

4.1 The Improvements of ESL Learners’ Descriptive Writing Skills

4.1.1 Document Analysis

How does Lumos-Express technique improve primary ESL descriptive writing skills? It portrayed the students’ descriptive product of the entries as a tool for language learning. The key aspect here was that making descriptive writing a very essential but an engaging task that involved many aspects of language learning as language is acquired through exploring and experiencing. The first aspect was where the Tayasui Sketches application was used as a manner for exploration that aroused the students’ interests. The application enabled the learners to have free choices, since the students were given the chances of autonomy in the topics they explored. In a way, the use of pictures and technology were deemed as a way to experience the process of writing. According to their end product, the learners experienced the need to source information on the topic and the autonomy in learning made the process an engaging task for them especially when it comes to choosing the pictures to use. The aspect of using decorating tools in their writing was the motivator in the writing process. Throughout the writing process, learners learned to improve their sentences through trial and error which involved the process of constructive criticism with the teacher. They explored the language needed to improve their writing through creativity and art in order to produce one of their own. Improvements can be seen in terms of the word counts and designs of their entries in the students’ essays. Below are some products of pre and post products produced by learners from average group:



Figure 2: Products of pre and post products from average group

In content, previously, most of students had difficulties on how to express their ideas. They could not state their ideas in English and write relevant supporting ideas. By using pictures, students can brainstorm ideas or contents within so their written text will have meaning. Visuals aid the learners especially average learners to state their ideas in English

and write appropriate supporting postulations. The presence of pictures supports the students' imagination as not everyone is a natural born writer especially in learning a second language. These learners need a technique which can enhance their aspects of motivation as descriptive writing in a second language is not an easy feat. Once these learners understand that they have the authorities on their own learning, Lumos-Express project became their voice. In time, these average students' experience during the project would eventually lead to improvements in descriptive writing and its quality. Below are the pre and post products from the advanced group:

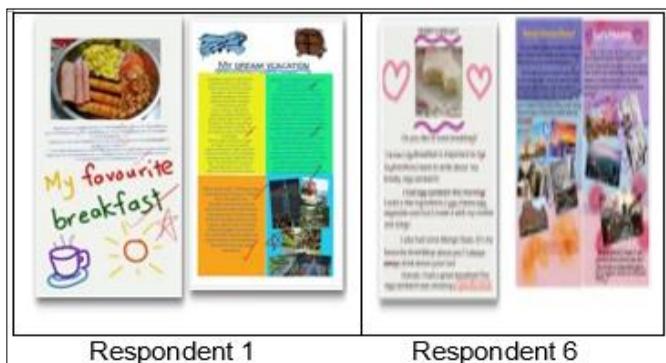


Figure 3: Pre and post products from the advanced group

The ideation and purpose of Lumos-Express project as a writing tool to motivate learners to write can be seen in the learners' end products. The aspect of exploring and experiencing help learners to develop motivation. The application became a space for creativity where learners have autonomy in their learning. The aspects of learner's autonomy encouraged the intrinsically advanced group of learners to manipulate the application to show their ability. In short, the application became a medium for these learners as a place to express not only their creative sides but also their ability to describe photos using words. These two advanced learners were from the advanced group and they were both from different schools, one being in town and another in a rural school. Advanced learners became better writers and they were able to experience their own improvements as they continue to write their entries.

4.1.2 Observation

The shift of attitude towards descriptive writing using the Tayasui Sketches technology was an intriguing process to witness as it showed a positive result. The learners were observed through participant observation where the observer participates into the activities of the group whose behaviour is to be observed. Through the observation, it was noticed that 10 respondents were motivated to write their essays using the application. Their positive attitudes were recorded using field notes three times (pre, during and post Lumos-Express project).

Items	What is the respondent doing in the journal entries?	What is the respondent trying to achieve in the journal entries?	What does the researcher see in the respondent attitude towards journaling?
Respondents			
R2	He can write a few sentences. He includes pictures and doodles in his entry.	He's trying to show his creativity using Sketches to write his entry.	He is motivated.
R7	The respondent looks happy because this particular learner loves art. She's editing the picture using the tools in the application before pasting it on the layout.	The respondent is trying to create an interesting layout for her essay.	She's excited to use the application to write her essay.

Figure 4: Pre Lumos-Express observation from the advanced group

Since everybody likes to look at photos, their function in the classroom as a stimulus for the students' attention. Pictures brings the outside world into the classroom in a vividly imaginative way. This aspect of pictures helps learners gain ideas for their writing. Pictures can motivate the learners and make them want to pay attention and want to participate. Pictures can contribute to the context in which in the language is being used.

Items	What is the respondent doing in the journal entries?	What is the respondent trying to achieve in the journal entries?	What does the researcher see in the respondent attitude towards journaling?
Respondents			
R3	She can write good sentences. She decorates her entry with pictures she found in the internet.	She's trying to be creative in her entry. She's writing and decorating her entry.	She is excited. She is trying to show her creativity in decorating her entry
R8	The respondent is designing her background using the brushes and she's editing her photo using the application.	The respondent is writing her essay and she's designing her essay layout using the application.	The respondent looks so excited and happy with the activity.

Figure 5: While-observation of Lumos-Express project from the average group

The task was purposely created to elicit the response on the students' interest where they were given the autonomy to express themselves. Nonetheless, it seemed that 2 students did not perform well in writing despite the task being easy. Thus, constructive

criticism was given to the students for the next lesson in order to boost their motivation and quality. At the end of the project, a final observation was made.

Items	What is the respondent doing in the journal entries?	What is the respondent trying to achieve in the journal entries?	What does the researcher see in the respondent attitude towards journaling?
Respondents			
R5	He's writing 3 paragraphs of entry with correct sentences. He includes a picture and doodles as well.	He is trying to show his creativity in writing his entry.	He is motivated and he is so focusing in completing the task.
R10	The respondent looks more confident using the application after a few entries and practice.	The respondent is trying to write his essay and describe his photo using longer sentences (compound sentences).	The respondent looks relaxed, happy and confident compared to the first few entries.

Figure 6: Post-observation of Lumos-Express project from the average group

These average learners benefited from the project as well. Their attitude on descriptive writing improved and they were motivated to express their thoughts because they realised that they are the ones in charge of their own learning through the Lumos-Express project. This was perhaps one of the impacts of incorporating technology and pictures in writing where the feedback during scaffolding session gave the students a sense of assurance that they were improving in their writing and motivation.

4.1.3 Interview

The students were interviewed at the end of the project, after writing their eighth entry. The interview showed that Lumos-Express received positive feedback from the respondents.

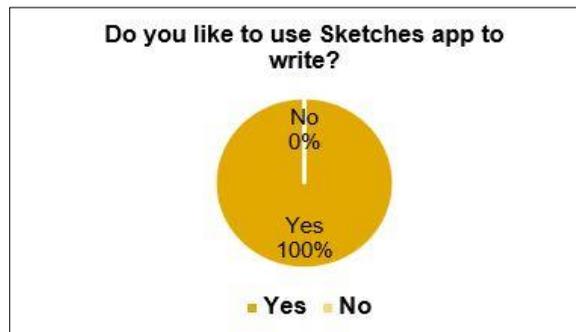


Figure 7: Respondents' feedback

Based on Figure 7, it was clear that all the respondents enjoyed writing using the Tayasui Sketches application. Lola (Baram) mentioned that:

Yes. I like to use Sketches app to write in English because it's very fun.

The respondent's view on Lumos-Express project using the Tayasui Sketches application portrayed a positive reception from the learners. The aspects of autonomy in learning, freedom of creativity and inclusion of technology contributed to this reception. The learners were well aware of the opportunities and discoveries from the application which contributed to the aspect of motivation in their writing. This was where the researchers could see the average learners became one step better while the advanced became a better version of a writer, a motivated writer. As mentioned by Justin (Baram):

Yes. I like to use Sketches app to write in English because it's very fun.

Writing is not an easy feat especially when it comes to second language learners. Motivation has to be inculcated and the use of the technology in this research had filled in the gap of achieving and imprinting motivation in these learners so they would be intrigued to write.

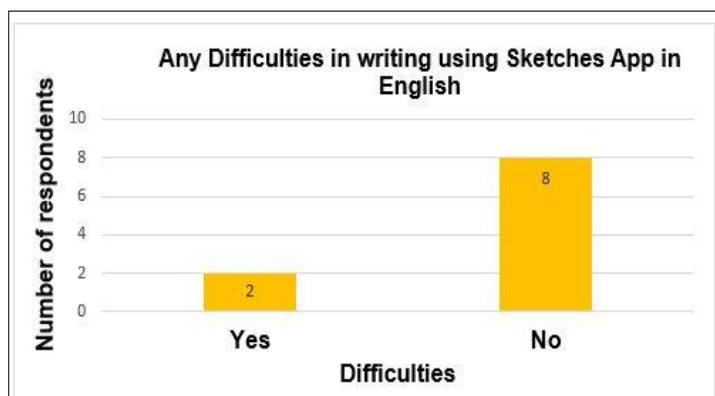


Figure 8: Respondent's feedback

Based on Figure 8, two of the respondents mentioned that they had difficulties at the early stages of experimenting with the Tayasui Sketches application, as mentioned by Joy (Baram):

Yes, it's difficult to type at first. I practice many times because it's my first-time using apps to write essay.

When it comes to discussing technology, being technology savvy is not necessarily a must, as skills and tools can be learned. That was the intriguing discovery of this research. Most learners nowadays have been using mobile devices like tablets and smartphones to play and learn since they could crawl. Therefore, it is logical to align today's lessons with the way that learners want and are used to learning. It is one thing to expose learners to technology and a whole different thing to integrate technology and use it to mould creativity. That was the gem of the research. Learners from various walks of life were able to experience these elements in this Lumos-Express project.

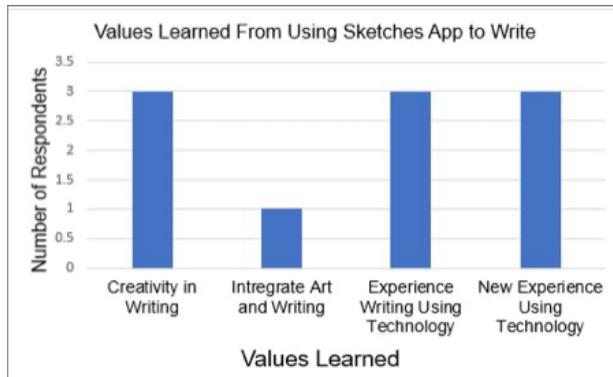


Figure 9: Values learned from using Sketches app to write

Combining technology and traditional ways to learn would enable the learners to have an enhanced learning experience. As portrayed in Figure 9, the learners had access to an incredible vast of new opportunities as technology such as Tayasui Sketches empowers learners to be more creative and be more connected. Lily (Johor Bahru) mentioned:

I learned how to write a good English compression using sketches app. When it comes to writing descriptive essays, learners need to give more attention because mastering descriptive writing could be intricate. According to Raimes (1983, p 27), with a picture, all students, after close observation of the material, will immediately need the appropriate vocabulary, idiom, and sentence structure to discuss what they see. It can help students improve their language use when writing (grammar and vocabulary). John (Johor Bahru) mentioned:

I learn how to draw and write more sentences.

When the learners write descriptive essays, they should have imagination to procure ideas which guide them on what to write. Wright (1989) expressed that pictures are often helpful if the learners can respond to a text non-verbally as pictures provide an opportunity for non-verbal response. They also need to understand the sensory detail of the object that they describe and this was where the utilisation of pictures to spark creativity came in handy. Moreover, they need motivation to keep them writing the descriptive piece and this was the function of using the Sketches technology for this Lumos-Express project. Justin (Baram) mentioned:

I learn to draw, edit pictures and use cool Fonts to write an essay.

According to Wright (1989, p 17) pictures can motivate learners to pay attention and take part in the lesson, it brings the context of any situations through which they can creatively express their ideas, and not to mention, pictures can be described in numerous ways that will develop learner's writing and organization skill as well.

5.CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The findings from the document analysis, observations and interviews revealed that Lumos-Express received positive feedbacks from the learners. Document analysis and observations enabled the researchers to see and experience the learners' journey throughout the whole process. The interviews enabled the researchers to elicit their perspectives on Lumos-Express. After triangulating these three instruments, it was found that Lumos-Express does motivate these learners to write. Within the 8 weeks of the implementation, the increase in motivation can be observed and this proved that using Tayasui Sketches application in Lumos-Express as a writing tool is a good technique to motivate students in writing.

Writing has been a medium of expressions dated back to centuries. The evolution in writing techniques has shown how vital of a skill it is to be mastered in language learning. The use of visuals to aid writing has made the process an intriguing one and with the autonomy given to the learners, the process became meaningful as the content was chosen by the learners themselves. The application of technology in writing adds to its *pièce de résistance*, and this piece is crucial as a means to motivate ESL learners to write.

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