

## Writing Essays Made Easy with Instawrite

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### Abstract

Writing is a mammoth task especially to English as a Second Language Learners (ESL). In the Malaysian education setting, Year 6 Pupils are required to sit for a public exam where their writing skills are evaluated. However, it was discovered that feedbacks from teachers to pupils take more time. This action research was carried out to determine how far the use of InstaWrite can improve writing essays among Year 5 Pupils. These pupils were from rural primary schools in Alor Gajah, Melaka and Jempol, Negeri Sembilan. The research participants were a total of seven males and seven females with low to intermediate proficiency levels. Participants would use InstaWrite to help them to write narrative essays. These essays are based on a specific context and in an environment that is relatively fun for the participants. The data collected for this research were analysed using document analysis and semi-structured interviews. Participants wrote a single paragraph daily and feedbacks were given by both teachers and other participants. These feedbacks were used to refine the work. After the implementation of InstaWrite, results of the study showed an increase in the number of correct sentences written. The sentences constructed post-InstaWrite adhered to the Subject-Verb Agreement (SVA) structure. The study showed that the use of Instawrite could be a suitable teaching tool to strengthen pupils writing of paragraphs to form an essay. This beneficial use of technology would encourage more pupils to practice writing in English.

**Keywords:** InstaWrite, Writing, Essay, ICT In Language Teaching, ESL

### Introduction

In this era of modernisation, English can be considered as a vital language to be proficient in. As technology evolves, it has become easier for people to have the ability to communicate with anyone anywhere. To ensure there will not be any misunderstanding and misconception, a message conveyed needs to be clear and accurate. This is where learning and practicing the vital skills in learning a language is important. In Malaysia, English is taught as a second language in all schools. We can see that the Malaysian education system shows growing interests in the importance of English when the former Malaysian Education Minister, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin made English as a compulsory pass subject in the 'Sijil

Pelajaran Malaysia' (SPM) from 2016 onwards. Tan Sri Muhiyiddin Yassin stated that since English is a global language, we need to be up to bar with these advanced countries (Singh, 2013). The competency of the language helps bring our country up to the international standard at a much faster pace. This shows that the ministry is very serious and concerned in improving our students' English competency level.

Unfortunately, over the past 40 years, the use of English, the language that runs the economic progress especially in transforming Southeast Asia particularly Singapore, has actually decayed in Malaysia (Frazier, 2015). The results of the 'Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah' (UPSR) candidates for the English subject in 2013 experienced a minor backslide in the number of "As in comparison to the years before (English score in UPSR takes a dip, 2013). Also, the 2005 School Certificate Examination Report on English Language 2 acknowledged that most of the candidates have yet to be proficient in writing skills in English at the required Level in the 2005 School Certificate Exam Report (Samuel et al, 2008). Many academic scholars have highlighted the backsliding of the English Language standard among primary and secondary students. In a nutshell, it can be seen that our mastery in the English Language is declining and deteriorating slowly.

Malaysian students were found to be limited in terms of competency in writing skills. (Chitravelu et. al, 2005). Because of this, parents and teachers are very anxious as this skill is consistently tested in the 'Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah' (UPSR), a Standardised Year 6 Examinations. Writing skills are among the components tested in UPSR. In order to keep up with the adjustments, 'Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah' (KSSR) was introduced to replace 'Kurikulum Baru Sekolah Rendah' (KBSR). The curriculum content for writing in KSSR 'aims to develop the pupils' ability to write and present a range of texts using appropriate language, style and form for different purposes and audience through a variety of media' (Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 2014, p.40).

ESL teachers face problem whereby their pupils could not construct grammatically correct sentences what more essay using the conventional method. Thus, this paper is to explore the use of InstaWrite to enhance pupils' essay writing while adhering to Subject-Verb Agreement. Data were gathered through document analysis and a semi-structured interview. An overview will be provided with the general findings of the data gathered.

## **Literature Review**

### **Writing**

One of the reasons writing has been proposed in KSSR is to establish pupils' ability to write using correct language, form and style for a range purposes. (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2014). In any language learning, there are productive skill and receptive skill. Productive skill is needed to convey a message and receptive skill is needed in order to perceive a language. Writing skill is needed to convey a message in written form, therefore, it can be considered as a productive skill. Writing is a very important skill to master as it helps a writer convey a message in a grammatically correct manner. According to Gillespie and Graham (2012), writing is a very complex process. The multifunctional and multidimensional task of writing is compared to a Rubik's cube. We need to correlate and design the process to accomplish the chosen outcome. Gillespie and Graham (2012) expressed that educators often struggle to find the right level of understanding for the students to understand the intricacies and complexity of the content. Therefore it is the responsibility of every teaching researchers to study a productive method of delivery in which pupils would perceive and practice, hence encouraging involvement in discussions.

Primary school teachers often face difficulties in making their pupils write essays as they lack exposure and the feedback from teachers to pupils often takes a long time. Writing is important as Nowacek (2011) put it briefly, every person will be judged by his writing, whether in learning institution or workplace. It is very important to pass down a clear and correct message when in the community. Therefore, the mastery of language is very important in our everyday's life. The proficiency of writing skill would help one to improve himself and express freely. The writing skill is especially important for primary school pupils because they would be evaluated on writing in the UPSR. Therefore an intervention was created with the incorporation of technology that would attract the pupils' interest to write more consistently.

The participants were not aware that the sentences they have written were grammatically incorrect simply because English is not their first language. According to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, the human learns as a social procedure and the instigation of human intelligence in a society or culture. The main idea of Vygotsky's theoretical framework is that social interaction plays a major role in cognitive development. In this digital era, the practice of writing on social networking platform especially social media platform is usually integrated with interaction and socialising purposes (Hashim et al, 2018). In education, this is seen as an opportunity to apply and practice the skills acquired during the process of learning the English Language. Therefore they were taught the Subject-Verb Agreement (SVA) sentences and slowly develop that skill to write paragraphs and finally good quality essays. Many studies have acknowledged the fact that pupils usually have difficulties in SVA because the same rules do not apply to their first language (L1). Of course, they would be more proficient with the rules that are applied to their L1 (Surina Nayan et. al, 2009). An example is 'Senah duduk atas lantai' whereby in English is 'Senah sits on the floor'.

Elliot (2006) mentioned, in SVA, if the subject is singular the verb should also be singular and this is also applicable for plural subject and verb. SVA is vital because wrongly used SVA can cause one's writing to be unclear and it blocks the ability to share the content effectively (Rio Salado College, 2015). The ability to write comes from good and consistent practice and formal educational guidance. This can be enhanced in the environment we are in. It has to be an acquired skill (Myles, 2002). In this setting, the instructional approach was used to encourage participants by facilitating them to construct essays that comply with the Subject-Verb Agreement.

The sentences constructed by putting words and phrases together are the important blocks of meaning that allow us to convey our thoughts in a correct and well-constructed manner. Besides assisting them to write grammatically correct sentences for their UPSR essay writing, simple sentences are also important to provide oneself a framework for a clear written expression of our thoughts and ideas (University of Leicester, 2015). Thus, the pupils are taught how to write simple sentences, this, then, developed into creating paragraphs and essays.

### **Use of Technology**

Technology is something that evolves at a very fast rate. It is definite that it will play a huge role in the education of the digital era. Cloud computing, Augmented Reality (AR) and 3d printing are fast developing technologies that are making their way into the education setting.

In this digital era, it is all about access, anywhere learning and collaboration (Hashim, 2018). One of the main reason technology is taken into account in designing the intervention is to gain pupils' interest in actually using it on a daily basis. Our education system is approaching towards the 21st-century learning. Hence this type of technological manipulation would really be beneficial especially in pupils' learning process. Teachers must constantly think of ways to manipulate technology in designing various interesting and engaging learning tools that involve active participation to achieve a better percentage in growth. Yunus et al.(2013) highlighted that the involvement of ICT in the teaching and learning of writing always encourages learners to have independence and self-discovery skills that could help them navigate when looking for materials online. This method of using technology in lessons is flexible for the teachers to model. With the use of technology, learning takes place anywhere at any time. However, Gilakjani et al. (2013) said that more pedagogy or theoretical framework is needed when using technology in order for teachers to model the instructions.

Howe and Strauss have classified the generations as Boomers (1943-1960), Gen X(1961-1981) and Gen Y/Millennials (1981-1994). The generation that comes after 1994 is called Gen-Z or the Net Generation. Hashim(2018) stated that this was further supported by Oblinger and Oblinger (2005) with a slight difference in the range of years. Of all the generations, the two generations who are impacted by technology is Gen-Y and Gen-Z. Students born between 1982 to the year 200 are commonly described as digital natives as they are highly competent in digital literacy(Best et al, 2013). This applies mostly to those who are born after 1995 as they are born during the beginning of the graphical web that we have today. They are also experiencing the development of mobile phones and cloud computing. This tech-savvy generation mostly prefers to be on social media instead of having a direct contact with a person. Therefore it is only fair if we include technology in the process of educating the pupils from this generation.

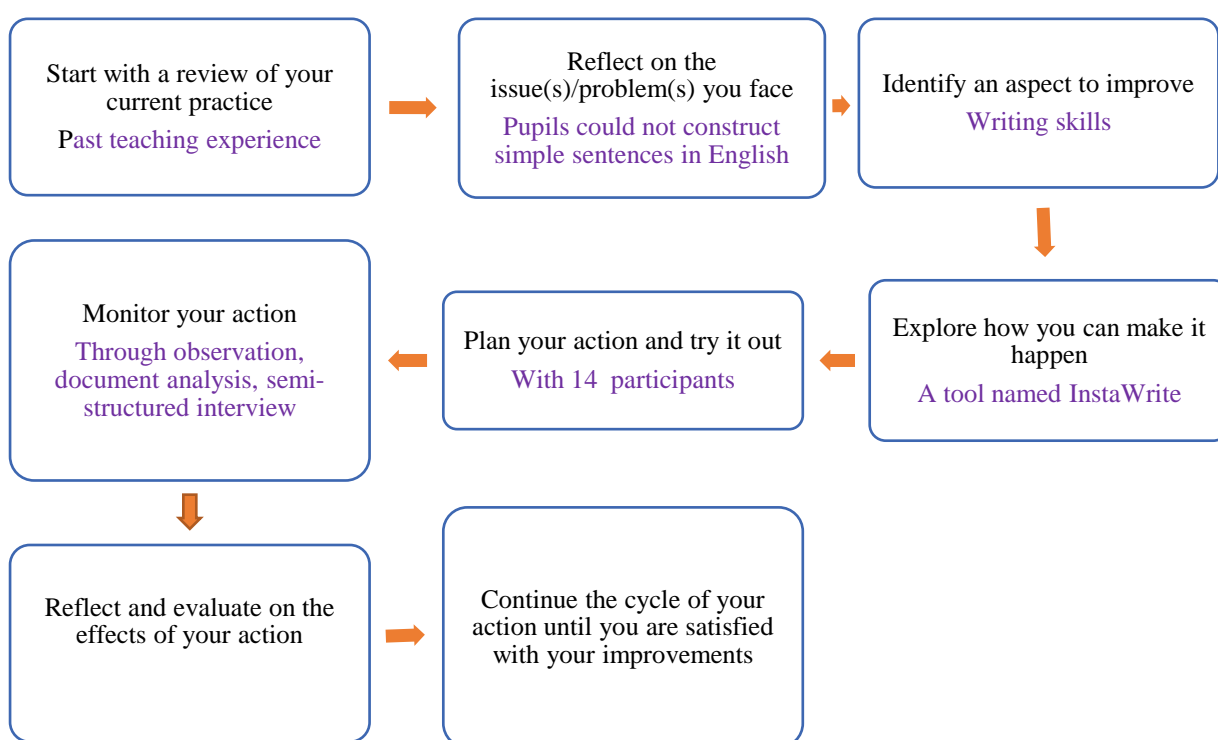
With that said, we can conclude that pupils are often exposed to and influenced by social media since that is the means of social interaction in the present day. And different social media platforms serve different purposes in the whole social media setting. Many social media platforms have been commonly used in the teaching and learning process. Primarily YouTube contents can be used as a teaching aid in class. Facebook groups are commonly used to share materials among students and teachers. However, it was observed that Instagram has yet to appear in an education setting even though almost every teenager today has an Instagram account. This is a great opportunity for teachers to manipulate this platform to teach skills that pupils are often reluctant to learn. .Social media tool are normally used for social engagement, direct communication, the speed of feedback and relationship building (Hashim, et al, 2018). As mentioned, the speed of feedback is a very important aspect when it comes to effective teaching and learning process. A journal has stated that when teachers decide to do a process approach to carry out a writing lesson, the features that comes with the technology enables faster feedback (Zaki, 2015). This is thought to be a form of collaborative learning as well. A delayed feedback will lead to setbacks in the pupils' learning process. Therefore by using a social media platform, feedback can be given instantaneously and pupils could learn better. Godwin-Jones (2018) said that getting students ready for online learning communities involve restructuring of how second language writing is taught. Teachers would have to include informal writing opportunities

## Material and Methods

### Research Design

The action research McNiff's model (Goh, 2012) was used to carry out this research. Using the model, it started off with a review of the current practice and it was realised that pupils face difficulty in writing. Then, reflections were made on the issues and problems that the researcher encountered. From it, it was found that the participants face difficulty in constructing essays that abide to SVA. Therefore, a method to guide them not only to write essays but also follow SVA was introduced. From McNiff's action research model, the next step was to carry out with InstaWrite. This was followed by a reflection on and the effects of this learning activity were critically evaluated.

Figure 1. Cycle 1 based on McNiff's



The recommended intervention would be using Instagram daily to write on paragraph daily. The picture was in accordance to the UPSR Section C Paper 2 format. Pupils needed to write one paragraph daily in Instagram based on the picture. Pupils were given feedback on that day so that pupils would correct the mistake. On the third day, pupils wrote the corrected paragraphs to form an essay.

### Research Participants

The research participants were selected from two rural schools and purposive sampling was used because these fourteen selected participants from Year 5 faced difficulties in writing essays. The participants were pupils who did not have much exposure to the English Language. They did not have the opportunity to speak or write in English apart from attending English Language classes in school. The language they communicated in was Bahasa Malaysia or Mandarin respectively, and therefore they were not fluent in the English Language. As a result, they did not have sufficient words to construct sentences. According to Smialek (2015),

visual learners best remember what is seen. Thus, posting a picture a day in Instagram would help them to visualize as all of them are visual learners.

Table 1

*Participants' Information in School A, Melaka*

School	Participant	Gender	Proficiency
A	1A	Male	Low
	2A	Male	Low
	3A	Male	Low
	4A	Male	Low
	5A	Female	Intermediate
	6A	Female	Intermediate
	7A	Female	Intermediate
B	1B	Male	Low
	2B	Male	Low
	3B	Male	Low
	4B	Female	Low
	5B	Female	Intermediate
	6B	Female	Intermediate
	7B	Female	Intermediate

### Data Collection Method

The main data collected were document analysis whereby their worksheets cum essays were evaluated and analysed. From the worksheet, their writing skills were being analysed. The worksheet was used to gauge their level of understanding. The worksheet served as a correction from the feedback given in InstaWrite. The participants were also interviewed using a semi-structured interview to check the effectiveness of using InstaWrite in writing essays. The findings and discussion will be expounded below.

### Results

#### Main Findings

It was found that the participants improved through their writing results while adhering to SVA. There are two parts that will be discussed below, which are the document analysis of the pupils' essay writing after the use of essay. The response of the participants towards the use of InstaWrite is also discussed in the semi-structured interview.

#### Document Analysis

After using InstaWrite, pupils were able to score better. The results were encouraging. Pupils were able to construct correct essays while adhering to SVA. According to the table above, all the 14 participants show increment in the score before and after the intervention. The increment range is between 12-30 scores.

Table 2

*Differences in Scores for Each Pupil in the Worksheet*

Participant	Score intervention (x/100)	before	Score after intervention (x/100)	Differences in scores
1A	40		62	+22
2A	34		60	+26
3A	48		70	+22
4A	36		60	+24
5A	60		80	+20
6A	56		70	+14
7A	60		72	+12
1B	30		60	+30
2B	34		54	+20
3B	24		50	+26
4B	46		58	+12
5B	50		68	+18
6B	52		66	+14
7B	60		78	+18

From the above table, it is noted that the participants scored better compared to their previous essay. The post-test showed increments for each participant. The participants were able to construct sentences that adhered to Subject-Verb Agree in the essay writing. The improvement is not drastic but through a longer period of time, it is believed that the pupils will be able to score better through the use of InstaWrite.

By using the data above, a paired sample t-test had been carried out to see whether there is a significantly significant improvement in student's score after following the InstaWrite intervention.

Table 1.

*Paired Samples Statistics*

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair	before	45.0000	14	12.07031	3.22593
	after	64.8571	14	8.69002	2.32251

From table 3, we can see that the mean score before the intervention is 45.0000 while the mean score after the intervention is 64.8571. There is an increment of 19.8547.

Table 2.

*Paired Samples Correlations*

		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	before & after	14	.906	.000

From table 4, there is a significant positive strong correlation at 0.906;  $p < 0.05$  of samples before and after the intervention. Thus, we can conclude that the result before and after the intervention has positive strong relation.

Table 3.

*Paired Samples Test*

		Paired Differences				t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference			
					Lower	Upper		
before								
e	-19.86	5.57	1.49	-23.07	-16.64	-13.33	3	.000
after								

\*Significant level less than 0.01.

From table 5 above, we can conclude that  $t(14) = -13.333$ ,  $p < 0.005$ . Due to the means of the scores before and after using the intervention, we can conclude that there was a statistically significant improvement in student's score following the InstaWrite Intervention from 45.00 to 64.86 ( $p < 0.0005$ ); an improvement of 19.86 overall.

### Semi-structured Interview

Writing is one of the most difficult skill in English as it requires the vocabulary and adhering to Subject-Verb Agreement (SVA). Many issues like first language interference, less supportive

classroom climate, failure in seeing the value of the learning content and the lack of vocabulary in the writing are problems that ESL learners face (Yunus et al, 2018). Semi-structured interviews are in-depth interviews where the respondents have to answer preset open-ended questions and would benefit from an open framework (Jamshed, 2014). Through the interview, it was noted that the instant feedback given in InstaWrite has enabled the participants to immediately learn and correct their mistakes. They enjoyed the process of using technology to write the essay instead of the conventional way through writing. Below are the pseudonym names that were interviewed and their feedbacks and responses towards InstaWrite.

*'I enjoyed using InstaWrite because I can do it at home and when I have completed my homework'- Participant 5A (Female, Intermediate)*

*'The teacher always gives instant reply towards my grammar mistakes and this helped me to learn from it. Instead of waiting for a few days, I get to correct it immediately.'* – Participant 3B (Male, Low)

*'I like to type instead of writing' – Participant 7B. (Female, Intermediate)*

From the above, it can be noted that the participants preferred to learn in their own comfort zone. Everyone has a different style of learning and InstaWrite catered to their needs. They did not have to sit in the classroom at a specific time to complete the writing task given.

*'I like to use Instagram.'* – Participant 1A (Male, Low)

*'Instagram is fun' - Participant 2B (Male, Low)*

*'Instagram is interesting and I like it very much' - Participant 3A (Male, Low)*

Additionally, the participants enjoyed using Instagram to do their writing task. Technology is undeniably the in thing for them and smartphones are the Gen Z's friend. Through the use of technology, they are excited to learn. Active learning has taken place whereby they corrected the mistakes and learned new vocabulary.

Also, the writing task is in line with the UPSR Paper 2 Section C essay writing format. Through the use of InstaWrite, the participants were exposed to the essays and at the same time, they learned how to write it. They were motivated to learn as it was a paragraph a day instead of three paragraphs in one day.

## Discussion

Writing for many is the most challenging tasks since it entails a lot of ongoing practices (Lim, et. al, 2017). In addition, writing is a complex skill and it could be a hindrance to some English as Second Language (ESL) learners (Nazril, et al, 2017). From the above, it is seen that writing is a difficult task that has made many ESL learners face difficulty in writing. It is a complex skill and therefore the conventional method of teaching is not effective in the 21st century. Thus, technology has to be incorporated into the lesson to enable learning to take place in a fun and interesting manner.

The intervention is aimed to develop the pupils' ability in writing essays. The strategy used in the intervention is the use of InstaWrite. From the above analyses and data gathered during the research, it could be summed up that the participants were eager to learn English using InstaWrite. As mentioned by Hashim et. al (2018) in this digital era, accessibility is everything. This could be used with the benefit of collaboration and borderless learning environment. This means the researcher's initial assumption on the ability of the use of InstaWrite to improve essay constructing was correct. The results have answered the aim effectively. This was also supported from a journal whereby it was stated that technology is definitely a good

tool in assisting students' writing (Yunus, et al, 2018). Additionally, the way people learn new knowledge these days are very much influenced by what they discover on social media (Ghazali, et al, 2017)

As mentioned above, the use of InstaWrite could also be used to teach other aspects of language. The pupils' mental approach is that English is difficult and dull to a positive one where learning the language is exciting and engaging. From an educational perspective, mobile technology cannot be seen as a single and homogeneous technology, but rather as a set of technological devices that supports a large number of Apps (Domingo, et al, 2016). Thus, it is opined that the use of Instagram in teaching writing will spur them to achieve greater heights. So, the introduction of InstaWrite ushers them to learn English in a more fun and engaging way of using technology. The pupils would find it interesting and participants were able to do it at any given time and place.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, this research indicated that there was a boost in pupils' ability to write essays correctly while adhering to SVA. Hence, this shows a positive results that InstaWrite is effective in teaching writing skills. It is recommended for further studies that the use of InstaWrite be used for different types of essays beside narrative writing such as descriptive, news report and so on. In conclusion, the use of InstaWrite is found to be useful in improving essay writing adhering to Subject-Verb Agreement. Educators could use InstaWrite to enable their charges to write in a simple fun and enlightening manner.

Advancing through, students today will be engaging in the global world that requires more understanding and abilities. Students not only need to perceive the subject basics but also to think decisively, to examine and to conclude. With this, Higher Order Thinking (HOTS) should be included in the essay. It is the aspiration of the researchers to see as many students as possible to improve their essay construction while adhering to SVA by using a simple but efficient tool called the InstaWrite.

Based on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, social interaction plays a major role in cognitive development. The practice of writing on social networking platform especially social media platform is usually incorporated with interaction and socialising purposes (Hashim et al, 2018). Thus, this research plays a pivotal role in engaging pupils of the 21st century to learn in a fun and interesting manner using Instagram to write essays. Learning starts with engagement as stated by Woon (2018) and therefore, the use of InstaWrite can help engage the pupils to learn effectively. The use of InstaWrite has enable writing to be appealing, fun and interesting. In this research, InstaWrite proves that interaction through social media helps in cognitive development.

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