

# Video Games: The Game Changer in Teaching Writing for ESL Learning

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Being able to write excellent academic writing has become a problem among English as Secondary Language learners. Learners tend to be wrong in writing and not show much interest in writing academic writing. One of the reasons for this is because of the conventional approach by educators that are making learners not to feel motivated to write and cause a lack of writing skills. Due to that, to motivate students to be engaged in writing, an intervention of video games is used in teaching writing for ESL learning. The use of video games, specific Players' Underground Battle, or widely known as PUBG, is used in motivating learners to write. A few words or phrases were taken from the video games, and learners needed to write a page of writing out of them. Based on the findings, it can be seen that the intervention of video games has helped learners to be more motivated and creative in writing.

**Keywords:** *academic writing, ESL learning, ESL writing, video games*

## Introduction

English language includes four primary skills which are reading, writing, speaking, and listening (Sadiku, 2015). Today's era of globalisation and the Internet of Things (IoT) has driven younger generations to be proficient in the English language, and also to acquire excellent communication skills (Li & Razali (2019). The use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and mobile devices to assist language learning and acquisition has rapidly expanded in today's era (Hsu & Wang, 2019). It has become an integral part of the teaching and learning environment over the past years. (Abbasova & Mammadova, 2019; Kawinkoonlasate, 2019). The purpose is to nurture digital literacy among citizens, also to further improve the proficiency of the learners in the English language. Malaysia, in particular, aims to educate its citizens to be fluent in the English language, and technology has been famously used among educators to help Malaysian learners to acquire the English language. Malaysian learners are expected to be at least proficient in the English language for them to secure spots in the future, in both tertiary education and also in the working environment. However, the aspect of speaking is

highlighted and prioritised so that sometimes learners tend to forget the importance of writing skills. It is believed that many educators tend to encounter quite a struggle when it comes to teaching writing (Singh, 2019; Aliyu & Danladi, 2018). Not to mention the fact that writing skills are the least favourite skills to learn among today's younger generations (Karim et al., 2019). In conjunction with this matter, it is believed that there should be a need for a strategy to change the mood of the classroom when it comes to teaching and learning writing (Mastan et al., 2017). Most Malaysian learners are moderate users of writing strategies, which is why to write is a challenging task and skill to master among them. Hence, this study aims to investigate the effectiveness of the use of video games in teaching writing for ESL learning.

### **Literature Review**

Technology is no longer a stranger among today's younger generations (Bloch, 2018; Hashim et al., 2018). Being born as digital natives make today's generation of learners pretty familiar with technology, especially smartphones (Bakla, 2019; Larekeng et al., 2019). Technology also is no longer a stranger in the world of education. Technology has been making its waves in the education system with the urge towards 21st-century learning. According to a study done by Pazilah et al. (2019), technology has been proven to be helpful and useful in language teaching and learning. Technology acts as a source of motivation and a platform for authentic learning. Research believes that mobile devices have particular characteristics that can allow learners to learn using them (Crompton, 2019; Hashim et al., 2018). Hashim et al. (2018), in their study on the perceptions of ESL learners towards the use of mobile learning in ESL learning: A total of 194 learners agreed that mobile technology is undoubtedly able to help them with their language learning, also as a tool for them to improve on their ESL learning. It is then later agreed by Hidayati and Endayani (2019), who believed that smartphones' multi-functionality and practical features help students to learn the English language. Their findings also gathered that students preferred mobile devices because they feel like they are more exposed to the English language quickly and become more confident with the language. Some learners are even more intrigued by the use of mobile devices as part of the learning process because they believed that it helps them to socialise with their friends, in a way for scaffolding purposes (Andrei, 2019; Stroud, 2019).

In a study done by Hashim (2018) on the application of technology in the era of digital education, she mentioned that games or gamification are useful tools in helping to stimulate concept and learners' real-world experience. They also help in engaging students in the classroom. Savonitti and Mattar (2018) conducted a study on the characteristics of entertainment games that might be useful for teaching English as a secondary language. In their research, they have figured that there are many characteristics of entertainment games that might be helpful in ESL learning. The components identified include motivation, classroom interaction, social interaction, etc. Hashim et al. (2019) then later conducted a study on the use of gamified learning in improving ESL learners' grammar. They have

concluded that gamified learning is proven to be effective in terms of grammar achievement. They found out that learners can obtain better results with the help of online language games in learning English grammar. With the existence of the fourth industrial revolution and advancement of technology, this comes in handy as ESL learners will benefit through gamified learning.

Many theories revolve around the use of technology in ESL learning. The philosophy underpinning this study is the theory of social constructivism by Jean Piaget (Carey et al., 2015). This particular theory of social constructivism is applied and to be considered as relevant in this context of study, as video games act as a medium of learning or scaffolding in writing in ESL learning. Piaget's theory of constructivism believed that people produce knowledge and meaning based on their prior experiences. Constructivists such as Piaget believed that students construct meanings as they interact with their surroundings and make sense of their previous experiences.

The intervention of video games is considered to be helpful to trigger the learners in writing (Kwan & Yunus, 2015). There are a few approaches to academic writing skills (Zaki & Yunus, 2015). The free writing approach is believed to be applicable for this study as this approach focuses on students' writing quantity, not their quality where learners are only needed to write freely without worrying about grammar and spelling. Previous researches have proven the effectiveness of video games in language learning, especially in learning English as a second language or foreign language (Rosman et al., 2015). Zaki and Yunus (2015) believed that there are various kinds of simulations and media to create an engaging environment for learners to learn writing and for them to practice writing with. They also believed that mobile learning and other technologies or mediums could also be useful in complementing writing skills approaches, rather than only using the conventional method. Most researchers thought that the integration of technology is somewhat essential and crucial as a learning tool that makes the learning process way easier for learners. (Mahmud, 2019; ROY, 2019).

## **Methods**

This study is a qualitative research study which involved ten undergraduate university students. They have an average level of proficiency in the English language. This study employed real life-based video games as an intervention in an English language subject. The response or the use of those particular video games act as a catalyst to probe the learners' prior knowledge and in writing skills. The learners needed to pick a few words or phrases used in the video games and make use of those words to produce one narrative writing. The effectiveness of the intervention is then later observed through the end products, which is the learners' writing.

## Results and Discussion

The video game that the learners have chosen is called Players' Underground Battles Games (PUBG). The choice of this entertainment video game by the learners is due to their background. The learners are the undergraduate students at a public university for military cadets in Malaysia. They can be considered as an intermediate level of proficiency learners aged between 21 to 25 years old. Their background explains their choice of interest towards the particular game of PUBG. The learners are very intrigued by the game due to the characteristics of the game of playing war. They, out of anyone else, could relate to the genre of video games due to their surroundings and environment. Some of the words and phrases that the learners have chosen to produce writing out of are '*tango spotted*' which symbolises that the enemy is close, '*get into the safe zone*' that signifies to find the protection, and '*I need resources*' which is a hint of asking for help. The learners managed to make use of the mentioned words and phrases to create a page of writing.

*"One day, Ali invited his friend to play futsal in the afternoon after school in the school field. After class ended, Ali goes changing his cloth for playing futsal as it said before. After an hour, his friends come, and they started to choose a team to play. Then, before the game started, Ali shouted to all his friends. **Good luck have fun** with the game. During playing, Ali had a miss penalty kick. His friend tells him to **better luck next time** and laughs at him. Ali had to **stay alert** while having this situation and not to be too confident. Then, Ali got a scored, and the games end. Ali's team won the game with a score of 2-1. They had a **good game well played** all of them. Too soon it is evening; they pick up their stuff and clean the place and go home by themselves."*

### Excerpt 1

The findings of this study have figured that the use and intervention of video games have helped the learners to be more participative in a classroom. Video games also helped learners to be more engaged and able to relate to their own experiences. This result is agreed upon and supported by a study by Kwan & Yunus (2015), who believed that the intervention of video games helps to trigger the learners in writing. The theory of social constructivism by Jean Piaget (1936) also underpins this finding. Constructivists believed that learning a language is about relating to prior knowledge and the ability to create meanings from experience. Moreover, the findings have figured that the intervention of video games has also helped learners being more creative and more motivated to learn.

*The teams were divided with armbands and simply placed on opposite ends of the field. Once the teams are in position, the referee shouted, "Game On!" and the war begins. I was hiding behind a big wall when my leader shouted, "**Enemies ahead!** Quickly get into **Safe Zone**." One of my teammates had been shot, and he*

*could not make it. It will be hard since no one could not fill the missing bottom. Then, I heard someone said "**Better luck next time.**" Somehow it made me eager to make them pay for what they did.*

Excerpt 3

*"After arriving safely into the building, Ainul used the hand signatures to tell his buddy that the area is clear to be entered. Then, Ainul whispered, "Get **into the safe zone.**" His buddy walked carefully, but unexpectedly, there were two more enemies on the balcony. The enemies saw Ainul's buddy, and they shot him. He was injured, and Ainul quickly drew his weapon and took a shot to kill the enemies. One-shot and both enemies fell onto the ground with their head were split into half. Ainul blew his gun as he was proud of the power that was shown by the weapon."*

Excerpt 4

Based on the learners' writings, it can be observed that they tend to be more creative and more eager to write. This particular finding is parallel to the study done by Savonitti and Mattar (2018) on the characteristics of entertainment games that are interesting and intriguing that can help learners, especially in ESL learning. They believed that entertainment games help to motivate learners and improve on not only learners' classroom interactions but also their social interactions.

## Conclusion

Writing for English as Secondary Learning is undoubtedly a tough thing to cope with for both educators and learners. It is quite hard for educators to teach writing skills to their students, and it is equally hard for learners to acquire excellent writing skills. It is undeniably crucial for educators to think of strategies to encounter the matter of lack of writing skills among learners. Writing for many is not an easy task. It takes a lot of on-going practice (Ien et al., 2017). Educators must be prepared and willing to make some innovations and changes in parallel with the advancements of technology waves in education. Educators must also take into account their learners' different characteristics and learning preferences (Polakova & Klimova, 2019). Making acquaintances with technology is crucial for language teachers as an effort to assist learners' language acquisition, specifically in ESL writing. It takes efforts and strategies to install the skills of writing in learners. In the education sector, technology is undoubtedly able to foster learning by providing platforms for sharing information and authentic knowledge (Amin, 2019), and also communication among both educators and learners.



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