



Fourth Graders Awareness of Writing Narratives through Reflective Journals

Solange Cristina Rivera Espinoza

Guide: María Rossana Ramírez Ávila

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Abstract

The present study was developed in a private school in Samborondon, Ecuador. It aimed at improving writing skills by using reflective journals. Twenty students from 7 to 8 years old and of 4th grade participated in the study. The level of this group of students was Pre-A1 according to the Common European Framework of Reference, with respect to technology all students were beginners. This research was implemented using action research with the combination of quantitative and qualitative instruments. Participants at the beginning of the innovation took a pre-test and at the end a post-test was implemented to compare results. An interview combined with field notes and students' reflective journals were carried out by the researcher to collect and interpret the opinions and expectations of participants and the difficulties they had during the innovation. The pretest and posttest results showed an effect size with a Cohen's d 0.955483 which demonstrated that the research had a significant impact in improving writing skills. The results of the interviews and the field notes observations indicated that students showed a great deal of agreement in relation to the acceptance and motivation towards the use of reflective journals and the game and English writing. This research is addressed to teachers, researchers and authorities in the field of EFL education and policy makers in the area.

Keywords: reflective journals, writing, narrative stories, young learners, EFL.

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Resumen

El presente estudio se desarrolló en una escuela privada en Sambodorón en Ecuador. Dirigido para mejorar las habilidades de escritura con el uso de diarios de reflexión. Veinte estudiantes en edades comprendidas entre 7 y 8 años pertenecientes al 4to grado participaron en el estudio. El grupo tenía un nivel de inglés pre-A1 de acuerdo al Marco Europeo Común de Referencia, eran principiantes en el área tecnológica. Esta investigación se realizó bajo la modalidad de investigación acción con combinación de instrumentos cuantitativos y cualitativos. Al comienzo de la innovación los estudiantes realizaron un pretest y al final un posttest para comparar resultados. Una entrevista, notas de campo y los diarios de reflexión de los estudiantes se desarrollaron para recolectar e interpretar las opiniones y expectativas de los estudiantes y las dificultades que tuvieron durante la investigación. Los resultados del pretest y posttest mostraron un efecto significativo con un Cohen's d 0,955483, demostrando una mejora de las habilidades de escritura. Los resultados de las entrevistas de las observaciones indicaron que los estudiantes mostraron aceptación y motivación en cuanto al juego y la escritura en inglés. Esta investigación está dirigida a los profesores, investigadores y autoridades en el campo del inglés como Lengua Extranjera (ILE) y los encargados de políticas educativas en el área.

Palabras clave: diarios de reflexión, escritura, textos narrativos, niños, inglés como lengua extranjera.

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English is considered the doors of the world since it is known as a global language (Crystal, 2003). It is the most commonly spoken language in the world with an estimated of 1 billion speakers as mother tongue and as a second language (Nishanthi, 2018). Consequently, the significance of encouraging English as a foreign language in schools has reached some advancement in Ecuador public sector. Since the year 2012, the Ministry of Education published two documents called the English Language Learning and English Teacher Standards. These documents express the goals and results that the students from 8th grade to 3rd baccalaureate need to achieve, and it is divided into proficiency levels according to the CEFR (Ministerio de Educación, 2012).

Regarding the English level in Ecuador, it was demonstrated that it is low. According to Education First (2019), Ecuador is ranked 81 with a score of 46.57 (very low level) which makes it the lowest country in Latin America at the level of English proficiency.

Teaching English in Ecuador could be a challenge for teachers since they need to know how to catch students' attention in order to involve them into the learning process through an extensive variety of approaches and techniques. In addition, all the language skills must be involved in the methodology some way or another. For certain educators, encouraging writing is one of the most difficult skills to teach, however it is one of the most important. The written language is the portrayal of communication in language; along these lines, it is a well-organized procedure in which students are legitimately associated with demonstrating their capabilities in the second language as they have to think and sort out their thoughts before showing them (Brown, 2015).

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Writing has been an arguable topic for all the parties concerned within the educational field like lecturers, linguists and researchers, since it involves not simply a final product but a process. Additionally, it is a process to be followed to accomplish the goal of writing effectively (Kroll, 2003). Besides, learning the way to write during a second language may well be difficult for pupils, as they need to be told a brand-new orthography, punctuation, system of rules in English, together with its regularities and irregularities (Celce-Murcia et al, 2014).

Using technology in education includes figuring out how to utilize particular equipment and programming. It requires a comprehension of pedagogical standards and procedures. According to Bialo and Sivin-Kachala (1996), using computer technology can provide a lot of benefits such as boosting students' motivation, improving learners' attitudes toward the learning process, and varying the tasks and routines.

In the international context research concerning the field of storytelling is diverse. Sarica and Usluel (2016), determined the effect of digital storytelling on the visual memory capacity and writing skills of students. The participants were primary school students and the results showed that digital storytelling created a positive difference in writing skills. Another research related to storytelling and EFL learners' literacy skills was carried out by Rahimi and Yadollahi (2017) revealed that literacy skills (reading and writing) improved significantly in comparison with the control group. There is a positive correlation between the time participants spent in online platforms and the development of reading and writing skills. In a third study, Rutta et al. (2020) explored the influence of comic-based digital storytelling on primary school children. The results showed that digital narratives from collaboratively storytelling are longer and more structured than working alone even if participants have to wait for their turn to write in the computer. The digital tool used in this study was Communicics. In the case of these researches, all

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of them applied technology with storytelling to improve literacy mainly reading and writing, like in the case for this innovation.

In Ecuador, there are several studies related to the area of writing and technology. In the research related to digital storytelling, Ortiz and Peñaranda (2016) showed the influence of technology on English learning. In this case the researcher studied the digital tool Storybird. With this tool, students wrote stories and improved their ability to imagine and write. As a result, a didactic guide for teachers was designed. This study is similar to this innovation because it uses a similar digital tool in which students can write and design picture books.

Remache et al. (2019) is another example of this kind of research in Ecuador. The objective of this research was to find out the improvement of writing skills by using the storytelling strategy. It was carried out at university level; participants were at sixth level based on Cambridge PET exam. The results showed more interest and greater improvement to produce written texts. Students also improved coherence in production of written texts. The strategy of storytelling was recommended to educators. In this case, the strategy did not include a digital tool but used storytelling to improve motivation in writing which is one of the goals of our research.

Estrada (2019) implemented technology to improve students' writing. The researcher used Quizlet which is a tool to build vocabulary. Students tested their knowledge with the use of quizzes. This research showed positive results for students, researchers and authorities to improve writing and vocabulary. Finally, Arguello (2019) applied storytelling by using pictures to benefit communicative skills. The results evidence a large impact of this intervention. Although this research focused on oral skills the use of storytelling in primary school was relevant to this innovation because of the lack of studies in this area in South America.

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This innovation was carried out in a private school in the city of Samborondon with EFL primary students from 4th grade. The participants were chosen after taking a simulation of an English proficiency exam. Results showed lack of writing skills. This research contemplated the improvement of writing skills through story maker websites by incorporating the target skill in a meaningful and creative form. Therefore, the data analysis answered the following questions:

- 1) To what extent do reflective journals improve students' writing skills?
- 2) What are students' difficulties during the process?

Literature Review

Several factors are significant and affect the development of writing skills. This action research concentrated on the improvement of writing skills through the use of reflective journals. The independent variable was the use of reflective journals, and the dependent variable was writing skill. The following concepts are developed in this section, cognitive development, components of a narrative story, reflective journals, instructional design, and CLT principles for writing. These variables are presented in the following lines in order to explain the major themes of this research work.

Writing Skills

Golkova and Hubackova (2014) commented that writing is one of the productive skills together with speaking in the context of the educational language process. It is also recognized as an active skill and it needs more energy to produce an outcome than passive skills like reading and listening. Furthermore, Riggensbach and Lazaraton explained that teachers should pay more attention to communicative activities than strictly to accuracy (1991, as cited in Golkova & Hubackova, 2014).

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Some authors have published about language writing instruction. Nunan (2003) proposed four principles for teaching writing. First, he gives significance to understanding learners' explanations behind composition. Second, the author pointed out that it is not enough to include just the sort of writing considered advantageous by the teacher but also it is important to take into account students' preferences. Next, Nunan advised giving opportunity for learners to write. He emphasized that great writing will be the consequence of training.

Cognitive Development of Four Graders

Brown (2015) proposed three main principles for teaching languages in general: Cognitive, affective and linguistic. *Cognitive principles* relate to mental and intellectual functions, and the main are: Automaticity, meaningful learning, the anticipation of reward, intrinsic motivation, and strategic investment. *Affective principles* are characterized by emotional involvement, feelings about self, relationships in a community of learners and ties between language and culture. The main affective principles are: Language ego, self-confidence, risk-taking, and language-culture connection. The *linguistic principles* centers on the language itself, on how learners interact with the linguistic systems. These principles are: The native language effect, interlanguage, and communicative competence.

Brown also explained the principles for designing writing techniques. Teachers should incorporate practices of good writers, like make as many revisions as needed. Second, to balance process and product because writing requires many drafts before the final product. Third, teachers must take into account cultural and literary backgrounds. Fourth, connect reading and writing because students learn to write by observing written materials. Fifth, provide as much authentic writing as possible, by establishing the purposes for writing, it means a specified audience. Finally, frame the writing process into prewriting, drafting, and revising.

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For this innovation, cognitive processes developed in children play a basic role. For Piaget (1976), the adaptation of intelligence depends on internal coordination and information acquired from experience. The subject's relations with objects in the exterior is the base of the theory, the subject's mental structure is constructed by a continuous interaction with the external world. For Ahmad et al. (2016) cognitive development is based on the construction of thought processes like problem solving, remembering, and decision making. These processes are not exclusive of children but at this stage are extremely relevant because children develop memory and imagination that allows thinking in terms of time: past, present and future.

Those skills are necessary in this innovation to think and write a story coherently, and to develop a sequence of actions with logic and meaning. Johnson stated that the use of computers with the appropriate software shows its influence in basic learning, nonverbal aptitudes and insight on children (1999, as cited in Ahmad et al., 2016).

Components of a Narrative Story

Zheng (2018) created a storytelling mechanism theory that considers narrative in all formats as a result of a mechanical production of a textual machine. The main elements of this machine are three narrative content or stories; the narrative content or story, the medium or physical agency, and the interpreter or person receiving the narrative. On the other hand, Perkins (2017) proposed for analysis four central concepts in narrative discourse: causality, character, space, and time. Causality includes aspects such as primary, secondary, tertiary causation, and causes or effects or both. Character can be anyone or anything that can think, feel, and interact with others or with self. It is included in the concept of personhood. Space can be seen as motion through space location and position; finally, time is visualized as a sequence or duration, pastness, presentness or futureness.

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Reflective Journals

The use of reflection to achieve a deeper understanding of social, scientific or personal answers is not new. The reflective inquiry as Dewey defined it is the “active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds that support it and further conclusions to which it tends” (p. 9; 1933, as cited in Lindroth, 2014). Journals are effective for reflection and reflective thought. Journals can improve dialogue in the relation student-teacher (Krol, 1996, as cited in Lindroth, 2014). Journals allowed students to create questions and answer them. It is possible because students can write using journals and writing in an open-ended style (Crème, 2005, as cited in Lindroth, 2014).

There is some research related to reflective journals. Baek (2019) studied student`s experiences during a film-based reading class. The researcher analyzed students` perceptions about the class. Participants consisted of 35 adult students of an English reading course. The main source of data was reflective journal written during 12 weeks. The aim and methodology of reflective journals were explained to students before starting to write. Results suggested according to the reflective journals that students in general considered that the use of English reading classes was helpful. Abdelhamid (2019) used reflective journals to develop writing skills, learning, and assess students` reflection level. Results in this study showed the usefulness of reflective journals to identify problems like classroom management, teachers` frequent questioning, and time mismanagement among others. On working with reflective reading journals Apsari (2018) demonstrated that this tool helped with the development of ideas, textual coherence and textual cohesion. This study included observation, interviews and students` texts. Reflective journals can be a technique of self-reflection in young learners. Ramadhanti et al. (2020) used reflective journals to integrate the process of metacognition. The results showed this

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technique can be used to monitor students' metacognition in writing. These students developed their writing skills and became more independent learners.

Technology in School

According to Cambridge Online Dictionary, the term Web 2.0 is defined as the group of internet tools and websites that let users create, modify and share online content (Cambridge Dictionary, 2019). Weller (2013) claimed the significant advantages of using Web 2.0 technology during the learning process. Firstly, a similar application can be applied in a wide range of gadgets (cell phones, tablets, etc.). Furthermore, they are open from any PC anywhere. Thirdly, many applications are free to utilize. Fourthly, they require lower-detail equipment, as the application is not run locally thus web gadgets become less expensive. Html is the normal language of the web and joins all the various gadgets. Any application written in html is practically sure to run on all gadgets that have a modern internet browser.

Moreover, researchers have demonstrated that the combination of these technological tools in the school boost learners' engagement (William & Chinn, 2009); enhance learners' participation, and improve learners' comprehension of complex ideas. Besides, there are several studies that indicate the capacity of technology to personalize children's content. Kucirkova et al. (2017) illustrated the use of an app called *Our Story* to increase children's narrative skills. This study concluded that children's narrative skills increased in the number of words and supplementary information by the use of this app. Neumann (2018) demonstrated that tablets can positively support aspects of emergent writing development like letter name and sound learning. In another study, Kucirkova (2019) presented arguments to emphasize that personalization is possible by using an app *Our Story* which places child's agency at the core of the design process. The study concluded that commercial designers would investigate more about the attractiveness

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to child that supports personalized stories like the empirically evaluated app *Our Story* of this study.

Nevertheless, a few discoveries on the use of technology tools in teaching and learning, have not been empowering. More importantly, the findings of one of these studies carried out by McCabe and Meuter suggested that it is better to “explore whether technology truly enhance student learning” (2011, p. 150). This is because despite an abundance of research conducted to understand the impact of technology and web tools on learning, the functions of these tools in enhancing students’ learning remains obscure.

Instructional Design

Instructional design according to the Cambridge Dictionary (2020) is the design of systems and computer programs to help people learn more effectively. Istrate (2018) explained that instructional design or the designing of educational situations is necessary even if there is technology and if instructors have digital resources, educational software or virtual learning platforms. Learning objectives need to be established to maximize the potential of digital support and increase the participation of students. The researcher pointed out that to ensure learning conditions for students is a complex process and cannot be achieved without a plan. He also remarked that there is a difference between access to information and access to learning. Groups and classroom relationships have changed due to digital environment (Istrate, 2018).

Interactive Storytelling

The website ABCya.com incorporates more than 400 educational games for children in the levels Pre-k up to 6th graders. The activities are designed by educators and parents. Games are categorized by grade and subject with the idea to cover many subjects (ABCya, 2020). Inside

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this site, there is a game called *Story Maker*. It is a fun game for children to create and print short stories with an interactive interface where students can write, draw and compose stories.

This kind of games based on digital formats is called Interactive Storytelling. As Wallbaum et al. (2017) proposed, storytelling is a way to facilitate children to develop the ability to manage emotions and to develop emotional literacy. In the research they concluded that an interactive storytelling prototype can help children and parents to explore emotions. Also, Harley (1971, as cited in Ahmad et al., 2016) stated that play which is another relevant element in this innovation is a vital part for youngsters, by playing they can find themselves about the surroundings, also to interact with other people and practice the abilities necessary for the future.

Innovation

This innovation consisted in raising fourth grader`s awareness of writing narratives through reflective journals with the help of the Story Maker game in the ABCya website. To this end, students were introduced to the use of technology from a game based pedagogy approach using interactive storytelling. The present study lasted four weeks with 24 teaching hours, 45 minutes each.

Students worked on a website called ABCya where many games were available to children from Pre-k through 6th graders. The game that students used in this innovation was Story Maker which is an interactive game that offers the possibility to write, draw, edit and print the final work. With this game it was possible to improve the writing skills in English with the interaction between technology and the learning of a foreign language.

In a first stage, the teacher gave students the overall idea of the activities, the goals and a detailed description for students to comprehend what was required from them. Then, the teacher organized students and the way they worked in the computer laboratory to improve writing skills

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during the process. After this, the teacher divided the innovation into two sessions. During the first session, the teacher presented the grammatical and syntactic elements necessary to write a story and by using brainstorming and students created and wrote stories with pictures. In the second session, students were introduced to the technological aspect and surfed the website to familiarize with the features that this tool could offer. In the following sessions they learnt how to organize a story, greetings, and farewells. During the middle sessions students were shown how to organize events by using time order words.

During the practices the researcher interviewed students to follow the progress of the innovation in two aspects, motivation and in conceptual aspects of storytelling (Appendix 1). In this way the teacher could reinforce the weak aspects before the conclusion of the intervention. Parallel to the interviews, some observations were carried out by the researcher and data collected as field notes using a template. (Appendix 2). The idea was to record and analyze aspects that others instruments could have missed.

Methodology

This research was implemented using action research with the combination of quantitative and qualitative instruments. Action research, according to Hernández et al. (2006), has the objective to solve common and immediate problems to improve concrete practices. Its main purpose is to guide the decision making process. Action research is considered a qualitative design research but it can be combined with quantitative research instruments. As Ivankova (2015) pointed out many authors recognized the advantages of using mixed methods in action research studies. Jhonson & Turner indicated that “incorporating mixed methods procedures into each action research cycle may help practitioner-researchers secure a more systematic approach

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to action/intervention monitoring, thus providing a solid ground for promoting sustainability of change.” (2003, as cited in Ivankova, 2015, p. 59)

Participants at the beginning of the innovation took a pre-test (Appendix 3) and at the end a post-test was implemented to compare results. An interview combined with field notes was carried out by the researcher to collect and interpret the opinions of participants and the difficulties they had during the innovation. The contents developed in this innovation were based on a lesson plan based on Backward Design (Appendix 4).

Participants

The study was conducted during the 2019-2020 school year. After a demographic survey made by the researcher the following information was gathered: In this innovation participants consisted of a group of 20 students of a private school in Samborondon, Ecuador. They were students of 4th grade, their age ranged from 7 to 8 years old, and 12 students were seven and eight years old.. Related to gender, 11 females and 9 males. All students were Ecuadorian and most of them were Catholic. Students` mother tongue was Spanish and their English proficiency level was Pre-A1 . The background of English learning corresponded to the following: 15 students have learnt English at school and 5 in private courses. All students had internet access at home and at school. With respect to technology all students were beginners.

Instruments

To answer the research questions, different tools were implemented.

A pretest and posttest were used to answer the first question *To what extent do reflective journals improve students' writing skills?* The pretest was applied in the first session of the innovation to explore and assess the level and weaknesses of writing skills students had. On the

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pretest students were asked to write a short story with pictures. The rubric (Appendix 5) used for these instruments (Pretest and posttest) had performance indicators from 1 or low standard to 4 or above standard for a total of 24 points for student as the highest value for all components included. Finally, during the last week of the intervention, students were presented with the posttest where each student wrote a new story from some basic parameters given by the teacher.

With the purpose to answer the second question of this research,- *What are students' difficulties in this process?* a semi-structured interview was employed to explore feelings and opinions about the use of the game Story Maker. The questions used in this interview were brought to the participants in a daily fashion for each session. At the end of each session at least two students were interviewed with the idea to get new information and to improve the plans if it were the case. The reflective journal, which consisted in a notebook with the respective dates, was checked to complement the interview. At the end of the innovation half of the participants were interviewed to collect the data necessary to answer the second question.

Another relevant component to answer the second question was the use of field notes. For this purpose a template was designed (Appendix 2). Each session was described and analyzed to record the attitudes, opinions and feelings of students. This instrument contained five main aspects; Basic information: Date, place, session/class, participants, period of time, (hours/minutes). Physical elements: What the researcher feels, hears and smells. Summary: Analytical of the day main aspects. Narrative: Details of the more relevant aspects. Emerging questions and analysis.

Data Analysis

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In order to answer the first question of the innovation, - *To what extent do reflective journals improve students' writing skills?*, a Rubric (Appendix 5) was used. And descriptive statistical data analysis was implemented to measure the impact of the innovation and the data were tabulated and encoded in Excel spreadsheet and were transferred to the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). For the calculation of Cohen's *d* for the effect size was used an online calculator.

The second question *What are students' difficulties in this process?* This question was answered with two qualitative instruments, a semi-structured interview and field notes. The data for these instruments was collected and tabulated based mainly on the questions of the interview. The main themes were: Story Maker experience, difficulties in writing English, difficulties in using Story Maker, role of Story Maker in facilitating English writing and the future use of this game to practice English. For each theme the main aspects were considered, for example for the difficulties in writing English the main aspects were vocabulary, sentences and grammar. With this organization of data the information collected with these qualitative instruments was analyzed.

Ethical Considerations

The authorities of the institution were asked permission to conduct the research. The participants were students of an elementary school and parental consent was given by legal written authorization, voluntary and strictly confidential.

Results

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In this research data were analyzed taking into account the two research questions in which the study was based. Question 1: *To what extent do reflective journals improve students' writing skills?* And for Question 2: *What are students' difficulties in this process?*

Table 1

Pretest and Posttest results

Instruments	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
Pretest	20	3	6	3.40	0.754
Posttest	20	11	17	14.55	1.468

The effect size with a Cohen's d 0.955483 demonstrated that the research had a significant impact in improving writing skills. Those results were based on the information in table 1 and it can be concluded that students improved their writing skills by using reflective journals.

Table 2

Results based on the rubric components

Components	N	Pretest mean	Standard deviation	Posttest mean	Standard deviation	Effect size
Use of Story Maker	20	1.05	0.224	3.15	0.587	0.472

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Basic information	20	1.05	0.224	3.05	0.394	0.624
Preferences	20	0.20	0.410	3.00	0.324	0.757
Introduction Greeting and Farewells	20	1.05	0.224	3.05	0.510	0.507
Vocabulary Time order words	20	0.05	0.224	2.30	0.470	0.611

Young students put emphasis on basic vocabulary, preferences (Likes and dislikes), how to introduce and close a story, and the use of words for internal sequence in the story. These aspects were from the beginning of the innovation reinforced by the teacher and practiced by students throughout the six weeks of the innovation.

The results indicated that the components that show a higher improvement were basic information and the introduction (Greeting and Farewells), although the results were evenly distributed, students improved considerable from the implementation of the pretest, until the end with the intervention. Therefore, as seen in the table, the components increased more than double and with this also the writing skill as a whole.

To answer the second question about *students* 'difficulties when creating stories by using technology, an interview and field notes were used. In this case open ended questions complemented with field notes. The researcher based the implementation of these instruments

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with a flexible criterion to achieve a broad approach. The information collected in field notes was classified, together with the interview, in the most frequent themes shown in table 3.

Table 3

Themes of the interview and field notes

THEME	Story maker experience	Difficulties in writing English	Difficulties using Story Maker	Role of Story Maker in facilitating English writing	Enjoyment using Story Maker	Future use of this game to practice English
Aspects	Good Regular Bad	Vocabulary Sentences Grammar	Easy Difficult	Yes Regular No	High Regular No	Yes Maybe No

The results of the interviews indicated that students showed a great deal of acceptance and motivation towards the game. Participants also expressed a relation between Story Maker and writing English in an easier fashion, like for example: “I liked Story Maker” or “I liked the drawings and using my English” (Appendix 6).

On the other hand, grammar was the most frequent aspect taking into account for students and the most frequently noticed by the researcher in field notes. For instance: “I did not know how to use the English grammar” (Appendix 6).

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The results of the observation collected in the field notes and the reflective journals of the students indicated that most of the participants were engaged in the activities and the interactions with the game Story Maker. During the observations participants demonstrated motivation and engagement to overcome obstacles. The ludic component of the learning process helped considerably to make students to be more interested to understand the mechanic of the language and the details of the writing process, which was necessary to create a short story.

Discussions

According to the results gathered in this innovation to improve writing by using Story Maker, a Cohend's d 0.955 showed a large effect or impact on participants' writing skills due to the implementation of the innovation.

Question 1: *To what extend do reflective journals improve students' writing skills?.-*

Reflective journals in this innovation helped to improve writing skills. The results showed in the rubric demonstrated the influence that reflecting on the activities has over the improvement of writing skills. As Ramadhanti et al. (2020) stated, reflective journals were able to integrate the process of metacognition to the learning process. On the other hand, Brown (2015) considered the emotional involvement and feelings about self as a part of the affective principles which at the end play an important role in learning.

For Nunan (2003), the opportunity to write is a basic element to develop writing, he advised to give lots of training to students to improve this skill. In this study, writing was combined with a ludic website. Because motivation is determinant for children to learn, William and Chinn (2009) emphasized the use of technologies to improve participation, engagement and comprehension. Technologies at the present time play a determinant role in education.

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Question 2: *What are students' difficulties in this process?* Attitudes and emotions are related in the learning process. As Wallbaum et al. (2017) explained, activities like storytelling help students to manage emotions. Besides, journals can improve dialogue in the relation student-teacher (Krol, 1996, as cited in Lindroth, 2014). This combination assisted the researcher to identify difficulties during the process and take actions to overcome them. Students pointed out that there were some clear difficulties in writing, like vocabulary, sentences and grammar, being grammar, the most frequent aspect taken into account for students and the aspect most frequently noticed by the researcher in field notes. The website chosen was useful to raise motivation and engagement. The website used in this innovation has hundreds of games, more than 400 educational games and the specific game applied in this innovation Story Maker is a fun game designed with an interactive interface where students wrote and drew (ABCya, 2020) The results based on the interview, observations of the field notes and reflective journals reinforced the statement that students in general showed a positive attitude and motivation towards writing as a product of the reflection and use of this technological tool.

Conclusions

Storytelling is an activity that integrates cognitive, affective and linguistic elements. The combination of this activity with technologies, as showed in reflective journals, helped students to learn more efficiently. Therefore, and taking into account all these variables, this research demonstrates the effectiveness of using the game Story Maker to improve writing skills. The use of technologies can help young learners in different ways.

The first question of this research intended to measure how reflective journals improve students' writing skills. Students improved on expressing basic information about themselves

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and others, preferences by using expressions to indicate likes and dislikes, introducing and closing a story, and vocabulary in general, specifically time order words which are helpful to give the story an order in time and a logical appearance. The results gathered in this study demonstrate the influence of the elements combined and applied in this innovation. The results were very similar for all the components of the rubric. A slight advantage for the use of Story Maker was noticed and meant that students were able to navigate the game and use its resources effectively. This may be linked to the ludic aspect which considerably motivates participants to write more. The rest of the components achieved very similar results except for Vocabulary. This difference is possible a result of the abstract component of “Time order words” for these young learners. They had to divide in their minds and visualize the main steps in the story to write sequentially and logically all the elements included. This may be also due to the short time participants had to manage all the information given during the innovation.

Finally, the results of the interview with open-ended questions, field notes and students' reflective journals, determined that students had a positive experience during this process. The reflective journals helped students to recall class activities, write in English and enjoy the process of learning. In general students considered that the most difficult aspect when writing in English was grammar but they also considered vocabulary and writing sentences as difficult aspects. It was observed that participants needed more time and practice to understand some grammatical rules. They asked frequently about the grammatical aspects to clarify doubts and some participants showed some difficulties to understand the rules. On the other hand, they were committed and enjoyed the activities and the dynamic of the digital environment showing an evident improvement on writing skills.

Limitations

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The most important limitation of this research was the navigational aspect students had with the game Story Maker. For them, at the beginning it was difficult to comprehend the relationship between the game and writing in English. Some of the students showed basic abilities with the use of technology specifically with the use of the PC. On the other hand, at the end, they comprehended the relationship between the game and the writing activities. Finally, Most of the participants internalized the usefulness of this tool for writing.

Another relevant limitation was the time and content of the innovation. This was important because the time spent in explaining the use of the game, how to write a story, and the new vocabulary limited the time to write and to play on the website. All this new knowledge in such a short period of time represented a real challenge to overcome. Although, the well planned activities and the motivation of students helped with these limitations.

Recommendations

After this research was implemented, the following recommendations are suggested: It would be more advantageous for students to have a previous period of adaptation with technologies before the implementation of the innovation. In this way students will have more time to concentrate in the process of writing. If it is possible, students may have some time at home during the innovation to interact with the game and in this way to dedicate more time to the writing activities in the classroom. In general, a longer period of time would be recommended for this kind of innovation considering these factors: age of students, variety of contents, and use of new technologies.

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Appendix 1

Interview

Student`s viewpoints about Improving Writing Skills by using Story Maker Website

Code: _____ Date: _____

Available upon request.

Appendix 2

Field Notes Template

Available upon request.

Appendix 3

Pretest/Posttest

Available upon request.

Appendix 4

Lesson Plan for the innovation.

Available upon request.

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Appendix 5

Rubric

Available upon request.

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Appendix 6

The following extracts belongs to the Interviews of the students

Available upon request.