Picture This! Boosting ESL Writing with Storyboards

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Abstract

This study explores the use of storyboard templates as a visual learning tool to support ESL students in writing the CEFR-aligned PT3 English Essay (Part 1). Storyboarding allows students to visualize, plan, and organize their ideas in sequence, enabling them to write with greater confidence, clarity, and creativity. Rooted in cognitive and constructivist learning theories and aligned with the multiliteracies approach, the storyboard method promotes student-centered, multimodal engagement in the writing classroom. A qualitative research design was employed, with data collected through semi-structured interviews to investigate students' perceptions and the impacts of using storyboard in their writing process. Thematic analysis revealed three key findings: (1) improved writing skills, particularly in structure and fluency, (2) enhanced confidence and time management, and (3) mixed reactions regarding limited writing space and constrained idea expression due to fixed visuals. While many students found the storyboard helpful as a guide for organizing ideas and managing time, some felt restricted by the predetermined images and limited space for elaboration. Vocabulary limitations also affected their ability to fully articulate their thoughts, especially when unfamiliar visuals were used. Despite these challenges, most students acknowledged the storyboard's usefulness in supporting idea generation and essay planning. They also suggested expanding its use to other subjects, such as Malay Language and History, to enhance comprehension and narrative skills across disciplines. This study contributes to the field of ESL writing instruction by highlighting the pedagogical value of visual tools. Storyboarding offers a practical shift from conventional text-heavy methods to a more accessible and engaging model. However, its effectiveness depends on thoughtful implementation, particularly in designing flexible templates and selecting culturally appropriate visuals that support, rather than constrain, learners' expression.

Keywords: *ESL writing; storyboard technique; CEFR PT3; visual literacy; student perspectives*

INTRODUCTION

English is a compulsory subject in the Malaysian education system, introduced from primary school through to tertiary education. To become proficient in the language, learners are expected to master the four foundational skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Among these, writing is widely regarded as the most complex and challenging skill, particularly for learners of English as a Second Language (ESL). Writing requires not only linguistic accuracy but also the ability to generate, organize, and articulate ideas clearly and coherently. Numerous studies have highlighted that ESL learners often struggle with grammar, vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure, which impedes their ability to complete writing tasks effectively (Selvaraj & Aziz, 2019). Although writing is a skill that requires consistent practice and guidance, it does not come naturally to many students and must therefore be taught through meaningful and strategic instruction (Rao, 2017). In response to these challenges, it is crucial for educators to implement innovative and effective strategies that cater to students' needs. One such approach is the use of storyboards, a technique that integrates visual prompts with structured storytelling to help students develop and organize ideas in a logical sequence (Hasan & Wijaya, 2016).

The storyboard technique is a visual-based instructional tool that uses a sequence of images to help students structure and develop their narratives more effectively. Typically presented as a series of illustrated panels, storyboards guide learners through the writing process step by step. This method reduces cognitive overload by breaking the task into manageable parts, making it easier for ESL students to organize ideas, develop content, and construct coherent sentences. By using images as prompts, learners can visualize their stories and write with improved confidence, creativity, and fluency. Storyboarding, which integrates visual elements with written narratives, is introduced as a pedagogical strategy to help learners overcome challenges in organizing and expressing ideas effectively. The visual sequencing of images enables students to structure their thoughts chronologically and articulate them with greater clarity and confidence. Grounded in cognitive and constructivist learning theories and aligned with the multiliteracies approach, the storyboard technique encourages student-centered, multimodal learning. Understanding students' perspectives provides valuable insights for educators aiming to design learner-friendly, engaging, and supportive writing strategies. Additionally, this research encourages the incorporation of multimodal tools like storyboards to cater to diverse learning needs and move beyond conventional, text-heavy approaches.

Despite Malaysia's efforts to align its English language education system with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) to enhance global competitiveness (Alih et al., 2021), many ESL students continue to struggle with writing proficiency. This issue is particularly evident in the CEFR-aligned Pentaksiran Tingkatan 3 (PT3) writing paper, where students often fall short of the expected performance standards (Awang et al., 2021). Writing remains one of the most challenging language skills to master due to its cognitive complexity, requiring learners to generate ideas, structure information logically, and apply appropriate language forms. Traditional instructional approaches that emphasize rote learning and rigid structures have proven insufficient in addressing these challenges. As a result, there is a pressing need for learner-centered and flexible pedagogical strategies such as multimodal approaches that support ESL learners in developing writing skills through visual scaffolding, critical thinking, and engagement. This study addresses this gap by exploring the use of storyboard techniques as a supportive tool for enhancing writing proficiency among Malaysian secondary school ESL learners.

The findings of this study offer practical implications for both ESL learners and educators. For students, the storyboard technique may enhance writing performance by providing visual scaffolding that aids idea generation, structure, and time management. Previous research found that the implementation of storyboards increased student engagement and improved writing outcomes,

with students showing higher participation and more relevant content development during group writing activities. For educators, this study offers insights into how visual-based instructional tools can be integrated into writing lessons to make learning more interactive and student-centered. It also provides guidance for future research and pedagogical innovation, particularly in enhancing students' writing ability through approaches that move beyond traditional lecture-based methods. Ultimately, this study contributes to the ongoing efforts to improve ESL writing instruction by demonstrating how visual storytelling tools like storyboards can serve as effective, accessible alternatives to conventional practices, particularly in the context of CEFR-aligned assessments.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study explores the perceptions and experiences of ESL students in using storyboard templates to write the CEFR-aligned PT3 Essay Part 1 and examines the technique's impact on their writing proficiency. By investigating how students respond to this method, the study seeks to uncover the effectiveness of storyboards in enhancing writing performance, particularly in the areas of idea development, structure, and time management. The specific objectives of this study are to investigate ESL students' perceptions of using storyboard templates in CEFR PT3 Essay Part 1 writing and to examine the impact of storyboard use on ESL learners' writing proficiency in CEFR PT3 Essay Part 1.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Writing Strategies among ESL Learners

Writing is widely acknowledged as one of the most complex and demanding language skills, particularly for learners of English as a Second Language (ESL). A prevailing challenge among ESL learners is the deeply held belief that writing is inherently difficult, which often results in reduced motivation and a reluctance to actively improve their writing capabilities. Many students struggle not because of a lack of ability but due to an inadequate understanding of the writing process and insufficient training in effective writing strategies. Rather than seeking constructive ways to improve, students often attribute their poor performance to a lack of ideas, which perpetuates disengagement and avoidance behaviours in writing tasks. To address these cognitive and affective barriers, educators have implemented a range of instructional strategies aimed at supporting students' writing development. One such technique is the Brainwriting strategy, a collaborative method where students silently generate ideas in writing before engaging in group discussion. Yulianti et al. (2019) reported substantial improvements in writing outcomes among seventh-grade students in Indonesia, where the average writing score increased from 50 to 71 over two instructional cycles. This strategy helped to stimulate idea generation in a low-pressure setting, making the writing process more accessible and collaborative.

Language Learning Strategies (LLSs) have also proven effective in enhancing ESL learners' writing proficiency. Aminatun et al. (2019) compared the effectiveness of two strategies which are Guided Writing and the PLEASE strategy, with secondary school students in Indonesia. The PLEASE strategy, which involves a step-by-step approach to planning, organizing, and refining written work, was found to be more effective in helping students produce coherent and well-structured texts. Teachers play a pivotal role in facilitating these strategies, and their ability to tailor instruction to the proficiency levels of their students is crucial. Maarof and Murat (2013) warned that insufficient teacher guidance can hinder students' understanding of writing expectations, ultimately affecting their performance. They argue that rather than overwhelming students with numerous strategies, it is more beneficial to ensure learners fully comprehend the requirements and structure of the writing task.

Visual aids have also shown promise in writing instruction, particularly in helping students conceptualize and organize their ideas. Sakkir (2020) demonstrated that the use of images in writing classes significantly improved paragraph development among Indonesian high school students. Visual prompts served as cognitive scaffolds, enabling students to generate content more confidently

and coherently. In this light, the present study introduces the storyboard technique as an innovative, image-based strategy designed to bridge the gap between idea generation and structured composition. By combining visual and textual elements, storyboarding offers a holistic approach to improving writing proficiency in ESL learners. Although writing instruction begins early in formal education, it remains a persistent challenge, especially for students learning English as a second or third language. Sarip and Khalid (2021) noted that many ESL learners struggle with writing because they lack a strong foundation in vocabulary and grammar and are unfamiliar with the conventions of English composition. Writing is the most cognitively demanding of the four language skills and requires consistent practice, critical thinking, and well-structured instructional support. These findings support the growing consensus that educators must move away from rigid, traditional methods and adopt more learner-centred, flexible strategies that align with students' cognitive and linguistic needs

Writing Performance in ESL Classrooms

Consistent with the challenges identified in writing instruction, research shows that ESL learners tend to underperform in writing compared to other language domains such as reading or listening. One major factor contributing to this discrepancy is the perception that English writing is an unattainable skill. Feng and Cole (2015) found that this perception fosters writing anxiety and self-doubt, creating psychological barriers that prevent students from fully engaging with the writing process. These internalized fears are further intensified by cultural attitudes that do not prioritize writing as a critical skill in academic or everyday life. Fareed et al. (2016) observed that ESL students often lack idea development strategies and face heightened anxiety during writing tasks, both of which contribute to poorly organized texts. This underperformance is particularly evident in rural areas, where learners typically have fewer opportunities to use or be exposed to English outside the classroom environment. Gobel et al. (2013) found that rural students often view English as a foreign rather than a second language, which increases the cognitive and emotional distance between them and the subject. This perception creates a substantial gap in academic achievement between rural and urban ESL learners.

Ler (2012) expanded on this by examining how cultural norms and practices in rural Malaysian communities contribute to low English proficiency. He argued that students' limited access to English-language media, coupled with strong reliance on local dialects and mother tongues, restricts opportunities to develop academic English skills. These findings underscore the necessity of context-sensitive pedagogical strategies that take into account the linguistic, cultural, and environmental realities of the learners. In a study conducted by Che Awang et al. (2021) in rural primary schools in Kuala Krai, Kelantan, 65% of Year 5 students were found to have low writing proficiency. One of the major causes was direct translation from the students' first language into English, resulting in syntactic and semantic errors. The study recommended the use of the process writing approach to develop students' narrative writing skills, as it encourages planning, drafting, revising, and editing components that are essential to the writing process but often neglected in traditional instruction.

Overall, these findings highlight the critical need for targeted writing instruction that not only builds students' technical skills but also fosters a positive writing mindset. Particularly in under-resourced and linguistically diverse settings, educators must implement innovative strategies such as visual aids, scaffolded instruction, and process writing to close the proficiency gap and promote writing confidence among ESL learners. The current study builds on this body of research by exploring the implementation of storyboarding as a practical, engaging strategy to support ESL learners in enhancing their writing performance in a CEFR-aligned assessment framework.

Storyboards in ESL Classrooms

Storyboarding is a pedagogical approach that uses a sequence of illustrations to depict key moments in a narrative, has gained recognition as a highly effective multimodal strategy for teaching writing, particularly in the ESL context. This technique engages learners visually and cognitively, supporting them in the complex processes of idea generation, content organization, and written expression. Instructional value of storyboarding isin helping students structure narratives, particularly in terms of

plot development and character progression. By externalizing the flow of a story through images, students are better able to visualize the sequence of events and plan their compositions more coherently. Toister (2020) further underscored the benefits of incorporating storyboards into prewriting sessions, noting that ESL learners in particular benefit from this visual scaffolding. By translating spoken or mental ideas into a visual format before writing, students are better equipped to bridge the gap between oral and written communication. This connection enhances learners' ability to organize content logically, making the transition into structured academic writing more intuitive and less intimidating.

The educational advantages of storyboarding are not limited to ideation and structure; they also support broader literacy development. Storyboarding fosters multimodal literacy by allowing students to express meaning through both visual and textual modalities. This dual-channel approach encourages learners to engage more deeply with the content, which in turn enhances their sense of ownership and achievement. The creative freedom to convey meaning in multiple formats often results in greater motivation and self-efficacy, particularly for students who may struggle with conventional writing methods. Harmer (2009) acknowledged the powerful role of imagery in stimulating descriptive writing. Images serve as prompts that ignite imagination, prompting learners to construct detailed narratives or reinterpret stories based on visual input thus storyboard-based activities foster key writing competencies such as sequencing, vocabulary development, discussion, role-playing, and creative expression. These activities provide learners with a richer, more interactive language learning experience, helping to reduce anxiety while enhancing engagement.

Pictures facilitate vocabulary acquisition and idea generation, especially for students who rely on visual cues to make meaning. When learners are able to associate images with words or concepts, they develop a stronger lexical repertoire that can be drawn upon during the writing process. This visual-verbal link becomes particularly beneficial in ESL settings, where vocabulary gaps often hinder fluent expression. Hasan and Wijaya (2016) further concluded that storyboard techniques surpass traditional lecture-based instruction in both engagement and outcomes. Their findings demonstrated that students taught with storyboard methods displayed greater interest, collaboration, and overall improvement in writing performance. These results reinforce the notion that active, visual, and student-centred strategies can lead to more meaningful and effective learning experiences.

Considering these findings, the present study adopted a storyboard template specifically tailored for CEFR PT3 Essay Part 1. This template was designed to guide students through the essay planning and writing process by providing structured visual cues that correspond with narrative sequencing. By offering both a framework and stimulus for idea development, the storyboard approach helped students better understand task requirements, organize their content, and produce more cohesive and fluent compositions. This application of storyboard in the CEFR-aligned writing task not only aligns with best practices in multimodal pedagogy but also addresses common challenges faced by ESL learners in Malaysian secondary schools.

Impacts of Storyboards in ESL Classrooms

Writing is a complex cognitive skill that requires learners to express their thoughts in a coherent, structured, and logically sequenced manner. Successful writing involves not only mastering grammatical accuracy and appropriate vocabulary but also the ability to organize and link ideas meaningfully within and across paragraphs. However, many ESL learners encounter significant challenges in meeting these demands due to limitations in vocabulary, inadequate grammar knowledge, and an inability to structure their thoughts effectively. These obstacles often result in fragmented, underdeveloped compositions that fail to meet assessment criteria for coherence and communicative achievement. To address these challenges, various instructional approaches have been introduced, with increasing attention given to visual-based learning strategies such as storyboarding. Storyboards, which consist of sequenced visual prompts, serve as a scaffold to support learners in the writing process. Setiawan (2020), in a study involving secondary school students, demonstrated that the use of multimedia storyboards significantly improved students' descriptive writing skills. The

visual stimuli provided by the storyboards activated students' imagination, facilitated idea development, and made the writing task more accessible compared to traditional text-heavy instructional methods. The visual prompts served not only to inspire but also to guide the logical flow of ideas, which is essential for coherent writing.

Similarly, Hasan and Wijaya (2016) emphasized that storyboarding as a pedagogical technique promotes creativity, critical thinking, and peer collaboration. In contrast to conventional methods—often characterized by teacher-led instruction and passive student engagement—the storyboard approach encourages active learning, where students collaboratively develop narratives based on visual sequences. This process enhances student motivation and ownership over their learning. Sarifah and Apsari (2020) also observed that the integration of pictures into writing instruction supported learners in constructing more detailed and coherent texts, particularly in descriptive genres, by providing visual context and a starting point for idea generation. Moreover, in collaborative learning settings, storyboarding has demonstrated considerable value. Hafour and Al-Rashidy (2020) explored storyboard-based collaborative writing using Google Docs and found that students showed marked improvements in writing fluency, syntactic complexity, and overall performance. The visual framework enabled students to contribute ideas, discuss content, and revise their compositions in real-time, fostering both language development and digital literacy. Storyboard use helped learners articulate their thoughts more clearly, organize content more effectively, and refine their compositions with greater precision.

Collectively, these studies reinforce the pedagogical benefits of storyboarding as an effective strategy for improving ESL learners' writing proficiency. Whether used individually or in group settings, storyboards offer a practical and engaging alternative to conventional writing instruction. By providing structure, stimulating creativity, and fostering collaboration, storyboard techniques can significantly enhance the quality and fluency of students' written work in the ESL classroom.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design to gain an in-depth understanding of students' perceptions and experiences with the use of storyboard techniques in enhancing writing proficiency. Conducted at a public secondary school in Kulai, Johor, Malaysia, the study took place within a typical Malaysian educational context marked by cultural and linguistic diversity. While Malay serves as the primary medium of instruction, students frequently use their heritage languages such as Mandarin and Tamil in informal interactions, reflecting Malaysia's multilingual environment. English, as a compulsory subject in the national curriculum, is taught consistently from primary through tertiary education. At the research site, students received approximately five English language lessons per week, with two sessions specifically allocated for writing instruction. These lessons emphasized preparation for the CEFR-aligned Pentaksiran Tingkatan 3 (PT3) English Writing Paper. The PT3 writing component consists of two sections which are Part 1 and Part 2 each carrying 20 marks. Part 1 is aligned with A2-level CEFR descriptors and focuses on fundamental writing skills, such as composing basic narrative or descriptive texts using simple sentences and familiar vocabulary. Part 2, on the other hand, corresponds to B1-level expectations and requires more advanced language use, coherence, and communicative effectiveness. Assessment across both parts is based on four main criteria: content, communicative achievement, organization, and language use. This qualitative design, grounded in the local educational setting, allowed for a contextualized exploration of how visual scaffolding through storyboards could support ESL learners in developing their writing skills.

Study participants

Five Form Two students participated in this study. These participants, aged approximately 14 years old, were selected from the 2 Camar class of a public secondary school in Kulai, Johor. All five students had a similar educational background, having received consistent English language instruction as part of Malaysia's national curriculum. They represented a range of English writing

proficiency levels and were able to articulate their thoughts in both English and Malay during the interviews. Purposive sampling was employed to identify participants who could provide rich and relevant insights into the use of storyboard techniques in writing instruction. The selection criteria were based on the students' performance in the CEFR PT3 Essay Part 1 during the school's Ujian Penilaian Kurikulum 1 (UPK1), a formative curriculum-based assessment. Their scores ranged from 12 to 18 out of 20, which corresponded to the A2 and B1 levels on the CEFR scale. A2-level students are typically able to express simple ideas using basic vocabulary, although their writing may include errors that affect clarity. In contrast, B1-level students are generally more competent in conveying clear and coherent ideas, using appropriate sentence structures and vocabulary. Selecting participants with varied proficiency levels allowed the researcher to explore a range of student experiences and perspectives regarding the effectiveness of storyboard use in supporting English writing development.

DATA COLLECTION AND DATA ANALYSIS

Data Collection

The primary method of data collection was semi-structured interviews, which allowed for guided inquiry while maintaining the flexibility to probe and explore emerging topics. This approach is particularly well-suited for educational research that aims to understand participants' personal experiences and viewpoints (Kvale, 2008). Each participant was interviewed individually after regular school hours in a quiet and conducive environment. Prior to the interview, informed consent was obtained from both the school administration and the students' parents. A total of 31 interview questions were developed and organized into five thematic categories: (1) Introduction and Background, (2) Perceptions of Storyboard Use, (3) Impacts on Writing Performance, (4) Challenges in Implementation, and (5) Concluding Reflections. Each interview session lasted approximately 25 to 30 minutes and was audio-recorded with participants' permission to ensure the accuracy of the data and to facilitate subsequent transcription and analysis.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to systematically identify, analyse, and report patterns (themes) within the interview data. Following the framework proposed by Grbich (2007), the analysis process involved segmenting the data into meaningful units, coding for initial themes, categorizing the data, and then re-linking it to the broader research questions. Transcripts were read repeatedly to enhance familiarity with the content and allow for the emergence of both predefined and emergent themes. Initial codes were generated based on the interview protocol's thematic structure, which provided a scaffold for analysing the responses. However, as new patterns emerged from the students' narratives, additional sub-themes were added to ensure a holistic understanding of their experiences with the storyboard technique.

RESEARCH ETHICS

Ethical integrity was maintained throughout the research process. Participants were fully informed about the purpose, scope, and voluntary nature of the study. Written consent forms were distributed and signed by all participants, with additional parental consent obtained for underaged students. All participants were assured that their identities would remain confidential and that the data collected would be used solely for academic purposes. During the interviews, participants were reminded of their right to withdraw at any point without penalty. Moreover, they were informed that the researcher may follow up for clarification to ensure data accuracy and validity. To enhance the study's transferability, in line with Tracy's (2012) qualitative rigor framework, a detailed account of the research setting, participant demographics, and data collection procedures is provided to allow readers to assess the relevance of findings to similar educational contexts. This comprehensive approach to research design, participant selection, data collection, and ethical practice ensures the credibility and

relevance of the findings, laying a strong foundation for analysing the impact of storyboard techniques in enhancing ESL students' writing proficiency.

FINDINGS

ESL Students' Perceptions of Storyboard Use in CEFR PT3 Essay Part 1

All participants acknowledged that writing was the most difficult skill in English language learning, primarily due to limited grammatical competence and lack of vocabulary. As one student remarked, "*Writing skill, because of my grammar*" (R1, DU6), while another stated, "*I'm not used to spell... I cannot spell it right*" (R3, DU6). Despite this, students expressed that their perceptions changed after the introduction of the storyboard technique. They found that the visual and structured format of storyboard templates helped them better understand the CEFR Part 1 essay structure. The visuals provided a scaffold that enabled students to organize their thoughts in a logical sequence, making the writing task less daunting. R1 appreciated this, stating, "*I can memorize the structure before doing the real thing*" (DU40), while R2 noted, "*The real exam structures are there, with the ideas*" (DU48).

Another significant benefit was improved time management. Students reported that using storyboard templates allowed them to write more quickly and efficiently, enabling them to allocate more time and mental resources to the more complex Essay Part 2. "*I write the essay faster than before*" (R1, DU77) and "*Using Storyboard saves my time*" (R3, DU76) illustrate the practical time-saving advantages experienced by the learners. Despite the benefits, students also highlighted several drawbacks associated with storyboard use. The most prominent concern was the limited space available in the storyboard template. Participants felt that the box format constrained their ability to expand on ideas or elaborate their responses. "*I wanted to write more. But the template just gives us a limit*" (R1, DU97), and "*Only two sentences for each box*" (R2, DU36), were commonly cited frustrations.

Moreover, the fixed nature of the storyboard visuals, imposed restrictions on the students' creative expression. Since the storyboard guided them toward specific content, some students felt it limited their ability to contribute their own perspectives or expand beyond what was visually presented. As R1 noted, "*I do want to write another point... but it's not there in the template*" (DU89–90). Beyond specific advantages and disadvantages, students reflected on the broader context of using storyboard templates in the ESL classroom. All participants agreed that the visual prompts provided crucial support, especially when they experienced difficulty generating ideas. For instance, R3 explained, "*Storyboard gave us pictures, so we just write the sentences*" (DU72), and R1 shared, "*The storyboard helps a lot to guide me*" (DU87). These visual cues helped reduce the cognitive load of idea generation and provided a foundation for students to build their narratives with greater ease. Additionally, visuals helped boost students' confidence in their writing. R1 mentioned, "*It helps me to write when I don't know what to write*" (DU56), while R3 highlighted the role of visuals in reducing anxiety, stating, "*I can write better because I'm not afraid of doing mistakes*" (DU98).

The participants also offered suggestions for expanding the use of storyboard techniques. They believed that the benefits could extend beyond CEFR Part 1 and proposed its application in Essay Part 2, which is more challenging and requires a deeper level of idea development. R1 explained, "*They will get the main point before doing the essay*" (DU123), suggesting the storyboard could provide a useful starting point for more complex tasks. Moreover, students saw the potential for storyboard strategies in other subjects such as Bahasa Melayu and History. R3 commented, "*If there are pictures in History, we can write even if we forget the facts*" (DU116), reflecting the belief that visuals aid memory recall and comprehension across disciplines. They also suggested enhancing the storyboard template by including words or vocabulary hints to support better picture interpretation and expression, as stated by R3: "*There should be words to describe the pictures*" (DU12).

In short, students' perceptions of the storyboard technique were largely positive, especially in terms of helping them understand essay structure, organize ideas, and manage time. However, concerns regarding spatial limitations and restricted creative freedom point to areas where the tool

could be improved. Despite these challenges, the technique was well-received and showed promise for broader application within and beyond ESL instruction.

The Impacts of Using Storyboard in ESL Classrooms

Students generally reported that storyboard templates significantly aided their writing performance. One of the most cited advantages was an overall improvement in writing skill. By providing visual guidance, the storyboard helped learners understand how to structure their essays and sequence their ideas more coherently. For instance, one student shared, "*It improves my writing skill... I know what to write already because of the pictures*" (R3, DU48). The visuals served as planning cues, reducing cognitive overload during the prewriting phase. Another important benefit was the facilitation of idea generation. Students noted that the storyboard's sequential images allowed them to conceptualize the storyline more easily, enabling them to begin writing more quickly and confidently. R3 noted, "*If I use Storyboard, I will get the ideas easily… otherwise, I spend so much time thinking*" (DU78). This indicates that the technique supports learners in overcoming writer's block, particularly when they struggle with idea development at the initial stage of writing.

Despite its advantages, the storyboard method was not without limitations. One major drawback identified by participants was a conflict between their original ideas and those suggested by the visuals. This dissonance occasionally left students feeling uncertain about how to proceed with their writing. As R3 expressed, "*I already know what I'm going to write. But if the storyboard gives different pictures, I don't know what to write*" (DU104). This clash of ideas disrupted the natural writing flow and constrained creative expression. Another commonly mentioned disadvantage was vocabulary limitation. Some students reported difficulties in describing the images due to a lack of appropriate English vocabulary, particularly when the visuals were unfamiliar or culturally ambiguous. "*I didn't understand the pictures… I know the words in Malay but not in English*" (R3, DU102). This challenge underscores the need for integrating vocabulary support when implementing storyboard-based writing activities.

In addition to specific disadvantages, participants highlighted several practical challenges in the implementation of storyboard in the ESL writing classroom. The most frequently cited issue was the restricted writing space in the storyboard template. Students felt that the space allocated for each segment of the story was insufficient, which hindered their ability to elaborate on their ideas. "*I wanted to write more, but the template limits me*" (R1, DU97). This often led to underdeveloped responses and a sense of dissatisfaction with their final work. Another challenge concerned the quality and clarity of the visuals themselves. Students reported that some images were too bright, blurry, or ambiguous, making it difficult to interpret and translate them into coherent written content. "*Sometimes the pictures are too bright or blurry*" (R2, DU103). This was particularly problematic when learners were expected to describe scenes or actions that were not visually clear. Furthermore, lexical limitations further compounded this issue, as learners found it difficult to accurately describe what they were seeing: "*I know the pictures, but I don't know how to describe them in English*" (R3, DU90).

In summary, the findings reveal that the use of storyboard in CEFR PT3 Essay Part 1 writing yielded both constructive outcomes and identifiable limitations. On the positive side, students appreciated how storyboard templates provided structural guidance, encouraged faster idea generation, and improved time management during writing tasks. These benefits indicate that visual support tools like storyboards can make writing more approachable and less cognitively taxing for ESL learners. However, the study also uncovered meaningful constraints. Limited space and the rigidity of predefined visuals were perceived as barriers to full creative expression. Furthermore, the mismatch between visual prompts and students' own ideas occasionally disrupted their writing flow, while vocabulary gaps hindered the accurate expression of thoughts. Taken together, these findings suggest that the storyboard technique holds significant pedagogical promise for improving ESL writing proficiency. Yet, its success depends heavily on thoughtful design particularly in selecting culturally relevant and clearly interpretable visuals, offering adequate space for elaboration, and

integrating language support where needed. With appropriate adjustments, storyboard-based instruction can be a valuable strategy in scaffolding ESL learners' development in narrative and descriptive writing.

DISCUSSION

Storyboarding has emerged as a powerful instructional strategy in ESL writing classrooms, offering a visually structured approach to support learners in idea development and text organization. According to Wahid and Aziz (2022), the storyboard technique serves a dual function which are facilitating teachers' delivery of content and encouraging students' active participation and creativity. The present study found that students generally responded to the implementation of storyboard templates with a mixture of appreciation and constructive critique.

From the semi-structured interviews conducted, students acknowledged that the storyboard format aided in generating and organizing ideas prior to writing. The visual prompts embedded within the template served as mental cues, helping them sequence events and maintain a logical flow in their essays. Many participants shared that the storyboard gave them a clearer understanding of how to structure their responses for CEFR PT3 Essay Part 1, which ultimately made the writing task less intimidating. The visual scaffolding also contributed to improved time management, enabling students to focus on content development rather than spending excessive time brainstorming. These findings align with the research of Shabiralyani et al. (2015), who emphasize the effectiveness of visual aids in simplifying complex topics and enhancing comprehension.

However, the benefits of the storyboard were not without limitations. Several participants expressed dissatisfaction with the limited writing space provided in each storyboard box, which they felt restricted their ability to elaborate on ideas. This design constraint led to frustration, particularly among students with a strong desire to include more details in their compositions. Smeda et al. (2014) support this concern, noting that while storyboarding enhances key writing skills such as planning and coherence, it may unintentionally inhibit learners whose creativity extends beyond the physical space allowed. Additionally, unfamiliarity with the images presented in some storyboard prompts caused certain students to struggle with vocabulary recall and idea expression. For instance, when learners could not relate to the visual content such as scenes or objects they had never encountered, they found it challenging to construct meaningful narratives. Brown (2013) has pointed out that while images can enrich narrative content, they are only effective when learners are able to interpret and connect with them meaningfully.

Despite these challenges, students generally agreed that the storyboard was a helpful resource, especially when they faced writer's block or lacked initial ideas. The imagery provided a useful foundation upon which they could build their essays, giving them direction and confidence. This supports the findings of Gutiérrez et al. (2015), who demonstrated that the integration of picture series in writing lessons enhances students' engagement, motivation, and skill development. Notably, some students recommended the broader adoption of the storyboard approach in other academic subjects such as Malay Language and History, arguing that the use of visuals could similarly assist in idea generation across disciplines. This suggestion resonates with Martikainen's (2017) findings, where visual strategies in art history instruction helped students connect abstract ideas with concrete understanding, thus fostering deeper learning.

The impacts of incorporating storyboard techniques in the ESL classroom were categorized into three core themes: advantages, disadvantages, and challenges. The advantages centred on improved writing skills, increased student engagement, and enhanced idea development. The structured nature of the storyboard provided students with a visual framework to guide their writing, which, according to participants, helped them remain focused and motivated throughout the task. The

presence of images offered a concrete stimulus that sparked creativity and reduced anxiety, making the writing process more approachable and enjoyable. These outcomes echo the findings of Sa'diyah (2010), who observed significant improvement in students' descriptive writing abilities following the implementation of picture series strategies in an Indonesian high school context. Likewise, Uematsu (2012) emphasized that visual aids contribute to improved learning experiences by making abstract content more tangible and appealing.

However, the use of storyboards was not without its drawbacks. A key disadvantage reported by students was the "clashing of ideas," whereby their original thoughts or personal narratives did not align with the sequence or content of the storyboard images. This mismatch led to confusion and disrupted the coherence of their writing. For some students, the rigidity of following pre-determined visuals felt restrictive and hampered their creative freedom. Additional challenges included constraints posed by the storyboard format itself. Limited writing space in the template boxes discouraged elaboration and prevented students from fully exploring their ideas. Furthermore, the visual clarity and relevance of the images presented posed additional hurdles. Blurred, overly bright, or contextually ambiguous pictures created uncertainty among students, making it difficult to determine the intended narrative direction. The confusion surrounding image interpretation suggests a need for careful selection and contextualization of visual materials in future storyboard applications.

In conclusion, while the storyboard method contributed positively to students' writing proficiency by offering structure, inspiration, and time efficiency, its effectiveness depends on how well it is designed and adapted to learners' backgrounds and language levels. The study highlights the importance of flexibility in instructional tools and calls for a balanced approach that allows room for student agency while still providing necessary scaffolding. With thoughtful implementation, storyboard techniques can serve as a powerful vehicle for enhancing writing instruction in ESL classrooms.

CONCLUSION

This study has provided meaningful insights into ESL students' perceptions of using storyboard techniques in the English classroom, particularly for writing CEFR PT3 Essay Part 1. The findings highlight the potential of storyboard as a valuable pedagogical tool that supports learners in organizing ideas, improving writing structure, and enhancing motivation. As educational practices continue to evolve, this research contributes to the growing body of evidence advocating for the integration of visual-based strategies in language instruction. Specifically, it encourages educators to move away from conventional, text-heavy approaches and embrace more engaging, multimodal techniques that cater to the diverse learning styles of ESL students. By bridging the gap between visual cognition and written expression, the storyboard method not only helps reduce writing anxiety but also offers scaffolding for students with limited proficiency. The study reinforces the idea that when teachers incorporate visual aids such as sequenced images into their instruction, they can create a more inclusive and stimulating learning environment. Such methods are especially relevant in contexts where learners struggle with idea generation, vocabulary, or grammatical structure. In doing so, educators can foster a classroom culture that promotes creativity, active participation, and linguistic confidence. Moreover, the potential of storyboarding extends beyond the English language classroom. As noted by student participants, the technique could be equally effective in other content areas such as Malay Language and History, particularly in tasks involving narrative writing or idea development. This suggests that visual strategies like storyboarding have cross-curricular relevance and could support broader academic engagement and comprehension across subjects.

While the present study focused exclusively on the use of storyboard templates for CEFR PT3 Essay Part 1, its scope remains limited to a specific writing task and a small group of participants.

Future research should examine the effectiveness of storyboard techniques across a wider range of proficiency levels and classroom contexts, particularly in more cognitively demanding tasks like CEFR Essay Part 2. Additionally, longitudinal studies could explore how continued exposure to visual scaffolding influences students' long-term writing development. It would also be valuable to investigate the role of teacher training and professional development in the effective implementation of storyboarding techniques. Furthermore, comparative studies involving digital versus paper-based storyboards could reveal insights into the technological preferences and engagement levels of 21st-century learners. Finally, cross-curricular investigations could further explore how the storyboard method supports learning in other academic subjects, enriching our understanding of its interdisciplinary potential and adaptability across educational settings.

In conclusion, this study affirms that the storyboard technique holds significant pedagogical value in enhancing ESL students' writing abilities. Its practical implementation can be a stepping stone toward modernizing teaching practices, aligning with student needs, and ultimately improving learning outcomes in ESL classrooms. Future educators and researchers should consider this approach as a viable pathway to reinvigorating writing instruction through visual, student-centered methods.

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