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Print-Based Multimodal Texts: Using Illustrated Poems for Generating Ideas and Writing Narratives

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Abstract

The article provides insights on how print-based multimodal texts can be utilized to generate ideas and help students to write narrative texts. A qualitative approach in research design was employed with a pre-test and a writing assignment. NAPLAN's (2010) Writing-Narrative Marking Guide was adapted to evaluate the respondents' narrative essays. Moreover, diary notes were used as instruments to gather data. The respondents were five Year 10 students from a suburban secondary school in Selangor, Malaysia. The findings indicated that the illustrated poem 'Pond' enabled the respondents to generate ideas for their writing. The narratives also fulfilled the criteria of text structure, ideas, character and setting, and vocabulary as stated in the Analytical Rubric for Narrative Marking. Therefore, the respondents were able to write narratives. However, the utilisation of picture stimulus only helped to generate ideas to a certain extent. The quality of narrative writing was also further improved through feedback provided during the teaching and learning sessions. The findings also revealed that the respondents were able to achieve the 'can do' statement as stated in the CEFR Assessment Format. Furthermore, the use of print-based multimodal texts encouraged multimodal and visual literacy as the respondents exploited semiotic resources within the texts. This study suggested that print-based multimodal texts could be used as instructional materials in narrative writing; thus, teachers should consider them to promote effective learning.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The English language is fundamental for students to access information and technology especially in this age of global competitiveness. Within the Malaysian context, students need to equip themselves with the essential skills of communication, creativity, critical thinking, and problem solving in order to keep up with the growing global economy.

Writing, next to listening, speaking, and reading skills, is an important skill to master as it enables students to communicate and clarify their thoughts and ideas in words. For low proficiency students, writing is not only a meaningless task but also a seemingly insurmountable task. They often grapple with putting down something on paper. Therefore, it is not surprising that the product of such an effort is often full of errors, stereotyped and unimaginative. Malaysian students generally perform unsatisfactorily in the writing section of English language examinations as they have a poor command of the language (Azman, 2016). Hence, students might find writing a difficult skill to acquire because of poor writing skills such as generating and organizing ideas, translating ideas into a clear and comprehensible text, and selecting proper words/vocabulary (Fhonna, 2014; Richards & Renandya, 2006). Therefore, teachers could adopt and adapt a variety of appropriate teaching strategies to improve students' writing in English (Chan et al., 2003; Foo, 2007).

One way to improve students' writing skills is to introduce multimodal texts in the English Language (EL, hereafter) classroom. Multimodal texts are print-based and digital texts. However, this study focuses on print-based multimodal texts. Print-based multimodal texts utilize more than one mode of semiotic resource to represent meaning potentials (Serafini, 2015). Text encapsulates semiotic resources such as written language, still images, colours, spatial design, and so forth that are significant in its production. Print-based multimodal texts include among others graphic novels, comics, newspapers, magazines, brochures, and posters. As pedagogical tools, they offer a creative outlet for students to communicate their thoughts in writing.

A picture is a multimodal text as it instantiates the co-deployment of the visual and the spatial resources that function together and support each other in the production of the coherent whole. Conversely, poetry, like other literary genres, not only serves as a model of language but also acts as a platform for teaching listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Illustrated poems as multimodal texts merge both literature and visual art together in the construction of the total composition.

The meanings embedded within these semiotic resources in both these multimodal texts help students generate ideas for narrative writing. According to Guijarro and Sanz (2009), images may simply illustrate the written story or can be used to tell different aspects of the story, even contradicting the written words. Based on Guijarro and Sanz's (2009) assertion, it is evident that semiotic resources such as images and words allow students to come up with multiple interpretations of multimodal texts. It is the interpretation and information provided by the semiotic resources that help students to come up with ideas for their narratives. Therefore, these multimodal texts provide students with the opportunity to indulge in writing which is

original and individual in character. Furthermore, it encourages multimodal literacy and visual literacy in the EL classroom.

The purpose of this study is to provide insights on the effectiveness of print-based multimodal texts in generating ideas for narrative writing and to discover if the texts enable Form Four (tenth grade) students to write narratives in an EL classroom. Therefore, the objective of the study is to explore how multimodal print-based texts could be utilized as tools to generate ideas for narrative writing and to find out how these materials enable students to write narratives. In line with its objectives, this study is guided by the following research questions:

1. Are print-based multimodal texts effective in generating ideas for narrative writing?
2. How do print-based multimodal texts enable students to write narrative texts?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Common European Framework of References (CEFR)

The [Malaysian Education Blueprint \(MEB\) 2013-2025 \(2013\)](#) stipulates that every student should be independently proficient in the English language as defined by the Common European Framework of References (CEFR, hereafter) for languages. The CEFR formulated in 2001 has been adopted as an international framework by many countries for language teaching, learning and assessment. This framework describes in detail what language learners need to achieve in order to communicate using a language. The framework constitutes six levels of descriptors and they are utilized to classify learners' ability to use a language. Language users are categorised into three primary clusters. They are Proficient users (levels C1 & C2), Independent users (levels B1 & B2), and Basic users (levels A1 & A2). The 'can do' statements refer to what the language learners are able to do and these detailed descriptors encompass all four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

It is hoped that the respondents of this study would be able to achieve the subject objectives of the CEFR Assessment Format for *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM or Malaysian Certificate of Education). These objectives include:

- respond to, analyse and evaluate a variety of literary text types;
- communicate with appropriate language, form, and style in a variety of contexts.

2.2 Multimodality

Multimodality is an inter-disciplinary approach where a variety of semiotic resources integrate to convey meanings. [Brandt \(2004\)](#) refers to multimodality as the combination of several semiotic resources within a socio-cultural domain that contributes to a semiotic product. [Gibbons \(2012\)](#) opines that multimodality enables readers to be engaged actively with the text and to construct meaning from a variety of visual and semiotic clues.

Print-based multimodal texts provide students with opportunities to read, view, and interpret images and written text. As they analyse these visual and verbal modes, they will understand how these modes are pertinent in the construction of meanings. Pictures are an amalgamation of various semiotic resources such as images, colours, and space. The interplay of these resources produces a coherent whole on the page.

Similarly, illustrated poems embrace multimodality as they combine various semiotic resources to create meanings that are coherent on the page. The multimodal approach to pictures and illustrated poems provide the opportunity for the development of various literacy skills. Blake (2009) postulates that the multimodal approach helps teachers to develop creative and critical thinking in students. Husarova (2012) in her study on creative writing reported that a multimodal approach to writing encouraged creativity and sensory learning among students. Therefore, it is hoped that the uniqueness of print-based multimodal texts enables students to apply their imagination, creativity, and critical thinking to generate ideas for narrative writing.

According to Rajendra (2015), although the multimodal approach has been carried out in Malaysian classrooms with digital texts, traditional print-based multimodal texts should be encouraged. This is because traditional print-based multimodal texts are readily available and can be made as photocopiable materials for students. Moreover, despite the advancement in technology, studies indicate that teachers have not adequately integrated information and communication technologies into the teaching of reading and writing (Hutchison & Reinking, 2011; Yamaç & Öztürk, 2018). Therefore, this might pose a problem to students when their teachers are not digitally literate to use digital texts in the classroom.

The multimodality of pictures and illustrated poems encourages students to think outside the box by discovering the visual, linguistic, and spatial elements in the texts. This, in turn, allows them to come up with ideas for their narrative essays. For example, the introduction part in a student's essay is considered the orientation stage in a narrative. Here, the student can utilize the visual and linguistic elements from the illustrated poem to come up with the characters and the setting of his/her story.

2.3 Local Studies on Writing and Multimodal Approach

Writing has always been considered a difficult skill to master, especially writing in English (Waters & Waters, 1995). According to Lim and Wong (2015), ESL or EFL students often grapple with structural issues in writing which include generating ideas and developing ideas on specific topics, proper word selection, and correct grammar usage.

Many studies have been carried out locally on students' writing skills. A study by Darus and Subramaniam (2009) on a group of high school students in a semi-urban secondary school in Malaysia revealed that the students mainly faced difficulties in applying correct grammatical rules in their writings. Their findings also showed that students had problems in constructing simple and complex sentences. Similarly, Maros et al. (2007) examined errors made by students in six rural schools and concluded that the students often encounter issues in utilising correct English grammar in their writings. Other studies suggested students from low socio-economy backgrounds or rural areas faced difficulties in their writing tasks as they were of low English proficiency level, utilized fewer writing strategies, hardly conversed in English, and had limited access to English speaking environment (Ler, 2012; Sovakandan et al., 2018).

Jalaluddin et al.'s (2011) study on the effects of teacher's assistance in developing rural students' writing skills revealed that students' vocabulary improved when teachers utilized an interactive approach as opposed to the process approach. Teachers' feedback in the form of questioning and providing comments is important

if successful writing is to take place in the EL classroom. These studies clearly indicate that Malaysian students often face challenges in writing tasks. Idea generation, language (grammar), and vocabulary need to be addressed if one is expected to write skilfully.

On the other hand, studies are advocating the efficacy of multimodal approaches in the Malaysian classroom (Kaur & Sidhu, 2007; Pillai & Vengadasamy, 2010). Ganapathy and Seetharam (2016) examined the effectiveness of ESL teaching and learning using multimodal approaches on literacy in meaning-making among 15 students in a private school in Penang, Malaysia. They reported that the integration of multimodal approaches had the potential to promote autonomous learning and facilitate various learning styles.

However, the studies that employ the multimodal approach in the Malaysian classrooms (Madarina et al., 2020; Nallaya, 2010; Puteh-Behak & Ismail, 2018) seem to be preoccupied with digital texts such as online articles/news, podcasts, weblogs, and social media. Though this development is highly encouraged, traditional print-based multimodal texts should also be advocated as not all digital texts can meet students' needs.

The studies above clearly denote that although much has been written in relation to writing and multimodal approach, literature on print-based multimodal texts and narrative writing is scarce. Therefore, there is a need for an insightful study in this area as an effort to contribute to the knowledge on narrative writing utilizing print-based multimodal texts in educational contexts. Therefore, this study focuses on the effectiveness of print-based multimodal texts in generating ideas for narrative writing and how these materials help students to develop and write narratives.

2.4 The Narrative Text

A narrative text tells a story with a beginning, a middle, and an end. It often conveys to the reader what happened, how it happened, and why that particular event was meaningful and relevant. Purba (2018) opines that the narrative is the most common type of writing as the writer tells his/her story without any purpose, hence making narrative writing popular among students.

The narrative structure is important in order to grab the reader's attention and keep him/her engaged. According to Droga and Humphrey (2003), a narrative text structure encompasses an orientation, a complication, and a resolution. They state that the orientation of a story encapsulates information about the characters, setting, time, and place. Complication refers to a problem faced by the main character or other characters in the story. Resolution refers to how the problem is resolved, hence bringing the story to a close. In sum, the narrative structure is pertinent as it presents the order in which a narrative text is communicated to the reader.

2.5 Analytical Rubric for Narrative Marking

The National Assessment Program, Literacy, and Numeracy or NAPLAN (2010) which is based on the Australian Education Curriculum is adapted to evaluate the students' narrative essays. NAPLAN is administered annually through a series of tests to Australian students. These standardised tests focus and assess students' basic skills

that encapsulate reading, writing, numeracy, and language conventions (spelling, grammar, and punctuation).

NAPLAN's Writing-Narrative Marking Guide is chosen as it encompasses the important elements of a narrative. The ten criteria assessed are the audience, text structure, ideas, character and setting, vocabulary, cohesion, paragraphs, sentence structure, punctuation, and spelling. However, this study only concentrates on the criteria of text structure, ideas, character, and setting, and vocabulary as the focus is on the effectiveness of print-based multimodal texts in generating ideas and how the texts enable students to write narratives. NAPLAN's Writing-Narrative Marking Guide would guide the researcher to discover students' ability to organize their narratives, generate ideas, explore characters and settings, and also use good vocabulary to make their narratives vivid and descriptive. By exploring and unpacking the illustrated poems, students are able to get an idea of what to write, thus expanding on the plot of their narrative essays. Semiotic resources would help to form the orientation, complication, and resolution in the narratives. Paragraphs, punctuation, and coherence are generally assessed and subsumed under text structure. The criteria of audience and spelling are omitted as they are considered not relevant to this study.

Table 1. The analytical rubric for narrative marking (adapted from [NAPLAN Writing Narrative Marking Guide, 2010, p. 4](#)).

Criteria	Descriptor	Score range
Text structure	- The sequence or organisation of events in a narrative that comprises of an introduction, complication, and resolution that contributes to an effective text structure	0-4
Ideas	- The selection, creation, and crafting of ideas for a narrative	0-5
Character and setting	- The portrayal, description, and development of a character/characters physical and personal traits, point of view, thoughts, and actions - Setting establishes the time, place, and environment and serves as the backdrop for the character's actions	0-4
Vocabulary	- The range and precision of language choices that encapsulate imagery and figurative language as well as content and grammatical words - Imagery refers to descriptive words that evoke one or more of the six senses- sight, touch, sound, smell, taste, and movement - Figurative language says one thing in terms of something else. Examples are simile, metaphor, and personification - Content words describe objects and concepts and encompass nouns, verbs, adverbs, adjectives, and etcetera - Grammatical word classes refer to prepositions, articles, conjunctions, pronouns, and interjection	0-5

3. METHODS

3.1 Research Samples

The research sample of this study comprised five Form Four (Year 10 or tenth grade) students from a suburban secondary school in Selangor, Malaysia. There were nine Form Four classes in this particular school. However, the students' attendance

was not encouraging due to the Covid-19 pandemic as most parents preferred not to send their children to school. The five students were from one class and they were selected from 20 students based on purposive sampling. Creswell (2012) defines purposive sampling as a form of non-random sampling. The students were of B2 (Upper Intermediate) and C1 (Advanced) levels of the Common European Framework of References (CEFR) level of language proficiency. Although these students could be considered as good students, their grades were not consistent as their results often fell between a B2 and a C1. The researcher limited the number of respondents in the study as it would have been time-consuming to involve an entire class. The selected students attended school regularly and were committed to their work. They also came from different economic and social backgrounds, and the English language was not their mother tongue. The students' names were coded throughout the paper with Student 1, Student 2, and so forth.

3.2 Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

This study employed a qualitative approach in research design as the nature of the analysis was to analyse the content of the respondents' narratives to see if they adhere to NAPLAN Narrative Marking Guide. A written test in the form of a pre-test and a writing assignment was utilized as instruments for the study. Diary notes were used to support the findings from both the pre-test and writing assignments. The topics for the pre-test and writing assignment were the same but with different instructional materials. Therefore, the instructional materials were a pond-based picture-stimulus and an illustrated poem 'Pond'. However, both these texts employed different semiotic resources to communicate meaning. The picture-stimulus had a combination of images, colours, and spatial design to construct meaning. Conversely, the illustrated poem employed the semiotic resources of images, written language, typography, colours, and space. The utilization of the illustrated poem for the writing assignment was pertinent as it employed semiotic resources such as written language and typography which could contribute to idea generation that indirectly affects meaning-making and the overall telling of the story. The instruments and the procedures are discussed in the next sub-sections.

3.2.1 Pre-test

The pre-test was carried out to gauge the students' narrative writing ability and to identify what the students already knew about narrative writing. It was also conducted in order to compare the pre-test written scripts with the assignment written scripts which the students were to produce later. All five respondents were asked to write a narrative essay based on the title 'Pond'. The narrative should be based on the picture-stimulus as depicted in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Pond (source: [Pond Maintenance, 2018](#))

The multimodal picture-stimulus ‘Pond’ was selected as it aligned with the topic ‘Mother Nature’ which was one of the topics in the prescribed Form 4 English Curriculum set by the [Malaysian Ministry of Education \(2013\)](#).

The respondents were required to write for 40 minutes within a minimum of 250 words. As this was a pre-test, no pre-writing activities were involved. However, instructions were given on what they were supposed to do. Therefore, they wrote based on their own understanding of the picture-stimulus to write an error-free narrative essay. The respondents’ narratives were read and graded according to the Analytical Rubric for Narrative Marking (Table 1).

3.2.2 Writing assignment

The writing assignment was carried out over two lessons to see if the respondents showed any improvement in generating ideas for their narratives after the first lesson. The objective was to see if the utilisation of the illustrated poem ‘Pond’ had a significant effect on students’ generation of ideas and also to see if they were able to write narratives.

The illustrated poem, ‘Pond’ (Figure 2) was written by Joan Bransfield Graham with the illustration by Steve Scott ([Graham & Scott, 1994](#)). It is a suitable print-based multimodal text that fulfils the Form Four English Syllabus and promotes interdisciplinary education in the classroom. [Mathison and Freeman \(1997\)](#) posit that the integration of two or more disciplines (in this case, language, literature and arts), increases understanding, retention, and application of general concepts in students.

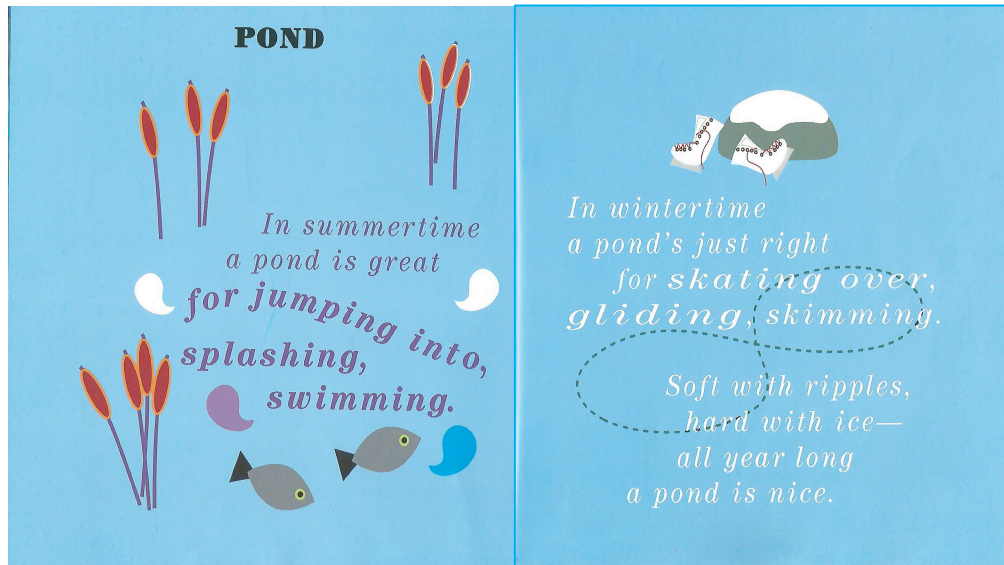


Figure 2. 'Pond' (from 'Splish Splash' by Graham & Scott, 1994).

3.2.3 Writing assignment procedure

a. Lesson 1

During the first lesson (70 minutes), clear instructions on the purpose of the lesson and the writing task were given to the students. The teacher/researcher introduced a few illustrated poems to expose the respondents to a variety of semiotic resources. She also encouraged the respondents to discuss or give comments about the poems.

The respondents then discussed the poem 'Pond' with the teacher/researcher based on a set of open-ended questions. The questions were asked to address the respondents' understanding of the poem and to generate ideas for their narrative. According to Creswell (2009), a qualitative design employs open-ended questions so that the respondents can express their views. They brainstormed about the poem and its images and exchanged their thoughts and ideas about it. She also encouraged the respondents to think about a plot (an outline) for a story that centred around a 'Pond'. The teacher/researcher also discussed the elements of a narrative and the marking criteria with them. This enabled them to get an idea of what and how they were supposed to write so that they would not repeat their pre-test 'mistakes' here.

b. Lesson 2

During the second lesson (70 minutes), the teacher/researcher recapped the first lesson and asked the respondents to write a narrative essay (40 minutes) within 250 words based on their own interpretation of how they viewed and comprehended the poem 'Pond'. The respondents' narratives were then marked and graded based on the Analytical Rubric for Narrative Marking.

3.2.4 Diary notes

In addition to pre-test and written assignments, the teacher/researcher also kept diary notes to record everything that happened during the teaching and learning

process. These entries included observation, reflection, and evaluation of the respondents' performance during the pre-test and writing assignment lessons.

3.3 Data Analysis of Written Scripts and Diary Notes

The data elicited from both the written scripts (pre-test and written assignment) are interpreted and discussed to provide an in-depth description of the data. Extracts from the respondents' scripts are inserted in the discussion to strengthen the analysis. This approach provides valuable insights into how the respondents generate ideas and how they write narratives. Data from the diary notes are analysed where the excerpts are included in the discussion. The analysis of the diary notes is pertinent to identifying how the respondents come up with ideas for their narratives. Triangulation allows the researchers to verify the results within the same phenomenon with different methods, thus improving the internal and external validity of the study (Bentahar & Cameron, 2015).

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Findings of the Pre-Test

Based on the data from the pre-test, it can be concluded that not all the five respondents wrote narrative essays. Three respondents wrote factual essays and only two respondents wrote narrative essays. This is illustrated in Figure 3.

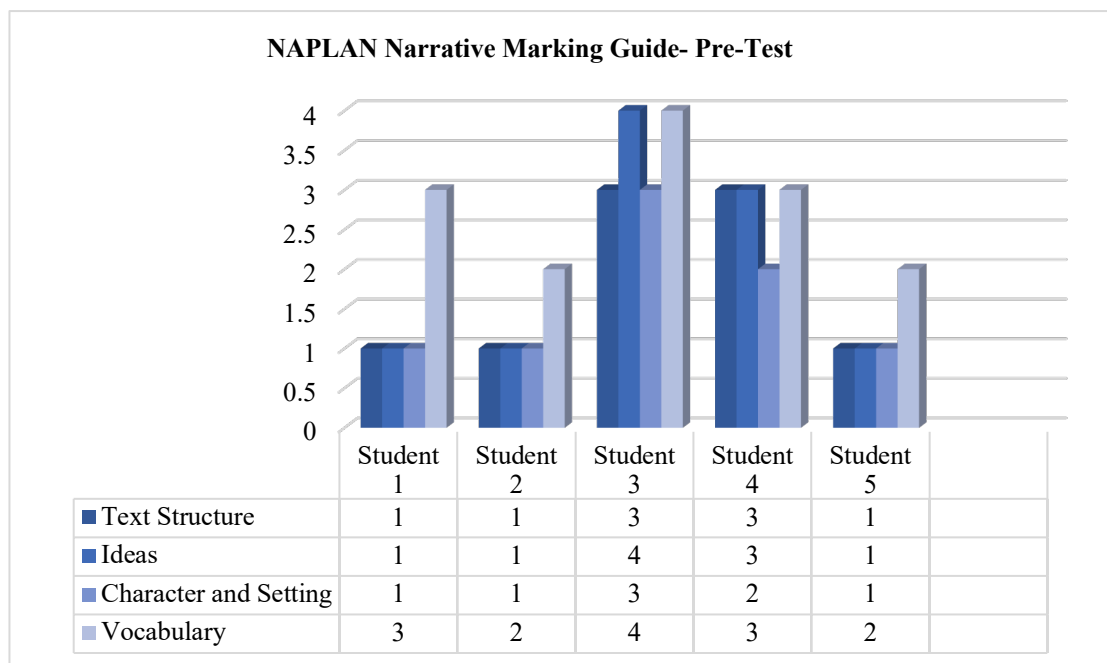


Figure 3. Pre-test - NAPLAN narrative marking guide.

The data analysis for the pre-test (Figure 3) clearly indicates that three written transcripts did not fully adhere to the Analytical Rubric for Narrative Marking. The scripts comprised factual information, and they did not conform to the criteria of text

structure, ideas, character, and setting. It was interesting to know that although the respondents were of the intermediate-advanced levels, they were unable to differentiate the basic types of text. This clearly indicates that necessary input should be given by the teacher prior to conducting any lessons even if it requires him/her to repeat the lesson. However, all the five respondents did adhere to the criterion of vocabulary as indicated in Figure 3.

4.1.1 Facts presented by respondents as regard to the picture-stimulus of 'Pond'

The examples of facts based on the picture-stimulus are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Pre-test - factual information in respondents' written transcripts.

Number	Name	Facts
1	Student 1	Plants such as lilies are floating on the pond. (physical appearance)
2	Student 2	A pond provides animals with food, shelter, and oxygen. (benefit)
3	Student 5	A pond is an area filled with water that is smaller than a lake. (definition)

Based on Table 2, it is evident that the three respondents gave clear and concise information about a pond. The information provided encompassed the definition of a pond, its physical appearance, and its benefits.

Conversely, two other respondents (Student 3 and Student 4) wrote narrative essays and they adhered to the Analytical Rubric for Narrative Marking. This is shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Pre-test - narrative elements in respondents' written transcripts.

Number	Name	Narrative (Story)
1	Student 3	The crystal-clear water and the green forest bring calmness to Luke. (text structure-orientation, ideas, character, and setting, vocabulary)
2	Student 4	The fiery ball in the sky prevented Shane from swimming. (text structure-complication, ideas, character, and setting, vocabulary)

In Table 3, for example, the line 'The crystal-clear water and the green forest bring calmness to Luke' (Student 3) distinctly depicts the orientation in the story. Phrases such as 'crystal-clear water' and 'green forest' are ideas brought about by the image of the pond and the cattail plants. The colour blue lends itself to 'crystal-clear water' and the feeling of 'calmness'. This line also introduces the character (Luke) and the setting of the story (green forest). Vocabulary is strengthened through phrases and words such as 'crystal-clear water' and 'calmness'.

As presented in Table 4, it is evident that content and grammatical words were prevalent in all five written transcripts. In addition, sensory information was mostly communicated through the sense of sight, sound, movement, and touch. For example, the line 'Ducks and insects like dragonflies live above the water' ...clearly denotes the content words 'ducks, insects, dragonflies' and 'water' and also grammatical words such as 'and, above' and 'the'. In addition, this line evokes the sense of sight and movement where the reader can visualise ducks and dragonflies moving above the water. In conclusion, the pre-test written scripts reveal that 60% of the respondents wrote factual essays instead of narrative essays.

Table 4. Pre-test- utilization of vocabulary in respondents' written transcripts.

Number	Name	(Content/Grammatical Words and Imagery)
1	Student 1	'Ducks and insects like dragonflies live above the water'. (content and grammatical words, imagery -sight, movement)
2	Student 2	"...green trees, colourful flowers, and a beautiful Pond" (content and grammatical words, imagery -sight)
3	Student 3	'Then, he relaxed and started to play with the cold water'. (content and grammatical words, imagery -sight, touch)
4	Student 4	'The pond looked peaceful but it was full of buzzing insects and creeping crawlies'. (content and grammatical words, imagery-sight, sound, movement)
5	Student 5	'Croaks of frogs and chirping of birds are heard near a pond'. (content and grammatical words, imagery -sound)

4.2 Findings of Written Assignment (Based on the Illustrated Poem 'Pond')

The findings of the written assignment revealed that all five respondents were able to generate ideas for their narrative writing. They also had adhered to the Analytical Rubric for Narrative Marking. This is indicated in Figure 4.

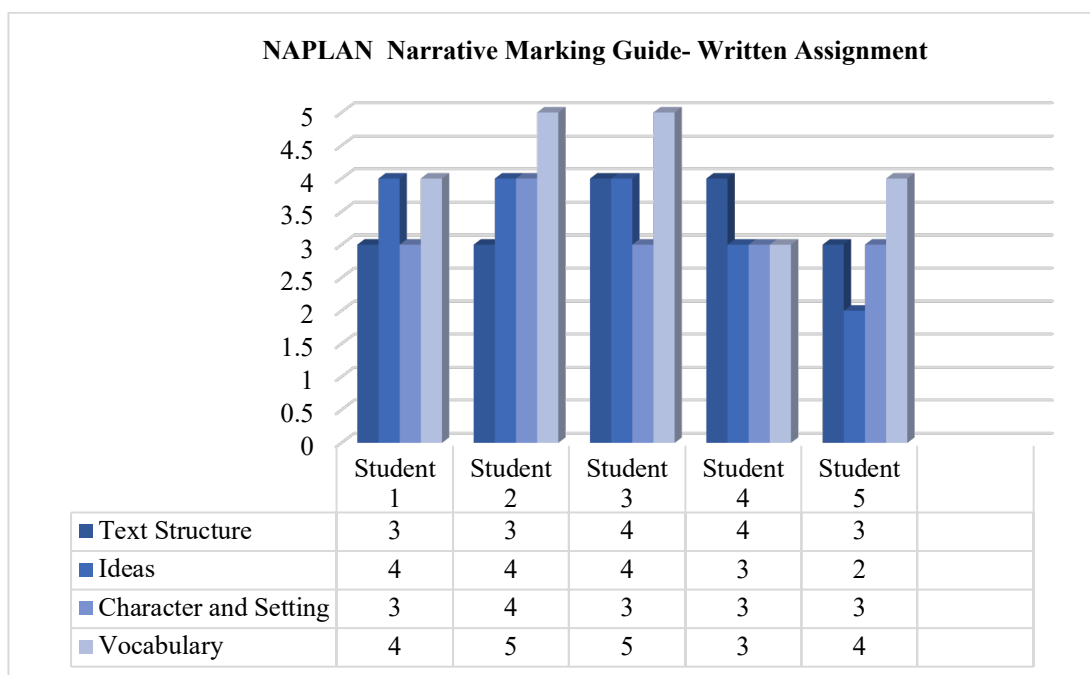


Figure 4. Written assignment - NAPLAN narrative marking guide.

Based on Figure 4, it is clear that the respondents were able to interpret the multimodal print-based illustrated poem 'Pond'. They came up with possible plots for their narratives utilising the semiotic resources and their narratives fulfilled the criteria of text structure, ideas, character and setting, and vocabulary. This is illustrated in detail below.

4.2.1 Text structure

The composite nature of illustrated poems enabled the respondents to write coherent and complete narratives that comprised an introduction, complication, and

resolution. It was interesting to note that all five respondents interpreted the illustrated poem differently and this was evident in the plots of their narratives. Signal words such as ‘soon after’, ‘however’, ‘when’ and ‘during’ helped to tie the ideas together. This contributed to an effective text structure with clear endings. For example:

- (1) The pond looked inviting during summer. The upright cattail plants reminded me of standing meerkats. (Student 1) (orientation)

In the sentences above, Student 1 has employed the image (pond) and the word ‘summer’ to describe the setting of the story. She also compared the images of cattails plants to standing meerkats which added realism to the orientation of the story. This clearly indicates that images and words contribute to the overall telling of the story but they do so in different ways

- (2) Soon after, it started attacking us. (Student 4) (complication)

Student 4 has created complications in his narrative essay by introducing the Yeti, a fictional and monstrous creature as the antagonist in his story. Student 4 employed the semiotic resources of image, words, typography, and colour to capture the terrifying moments where the creature appears unexpectedly

- (3) However, the frozen icy water reminded me that the pond was God’s blessing. (Student 5) (resolution)

Student 5 utilizes the image (pond) and the word ‘winter’ to create the impression of God’s gifts to mankind, thus bringing the story to an end.

4.2.2 *Ideas*

The findings demonstrated that the illustrated poem ‘Pond’ provided the opportunity for the respondents to create original and appropriate pieces as they explored the poem and its images. This significantly improved their narrative writing as they were able to generate ideas based on the discussion, brainstorming, and question-answer sessions. For example, the meaning brought about by the images of cattail plants and the typography of the phrase ‘for jumping into’ provided information about the pond in summer. The phrase ‘for jumping into’ also conveyed a paralinguistic message. Moreover, the image of the figure eight skating movement described the act of skating during winter.

The integration of semiotic resources enabled the respondents to aptly describe the pond and the activities in summer and winter. This, in return, furnished them with possible plot lines that centred around these seasons. The ideas were developed to explore a particular theme which contributed to a coherent and complete story. This is illustrated in the examples below.

- (4) The yellow flame trees exploded with blooms. I feel the summer breeze on my face. I am always happy and calm when I am at the pond until that unfortunate day. How can I forget that face? (Student 2)

Here, Student 2 utilized the word ‘summer’ to depict the setting and the mood of the story. He constructed the nature of events around summer. First, he described

summer in all its galore and then added a twist at the end of the story. Therefore, his story was not all about the beauty of summer but incorporated the element of suspense. The use of the inner voice ‘How can I forget that face?’ gives a hint to the reader of what is to come or what happens later in the story. As the story develops, the reader is left to wonder that summer is not as beautiful as it sets out to be.

- (5) Then, we saw IT! The menacing and monstrous Yeti, a mythical monstrous creature believed to be roaming the Himalayas. Soon after, it started attacking us. (Student 4)

Student 4, on the other hand, turned the season of winter into a living nightmare. His story revolved around the snow-capped Himalayas, and as the story progressed, the protagonist had to face his innermost fear. It is evident that Student 4 had used winter as the setting for his grisly story. This demonstrates that Student 4’s perceptions of the characters are influenced by the settings where the characters are placed. Informative and illustrative details such as ‘Yeti, mythical monstrous creature’ and ‘Himalayas’ further supported and developed the story.

- (6) I liked the cold weather and started imagining being a famous figure skater. Oh, I wish I could skate! This weather is not stopping me! I told myself. (Student 5)

Student 5, on the other hand, chose to focus on the activities that were carried out in winter, like figure skating. Her story developed from wanting to become a figure skater to enrolling herself in a skating academy. The incorporation of Student 5’s inner voice ‘Oh, I wish I could skate! This weather is not stopping me!’ reinforces the main idea in the story which is becoming a figure skater.

The examples above denote that the same illustrated poem may trigger different interpretations for different people. The respondents’ creativity and imagination were evident through the choice of plotlines that contributed to well-developed narratives.

4.2.3 Character and setting

The written transcripts revealed the portrayal of the characters through their actions and thoughts. The narratives were written from the first-person point of view where the utilization of the pronouns ‘I’, ‘we’ and ‘our’ were employed to express opinions and to mention what happened around and to the characters as illustrated in the examples below.

- (7) I quickly removed my sandals and jumped into the pond. (Student 1)
(8) I would be over the moon to experience it again! (Student 5)

The setting was clearly established through selected details to create an appropriate atmosphere according to the storyline. For example:

- (9) I had a great time watching the pond appearing alive with figure skaters... (Student 5)
(10) I watched the feeble old man picking a bundle of firewood near the gloomy looking pond. (Student 2)

4.2.4 Vocabulary

The language choice which encapsulated the vocabulary was precise and suitable according to the plot of the narratives. During the brainstorming session, the words from the illustrated poem helped generate other words or phrases associated with a pond. Besides, the colours of the fonts and images in the poem helped to build on the vocabulary. For example:

(11) pond – ‘picturesque’, ‘crystal blue water’, ‘majestic’, ‘floating lilies’

(12) jumping – ‘leaps’, ‘dive’, ‘feeding fish’, ‘floating boat’

(13) winter – ‘bone-breaking cold weather’, ‘cold icy’, ‘snowflakes’, ‘powder white’, ‘chilly’

The respondents were exposed to imagery and figurative language (simile, personification) in Form 3 (Year 9 or grade eight), and hence, they were able to use them in their narratives. The prevalence of imagery brought about a multisensory journey to the reader through the use of descriptive words. The dominance of visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, and tactile imagery provided sensory details to the narratives. Phrases such as ‘lined with yellow flame trees’, ‘flapping my arm’, ‘dark blue sky’ and ‘cold icy water over my skin’ distinctly describe experiences that are evoked by senses. Imagery helped to heighten the experience by providing concreteness to the narratives. However, the use of figurative language concentrated mainly on simile and personification. This is illustrated in Table 5.

Table 5. Examples of figurative language in respondents’ narratives.

Figurative language	
Simile	Personification
as quickly as lightning	heart flutter
mad as a hornet	The pond was brimming with pride
as silent as the grave	winter called me outside to play

As shown in the examples in Table 5, the respondents were able to create stories that centred around a pond, the weather, and the seasons: summer and winter. The poem ‘Pond’ offered information in the form of images and words that they could translate into writing. According to [Alvarez Valencia \(2016\)](#), every single element in a multimodal text is designed to contribute to its general meaning, and these elements combine to create a specific message. The semiotic resources in ‘Pond’ contributed to meaning-making and the generation of ideas.

4.3 Findings of Diary Notes

The findings from the diary notes revealed that the respondents showed an understanding of the picture stimulus and the illustrated poem ‘Pond’. However, the interpretation of both these instructional materials differed as shown in the data above. The excerpts in Table 6 present the observation, reflection, and evaluation of the respondents’ performance during the pre-test and written assignment stages.

Based on Table 6, there was a difference in how the respondents carried out their tasks. This was indicated in both the pre-test and written assignment. In the pre-test, the respondents only achieved 60% of the Analytical Rubric for Narrative Marking as

three of them wrote factual essays. At the beginning of the pre-test, the respondents seem to suffer from ‘writer’s block’ as they did not have anything in mind.

Table 6. Excerpts from diary notes.

	Pre-test	Writing assignment	
		1 st Lesson (Stage 1)	2 nd Lesson (Stage 2)
Observation	i. Respondents - answer as directed based on picture stimulus ii. No clear purpose, they feel their essays are correct	i. Respondents - active in class discussion/ brainstorming session ii. React positively to feedback	i. Recap of the previous lesson - better grasp of content/ good preparation before writing ii. Answer confidently
Reflection	i. Respondents do not know the elements of narrative writing ii. Wrote what they thought was right - facts about pond	i. Effective teaching-learning process took place ii. Utilising multimodal texts with visual/verbal elements gives them more confidence	i. Knowledge in the form of discussion, brainstorming, question /answer session - important in shaping students’ thoughts and ideas ii. Illustrated poem - helps in generating ideas
Evaluation	i. Not all conform to the Rubric of Narrative Marking. ii. 3 students wrote factual essays	i. Showed the knowledge acquired in their sharing of ideas/plotline of stories	i. Adhere to the Rubric for Narrative Marking. ii. Narratives fulfil the criteria

As for the written assignment, the respondents actively took part in class discussion and brainstormed the images in the layout and possible related vocabulary. The brainstorming, discussion, and question-answer sessions helped them to focus their thoughts on illustrated poems in general and on the poem ‘Pond’ specifically. They were encouraged ‘to think beyond the layout’. In other words, they did not simply describe what they saw in the poem but rather speculated about what the semiotic resources in the layout mean.

Therefore, the discussion involved some level of critical thinking. This enabled them to construct personal opinions and develop an understanding of the multimodality of an illustrated poem. The findings also revealed that Lesson 1 successfully ignited the respondents’ imagination and creativity which they could later transfer into their writing of narratives. In Lesson 2, the respondents were able to experience better performance and made significant progress as they adhered to all the elements of narrative writing. In the end, they were able to produce interesting narratives.

5. DISCUSSION

In this section, the answers to the research questions are discussed. The findings for the first question ‘Are print-based multimodal texts effective in generating ideas for narrative writing?’ clearly demonstrate that both the print-based multimodal texts generate ideas but in comparison with picture stimulus, illustrated poems generate ideas more effectively, and it is comparatively better. The multimodality of the

illustrated poem 'Pond' enabled the respondents to generate ideas for their narratives by identifying the semiotic resources and the meaning-making functions of these resources. By doing so, they were able to interpret the poem and come up with possible plots for the narratives. This underpins Serafini's (2014) notion that students would get an idea of what these texts are, how they are organized and produced, and what they could do as they begin to read, understand and experience a variety of texts. Consequently, multimodality provides educators with the opportunity to exploit and explore poetry's communicative potential (Xerri, 2012).

As for the second research question, 'How do print-based multimodal texts enable students to write narrative texts?', the evolution of the respondents' narrative writing skills could be noticed from the extracts of their written scripts and diary notes entries. The respondents were given the opportunity to navigate through the distinguishing features of an illustrated poem, and they were able to draw on their knowledge to write narratives that fulfilled the criteria of the Analytical Rubric for Narrative Marking. The utilization of picture stimulus to a certain extent encouraged the generation and development of ideas in narrative writing as shown in the extracts from the written scripts. Some of their phrases conveyed paralinguistic messages, and this supports Bateman's (2008) notion that typographical elements function as visuals as they communicate paralinguistic information. Their use of images to describe acts also concurs with Lewis's (2001) view that all pictures have decorative, narrative, and interpretative potential. This buttresses Crossley et al.'s (2016) views that the originality of ideas and the appropriateness of ideas among others are important components in writing. Nevertheless, students have to be guided by teachers to exploit the meaning-making potentials of these print-based multimodal texts.

There were some noteworthy differences in students' written scripts in the writing assignment compared to the pre-test. The respondents were able to write detailed information with longer paragraphs, had better organization skills, utilized sufficient supporting sentences, and had a good understanding of tenses in their written assignment. In short, the respondents produced better narrative essays for their writing assignment compared to the pre-test.

Interestingly, this study also revealed that it is important to take equal consideration of the visual component of meaning-making in multimodal texts next to the verbal component of meaning. This is because when students started exploring meanings in these texts, they might be aware that meaning-making goes beyond the decoding of words/written language.

Feedback and comments given during the brainstorming, discussion, and question-answer sessions are fundamental in improving the quality of writing. This clearly proves that teachers should encourage and motivate students despite having differences in opinions and ideas. The study's findings are also consistent with Purba (2018) who suggests that students should be provided with enough language and information in order for them to write successfully. According to Wiggins (2012), a successful teacher's feedback provides a student with a better understanding to become a proficient writer.

The findings of the study also suggested that the respondents were able to achieve the subject objectives of the CEFR Assessment Format for SPM. They were able to respond, and analyse the print-based multimodal texts and communicate their thoughts and ideas in writing by using appropriate language, form, and style.

Therefore, they realized the ‘can do’ statement as stated in the CEFR Assessment Format and achieved the maximum of a C1 level.

The utilization of print-based multimodal texts promotes multimodal and visual literacy as students read and unpack the semiotic resources that combine to create meaning within these texts. By doing so, they creatively come up with their own style of writing narratives. Goldstein (2016) posits that nowadays learners have greater access to visual materials but they are not fully aware of their use in an academic context. The illustrated poem ‘Pond’ encouraged interdisciplinary learning among the respondents as they applied their knowledge from the fields of language, literature, art, and geography to their writing.

Nevertheless, providing students with multimodal texts without proper instruction might lead to misinterpretation of the question as in the case of the pre-test in this study. Students need proper instruction, discussion, and preparation about the subject matter before they start writing. Importantly, this study proves that any texts that are accompanied by verbal, visual, or spatial modes contribute to idea generation and writing of narratives successfully.

6. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that print-based multimodal texts helped to generate ideas for narrative writing, and the respondents were able to write interesting narratives. Therefore, these multimodal texts offer students the opportunity to experience and understand how different semiotic resources integrate to construct meaning. Nevertheless, it must be noted that this is not a study that aims to generalize the findings for good practices in narrative writing. Each student is endowed with different learning styles, creativity, and interest, and teachers need to adopt and adapt different teaching strategies according to their students’ proficiency levels.

The effectiveness of using multimodal texts in the EL classroom indicates that teachers need to diversify their teaching materials that encapsulate both monomodal and multimodal texts. Therefore, they need to rethink and revamp their pedagogical approaches to suit the current changes in literacy practices as the combination of visual and written text is becoming a norm in today’s educational landscape.

Future studies should include more participants which include students from urban, suburban, and rural areas in Malaysia. Moreover, similar studies should be carried out on a larger sample size with different levels of proficiency in English. By doing so, researchers may obtain insightful findings and gain a better understanding of using print-based multimodal texts in narrative writing. Furthermore, this study may be replicated using other print-based multimodal texts such as comics, drawings, and print advertisements.

The study’s limitations were unavoidable as it was carried out in a short span of time due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Face-to-face school sessions were carried out for a few months only. During this duration, students’ attendance was largely poor. Therefore, the sample of the participants was restricted to only one class. In conclusion, print-based multimodal texts help students generate ideas for narrative writing and enable them to write interesting narratives. Teachers should consider them to promote meaningful and effective learning in the writing classroom.

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