Stone, Paper, Screen: Tracing the Path of Written Expression

R. Meenakshi[1] & Dr. B.S. Prameela Priadersini[2]

[1]Ph.D Research Scholar, PG & Research Department of English
Kalaignar Karunanidhi Government Arts College for Women (A), Pudukkottai
Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirapalli, Tamil Nadu
[2]Research Guide, Associate Professor, PG & Research Department of English
Kalaignar Karunanidhi Government Arts College for Women (A), Pudukkottai
Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirapalli, Tamil Nadu

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Abstract

Writing as a field has undergone radical changes through time, since it evolved in periods of deliberate, long-lasting scribbles in lithic tablets up to the fast, interactive forms of modern digital allowances. This paper poses inquisitive questions about the pedagogical implications of this change which is to be applied to English language teaching and assumes that the replacement of stone with screens demands the incorporation of new and ingenious practices in writing classrooms. Based on historical processes, literacy theories, and existing practices in classrooms, the paper discusses how the use of technologies (collaborative cloud environments, weblogs, social networking sites, multimodal storytelling tools) are transforming the concept of written communication in English language classrooms. These mechanisms enhance the traditional understanding of literacy because it creates creativity, teamwork, reader mindfulness, and critical engagement on digital texts. Using digital writing paves learners with legitimate opportunities to conduct intentional communication and the practical use of the English language in the actual circumstances. At the same time, the research conducts a close analysis of the issues involved in digital writing, including the complications of assessment, the increased cognitive demands created by multitasking and multimodality, the development of learner anxiety, and the unequal access to digital technologies in the long term. Using a classroom-based action-research method, the research proves that stone-to-screen writing tasks can substantially raise the motivation, engagement and multimodal skills of the ESL learners and, therefore, result in more learner autonomy and a more flexible approach to building knowledge. The paper concludes by providing practical solutions to the reconciliation of the traditional writing competency (spelling, organization, and argumentation) and the multimodality of digital texts (constantly changing) so that learners could be able to express ideas fluently using both the traditional compositional practices as well as the digital tools that are often used.

Keywords: writing pedagogy, digital literacy, multimodality, English Language Teaching, screen-based writing, collaborative writing, literacy evolution

Introduction

Writing is at the heart of how people connect and share ideas, and it has grown alongside our societies. Think back to when writing was done by carving words into stone slowly, carefully, and built to last.

Then came pen and paper, making writing lighter, more personal, and portable. Writing now mostly takes place on screens, where words can be created instantly, revised endlessly, and integrated with images and sounds to reach people globally. "For

teachers of English, knowing this history is key. Writing cannot be taught in the same way when its very nature is undergoing such rapid transformation Today's learners write in a variety of formats, from essays to quick texts and social media posts, each with its own style, audience, and purpose. It is a preliminary introduction to the discussion of how these tremendous alterations in the practices of writing affect English language teaching. The implication of this discovery is that teachers have to strike a balance between teaching students long-term composition skills, including clear, well-organized, and argumentative, and the new literacies needed to be successful in digitally mediated spaces. This paper will explore the history of writing, the conceptual framework of literacy, the applied methods of teaching writing and the specific suggestions that can be given to teachers that will help students to leave their stone-to-screen writing habits..

Writing Through the Ages: A Story of Change
Stone and Clay: Writing as a Monument

The history of writing is also related to the earliest civilizations of Mesopotamia and Egypt where the drawings of the symbols on the stone and clay were meticulously written by the professional scribes. These initial writings were to be enduring and store the law codes, religious teachings, and royal decrees. They were expected to be permanent and official, and this is what resulted in their use as the symbol of authority and the truth that would be preserved until the next generations. During that era, literacy was elite and a rare skill and it conjoined itself to elite forms of power. It was more detail oriented and consistent and there are not many opportunities of mistake and it is creative. This cave age of writing shows to modern language teachers and students that writing was once viewed as an entire and flawless commodity and not a process. Despite the fact that this tradition continues to add to the accentuation of the properness of a formal composition, it is also the precondition of the necessity to adapt pedagogy to the requirements of modern and more open and flexible communicative activity.

Paper and Print: Writing Becomes Personal

The development of the paper technology in China to Europe and the 15th century printing press under Gutenberg transformed the way the text was created and consumed. The cheapness of paper, its portability, and ability to edit allowed the writers to experiment and test their thoughts. Mass printing enabled the mass distribution of books and manuscripts, so the process of gaining literacy skills and standardisation of language use became faster. In the learning context, paper provided learners with a physical platform to express themselves, ask questions and even demonstrate their learning. Essays, correspondence, poetry, and reports were composed by hand thus students were practising the basic skills of organisation, legibility, orthography and syntax. The era defined the conceptualisation of writing as a gradual activity, which develops through a series of drafts and comments. Concurrently, writing also took on a social aspect, a writing to be shared with colleagues and teachers, therefore, promoting clarity and critical discussion. However, the writing that occurred at this time was mostly relegated to the textual artefacts on a page, unlike the multimodal tapestry of words, images, and sounds, which is present today.

Digital Screens: Writing that Breathes and Lives

Digital technology has changed the ways of writing radically since the end of the twentieth century. On-screen textual production is timely, unstable and often collaborative. Online works can include pictures, video, links, and sounds and combine various forms of communication in interactive and immersive experiences. Cloud based systems enable collaborative writing (in a real-time) over geographical spaces, redefining writing as a socially and communally practice. For English language learners, this necessitates the simultaneous development of digital competencies alongside traditional language acquisition, including engagement with emerging genres such as blogs, social media posts, and digital storytelling. Contemporary writing instruction extends beyond correctness to encompass visual content design, audience engagement, and the responsible use of digital technologies. Students also learn to

think critically about their sources, their audience, and the technology they use, things that were impossible in the days of stone tablets and paper. For educators, embracing these transformations entails remaining receptive to innovative approaches while guiding students through the attendant challenges (Kress, 2003; Lankshear & Knobel, 2011).

Literature Review
Literacy as Social and Situated Practice
Brian Street's influential concept of literacy emphasizes that reading and writing are not merely sets of skills but are deeply shaped by the social and cultural contexts in which they occur. Writing means different things in different places, whether it's ancient stone carvings, formal school essays, casual chat texts, or digital blogs. For English teachers, this means that writing isn't just one simple skill but many different ways of communicating that students need to learn based on their real lives. Digital writing, characterized by diverse audiences and purposes, exemplifies this multiplicity. Educators should assist students in selecting appropriate language, style, and format according to the intended audience and communicative purpose (Street, 1984).

Multimodality and New Media Literacies
Gunther Kress (2003) explains that communication today isn't just about words it includes images, sounds, and even gestures. Digital writing uses all of these elements together to share meaning in richer and more interesting ways than words alone ever could.

According to Lankshear and Knobel (2011), contemporary digital literacy entails the capacity to participate actively, connect with others, and utilize a broad array of media and technological tools. This changes how teachers think about literacy. Now, helping students create texts that combine words, pictures, and sounds is just as important as teaching them grammar and vocabulary. For English teachers, this means showing learners not only how to write well but also how to blend visuals and audio into their work, so they can communicate more fully and creatively in the digital world (Kress, 2003; Lankshear & Knobel, 2011)

Cognitive Processes and Writing
Flower and Hayes (1981) describe writing as a cycle that involves planning what to say, putting thoughts into words, and then revising based on feedback or new ideas. Digital tools facilitate instantaneous and continuous collaboration and revision, enabling processes to unfold flexibly rather than adhering to rigid, predetermined steps. This perspective on writing aligns well with computer-based practices, where students can save multiple drafts, receive feedback, and continuously refine their work. In English language classrooms, recognizing this iterative process enables educators to guide learners in reflecting on their writing, adopting effective revision strategies, and fully leveraging digital tools to develop as more proficient and reflective writers.

Critical Digital Literacy
In today's digital world, learning to write is more than putting words on a screen Digital literacy includes making informed online decisions, evaluating the credibility of information, respecting copyright laws, and safeguarding one's digital identity (Warschauer, 2010). English educators must engage in open discussions about these competencies to prepare students for navigating internet challenges with wisdom and ethical responsibility. By fostering critical digital literacy, teachers empower learners to use online resources confidently, avoid pitfalls such as plagiarism, and cultivate lifelong skills extending beyond the classroom.

Empirical Classroom Application: A Sample Action Research Study
Research Context and Question
In an urban community college ESL class serving 25 intermediate adult learners, the study aimed to explore how "stone to screen" writing activities impact learners' motivation, skill development, and digital literacy awareness.

Table 1: Participant Demographics

Characteristic	Details
Number of Participants	25 adult learners
Age Range	18 to 35 years
Language Background	Diverse linguistic and cultural groups

Context	Urban community college ESL classroom

In table 1 shown that 25 adults ESL learners from varied culture background took part, offering diverse perspectives on writing practices.

Methodology
Research Design
This study employed an action research methodology, wherein educators systematically examine their own classroom contexts while simultaneously engaging in professional development (Burns, 2010; McNiff, 2017). Action research enables teachers to address authentic challenges through iterative cycles of planning, implementation, observation, and reflection. This approach was selected due to its alignment with the study's objectives: to investigate how integrating "stone-to-screen" writing tasks might enhance students' motivation and skills, and to provide educators with practical strategies applicable to their instruction. Action research privileges teachers' experiential knowledge alongside formal data, positioning them as active agents in the advancement of classroom learning.

Table 2: Writing Tasks Overview

Task Name	Description	Focus Areas	Duration
Stone-Inspired Writing	Brief inscriptions on cards, emphasizing precision	Linguistic accuracy, word choice	2 weeks
Paper-Based Writing	Handwritten personal narratives	Narrative structure, voice	2 weeks
Screen-Based Writing	Digital multimodal stories/blogs with text, images, audio	Creativity, audience awareness, digital literacy	2 weeks

Table 2 each writing task focused on different skills, helping students develop accuracy, structure and Creativity.

Participants and Context
The study was conducted in an intermediate-level ESL classroom at an urban community college. The participant group consisted of 25 adult learners, aged 18 to 35, representing a diverse range of linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The class convened tri-weekly for sessions lasting 90 minutes. Notably, the instructor concurrently assumed the role of researcher, thereby facilitating an immersive and nuanced engagement with both the pedagogical intervention and the associated empirical data collection.

Research Questions
The Study Aimed to Explore
1. How does the integration of "stone to screen" writing tasks affect learners' motivation and engagement?
2. What impact does this pedagogical approach have on learners' writing competency and digital literacy awareness?
3. What challenges and affordances arise when incorporating multimodal and digital writing tasks in an ESL classroom?

Intervention and Procedures
The intervention comprised three sequential writing tasks reflecting the evolution of writing media:
• Stone-Inspired Writing Task: Learners composed brief "inscriptions" on physical cards, emphasizing concise, precise language, mirroring the permanence and formality of ancient writings. This task was designed to enhance linguistic accuracy and raise awareness of word choice in a targeted, scaffolded manner.
• Paper-Based Writing Task: Students wrote personal narratives by hand to practice organizing ideas cohesively in extended texts while experiencing the tactile aspects of traditional writing.

- Screen-Based Writing Task: Learners produced digital multimodal stories or blog posts integrating text, images, and/or audio, facilitated through collaborative cloud platforms (e.g., Google Docs). This task aimed to develop creativity, audience awareness, and digital literacy competencies.

Each task spanned approximately two weeks, including instruction, drafting, peer review, revision, and final submission phases.

Data Collection

Multiple data sources were employed to gain a holistic understanding of the intervention's effects:

- Writing Samples: Pre- and post-task writing assignments were collected for qualitative and quantitative analysis of linguistic complexity, coherence, and multimodal integration.
- Student Survey: Motivation and engagement questionnaires using Likert scale questions and open ended were completed at the end of each task to get an idea of the perception and attitudes held by the learners.
- The Focus Group Interviews will be semi-structured conversations with a specifically chosen sample of eight participants of the study which will lead to detailed information on the experience of the learners as well as their struggles and perceived advantages of the various modes of writing.
- The classroom dynamics, interaction between students and teacher, and observation of the instruction were recorded with the help of field Notes of the Researcher kept in a systematic form during the period of the research.

Table 3: Data Collection Methods

Method	Purpose	Details
Writing Samples	Analyze linguistic complexity & coherence	Pre and post-task collections
Student Questionnaires	Capture motivation & engagement	Likert scales and open-ended questions
Focus Group Interviews	Deep dive into learner experience	Semi-structured interviews with 8 participants
Researcher Field Notes	Document classroom dynamics and observations	Reflective notes maintained throughout

In Table 3 summarizes the tools used to gather data, combining writing samples, surveys and interview for a fuller understanding of learner progress.

Data Analysis

- The samples of the writing were checked by using the rubrics which focused on accuracy, organization, voice, and multimodal in the digital task.
- The quantitative survey data were exposed to statistical summarization to identify the tendencies of pedagogical values in motivation differences among the various tasks.
- Thematic coding was done on qualitative data in form of questionnaires, interviews and field notes to shed light on the attitudes of learners, perceived challenges and possible instructional implications.

Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted in strict ethical guidelines in order to facilitate fairness and respect in the research process. All participants gave informed consent and fully informed them of the purpose of the study and willingly participated. Privacy of the participants was ensured with the help of confidentiality and no one was coerced to participate in the study. Additionally, all the reporting was to be anonymous to ensure individual identities.

Limitations

Being a small-scale, context-related study, the findings cannot be generalized but provided a valuable input to other situations of ESL teaching. There are chances of introducing biases due to the dual role of teacher-researcher and this was reduced

with the help of triangulation across various sources of data and reflective practice.

Findings
- Common to the task involving the use of the stone style, which is lexically oriented was seen to be restricting and was relatively less enjoyable to learners.
- Narrative activities taken on paper contributed to building structural coherence and authorial voice thus playing a central mediating role in the instructional continuum.
- Digital storytelling increased motivation in learners and teamwork skills; however, it also highlighted the difference in digital access which impacted some learners.
- The task on the screen made the participants more conscious of the audience consideration and enabled the proposal of multimodal expression.

These findings indicate that a mixed method approach, which combines the old and new writing practices, is a viable approach to balance between acquisition of skills and the long-term involvement in the instruction of writing in ELTs.

Table 4: Key Findings by Writing Task

Task	Motivation	Skills Developed	Challenges
Stone-Inspired	Low	High linguistic accuracy	Perceived as limiting and less engaging
Paper-Based	Medium	High narrative structure	Transition bridge
Screen-Based	High	High creativity, digital literacy	Access inequities for some students

As shown in table 4 students who are driven to finish activities based on screens are less likely to have creative and digital abilities than those who are inspired by stone.

Implications for ELT Pedagogy
Adopting Writing as Process and Product
The digital tools also introduce the process oriented pedagogical paradigm where emphasis is made on drafting, feedback and revision with the assistance of the smooth editing and commenting that may be conducted using these technologies. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that the aspect of clarity and consistency must be created in the finished product particularly within the academic or scholarly setting.

Composing Multimodal Designing
The mixture of digital storytelling, blogs, and multimedia projects offers learners with the opportunity of writing beyond the norm of the text therefore employing multiple forms of communication. The application of apps such as adobe spark or Storybird can support the English Language Teaching environment, because it can provide multifaceted affordances.

Learning How to Be an Authentic Audience
Posting student work on classroom blogs or e-portfolios introduces real-life audiences and therefore builds up the perception of the intentions, stylistic decisions and tone manipulations which transcend beyond teacher-student dyad.

The Creation of Critical Digital Citizenship
Education on the analysis of web-based sources, reference guidelines, copyright regulations, and provisions on online privacy in clear terms will enable the student to participate in the Internet in an ethical way, which is one of the required aspects of literacy in the modern world.

Pressing the Buttons to Equity and Access
The educators need to develop flexible online writing assignments, which can embrace the difference in availability of equipment and access to the internet, which will play a role in inclusiveness and arousal of institutional awareness regarding the digital gap.

Critical Problems and Solutions
Evaluation of Multimodal and Digital Genres

The use of rubrics to measure accuracy, content, innovation, and design allows for an equitable assessment of many subjects. Portfolio-based assessments (which include essays, blogs, and multimedia artifacts) give a learner a holistic view of evaluation.

Executing Cognitive Fret and focus

The division of the complex digital writing tasks, into smaller and more specific ones, would assist the learner in engaging in the task and minimizing cognitive overload. In- depth learning is also facilitated by clear instructions and thinking activities.

Instructional Leadership Teacher Training

Assessment using the development of rubrics used to measure accuracy, content, creativity, and design renders an assessment of different themes equitable. Portfolio based assessments (which are part of essays, blogs, and multimedia artifacts) provide a comprehensive perspective of assessment to a learner.

Executing Cognitive Fret and focus

The division of the complex digital writing tasks, into smaller and more specific ones, would assist the learner in engaging in the task and minimizing cognitive overload. In- depth learning is also facilitated by clear instructions and thinking activities.

Classroom Activities

- Epigraphy/ Mini-Inscriptions: The use of brief, purposeful messages on cards simulates the accuracy in classic epigraphy, and thus encourages the careful choice of words and care in writing.
- Writing Letters: Handwritten letters give students an opportunity to develop reflective prose, allowing the students to learn to talk with a different voice through the use of a tangible writing material.
- Collaborative Blog Writing: Group blogging creates teamwork, editorial skills and authenticity of being a published writer in the digital environment.
- Digital Stories: Multimodal narratives Multimodal narratives are created by merging textual, audio, and visual features to support and promote multimodal literacy and innovating the ways of telling stories.
- Social Media Writing Workshops: Stylistic brevity and rhetorical suitability are trained through systematic analysis and output of micro-texts, i.e. tweets and captions.
- Media Literacy Lessons: students learn to be skeptical of the online sources of information and follow the ethical principles in citing the references in order to promote ethical academic behaviour.

Chart 1 Motivation and Skills Development Across Writing Tasks

Conclusion: Writing as a Bridge Across Time

Writing is one of the best inventions of human race that brings us all together since the crude chiselling of the stones all through to the recent zoltz lightning speed digital discussions. Writing has been the tool of telling the stories and the laws, as well as the tool of bringing the visions of the new ways of life and creating a bond with other people in other places. The stone tablets had originally been assured of immortal wisdom. It is online writing that makes up instant communication and makes colourful people all over the world connected to each other. Speaking of teaching writing, especially when it comes to English Language Teaching (ELT) it should be stated that the process of teaching writing is quite more than a skill. It is an integration of the ancient art of writing that entails spelling and the structure with the digital art.

This is not just a means of having good writers, but also good communication people who are flexible to diverse environments and individuals. The combination of digital technologies, collaboration, and multimodal writing using conventional ones can assist students in being fluent, innovative, and adaptable in writing. This aspect of coming into contact with new forms and new possibilities also entails that they learn to be critical-minded and culturally sensitive since they continue to discover the old wisdom by means of new possibilities. This instructional approach will enable the learners to respond to the actual life problems through adhering to the fixed and unsteady nature of writing. It assists students in visualizing themselves as being part of a very big continuing narrative, where any written piece of work upholds experience and generates new discourses. Writing is thus both the living bridge, it is a continuum in the traditional sense of this word and it is also change, which is generational.

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