

# ESSAY WRITING IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN GLOBAL CONTEXTS: ANALYSIS OF PRE-POST INTERVENTION STUDY

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**Abstract.** Essay writing in a foreign language is of a high demand in the labor market. Essay writing in a foreign language is intended for audiences – including online users - with diverse cultural background in different parts of the globe. the aim of this article is to analyze the effectiveness of techniques (digital tools, visual aids, and interactive activities) for essay writing in a foreign language via the study of the pre-post intervention. The evaluation study was implemented at Riga Ilguciema Elementary School in Riga, Latvia. The study took place in April 2024. 20 students took part in the quasi-experiment. The average percentage value regarding improvement or deterioration of the result during the experiment is 7.99%. This result is obtained using the average formula regarding the percentage of each student's result. This number indicates that the overall essay writing result among students in grade eight has improved at least by 8%. Thereby, the finding is that the leverage of three techniques – digital tools, visual aids, and interactive activities – are effective for the development of students' essay writing in a foreign language.

**Keywords:** digital tools in teaching essay writing, essay writing, foreign language, global context, interactive activities, mother tongue, visual aids

## INTRODUCTION

Essay writing in a foreign language is of a high demand in the labor market. Essay writing in a foreign language is becoming more complicated due to the pervasive spread of the Internet and online access to essay materials. Essay writing in a foreign language is intended for audiences – including online users - with diverse cultural background in different parts of the globe. Essay writing in a foreign language is getting more complicated as essay writer's mother tongue, that impacts his/her essay writing in a foreign language, can be different from the mother tongue of the essay's readers. Even a difference in a level of the mother tongue of the essay writer and reader might create misunderstanding between them. Figure 1 reflects the relationships between global context, essay writing in a foreign language, and mother tongue of the write and reader.

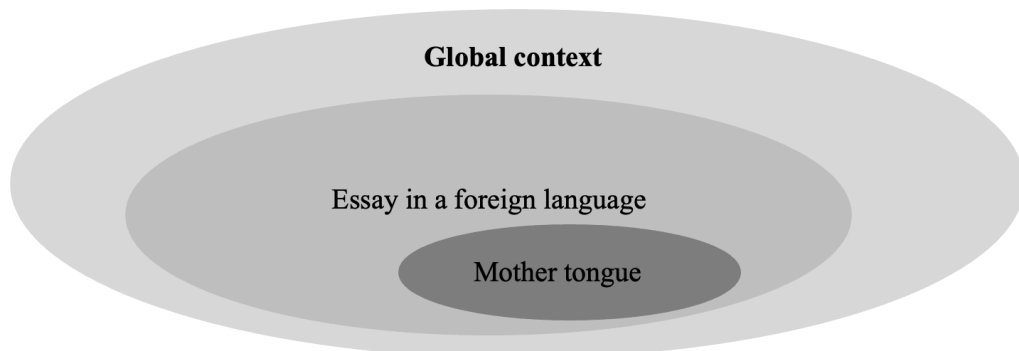


Figure 1. Relationships between global context, essay writing in a foreign language, and mother tongue

Essay writing in a foreign language can be enhanced through the leverage of techniques. Examination of the effectiveness of these techniques requires the study of the pre- and post-intervention. Therefore, the aim of this article is to analyze the effectiveness of techniques for essay writing in a foreign language via the study of the pre-post intervention.

## RESEARCH METHOD

The empirical study was motivated by the research question: What techniques are effectiveness for teaching essay writing in a foreign language?

The purpose of the empirical study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention built on applied techniques for teaching essay writing in a foreign language. The intervention was built on the combination of three teaching techniques: 1.Integration of digital tools such as Kahoot, social media and others in teaching essay writing. 2.Incorporation of visual aids. 3.Use of interactive activities.

The evaluation study (Zašcerinska, 2010a) was implemented at Riga Ilguciema Elementary School in Riga, Latvia. The study took place in April 2024. 20 students took part in the quasi-experiment. English is a foreign language for the participating students. It should be also pointed that the educational process at Riga Ilguciema Elementary School

is implemented in the Latvian language. However, Latvian language is not the mother tongue for all the participating students. Figure 2 highlights the relationships between global context, essay writing in a foreign language, language of the educational process, and mother tongue of the write and reader.

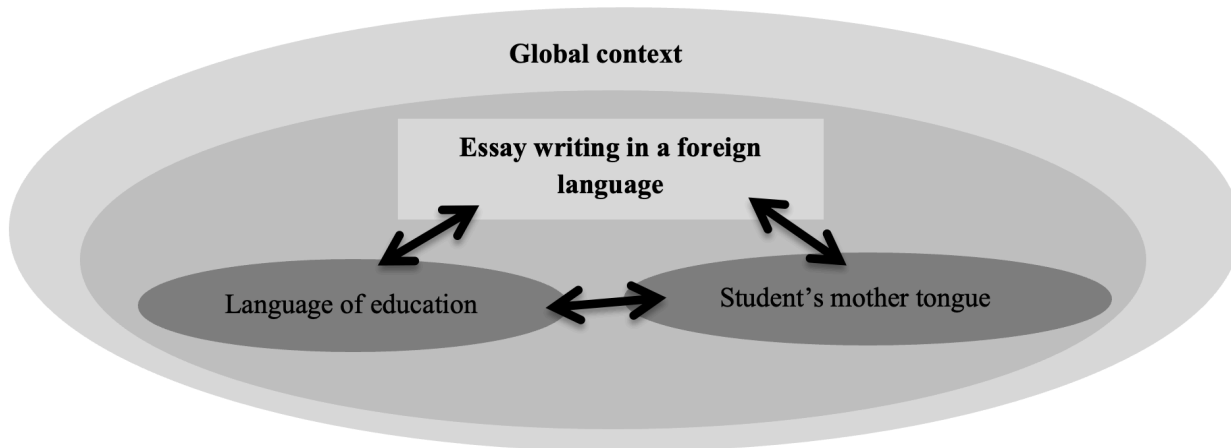


Figure 2. The relationships between global context, essay writing in a foreign language, language of the educational process, and mother tongue

All the languages interact with each other and impact each other (Zaščerinska, 2010a).

The data were collected via the pre- and post-test. The collected data were analyzed via a difference between the points in the student's pre- and post-test as well as percentage.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The main purpose of the quasi-experiment was to check the effectiveness of three techniques (digital tools, visual aids, and interactive activities) applied to teaching essay writing in a foreign language:

**Digital tools:** Using technology to teach essay writing increases student engagement and participation in writing instruction (Williams & Beam, 2019). With the help of digital technologies, teachers can motivate students to participate in the learning process, since digital technologies are considered popular and interesting among students (Williams & Beam, 2019). The use of technology in essay writing learning helps students focus on specific tasks and stay on the way to solve those problems (Williams & Beam, 2019). Also, digital technologies contribute to the expansion of interaction and cooperation between students, not only among peers, but also between students and the teacher. This is based on the connections that are made during learning how to use computer technology to teach writing (Williams & Beam, 2019).

Gamification including online gaming is an effective technology tool (Zaščerinskis, Zaščerinska, Gloņina, & Andreeva, 2013). Gamification is the use of technology, thinking and aesthetics to facilitate learning, engage and encourage people, as well for problem solving (Yunus, Hashim, Hashim, Yahya, Sabri, Nazeri, 2019). An example of a platform that includes gamification is Kahoot (Yunus, Hashim, Hashim, Yahya, Sabri, Nazeri, 2019). Kahoot is a game-based learning platform designed to engage students in the learning process. This platform can serve as an alternative media as by playing Kahoot games (such as answering questions), students better focus on the topic and learn the educational material faster, which motivates them to study. The use of Kahoot in teaching essay writing can be done by reinforcing the material being studied (for example, teacher can ask students to choose the correct order for the essay structure, introduction, body, conclusion, which will allow them to better remember the structure of the essay, etc.) or by testing students' knowledge of specific topic related to writing (Yunus, Hashim, Hashim, Yahya, Sabri & Nazeri, 2019).

Another powerful tool in the digital world for teaching English is social media (Lakhal, 2021). Social media have a huge impact on people today as they bring together a wide variety of people with some common interests, activities and experiences, allowing people to share ideas or make new discoveries with other people (Lakhal, 2021). Social media offer a variety of educational materials (texts, audio, video, etc.) and involve active learning among students Lakhal (2021). The use of social media in teaching essay writing increases student engagement in the learning process (Lakhal, 2021). Social media develops interactions between people through the transmission/reception of information (Mukminin, Habibi, Muhaimin, & Hidayat, 2023). In most cases, communication through social networks occurs through sending messages, assuming that a person will come up with a text, type it and send it to the recipient. Students perform similar actions in the process of writing an essay: they come up with an idea, analyze it, write it down on paper, reread it and correct it. Therefore, the use of social media in learning essay writing can have a positive impact on students' essay writing (Lakhal, 2021). One of the effective social networks for teaching English to students is YouTube (Prihatini, Prihatin & Sani, 2018). YouTube is a popular social network used to watch videos. The use of YouTube in the classroom can have a number of positive effects on students' essay writing learning (Prihatini, Prihatin & Sani, 2018). First, by watching relevant videos, students can discover new ideas and discuss them with peers. Since all people perceive information differently, the YouTube platform is suitable for everyone, since the videos contain audio and visual information (many

videos also have subtitles available in several languages), accordingly making it easier to perceive this information. Secondly, students can expand their vocabulary and learn how to construct sentences correctly. Thirdly, the use of YouTube in English lessons for teaching students essay writing can increase their interest and motivation to learn. An example of using YouTube would be using a video that explains educational material in a way that students can understand (Prihatini, Prihatin, & Sani, 2018).

**Visual aids:** Essay writing is an important language skill as it helps students better understand and learn the language. In the essay writing process, students have the task of expressing a specific idea using vocabulary and grammar appropriate to the topic. Teachers can have a great impact on students' learning to write because they can motivate students to write by creating the right conditions for generating ideas (Abdullah & Yunus, 2019). To enhance students' motivation in essay writing, apps, slides, and digital posters should be used, which has a positive impact on essay writing learning outcomes among eighth grade students (Muhamad, Lidiyatul, & Qondila, 2021). Visual aids such as pictures, presentation slides, posters, diagrams, photographs, etc. are valuable tools for teaching English foreign language (EFL). Visual materials greatly facilitate the memorization of information, which makes language learning effective (Abdullah & Yunus, 2019). When learning to write essays, visual aids can have a significant impact on students' results, since looking at pictures stimulates students' attention and helps them develop ideas, which subsequently affects the construction of sentences in essays (Abdullah & Yunus, 2019). The choice of visual aids is based on supporting students in essay writing by helping them to organize ideas, select appropriate vocabulary items, and combine them into sentences (Abdullah & Yunus, 2019). For example, one of the linguistic strategies for effective essay writing is discourse markers (Al-khazraji, 2019). Discourse markers are words and phrases that connect one section of a sequential text to another (Al-khazraji, 2019). They serve as important elements that make it easier for the reader to perceive the flow of the text (Al-khazraji, 2019). Discourse markers are particularly important in essay writing because they can help students learn text coherence, which is essential in essay writing (Al-khazraji, 2019). Discourse markers can be presented in pictures, tables or slides as visual aids that attract students' attention and allow them to easily remember the material and subsequently use it when writing an essay (Al-khazraji, 2019). Another visual aid is the visual effects used in presentations. Pictures and color effects in the presentation, which are associated with real life, attract the attention of most students (Patesan, Balagiu, & Alibec, 2018). Providing students with the opportunity to refer to visual material (pictures, effects) and compare it with their own real-life experiences or known experiences of others increases understanding of topics and students' involvement in the learning process (Patesan, Balagiu, & Alibec, 2018). Posters are an effective means of allowing students to absorb a large amount of information in a short period of time (Alsalihi, 2020). Posters are sheets that display any information. Posters are considered visual aids because they help explain words and phrases, convey information about events, and visually demonstrate differences between something (Alsalihi, 2020).

**Interactive activities:** Interactive writing activity can be defined as the collaborative efforts of students and teacher in the process of exchanging experiences and ideas to create a piece of writing (Lumbantoruan, Sihotang, & Situmeang, 2022). Interactive activities involve the creation of comfortable conditions for students so that they can successfully develop and acquire the necessary knowledge and skills. Interactive activities involve students collaborative work on a task (Brito, 2019). Interactive activities (Senthamarai, 2018) include 1. Think, pair, share strategy. 2. Brainstorming is a process aimed to bring students together to generate creative ideas and thoughts. 3. Live session when students gather in groups and express their ideas/thoughts on a specific topic. 4. Questions and Answers Session. 5. Incident Process. When initiating an incident process, the teacher divides students into groups, provides them with details of a real-life situation, and asks students to find an effective solution for the situation.

The quasi-experiment states that introducing structured essay writing techniques that include digital tools, visual aids and interactive activities will positively improve eighth graders' writing skills in English classes, then at the beginning and at the end of the experiment the teacher tested the students.

Pre-testing of students took place in the first week, after students were familiarized with the topic of essay writing, the structure and types of essays. Before the pre-test, the teacher conducted an interactive lesson, during which the students had the opportunity to discuss and express their opinions on various topics, working in pairs. The main task of the pre-test was to write an opinion essay on one of these topics. The students pulled a ticket to get the topic they would write about.

Table 1

<b>Points and requirements for the assessment criterion of the content and execution of the task</b>				
<b>Assessment criteria: Content and execution of the task</b>				
<b>PERFORMANCE DESCRIPTION, POINTS:</b>				
An attempt to write about the topic, the text of the task has been rewritten.	Text content that partially corresponds to the conditions of the task and reflects information from the task.	Mainly text content that corresponds to the conditions of the task; repetitions or deviations from the conditions of the task are possible.	The content of the text corresponds to the conditions of the task, whereby the opinion is supported with individual examples.	The content of the text fully corresponds to the conditions of the task and the communication situation and justifies the opinion with relevant examples.
<b>1 point</b>	<b>2 points</b>	<b>3 points</b>	<b>4 points</b>	<b>5 points</b>

The results of the pre-test were assessed in relation to these criteria: content, organization, grammar and accuracy. The maximum number of points that students could score on each criterion was 5 points. Table 1 demonstrates

essay performance descriptions for obtaining a certain number of points on the assessment criterion of content and execution of the task.

A student can receive the least number of points if he/she only rewrote the terms of the assignment (has added one topic sentence in the essay). The largest number of points is assigned if the content of the essay fully corresponds to the topic and substantiates the author's opinion with logical examples/situations.

Table 2 demonstrates essay performance descriptions for obtaining a certain number of points on the assessment criterion of the organization and text formation.

Table 2

**Points and requirements for the assessment criterion of the organization and text formation**

<b>Assessment criteria: Organization and text formation</b>				
<b>PERFORMANCE DESCRIPTION, POINTS:</b>				
The text contains several coherent sentences and some structural elements. The direction of the thoughts is barely recognisable.	The structure of the text only partially corresponds to the task. The combination of words and paragraphs only partially corresponds to the principles of text structure and content presentation.	The presentation of the text corresponds as far as possible to the task at hand. Predominantly coherent text; connecting words and paragraphs correspond in part to the principles of text structure and content presentation.	Formatting of the text according to the task. Coherent text; connecting words and paragraphs are more in line with the principles of text structure and presentation of content.	Formatting of the text according to the task. Clear and coherent text; connecting words and paragraphs fully comply with the principles of text structure and content presentation.
<b>1 point</b>	<b>2 points</b>	<b>3 points</b>	<b>4 points</b>	<b>5 points</b>

Inconsistency with the structure of the essay (introduction, main part, conclusion) and lack of coherence of thoughts in the essay are assessed with the least number of points. A student can receive the greatest number of points if he/she writes a coherent text that matches the structure of the essay.

Table 3 demonstrates essay performance descriptions for obtaining a certain number of points on the assessment criterion of the variety of linguistic means (lexical and grammatical structures).

Table 3

**Points and requirements for the assessment criterion of the variety of linguistic means (lexical and grammatical structures)**

<b>Assessment criteria: Variety of linguistic means (lexical and grammatical structures)</b>				
<b>PERFORMANCE DESCRIPTION, POINTS:</b>				
The linguistic means are very limited, the use of simple, memorized phrases.	Limited vocabulary, use of memorized phrases and simple grammatical structures that are often repeated.	Sufficient vocabulary to express thoughts simply using basic grammatical structures.	Sufficiently copious vocabulary and grammatical structures used predominantly in accordance with the context appropriate to the task and communication.	Appropriate vocabulary and grammatical structures to complete tasks effectively and communicate clearly.
<b>1 point</b>	<b>2 points</b>	<b>3 points</b>	<b>4 points</b>	<b>5 points</b>

Limited vocabulary and memorized simple phrases, as well as many grammatical errors, are scored with the least number of points. A student can get the greatest number of points through the effective use of expanded vocabulary and grammatical structures in an essay.

Table 4 demonstrates essay performance descriptions for obtaining a certain number of points on the assessment criterion of the correctness and accuracy of language use (vocabulary, grammar and spelling).

A student can receive the least number of points if the essay contains many errors, which make it difficult to understand. To get the greatest number of points, the student must write a clear and accurate essay, without errors.

Table 4

**Points and requirements for the assessment criterion of the correctness and accuracy of language use (vocabulary, grammar and spelling)**

<b>Assessment criteria: Correctness and accuracy of language use (vocabulary, grammar and spelling)</b>				
<b>PERFORMANCE DESCRIPTION, POINTS:</b>				
The use of language is mostly incorrect and only partially comprehensible.	The use of language is often incorrect and sometimes disturbs the perception of thoughts.	The use of language is mostly clear, although there are sentences or words that are incorrect.	The use of language is generally accurate; a few occasional errors do not affect the understanding of the text.	The use of language is generally accurate, with a few errors in more complex constructions not affecting the understanding of what is written.
<b>1 point</b>	<b>2 points</b>	<b>3 points</b>	<b>4 points</b>	<b>5 points</b>

In total, students could score 20 points, which corresponded to a very high level. Table 5 illustrates points and their correspondence to the levels of assessment of essay writing.

Table 5

Points and their correspondence to the levels of assessment of essay writing					
<b>Assessment points</b>	0-4 points	4-8 points	8-12 points	12-16 points	16-20 points
<b>Assessment levels</b>	Very low	Low	Average	High	Very high

According to the results of the pre-test, most of the students' errors were related to grammar and accuracy. Some students had difficulties organizing the essay (students didn't follow the basic essay structure - introduction, main part, conclusion). However, almost all students coped well with the content of the essay (students expressed their opinions on the topic of the essay, supporting it with generally accepted facts and situations from real life).

After analyzing these results, the teacher concluded that more attention should be paid to grammar, accuracy and organization when teaching eight grade students how to write essays. Therefore, throughout the three weeks of experiment, the teacher tried different interactive methods and also used visual tools to improve essay writing among eighth graders.

In the last week of the experiment, the teacher administered a post-test. During post-testing, students wrote opinion essay on the topic of a healthy lifestyle. Previously, the teacher conducted a lesson on this topic, during which the students expanded their vocabulary, discussed good and bad human habits, as well as played Kahoot for the material revision. When preparing the topic for the last essay, the teacher wrote three clauses on the topic that the essay should include. Since students often wonder what to write about in an essay despite being given a specific topic, these clauses help students to better organize their thoughts and ideas and write specifically on the topic.

The post-test assessment was carried out using the same criteria that were selected for the pre-test assessment, in order to compare the results and determine the changes that occurred with the students during the period of essay writing learning.

Figure 3 shows the students' pre-test and post-test results in essay writing in the foreign language, namely English.

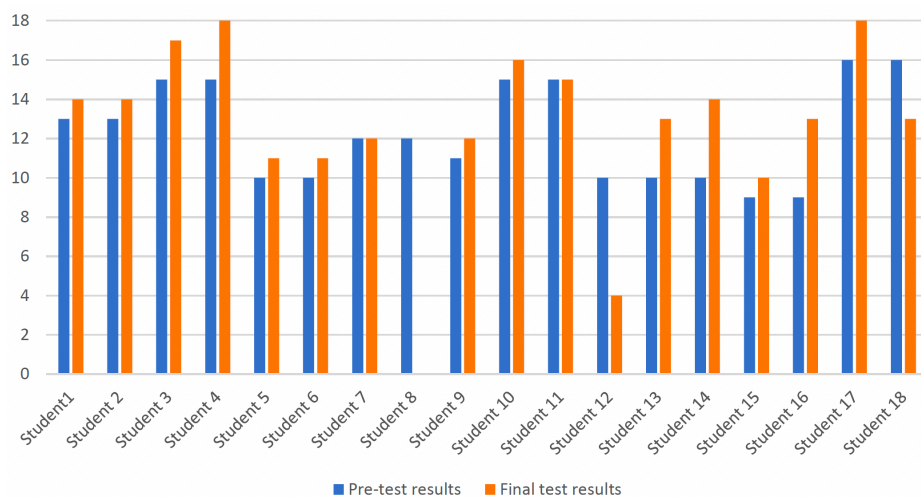


Figure 3. The students' pre-test and post-test results in essay writing in English

Table 6 demonstrates the differences in the students' pre-test and post-test points, levels as well as the percentage changes in the students' scores.

Table 6

Students' results in the pre- and post-test					
Student	Pre-test assessment results (in points)	Pre-test assessment levels	Post-test assessment results (in points)	Post-test assessment results	Percentage changes in students' pre-test and post-test scores
Student 1	13	High	14	High	7,69
Student 2	13	High	14	High	7,69
Student 3	15	High	17	Very high	13,33
Student 4	15	High	18	Very high	20,00
Student 5	10	Average	11	Average	10,00
Student 6	10	Average	11	Average	10,00
Student 7	12	Average	12	High	0,00
Student 8	12	Average	-	-	0,00
Student 9	11	Average	12	High	9,09
Student 10	15	High	16	Very high	6,67
Student 11	15	High	15	High	0,00



Student 12	10	Average	4	Low	-60,00
Student 13	10	Average	13	High	30,00
Student 14	10	Average	14	High	40,00
Student 15	9	Average	10	Average	11,11
Student 16	9	Average	13	High	44,44
Student 17	16	High	18	Very high	12,50
Student 18	16	High	13	High	-18,75
Student 19	-	-	-	-	-
Student 20	-	-	12	Average	-

The first column displays the number of students who took part in the pre-test and post-test. The second column discloses the results of the students' pre-test assessment in points. A total of 18 students participated in the pre-test. The third column presents the students' post-test assessment results in points. 18 students took part in the post-test, too. Table 1 emphasizes that the two students who did not take part in the pre-test and post-test in one case is the same student, and in the second case, these are two different students.

The pre-test results showed that the class scored 12 points out of 20 on average, which corresponds to the average level of knowledge in essay writing in English. The largest number of points was 16, which corresponds to a high level; only two students showed this result. While the lowest number of points was 9, which corresponds to the average level, this result was achieved by only two students.

The post-test results showed that the class averaged 13 points out of 20, which corresponds to a high level. The highest number of points was 18, which corresponds to a very high level. Only 2 students showed this result. Whereas the lowest number of points was 4, which corresponds to a very low level. Only one student had this result.

The average percentage value regarding improvement of the result during the experiment is 7.99%. This result is obtained using the average formula regarding the percentage of each student's result. This number indicates that the overall essay writing result among students in grade eight has improved at least by 8%. Thereby, the finding is that the leverage of three techniques – digital tools, visual aids, and interactive activities – are effective for the development of students' essay writing in a foreign language.

## CONCLUSIONS

The theoretical analysis allows finding the interconnections between the global context, essay writing in a foreign language, language of the educational process, and mother tongue of the write and reader. Another theoretical finding is that languages as an individual unity are linked and impact each other. Student's mother tongue influences student's essay writing in a foreign language, and vice versa.

The empirical study reveals that the combination of three techniques – digital tools, visual aids, and interactive activities – is effective for the development of students' essay writing in a foreign language. The pre- and post-test results show the improvement in the students' essay writing in a foreign language.

The empirical study has a limitation in a number of study participants. Another limitation is the quasi-experiment that was carried out only in one grade, namely eighth grade. Implementation of the quasi-experiment is limited by taking place only in one country, namely Latvia.

Future research will widen the engagement of the quasi-experiment participants of different educational levels, grades, educational institutions, and countries.

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