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UNVEILING THE POTENTIAL OF DIGITAL STORYTELLING IN NARRATIVE WRITING:
A Qualitative Study at a Vocational High School

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ABSTRACT

Many students perceive writing, especially in English, as a complex and challenging task. Digital Storytelling (DS), which integrates audio, images, video, text, and interactive elements, has emerged as an innovative medium to support students in developing their narrative writing skills. This qualitative study explores the experiences and challenges faced by tenth-grade vocational high school students in West Java, Indonesia, when using DS as a medium for learning narrative writing. The findings reveal that students navigate five key stages: familiarizing themselves with the DS application, crafting their stories with teacher feedback, transferring content to DS, editing, and submitting their narratives. While digital storytelling fosters creativity, supports idea development, and provides students with a novel writing experience, it also presents challenges. These include difficulties in adding text, selecting suitable images, customizing text styles and colours, as well as technical issues related to devices and internet connectivity. The study highlights the importance of teacher preparation and proficiency with DS applications to ensure effective classroom implementation. These insights emphasize the potential of DS to transform narrative writing instruction while addressing its practical challenges.

Keywords: Digital Storytelling, Narrative Text, Storyjumper, English writing, Learning Media

INTRODUCTION

Writing is a crucial skill in learning English, as it allows individuals to transform ideas into words, sentences, and paragraphs that can be understood by others. Sakkir

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et al. (2016) emphasize the importance of writing in acquiring a target language, particularly English, as it enables EFL students to express their imagination, ideas, insights, and creativity. For EFL students, learning narrative text is essential because it fosters creativity, imagination, and critical thinking. However, many students perceive writing, especially in English, as complicated and irrelevant. Novariana et al. (2018) highlight that students often struggle with linguistic elements, grammatical structures, and motivation, making writing a challenging task for EFL learners.

To address these challenges, teachers must explore innovative and engaging mediums that enhance students' narrative writing skills while sparking their interest in writing. Traditional, paper-based approaches can disengage students, further diminishing their willingness to write. However, blending traditional methods with modern technology can revitalize the learning process. For example, tools like mind maps and digital storytelling enable students to combine creativity with technology, making writing a more enjoyable and meaningful experience. Hillmayr et al. (2020) note that incorporating digital resources into teaching strategies can modernize education without replacing its fundamental purpose.

Despite the increasing integration of technology in education, many teachers fail to make it an engaging experience. Often, technology use in classrooms is limited to searching for information online. Instead, teachers can actively guide students to use technology creatively, such as through digital storytelling. Rubegni and Landoni (2018) argue that digital technology enriches learning experiences and supports the development of language and communication skills. Introducing tools like digital storytelling allows students to brainstorm and collaborate while fostering engagement and creativity.

Digital storytelling offers multifaceted benefits, as Foley (2013, in Gürsoy, 2021) highlights, including identity development, multitasking skills, collaboration, peer feedback, and 21st-century competencies. By integrating digital storytelling into language learning, students can enhance their writing, communication, and critical thinking skills. Applications like *StoryJumper* facilitate this process by enabling students to create digital narratives enriched with multimedia elements such as images, audio, and video. Tarigan and Liana (2018) found that *StoryJumper* significantly improves students' writing scores, while Choo & Li Li (2017) recommend it as an effective tool for teaching English writing.

Although prior research has explored the use of digital storytelling in writing instruction, there remains a need for deeper investigation into its specific application in teaching narrative texts. This study focuses on understanding students' experiences and challenges when using digital storytelling to write narrative texts. By examining these aspects, this research aims to provide valuable insights for educators and researchers, contributing to the effective integration of digital storytelling into narrative writing instruction.

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THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Writing is an essential skill in English language learning, serving as one of the four core skills required for communication. It involves the use of written symbols to represent sounds, syllables, or words, incorporating capitalization, spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure. Writing allows individuals to express ideas, emotions, and desires through a system of symbols, making it a form of indirect communication and a means to preserve and share knowledge and culture (Putri & Amidatun, 2021). According to Citraresmana (2018), writing reflects a person's language abilities and is often considered a mirror of the writer's thoughts and feelings. Through writing, learners can convey information, create stories, or compile essays, articles, and diaries. Writing is also expressive, enabling students to organize and communicate ideas effectively. Continuous practice helps learners enhance their writing clarity and effectiveness, as noted by Jayanti (2019). However, many students, particularly EFL learners, often view writing as difficult or unimportant, requiring additional motivation and strategies to foster improvement (Asiah et al, 2020).

Narrative Text

Narrative text is a type of writing that recounts events or experiences over a specific period, with the primary purpose of entertaining or conveying a story. It typically includes elements such as characters, plot, conflict, and resolution. Rohmana et al. (2019) describe narrative text as structured writing that can be fictional or non-fictional, while Latifa and Manan (2018) emphasize its imaginative nature, often crafted to captivate readers.

Narrative writing focuses on telling stories, either based on real-life events or the author's imagination. Sulaiman (2017) highlights that narrative writing connects events through cause-and-effect relationships and time sequences, structured to introduce characters, establish settings, and develop plots. This type of writing encourages creativity and helps students practice organizing ideas into coherent and engaging stories.

Digital Storytelling

Digital storytelling integrates storytelling with digital media, offering a modern approach to teaching and learning. Fitri et al. (2021) note that digital storytelling enhances language learning by engaging students in creating narratives using multimedia elements such as text, audio, video, and images. This approach fosters technical and creative skills, strengthens linguistic abilities, and makes the learning process more interactive and engaging.

Reinders (2011) emphasizes the ability of digital storytelling to combine multimedia elements, making stories more compelling and appealing. Sarica and Usluel (2016) argue that digital storytelling enriches learning by combining visual

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and narrative components, which enhances students' memory and motivation while improving their writing and creative abilities. Furthermore, Rong &Noor (2019) highlights its value as a Web 2.0 tool, facilitating interactive and contextualized learning experiences in language classrooms.

According to Center for Digital Storytelling (2005 in Tarigan, 2016), the key elements of digital storytelling include point of view (the author's perspective), dramatic question (a question resolved by the end of the story), emotional content (engaging the audience emotionally), the gift of voice (personalizing the story for context), soundtrack (using audio to enhance the narrative), economy (concise and efficient storytelling) and pacing (maintaining an appropriate rhythm for the story). Digital storytelling also takes various forms, including personal narratives, documentary stories, and fairy tales, each tailored to engage audiences in different ways. By effectively combining these elements, educators can create immersive learning experiences that captivate students while building language and communication skills.

StoryJumper

StoryJumper is a digital storytelling platform that facilitates creative storytelling, allowing users to create and publish digital storybooks. It serves as an effective tool for developing writing, reading, listening, and speaking skills while fostering creativity. StoryJumper supports interactive learning and encourages innovation, as noted by Fitriyani, et al. (2023). The platform enables users to incorporate multimedia elements such as text, images, and audio, making it an engaging tool for both teachers and students that make it suitable to use as a medium in facilitating students' process of learning writing. In previous studies, StoryJumper has been used in supporting students' learning of descriptive (Fitriyani et al, 2023) and creative writing (Binti Mohammad & Yamat, 2020) showing the improved writing development and motivation as well as positive perception. By leveraging tools like StoryJumper, educators can create a dynamic and engaging environment for teaching narrative writing, combining traditional storytelling with the benefits of digital innovation.

METHOD

This study adopted a qualitative research design, employing observation, interviews, and document reviews as the primary methods of data collection. Qualitative methods were chosen because they are well-suited to exploring multiple perspectives and realities, allowing researchers to interact directly with participants to gain deeper insights into their experiences. These methods are also flexible and responsive to emerging patterns and contextual influences. Creswell & Creswell (2018) describe qualitative research as a method to "describe, explore, and understand the meaning given by individuals or groups to social or human

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problems." Similarly, Kriek and Miller (as cited in Moleong, 2017) emphasize that qualitative approaches prioritize studying people in their natural environments and understanding their experiences through their language and terminology. Hendryadi et al. (2019) further highlight qualitative research as a naturalistic process that seeks to deeply comprehend social phenomena in real-life contexts.

This study focuses on two key research questions: how students experience using StoryJumper as one of DST platforms for creating digital narrative texts, and what challenges they face when transitioning their narrative drafts to technology-mediated learning. The participants were 32 tenth-grade students from a vocational high school during the 2023–2024 academic year. One of the researchers, who also acted as their English teacher, facilitated the learning process and guided the students through the various stages of data collection.To gather data, three instruments were utilized: observation, questionnaires, and interviews. Observation provided insights into students' engagement and behaviour during the learning process. Questionnaires were used to collect students' perspectives and opinions, while interviews offered an in-depth exploration of the challenges they encountered. These instruments were specifically designed to comprehensively address both research questions and ensure the collection of meaningful data.

To analyse the collected data, the study followed Creswell& Creswell's (2018) five-stage approach to qualitative data analysis. The process began with organizing and preparing the data for analysis by sorting information from observations, questionnaires, and interviews. The researcher then read through all the data to gain an overall understanding before coding it to identify recurring patterns and themes. These codes were used to create descriptions and develop themes that addressed the research questions. Finally, the researcher interpreted the findings and presented them through themes and narratives that provided comprehensive answers to the study's objectives.

This qualitative design enabled a thorough exploration of students' experiences with digital storytelling and the challenges they encountered. The researcher's role as both facilitator and observer allowed for a deeper connection with the participants, ensuring that the data collected was rich and meaningful.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Students' Experiences in composing narrative text with Digital Storytelling

This section discusses the findings related to students' experiences with digital storytelling, specifically using StoryJumper to create narrative texts. To address the first research question, the researcher utilized classroom observations, interviews, and questionnaires, actively participating as both teacher and observer. The data revealed a mix of excitement and challenges encountered by students during the learning process.

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In learning narrative writing through digital storytelling, the students experienced several learning stages. First, the students were introduced to StoryJumper as one of DS platform by reviewing the narrative text concepts they had previously learned and providing a demonstration of the platform's features. Then, they drafted the narrative text followed by the teacher's feedback to the text. After that, the students were guided through the process of accessing StoryJumper and given an overview of its functionality. Following this, students were tasked with transferring their handwritten narrative drafts into the digital platform with the teacher's support. While some students completed their work in class, others finished it at home. Once completed, students submitted their projects by sharing the StoryJumper links via WhatsApp. Throughout this process, students actively engaged with the platform, and many experienced digital storytelling for the first time.

From classroom observations, it was clear that students were enthusiastic about the opportunity to use digital storytelling. Interviews and questionnaire responses highlighted that most students found StoryJumper engaging and enjoyable. They appreciated the creative freedom it offered, particularly the ability to integrate images, audio, and text into their stories. Many students noted that StoryJumper allowed them to bring their narrative ideas to life in ways they had not experienced before. They described the platform as "fun" and "motivating," with several students expressing a newfound interest in writing through this medium. This aligns with the findings of Binti Mohammad and Yamat (2020), who argue that digital storytelling enhances student motivation and creativity in writing by providing an interactive platform for expression.

The integration of StoryJumper as a digital storytelling platform into the classroom not only enhanced the learning experience but also fostered creativity that developed students' narrative writing skills as revealed from the following interview result.

> Digital storytelling apps provides greater access to creative resources such as images, sounds, and animations that can inspire story ideas. With digital tools, I can easily create and organize plots, characters, and settings, as well as edit text more efficiently. I feel comfortable because I can explore characters, plots, and settings more broadly. This allows me to create texts that are more efficient, better, and more comprehensive [Interview, student 2]

The student's statement highlights the potential of digital storytelling apps such as StoryJumper in stimulating narrative writing ideas and its modification that support the students' creativity and their narrative writing development which also supported by other students' statements in interview and questionnaire that the use of digital storytelling in writing their narrative text helped them to be more creative in developing ideas, including plot and characters.

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Further, the use of digital storytelling as medium in learning narrative text inspired the students to continue and expand their writing.

From my experience, I want to explore further how to create digital books that can be shared online. [Questionnaire, student 4]

The statement shows that interactive aspect of digital storytelling encouraged the student to continue their exploration autonomously beyond the writing class. At that point, the platform's interactive features enabled the students to craft visually appealing and personalized storybooks, which contributed to a more engaging and enjoyable learning process. These findings are consistent with previous studies demonstrating the effectiveness of digital storytelling in developing second language (L2) writing skills.

Barriers to Using Digital Storytelling as a medium in Writing Narrative Texts

Despite its potentials, the use of StoryJumper as digital storytelling medium also presented challenges, as revealed through classroom observations, interviews, and questionnaires. One major issue was students' initial difficulty transitioning from traditional text-based methods to digital storytelling.

The observation data reveals the students' struggle in following instructions that required peer or teacher assistance to navigate the platform effectively. Internet connectivity problems were another common challenge, as unreliable access hindered the smooth implementation of digital storytelling activities. Internet connectivity issues emerged as a critical obstacle, particularly in areas with unreliable networks. Poor connectivity not only delayed students' work but also disrupted the overall flow of classroom activities. This issue underscores the need for stable internet access as a prerequisite for successful integration of digital tools like StoryJumper.

Device limitations further complicated the use of StoryJumper. Many students accessed the platform via mobile phones, where small screen sizes and intricate navigation made it difficult to edit text or manipulate design elements effectively. Through questionnaire and interview, the students reported issues with editing, such as clicking the wrong buttons due to the close proximity of editing marks. Additionally, the limited selection of images and animations on StoryJumper required students to search external platforms like Google or Pinterest for supplementary visuals, which was time-consuming and occasionally frustrating.

Interviews with several students revealed deeper insights into these challenges. Students mentioned difficulties in editing text, finding suitable images, and fully exploring StoryJumper's features.

The challenge is the hassle of switching between websites to find interesting images because the images on the StoryJumper platform are

less appealing. Another difficulty is the need to be meticulous, which can be overwhelming when dealing with the various buttons in the application. To overcome these issues, I need to watch more tutorials and ask for guidance from the teacher. [Interview, student 5]

The student explained that while the platform offered numerous tools, understanding and utilizing them required significant time and effort. The student noted that the platform's design constraints limited their ability to fully realize their creative vision. These findings highlight the importance of providing adequate guidance and support for students when introducing new digital tools.

CONCLUSION

The findings highlight the significant potential of StoryJumper as a medium in learning English narrative writing. It fosters creativity, encourages active participation, and enhances narrative writing ideas development in an interactive and dynamic manner. With adequate support and proper planning, digital storytelling can significantly enrich students' learning experiences, opening new avenues for creative expression and language development. While the challenges associated with StoryJumper—such as feature limitations, device constraints, and connectivity issues—cannot be overlooked, they provide valuable lessons for educators aiming to integrate digital storytelling into their classrooms. To address these barriers, teachers should offer detailed tutorials on using digital tools and allow ample time for students to familiarize themselves with the platform. Schools should also prioritize providing reliable internet access and devices with larger screens to enhance usability. Future research could explore the long-term impact of digital storytelling on students' writing proficiency and engagement, particularly across diverse educational settings and age groups.

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