

PROCEEDINGS OF THE 1ST ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING (AICELT)

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English Language Education Study Program, Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training, State Islamic University of Mataram

DIGITAL STORYTELLING AS ENGLISH WRITING PRACTICE: CHALLENGES FACED BY EFL STUDENTS

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Abstract

Digital storytelling, as the new development of traditional storytelling involving various media, is currently becoming one of the methods of teaching and learning English that is applicable in many schools. This method is suitable for the development of the four English language skills namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This study aimed to find the EFL students' perspectives toward Digital Storytelling (DST) focusing on the benefits and challenges students experience regarding their English writing. A descriptive design with a qualitative study is applied. To obtain the data, the researchers conducted observations and interviews. The data was then summarized and elaborated systematically. Based on the findings, the researchers found the three challenges the EFL students experience while creating digital storytelling in writing, namely: inadequate knowledge of grammar, brainstorming ideas to write, and sentence construction. Students agreed that their inconsistency, errors, lack of exposure, and unfamiliarity with the writing process all contributed to the challenges. This study also discovered that students viewed digital storytelling as beneficial to their education as it helps them practice using English in written forms and critical thinking skills. In conclusion, the use of digital storytelling-based tasks for EFL students is advantageous. This study will provide students, teachers, and future researchers with valuable insight to enhance language acquisition.

Keywords: Challenges, Writing Skills, EFL Students, Digital Storytelling

INTRODUCTION

Teachers need to understand both academic and non-academic fields that may bring benefits for students' learning development. Classroom activities are those including in the academic fields that teachers can utilize to facilitate their students in learning. Meanwhile, extracurricular is one of the non-academic fields that facilitates students' development, including English skills. This outside of class time activity can be utilized to develop students' interest and ability in, for instance, English speaking, debating, and writing. According to the Ministry of Education of Indonesia, extracurricular activities are considered as a forum for developing students' potential that can have a positive impact on strengthening students' educational character (Government Regulation Number 62 year 2014). Every school may allow the development of students' competence by applying extracurricular programs.

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To be specific, there are many activities using the English language that can be included in the extracurricular activities namely conversation club, performing drama, writing stories, or performing storytelling. These activities' purposes are to increase the students' interest in English language and also to enhance their English mastery, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. As stated by (Cahyono & Widiati, 2011) teaching and learning English achievement is still far from what is expected and needs more development, (Songbatumis, 2017) also explained that exposure to English language, classroom size, and small number of English teachers have affected teaching English language in Indonesia. According to the researchers' previous experience, classroom size is certainly becoming one of the biggest problems. Generally classes consist of thirty to thirty-five students. This condition sometimes makes it difficult for teacher to control the students. If the class size or the number of the students is not excessively large, there is a greater chance of achieving learning objectives. This idea is supported by Mulyasa (2007) as cited in (Neno & Siahaan, 2021) on his statement that an extracurricular program within a specific program held outside of regular school hours is intended to support and enhance students' competence.

Some research has been conducted on how an extracurricular activity, for instance, storytelling, can bring positive impacts on students. A study by Samantaray (2014: 44) as cited in (Hidayati, 2019) discovered that storytelling technique has a substantial impact on students' English language acquisition. Another proof is under a research conducted by Dewi (2021, p. 7) concluded that storytelling activity can enhance and develop students' critical thinking skills. The study concluded that storytelling is a teaching method that improves students' ability to master English. With the development of technology that engages many people including students and teachers, storytelling activity is integrated with digital media including texts, pictures, and audio.

Abd Rahman and Bakar (2020) assert that digital storytelling (DST) is getting popular for its essential role in facilitating students' language learning development. The use of technology in DST can assist students in conveying stories which they write that help make the stories more appealing (Robin, 2008). In the same line with Buendgens-Kosten (2021), he mentions that using DST allows language learners to

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practice using the language in a highly motivated context. Moreover, she asserts that using DST can improve learners' multimodal meaning-making skills, namely experimenting with various genres, thinking critically, and becoming role models for others. A study by Bakar (2019) investigates the potential role of DST and proposes a model of DST that affects students' reading comprehension and critical thinking skills. The model incorporates the elements of DST with the elements of reading comprehension and the elements of critical thinking • Elements of reading comprehension are include predicting what will happen in the reading, making predictions, asking questions, identifying relationships between facts, and drawing conclusions. These elements are intrinsically linked to critical thinking abilities. Elements of reading comprehension are include predicting what will happen in the reading, making predictions, asking questions, identifying relationships between facts, and drawing conclusions. These elements are intrinsically linked to critical thinking abilities.

Previous research highlights the impacts of using digital storytelling to the developments of reading comprehension and critical thinking skills. Hence, the aim of the present study is to investigate the role of DST in the development of English writing skills of EFL students particularly in Indonesia. It tries to reveal the benefits and challenges that EFL students face in using DST pertaining to their English writing skills also the critical thinking skills.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital Storytelling

Digital storytelling is a technique for creating and sharing stories to life using digital media such as images, videos, and sound recordings. It can be utilized to explain a concept, reflect on a personal experience, recount a historical event, or make an argument. According to Robin (2008), digital stories can be divided into three categories: (1) personal stories, (2) stories that examine historical events, and (3) stories that primarily used to educate, inform or instruct. Typically, digital stories are videos that incorporate audio, images, and video clips to tell a story. Digital storytelling is a potent instrument for communication, education, and self-expression.

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Joe Lambert, defines digital storytelling as "the practice of combining narrative with digital content, including images, sound, and video, to create a short movie or multimedia presentation" (Lambert, 2013, p. 3). Digital storytelling can serves many functions or purposes, including education, advocacy, community building, and self-expression. In accordance with this, combining visual images with written text improves and accelerates student comprehension, and digital storytelling is a particularly useful technology tool for collecting, creating, analyzing, and combining visual images with written text (Chun, Kern, & Smith, 2016). Digital storytelling can be used to foster creativity and critical thinking, as well as to enhance students' learning and engagement. By integrating digital storytelling in education as previously described with the theoretical framework of Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPCK), researchers will gain a deeper understanding of the various and more potent roles that digital media can play in both teaching and learning (Robin, 2008, p. 227).

The Steps of creating Digital Storytelling

The steps of creating a digital storytelling project can vary depending on the purpose, audience, and content of the story. However, there are some common steps that can be followed to create a digital storytelling project, based on the key principle states by Ohler, (2013):

1. Choose a topic, this can be a personal experience, a historical event, a social issue, or any other topics to share.
2. Plan the story, deciding on the story's main message or theme, key events or elements, and a storyboard or outline.
3. Collect multimedia resources, gather pictures, videos, music, sound effects, and voice-overs.
4. Create a script, the script must be concise, engaging, and well-structured, with a clear beginning, middle, and end.
5. Record the narration, it is recorded using a microphone or other recording device. This should be done in a quiet environment to ensure good sound quality.
6. Edit the multimedia, this may involve cropping, resizing, adjusting, adding music or sound effects to the multimedia resources that have gathered.

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7. Combine the elements, synchronizing the visuals with the narration. This may involve using a software tool to create a video or interactive presentation.
8. Share the story, the digital storytelling project can be shared with the audience. This may involve publishing the story online, sharing it on social media, or presenting it in a live event.

Writing Skill

Writing skill is the ability to write clearly, concisely, and effectively. It is a complex cognitive process that involves multiple sub-skills, including generating ideas, organising them into a coherent structure, using appropriate vocabulary and grammar, revising and editing the text for clarity and accuracy. Harmer (2004, pp. 4–6) lists four writing elements. Those are planning, drafting, editing (revising), and final version.

Writing is essential for academic, professional, and personal success. It is a fundamental communication skill that enables individuals to spread their message to a wide range of audiences. At least one-fourth of community college students enroll in remedial writing courses (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003). On the basis of the problem, it appears that remedial enrollments underestimate the number of students who actually require writing assistance. (Graham & Perin, 2007, p. 9). As EFL learners, Indonesian students, for instance, have difficulty to master English writing. When junior and senior high school students who write in English infrequently are asked to write about their ideas, thoughts, or experiences, they inevitably experience some difficulty.

In curriculum 2013, students have to master several kinds of genres. It is difficult for students since every genre has a specific purpose, specific language feature and generic structure. Likewise, when writing a digital script for digital storytelling. It involves using digital tools and media to create written texts, including using online platforms, multimedia elements, and social media to create, share, and collaborate on written texts. Thus, involving digital platforms becoming one of the challenges or the problems in writing digital stories.

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Digital Storytelling Script-writing

Unlike academic papers, which are written according to rigid academic discourse, creative writing requires imagination and creativity. Script writing involves writing for film, television, theatre, digital storytelling, and other media. Digital storytelling offers a powerful platform for writers to bring their stories to life and engage audiences in new and innovative ways. However, writers of digital storytelling scripts may also face several challenges. According to "The Handbook of Digital Storytelling" edited by Carolyn Handler Miller (2017), some of the main challenges of digital story script writing include:

1. Balancing text and media: Writers must integrate these elements (media and narration text) to enhance the story and engage the audience while maintaining a clear narrative thread.
2. Writing for multiple platforms: Digital storytelling can be presented on social media, mobile apps, and websites. Since mobile users have shorter attention spans than website users, a story script for a mobile app like Instagram or Facebook may need to be shorter and more concise.
3. Working with other creatives: Digital storytelling often involves designers, animators, sound engineers, and others. Writers must collaborate well with these collaborators to achieve their creative vision.
4. Making the story shareable: With so much content available online, it can be challenging to create a story that stands out and shareable. Writers must consider the audience and how to promote the story to increase visibility and reach.
5. Writing for a global audience: Digital storytelling has the potential to reach a global audience, which presents challenges in terms of cultural sensitivity and translation. Writers must consider how their story will be interpreted by different cultures.

METHOD

Study Design

A descriptive design with a qualitative study is applied to this research to

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discover the perspectives of the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students toward the challenges of the digital storytelling that has previously been implemented. According to Creswell (2012, pp. 61–64) implementing a qualitative study design is necessary since the purpose of qualitative research is to collect, analyze, and interpret data by observing what people actually say, also qualitative study is an explorative study which is useful to know the problems and the phenomenon. To obtain the data, the researchers conducted observations and interviews on the process of learning in "Smart English" Extracurricular activity. The interview was conducted using a semi-structured interview. The researchers interview the subjects individually with some questions to discover the students' opinion on digital storytelling and the challenges they have during writing digital storytelling scripts. The data was then analyzed, summarized and elaborated. Finally, the research findings were described systematically in the findings section.

Subject of the Research

The subjects were the students in *SMP Negeri 6 Banjarmasin* who were enrolled as the members of Smart English (Extracurricular Program) of *SMP Negeri 6 Banjarmasin*. The total members of this extracurricular program were 24 (twenty four) students who were also considered as the population. For this research, the sampling technique chosen by the researchers is Quota Sampling, therefore the number of the subjects taken are 6 students in seventh–eighth grade.

Instrumentation

In order to discover the challenges or the difficulties that the students face during the implementation of digital storytelling, the researchers used observation and interview as the instruments of collecting the data. The observations were to note the implementation process of digital storytelling. Meanwhile, semi-structured interviews were aimed to reveal the students' perception, opinion, or perspectives on digital storytelling and its challenges, especially in writing.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The observation was conducted 5 (five) times, and during different periods. The first was in October 2022, the second was in November 2022. The next was on

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Wednesday, 01 February 2023, in *SMP Negeri 6 Banjarmasin* English Extracurricular Program Called "Smart English ". Thenceforth, the observation continued regularly every Wednesday and ended on Wednesday, 15 February 2023. The duration of the extracurricular is 60 minutes in each meeting while the interview was conducted after the researchers had finished the observation. The interview session was implemented to reveal the subjects' perspectives on the implementation of Digital Storytelling (DST) and to discover the challenges that they have faced during writing the stories in the extracurricular program in *SMP Negeri 6 Banjarmasin*. The findings are presented as follows.

Students' General Opinions of DST

Through the interview, all of the subjects showed positive opinions on digital storytelling. They perceived it as an interesting and exciting method to improve their English skills. It can provide an experience of composing stories and strengthen language skills, including communication skills, writing skills, and the ability to comprehend the storyline of a story. When it comes to delivering stories publicly, they stated that digital storytelling is a great way to capture the eyes of audiences. This opinion is in line with the statements of (Prayitno & Mardianto, 2020); (Rosmiati & Lestari, 2021) that have mentioned how learning media can attract students' attention and make learning meaningful. The subjects also added that in this era, people are more interested or captivated by stories that have media, such as videos, pictures, etc. It also helps to reinforce and clarify the message in the story to be conveyed through visualization and audio provided by digital storytelling videos. Multiple studies indicate that students retain information better when it is presented visually and verbally. (Raiyn, 2016)

The subjects believed that digital storytelling is beneficial. They mentioned that digital storytelling improves critical thinking since it requires them to be inventive in collecting and combining multiple media types instead they also have to think of a concise storyline. Storytellers must use critical thinking skills such as deductions and interpretations to influence their audience (Sims, 2004) which necessitates a number of critical components, such as listening and storytelling. It is supported in a result of a research done by Farkhan et al. (2022) that it had a significant effect on the

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application of project-based learning over the scientific or critical thinking skills. Digital storytelling can be included in project-based learning. DST may be an effective educational approach for improving students' critical thinking abilities. (Benmayor, 2008; Maier & Fisher, 2006; Malita & Martin, (2010)) in a research done by (Yang & Wu, 2012). The results of relevant previous research have also revealed the impact of digital storytelling (DST) on students' creative thinking skills (Jaca, 2021; Yang et al., 2020; Haryani et al., 2019; Zakaria & Aziz, 2019;) as cited in Fitri et al. (2022).

According to the subjects, it also motivated them to have creativity in using technology, such as editing using software that they barely used. When students are tasked with creating their own digital stories, it allows students to operate technologies while learning English. As mentioned previously, digital storytelling is a project-based task, and based on previous research, it is an innovation that allows students to gain experience using technology to complete projects. (Mali, 2016). Moreover, according to the subjects, digital storytelling will be a simple yet effective way to get the opportunity of speaking or sharing stories online. It increases students' self-confidence. Additionally, the other subject explained that the distribution to social media platforms and its open access allows the video to be viewed by all people or foreigners worldwide, meaning they can watch the digital storytelling videos and perhaps even get constructive feedback for improvement as (Tarantino , McDonough , & Hua , 2013) indicate that students who use social media as a learning tool are better able to integrate course content with out-of-class peer interactions, ultimately enhancing their classroom learning. The other subjects also agreed that digital storytelling is suitable for them (EFL students) as they can learn pronunciation, grammar, or even spelling.

The subjects did not perceive writing for multiple platforms as a problem since the duration of digital storytelling is relatively short. They can upload the same video length on Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, and others without changing it.

Students' Writing Problems for the DST as an EFL Student

According to the majority of subjects, writing scripts for digital storytelling was quite tricky. They rarely practice writing, which causes inconsistency and errors in their writing, for example arranging a good sentence. The subjects said that the cause

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of their difficulties was because they have inadequate knowledge of grammar. This condition refers to a lack of proficiency in text production abilities, which was one of the causes of the students' writing difficulties. (Ismayanti & Kholiq, 2020). Despite this, only one student thought writing a script for digital storytelling was easy. For her, writing a script is as easy as she naturally talks. Therefore, what needs to be considered is her ability to explain something, the script was just a written version of everything that she speaks. She only needs to make minor adjustments to the script for the digital storytelling videos she created. The researchers determined, based on the interview, that this student has usually used English on a daily basis with her family since she was a toddler, this background becoming one of the reasons that affects her opinion and also ability in English language. This situation is in line with Puspita et al. (2022) statement that everything a child sees and hears in his or her environment will influence the language input they receive in early childhood.

All of the subjects agreed that the most difficult aspect of scriptwriting is brainstorming. It is challenging for them to generate a story plot idea. Keeping track of all of the ideas for a coherent script is one of the most difficult aspects of brainstorming. They commonly detect writing inconsistencies and errors. This statement is in line with (Kareem, 2014) as cited in (Arianti & Fitriana, 2017) the fact that writing a good English composition requires good grammar, imagination, and thought, as well as the ability to explore major and supporting ideas, put them together, revise, and then perform final editing. Moreover, (Mason & Washington, 1992) in (Ariyanti, 2016) state that “to write is to do many things at once”, means that in order to improve their writing skills, students should read articles and books, as well as discuss to their peers, in order to generate new ideas.

The subjects revealed that writing stories in English is a challenge since it is not their first language. In EFL countries, instead of using English, students tend to converse in their first language. (Hatmanto, 2012) as cited in (Ariyanti, 2016). This is becoming an obstacle for them to construct a good sentence. In reality, even writing stories in Bahasa Indonesia took more work for their level. In addition, they recognized that the majority of their errors were not only in grammar, but also vocabulary, and spelling. They were uncertain about which tense to use when writing, how to use the proper pronoun, and how to change verbs into different forms. As

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they said that English grammar is more complicated compared to *Bahasa Indonesia*. Considering that, in a research done by (Ariyanti, 2016) grammar is one of Indonesian students' biggest challenges in English writing (Megaiab, 2014; Siahaan, 2013) additionally Aziz (2003) also notes that Indonesian students simplify English tenses by ignoring verb form in simple present and simple past tenses.

The subjects also added that online translation is not always accurate. Hence, it cannot be relied upon. To overcome this challenge, the subjects suggested solving it by starting to write the draft in *Bahasa Indonesia* first, then with an online translator they changed it into English, while at the same time observing and learning grammar from the internet. Moreover, their alternative is to seek the teacher for assistance.

Student's Difficulties in Balancing the Text and the Media of DST

Half of the students thought that editing the pictures that match the text is hard, since the perfect duration of digital storytelling video is expected to be around 2–3 minutes only. As a result, they must determine if the script they have created matches the length of the video. Some individuals also stated that balancing text and media is challenging when they are unable to locate relevant pictures or videos to combine them with the text or the script, the quality of the pictures or videos also matters, if the pictures or videos are poor quality it will ruin the storyline and the duration of the video. In this case, they suggested using supporting images from the internet that match the story, or create representative pictures by themselves (using AI, Microsoft paint, Canva, etc.). While the other half believed that balancing these two is not a major issue. According to the responses of the subjects, when students participate in the multiple steps of designing, creating, and presenting their own digital stories, they gain a full complement of literacy skills, including: (1) Research Skills (documenting the story, finding and analyzing relevant information) and (2) Organization Skills (managing the scope of the project, the materials used, and the time required to complete the task). (Robin, 2011)

The result of the interview was supported by the observation result that has been done previously. The teacher instructed the students to start creating their own digital storytelling video. The given themes were a historical and a personal story. From 5 (five) times observation obtained, the researchers conclude some results of

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the observation regarding to the points mentioned: (1) Students present clear media including pictures and videos (2) Students include clear voice over, audio or soundtrack that are related to the story, they are able to personalize the story through the voice to help the audience understand the context (3) Students used understandable language but they made a few grammar mistakes on the script as explained above due to the writing challenges they had.

CONCLUSION

As mentioned earlier, the current study was conducted to reveal the challenges that faced by EFL students specifically in digital storytelling script-writing. This study found that students find that digital storytelling is beneficial for their learning. However, they also agreed that they had some challenges with writing and digital storytelling in general, the students agreed that the factors influencing them include their inconsistency, errors, minimum exposure or unfamiliarity with writing.

Alternatively stated that the use of digital storytelling-based tasks is advantageous. It allows students to express themselves through different methods. . Another benefit is that the DST increases students' self-confidence and creativity in using technology. Beside the challenges, digital storytelling is also suitable for EFL students as they can learn many aspects of language such as pronunciation, grammar, or even spelling. Understanding the English grammar including the tenses is very important, particularly it helps to convey ideas in a clear and concise manner.

According to the result of this study's findings, suggestions can be made for teachers and students. As for teachers, they can try to teach more grammar and sentence construction more frequently with fresh and fun methods. They can also give more time to practice on writing in English. Therefore, it is hoped that both students and teachers will gain valuable insight from this study. To teach and learn English, both teachers and students must understand the significance of English and technological skills such as DST and other technological aids in the modern world. Future research in the fields of writing skills and technology-enhanced language acquisition may find this study to be of interest.

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