



Digital Storytelling as an Innovative Approach to Developing Narrative Writing Skills in Indonesian EFL Contexts

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the effectiveness of digital storytelling in enhancing senior high school students' narrative writing skills. A quantitative quasi-experimental design was employed involving 60 tenth-grade students, who were divided into an experimental group ($n = 30$) and a control group ($n = 30$). Data were collected through narrative writing tests administered as pretests and posttests and analyzed using descriptive statistics, paired sample t-tests, and independent sample t-tests. The results showed that the experimental group's mean score increased significantly from 64.06 on the pretest to 81.39 on the posttest, while the control group improved from 64.06 to 71.90. The paired sample t-test revealed a significant improvement in the experimental group ($p < 0.05$), and the independent sample t-test indicated a significant difference between the posttest scores of both groups ($p < 0.05$). These findings demonstrate that digital storytelling is more effective than conventional instruction in improving students' narrative writing ability. However, this study was limited to a single school and a relatively short intervention period, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Therefore, it is recommended that educators integrate digital storytelling into writing instruction to promote creativity, engagement, and digital literacy, while future research should involve broader samples and longer implementation periods.

Keywords: digital storytelling; narrative writing; quasi-experimental study; English education

INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the most complex language skills, as it requires the integration of multiple linguistic and cognitive components simultaneously (Noviarini, 2022; Prihatini, 2024). This skill does not merely involve constructing grammatically correct sentences but also encompasses the ability to generate ideas, organize thoughts logically, and convey meaning coherently (Fransiska & Al Fatih, 2023; Izzati, 2024; Noviarini, 2024). In English language learning, writing serves as a primary medium through which students demonstrate their productive language competence (Kojima & Popiel, 2023; Samiullah & Haidar, 2023). Consequently, writing proficiency is often regarded as a key indicator of success in language learning at the secondary education level (Haidar, 2023; Lembke et al., 2021). The demands of writing instruction have become increasingly challenging due to curriculum reforms that emphasize competency-based learning and twenty-first-century skills. These conditions require teachers to adopt instructional approaches that are both innovative and contextually relevant (Parrott & Napier, 2023; Rybakova & Witte, 2019).

Within the framework of twenty-first-century education, English language instruction is expected to foster creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and digital literacy (Parris & Estrada, 2020; Wei & Li, 2024). Today's students are digital natives who interact with multimedia technologies as part of their daily lives. As a result, traditional instructional approaches that rely heavily on lecturing and paper-based writing exercises are increasingly misaligned with students' learning characteristics (Cladis, 2020; Suleimanova & Vodyanitskaya, 2020). This mismatch often leads to reduced motivation and suboptimal learning outcomes. Integrating technology into language instruction has therefore become a strategic response to these challenges. When used effectively, technology has the potential to create learning environments that are more engaging, interactive, and meaningful (Guvin Felcida & Parameswaran, 2024; Louhichi et al., 2021).

In Indonesia, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at the senior high school level emphasizes learner-centered instruction and holistic competency development. English language

learning under this curriculum is designed to enable students to comprehend and produce a variety of text types. Among these, narrative text occupies a central position, as it develops students' ability to construct stories in a coherent and logical sequence (Fauziah et al., 2023; Hartati et al., 2024). Narrative writing instruction not only focuses on linguistic accuracy but also encourages imagination and creativity (Hellystia & Hermawati, 2024). Accordingly, teaching narrative writing requires instructional strategies that address both linguistic competence and creative expression. Selecting an appropriate pedagogical approach is therefore crucial to achieving the intended learning outcomes (Cahyani & Nurhadi, 2023; Kavakli & Hanci-Azizoglu, 2020).

Despite the importance of narrative text in senior high school English instruction, many students continue to experience difficulties in writing this type of text. These difficulties include problems in developing a coherent plot, applying appropriate text structure, and using varied vocabulary. In addition, grammatical errors—particularly in the use of past tense forms—are frequently found in students' writing (Fan, 2022). Such issues indicate that students have not yet fully mastered the conventions and linguistic features of narrative texts. Low narrative writing proficiency can also negatively affect students' confidence in expressing ideas in written form. This situation presents a significant challenge for English language teaching at the senior high school level.

One contributing factor to students' low narrative writing proficiency is the continued dominance of conventional teaching methods. Teacher-centered instruction often positions students as passive recipients of knowledge rather than active participants in the learning process (Badjie & Velankar, 2023). Moreover, reliance on textbooks as the primary learning resource can make writing instruction monotonous and less engaging. Limited use of digital media further restricts students' opportunities to experience contextualized and meaningful learning. As a consequence, students' motivation to write narrative texts tends to be low. These conditions highlight the urgent need for innovation in writing instruction strategies and learning media (Dockx et al., 2020; Malisetty et al., 2024).

Along with rapid technological development, various digital-based instructional approaches have been introduced to improve the quality of language learning. One approach that has gained increasing attention is digital storytelling. Digital storytelling combines narrative elements with digital media such as images, audio, video, and animation. This approach allows students to present stories in creative and multimodal ways. Through digital storytelling, students are not only positioned as writers but also as digital content creators. Consequently, the learning process becomes more engaging and meaningful for students (Bozhik et al., 2024; Huang & Loranc, 2023; Nunvářová & Poulová, 2022).

Previous studies have demonstrated that digital storytelling has considerable potential for enhancing students' language skills. Research findings indicate that digital storytelling can increase learners' motivation, creativity, and engagement in the learning process (Alemi et al., 2022; Zarei & Navidinia, 2024). Additionally, it helps students better understand text structure through visual and auditory representations of stories. In writing instruction, digital storytelling has been shown to support idea generation and narrative development (O'Byrne et al., 2018). However, most existing studies tend to focus on speaking skills or general literacy development. Research that specifically examines the effectiveness of digital storytelling in teaching narrative writing at the senior high school level remains limited.

The research gap addressed in this study lies in both contextual and instructional focus. Many previous studies were conducted at the primary school or higher education level, making their findings less directly applicable to senior high school contexts. Furthermore, limited research explicitly aligns digital storytelling instruction with the learning outcomes of the Merdeka Curriculum. Alignment between instructional strategies and curriculum objectives is essential to ensure instructional effectiveness. In addition, the lack of studies conducted within specific local school contexts represents another gap in the literature. Therefore, more context-sensitive research is needed to address the realities of narrative writing instruction in senior high schools.

The state of the art of this study is reflected in the use of digital storytelling as a primary instructional approach for teaching narrative writing in accordance with twenty-first-century learning principles. In this study, digital storytelling is not merely employed as a supplementary

medium but as an integral pedagogical strategy. This approach enables the simultaneous integration of language skills, creativity, and digital literacy. Moreover, digital storytelling provides opportunities for active and collaborative learning. These characteristics align closely with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes meaningful and student-centered learning. As such, this study is positioned within contemporary developments in English language pedagogy.

The novelty of this research lies in its investigation of the effectiveness of digital storytelling in teaching narrative writing at the senior high school level while explicitly referencing the learning outcomes of the Merdeka Curriculum. The study goes beyond measuring learning outcomes by examining the relevance of instructional strategies to students' learning characteristics in the digital era. Additionally, the research is conducted within a specific senior high school context with distinct social and academic characteristics. The quasi-experimental design allows for a systematic comparison between digital storytelling-based instruction and conventional teaching methods. Consequently, the findings are expected to provide empirical contributions to the development of narrative writing pedagogy. This novelty strengthens the study's contribution to English language education research.

Based on the preceding discussion, this study focuses on examining the effectiveness of digital storytelling in teaching narrative writing to senior high school students. The research specifically investigates changes in students' narrative writing ability before and after the implementation of digital storytelling. In addition, it compares the writing performance of students taught using digital storytelling with those taught through conventional instruction. This approach is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of digital storytelling on writing proficiency. Detailed information regarding the research context is presented in the methodology section. Through this focus, the study aims to address practical challenges in narrative writing instruction.

Accordingly, the research questions guiding this study are as follows: (1) Is there a significant improvement in students' narrative writing ability after the implementation of digital storytelling in English language instruction? and (2) Is there a significant difference in narrative writing achievement between students taught using digital storytelling and those taught using conventional methods? These questions are formulated to guide data collection and analysis systematically. The answers are expected to provide empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of digital storytelling. Furthermore, the findings may serve as a reference for teachers in selecting innovative instructional strategies. Ultimately, this study is expected to offer both theoretical and practical implications for English language teaching at the senior high school level.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative approach using a quasi-experimental design with a pretest–posttest control group format. The participants consisted of 60 tenth-grade students from a senior high school, divided equally into an experimental group and a control group. The experimental group received instruction through digital storytelling, while the control group was taught using conventional writing instruction. The main research instrument was a narrative writing test administered as both a pretest and a posttest to measure students' writing achievement. The narrative writing task required students to produce a narrative text that included a clear orientation, complication, and resolution, as well as appropriate language features such as the use of past tense verbs, temporal conjunctions, action verbs, and coherent sequencing of events. In addition to the writing test, an observation checklist was used to record students' learning activities and engagement during the instructional process. An illustration of digital storytelling used in the experimental class is presented in Figure 1, showing the integration of images, text, and multimedia elements to support narrative construction.



Figure 1. Example of digital storytelling.

The research procedure was conducted in several stages. First, both the experimental and control groups were given a pretest to identify their initial narrative writing ability. Next, the experimental group received instruction using digital storytelling, in which students planned their stories, developed storyboards, selected digital media (images, audio, or video), and produced narrative texts supported by multimedia elements. Meanwhile, the control group learned narrative writing through traditional instruction, focusing on textbook-based explanations, model texts, and individual writing exercises without digital media integration. After the instructional treatment, both groups were administered a posttest to measure learning outcomes. The procedural steps implemented in each group are illustrated in Figure 2, which outlines the instructional sequence for the experimental and control classes. The collected data were analyzed using statistical procedures, including tests of normality and homogeneity, followed by paired sample t-tests to examine within-group improvement and independent sample t-tests to determine differences between the experimental and control groups.

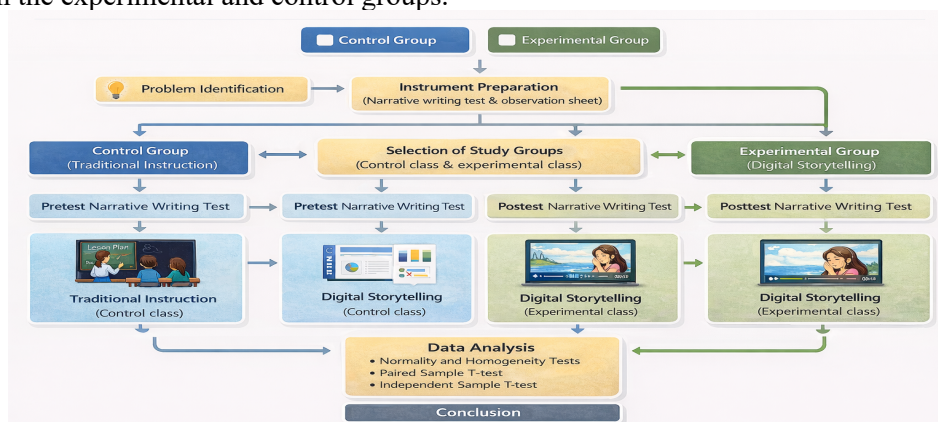


Figure 2. Research Procedures

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Descriptive Statistics of Students' Narrative Writing Performance

Descriptive statistical analysis was conducted to examine students' narrative writing performance in both the experimental and control groups before and after the instructional treatment. This analysis aimed to provide an initial overview of students' writing achievement and to ensure comparability between the two groups at the beginning of the study. The results indicate that both groups had relatively similar mean scores on the pretest, suggesting equivalent baseline writing ability.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Narrative Writing Scores

Group	Test	Mean	Standard Deviation
Experimental	Pretest	64.06.00	04.50
Experimental	Posttest	81.39.00	0,2125
Control	Pretest	64.06.00	0,23333333
Control	Posttest	71.90	04.54

As shown in Table 1, the experimental group demonstrated a substantial increase in mean score from pretest to posttest, with an improvement of 17.33 points. In contrast, the control group showed a more modest improvement of 7.84 points. Although both groups exhibited progress, the magnitude of improvement in the experimental group was considerably higher. These findings suggest that the instructional treatment applied in the experimental group may have contributed more effectively to the development of students' narrative writing skills.

2. Improvement of Narrative Writing Ability within Each Group

(Paired Sample t-Test Results)

To address the first research question—whether digital storytelling significantly improves students' narrative writing ability—a paired sample *t*-test was conducted for both the experimental and control groups. This test examined differences between pretest and posttest scores within each group.

Table 2. Paired Sample t-Test Results

Group	t-value	df	Sig. (p)
Experimental (Pretest–Posttest)	-15.447	29	0.000
Control (Pretest–Posttest)	-5.969	29	0.000

The results indicate a statistically significant improvement in narrative writing performance in both groups ($p < 0.05$). However, the experimental group achieved a much higher *t*-value, reflecting a stronger instructional effect. This finding suggests that while conventional instruction can lead to some improvement, digital storytelling provides a more powerful learning experience that enhances students' writing development more substantially.

Finding related to Research Question 1:

There is a statistically significant improvement in students' narrative writing ability after the implementation of digital storytelling.

3. Comparison between Experimental and Control Groups

(Independent Sample t-Test Results)

To answer the second research question—whether there is a significant difference between students taught using digital storytelling and those taught using conventional methods—an independent sample *t*-test was conducted using posttest scores.

Table 3. Independent Sample t-Test on Posttest Scores

Comparison	t-value	df	Sig. (p)
Experimental vs. Control	7.994	58	0.000

The analysis revealed a statistically significant difference in posttest scores between the two groups ($p < 0.05$). Students in the experimental group outperformed those in the control group, indicating that digital storytelling was more effective than traditional instruction in improving narrative writing ability.

Finding related to Research Question 2:

There is a significant difference in narrative writing achievement between students taught using digital storytelling and those taught using conventional teaching methods.

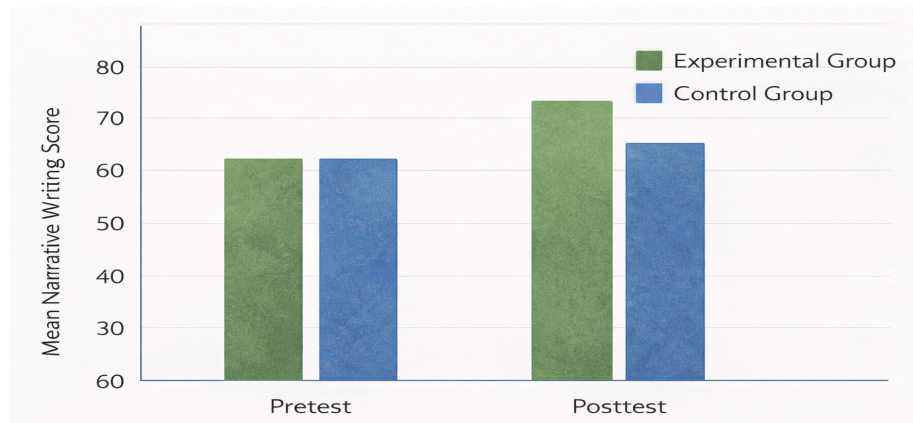


Figure 3. Comparison of Mean Narrative Writing Scores

The bar chart illustrates clear differences in learning outcomes between the two groups. While both groups began with comparable pretest scores, the experimental group exhibited a markedly higher increase at the posttest stage. This visual trend supports the statistical findings and further confirms the effectiveness of digital storytelling in enhancing narrative writing skills.

Discussion

The results of this study demonstrate that students in the experimental class experienced a substantial improvement in their narrative writing ability after being taught through digital storytelling. The significant difference between pretest and posttest scores indicates that digital storytelling effectively supports writing development. This improvement reflects students' enhanced ability to generate ideas and transform them into coherent written narratives. The integration of digital media created a more engaging learning environment that encouraged active participation. Students were more confident in expressing their thoughts when supported by visual and audio elements. These findings confirm that innovative digital approaches can address common difficulties in narrative writing. Therefore, digital storytelling can be considered an effective pedagogical strategy in senior high school writing instruction.

One notable improvement observed in the experimental group was students' understanding of narrative text structure. Digital storytelling provided clear examples of narrative elements such as orientation, complication, and resolution. By repeatedly interacting with structured digital stories, students internalized the organization of narrative texts more effectively. This finding is consistent with previous studies that emphasized the role of storytelling in strengthening text organization skills. Students demonstrated better coherence and logical sequencing in their written work. The visual representation of story events helped students maintain a clear storyline. As a result, their narratives became more structured and meaningful (Schrodt et al., 2023; Tanrikulu, 2022).

Digital storytelling also contributed to the improvement of students' linguistic accuracy. The combination of images, narration, and written text helped students select appropriate vocabulary and apply grammatical rules more accurately. Visual cues supported students in recalling relevant words and sentence patterns. This multimodal learning experience reduced students' anxiety during the writing process. Previous research has shown that multimedia-based instruction enhances language comprehension and retention. The present findings support these conclusions by showing improved grammar and vocabulary usage (Alhazmi, 2024). Consequently, digital storytelling facilitates more effective language production in writing.

Another important finding of this study relates to students' motivation and engagement. Students in the experimental class showed higher enthusiasm during writing activities compared to those in the control class. The creative nature of digital storytelling encouraged students to explore their imagination. Students were more willing to revise and improve their work when using digital media. This aligns with earlier studies reporting that digital storytelling increases learners' intrinsic motivation. Engaged students tend to invest more effort in the learning process

(Bai et al., 2023). Therefore, increased motivation played a crucial role in improving students' writing performance.

Digital storytelling also fostered collaborative learning and social interaction among students. During the learning process, students actively discussed story ideas and shared feedback with their peers. Collaborative activities helped students refine their narratives and gain new perspectives. This interaction enhanced their communication and teamwork skills. Prior studies have highlighted collaboration as a key benefit of digital storytelling. The findings of this study support the idea that collaborative storytelling strengthens learning outcomes (Chen & Pan, 2024). Thus, digital storytelling serves both academic and social learning purposes.

Finally, the implementation of digital storytelling aligns with the goals of the Kurikulum Merdeka and the Profile of Pancasila Students. The learning activities promoted creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and digital literacy. Students were encouraged to take responsibility for their learning through independent story creation. Digital storytelling provided opportunities for students to integrate technology meaningfully into language learning. This approach reflects the demands of 21st-century education. The findings of this study reinforce previous research supporting technology-enhanced learning (Meletiadou, 2022). Therefore, digital storytelling is a relevant and effective approach for teaching narrative writing in Indonesian senior high schools.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that digital storytelling is an effective instructional approach for improving senior high school students' narrative writing skills. The findings indicate significant improvements in students' ability to generate ideas, organize narrative structure, and apply appropriate grammar and vocabulary after the implementation of digital storytelling. Compared to conventional instruction, students exposed to digital storytelling demonstrated higher writing performance and learning engagement. The integration of visual and audio elements supported students in developing more coherent and meaningful narratives. In addition, digital storytelling fostered creativity, collaboration, and digital literacy, which are aligned with the objectives of the Kurikulum Merdeka and 21st-century learning. Therefore, digital storytelling can be considered a pedagogically valuable strategy in teaching narrative writing at the senior high school level.

Despite these positive findings, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. The research was conducted in a single school with a relatively limited sample size, which may affect the generalizability of the results. The duration of the intervention was also relatively short, so long-term effects were not examined. Future researchers are encouraged to involve larger and more diverse samples across different educational contexts. Further studies may also explore the impact of digital storytelling on other language skills or text genres. In addition, qualitative data such as interviews or reflective journals could be incorporated to gain deeper insights into students' learning experiences. Addressing these limitations will strengthen future research and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of digital storytelling in language education.

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