The Effectiveness of Storybird in Improving English Narrative Writing

Nurul Falahani Shamsulbahri, Azlina Abdul Aziz

The Effectiveness of Storybird in Improving English Narrative Writing

Nurul Falahani Shamsulbahri[1][2], Azlina Abdul Aziz[2]

[1]SK Sebauh, KM1, Jalan Sebauh-Bintulu, 97100 Sebauh, Sarawak, Malaysia, [2]Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
Email: nurulfalah93@gmail.com, azlina1@ukm.edu.my

Abstract
In teaching English language, the traditional way of teaching like chalk-and-talk and lecture based lesson are not sufficient to teach English effectively. The integration of technology has substantially changed English teaching methods as it provides a variety of alternatives in order to make teaching and learning more interesting and productive. Therefore, this research emphasizes the use of technology specifically digital storytelling website, Storybird in assisting pupils' English language learning; narrative writing skill. The research design is an action research which employed pretest and posttest, semi-structured interviews and observations. The data was collected from eight Year 4 pupils from SK Sebauh of Sebauh district in Sarawak. The research findings indicated that there was a positive improvement in the participants' narrative writing skills. There was also an increase in motivation level and interest in learning English, and existence of English collaborative learning among the participants after using Storybird. Therefore, Storybird is shown to help the participants to improve their English narrative writing skills as well as their proficiency level, motivation and interest in learning English.
Keywords: Storybird, Narrative Writing, Proficiency Level, Motivation

Introduction

In 2016, results of the Malaysia Primary School Achievement Test revealed the pupils' concern in writing accurate and grammatically-correct answer and revealed that Primary 6 pupils have yet to achieve a level desired for writing in the English Language (Hillson, Shamsulbahri & Imas, 2019). This shows that after six years of schooling, our primary school pupils are still weak in their writing skill. Most Malaysian pupils are least proficient in writing skill (Chitravelu, Shithamparam & Teh, 2005). Compared to listening, speaking and reading skill, writing skill has become a major issue in our pupils' English proficiency.

Ahmad (2003) also mentioned that the failure rate among rural pupils in national standardized English examinations is doubled that of urban pupils. This shows that factors of location of schools'

urban and rural school, affect pupils' level of proficiency and the issue should be addressed. To address the issues stated, Ministry of Education (MOE) in the third thrust Education Transformation Plan Rural School Sabah and Sarawak have initiated initiatives to improve the development of physical facilities, internet access and virtual learning (e-learning) to help teachers and pupils maximize the use of ICT in classroom. This is due to the importance of technology in pupils' learning in school as ICT has been regarded as a catalyst in learning (Ross, Morrison & Lowther, 2010).

In teaching English language, traditional way of teaching like chalk-and-talk and lecture based lesson is not sufficient to teach English effectively. This is supported by Patel (2013) that the integration of technology has substantially changed English teaching methods as it provides varieties of alternatives in order to make teaching and learning more interesting and productive. Due to that, the integration of digital storytelling tool into English writing class as one of the technology tools shall be incorporated with the emphasis of integrating the 21st Century skills to address the issue of Malaysian pupils English proficiency, proficiency gap between urban and rural pupils, and the effective way to teach English.

Research Objectives
The objectives of this study are to:
  i)   study the effectiveness of using Storybird to enhance pupils' creativity in narrative writing.
  ii)   explore pupils' perspectives on the use of Storybird to enhance creativity in narrative writing.

Literature Review
Technology in English Language Learning
The importance of using technology in English language class has been supported by many as some stated that it could increase students' cooperation in learning the language. A study by Peregoy and Boyle in 2012 on the use of technology in enhancing reading and writing skills showed that technology does improve learners' reading and writing skill because it is easy to be used and learners learned faster and in a more effective way. The other finding is the Internet provided an encouraging learning environment and acted as a platform that facilitate learner to learn conveniently. This means technology could ease teachers' burden in preparing teaching aids as technology could be used as one as it is time effective for students' to learn the language.

Technology in Teaching English Writing
In the Malaysian English Language Curriculum for Primary Schools, two out of five objectives in the curriculum emphasized the writing skills of the primary school's students. Zakaria, Yunus, Nazri and Shah in 2016 conducted a study on English as a second language (ESL) writing among Malaysian students and the results indicated that urban and upper class students did not face issues in English writing as they were used to speak and write on English every day. However, for rural areas students who rarely used English, a lot of issues aroused especially in writing in English. This shows that there are proficiency gap among urban and rural areas students because of exposure and access to English

language. The researchers recommended for the teachers to use technology to shorten the proficiency gap by exposing the students to technology more in English language class.

Storybird in Teaching Writing

As a digital storytelling website, Storybird is a new way to be creative and to be able to collaborate simultaneously. A study was conducted by Thonghattha, Kanokkarn and Nattapakal in 2017 on the effects of using Storybird to enhance creative English writing ability. The results were students' writing ability increased and students had positive perceptions on using Storybird for their English writing. The results also revealed that students' motivation also improved towards writing creative essay. Storybird helps students to feel motivated in writing in English and in the same time increase their ability to write well.

Methodology

Research Design

The research design of this research is action research. Pretest and posttest on pupils' narrative writing were used to examine the improvements of pupils and observations were taken in a form of anecdotal record to observe pupils' responses before, during and after the implementation of Storybird. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted to examine the pupils' perceptions and experience on using Storybird in narrative writing.

Research Participants

The participants of the research consisted of eight ten-year-old pupils from SK Sebauh which is located in Sebauh district of Sarawak, Malaysia. Purposive sampling method was employed in which all the participant fall into average category of English language proficiency level.

Data Analysis Techniques

To analyze the data of pre- and post-score of narrative writing test, central tendency of descriptive statistics is used and generated using Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS). The semi-structured interviews and post- implementation anecdotal records were transcribed and analyzed thematically.

Findings and Discussion

Participants (N)	Pre-test score	Post-test 1 score	Post-test 2 score
P01	7	15	17
P02	8	17	19
P03	8	17	20
P04	6	13	15
P05	5	12	15
P06	5	13	16
P07	5	12	14
P08	6	14	16
Mean (M)	6.25	14.13	16.05
Standard Deviation (SD)	1.28	2.03	2.07

Figure 1: Results of pre-and post-tests

One of the findings of this research is Storybird helps in improving participants' proficiency in English narrative writing. The following results are the analysis generated using SPSS as shown in Figure 1; pre-test, N=8, M= 6.25, SD=1.28, post-test 1, N=8, M= 14.13, SD= 2.03, and post-test 2, N=8, M=16.05, SD=2.07. The results showed that the participants scored more consistent and higher in post-test 1 and 2 compared to pre-test.

The findings are parallel with the classroom observation in English lesson class where the participants were asked to write a one-paragraph story based on the topics given on the whiteboard. The participants improved their punctuation, spellings and vocabulary aspect of their writing after practicing and using Storybird to write. Digital storytelling tools are recognized for their effectiveness in aiding writing, enlightening creativity, and improving critical thinking skills (Kim & Lee, 2018).

The use of Storybird also increases participants' interest and motivation in learning English. The participants eventually regard English language as a fun subject and writing in English becomes easy after the implementation of Storybird. The notion is supported by the following responses from participants as stated below:

P01: "I enjoy English class because the story writing activity is fun."
P02: "I like English class because it is fun!"
P05: "I really enjoy the English class. We get to choose many colourful pictures in the website and then write our story. The activity is really fun."
P06: "Writing story in English is no longer hard. Using the website helps me to be creative and make it easy for
me to imagine my story plot."

P08: "It is very easy. It is fun, quick and my teacher loves my story!"

The findings also show positive perspectives of pupils as the participants' imaginations have also expanded after the implementation of Storybird. This is due to nice and colourful illustrations offered in Storybird, and interesting digital storybook features of the website. This is supported by the participants' responses as follow:

P01: "I like the pictures. The pictures are all beautiful. The pictures help me to imagine the characters I want in my story."

P02: "I can turn my story into storybook. I can imagine the sequence of my story as I flip the pages using my mouse."

P04: "The pictures are nice and I love it. I get to know which vocabulary I want to use after I saw and arrange the pictures."

P05: "I like Storybird because it has many colourful pictures and it makes the writing activity fun."

P07: "My stories turn into storybooks and I love it. I can imagine myself to write stories in series like other storybooks I saw in school library."

The findings also indicate that Storybird helps in English collaborative learning among the participants. This is important as it causes the learning to be time-efficient and new knowledge and input could easily be understood by the participants. The notion is supported by the following responses from participants as stated below:

P03: "I understand better when my friends taught me how to use the website. I get to understand how to start writing and expanding my story from my friends."

P06: "I think I learn how to use the website is faster when I am with my friends. We can explore the website, share ideas and write a story together."

P07: "After I learn writing the story using Storybird from my friends, I could easily write my stories in a short time."

From the analysis of the findings from the test scores, semi-structured interviews and anecdotal records, four major themes can be concluded as follow:

i.   the use of Storybird contributes to the improvement in the participants' English proficiency level

ii.   increase in interest and motivation level of the participants in learning English after the implementation of Storybird

iii.   nice and interesting illustrations and digital storybook features in Storybird helps in expanding participants' imagination.

iv.   the use of Storybird helps in creating English collaborative learning among the participants

Conclusion

In conclusion, the use of Srorybird in teaching English narrative writing is effective in improving pupils' proficiency level and creativity as the aspect of writing elements are enhanced throughout the

research. Pupils' motivation in learning English is also increased with the use of Storybird as it contains interesting features that could attract pupils' attention and interest while learning in fun yet meaningful environment.

It is also concluded that pupils' has positive perspectives towards the use of Storybird in improving their English writing as the pupils are able to have collaborative and effective learning with their friends too. Therefore, pupils' positive attitude and perspectives towards learning English should be maintained in order to encourage the pupils to learn more as learning is a continuous process especially for rural areas pupils.

This research hopes to help Malaysia English teachers to explore more digital tools and strategy in English teaching and learning for our young generations.

References

Ahmad, S. (2003). Promoting English language development and the reading habit among students in rural schools through the Guided Extensive Reading program. Reading in a Foreign Language. Volume 15, Number 2, October 2003

Chitravelu, N., Sithamparam, S., & Teh, S. C. (2005). ELT methodology: Principles and Practice. Shah Alam: Fajar Bakti Publication.

Hillson, K. R., Shamsulbahri, N. F., Imas, S. (2019). "Storybird: Engaging Learners in Building Simple Sentences". *International Journal of Scientific & Research Publications*, vol. 9.

Kim, H., & Lee, J. H. (2018). The value of digital storytelling as an L2 narrative practice. *Asia-Pacific Edu Res*, 27(1), 1-9.

Patel, C. (2013). Use of multimedia technology in teaching and learning communication skill: An analysis. *International Journal of Advancements in Research & Technology*, 2(7), 116-123.

Peregoy, S., & Boyle, O. (2012). *Reading, writing and learning in ESL: A resource book for teachers*. New York: Allyn & Bacon.

Ross, Morrison & Lowther. (2010). Educational Technology Research Past and Present: Balancing Rigor and Relevance to Impact School Learning. *Contemporary Educational Technology*, 1. 17-35. 10.30935/cedtech/5959.

Thonghattha, M., Kanokkarn, K., Nattapakal, K. (2017). Effects of using Story Bird to enhance creative English writing ability of Mathayomsuksa III students. *International Journal of Management and Applied Science (IJMAS)*, vol.3, pp. 6-9.

Zakaria, S., Yunus, M., Nazri, N., and Shah, P. (2016). Students' experience of using Storybird in writing ESL narrative text. *Creative Education*, 7, 2107-2120. doi: 10.4236/ce.2016.715210.