



The Impact of Digital Storytelling on Junior High School Students' Writing Skills

Suci Riya Safitri¹, Dewi Sri Kuning²

^{1,2} Fakultas Keguruan dan Ilmu pendidikan, Universitas Muhammadiyah Kotabumi,
Lampung

Corresponding E-Mail: Suciriya20@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study explored the effects of implementing collaborative Digital Storytelling (DST) on the writing proficiency of junior high school learners in Indonesia, this study focused on Tompkins et al.'s (1984) five stages of writing process: prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. The main issue identified was students' challenges in writing, especially when dealing with English as a Foreign Language (EFL), requiring innovative pedagogy. Objectives included analyzing improvements in writing proficiency, group collaboration dynamics, and pedagogical implications under the Merdeka Curriculum. A qualitative case study design was employed. Findings revealed that DST significantly enhanced student engagement, creativity, and writing skills across stages, with 75% of students improving from "Low" to "High" levels. Tools like Canva and CapCut made the process student-centered. In conclusion, collaborative DST offers a valuable strategy for improving writing instruction, integrating into curricula to foster 21st-century skills and address cultural barriers in Indonesian EFL settings, contributing to Merdeka Belajar reforms.

Keywords: Digital storytelling, Writing skills, Language education, Merdeka Curriculum, Junior high school students.

Introduction

Imagine a junior high school classroom in Indonesia where students are struggling with English as a foreign language and are staring blankly at blank pages. Their limited vocabulary and lack of confidence make it difficult for them to express their ideas. Many students produce incomprehensible documents that impede their scholastic and professional futures, a situation that is all too typical. Writing is an essential skill in the digital age, where clear communication in essays, reports, emails, and documents drives success. As (Lestari & Rokhayati, 2025) emphasize,

strong writing skills are vital for academic and professional achievement. (Smith, 2020) further describes writing as a blend of physical and mental acts, serving both to express ideas and impress audiences, while functioning as both a cyclical process and a polished product.

Beyond mere word arrangement, writing fosters idea articulation, meaning construction, and social discourse. Grammar accuracy, logical structure, word choice, and revision strategies are all included in proficiency. The intricacy of writing is emphasized by (Barton et al., 2024), who point out that students must choose words, sentences, and structures to captivate readers. For cohesive texts, (Puspitarini et al., 2024) emphasize that frequent, meaningful practice is necessary for effective instruction. In a similar vein, (Maulidah & Jamaludin, 2024) observe that by improving oral and written communication, writing skills taught in schools and courses prepare students for future challenges. (Munir & Hendaryan, 2023) add that writing activities benchmark creativity and are integral to teaching and learning.

Although writing plays an essential role, many junior high school learners in EFL contexts still face difficulties in producing clear, well-organized texts and often lack confidence in their writing skills. To improve their skills, creative methods are required. A potential option is collaborative digital storytelling (DST), which creates student-centered narratives using digital resources like text, audio, video, and images. (Ginting, n.d.) describes DST as merging traditional storytelling with multimedia for enriched learning. (Munajah et al., 2022) and (Nuroh & Frestiya Adiyawati, 2023) observe that DST, often involving 30 images or still photographs for 2-3 minute stories, increases student happiness and engagement. (Haetami, 2023) connects DST to realia, which are practical learning resources like visuals and recordings.

Research underscores DST's benefits for EFL writing. (Alemi et al., 2022) argue it modernizes traditional methods by focusing on the learning process and enhancing technological skills. (Nair & Yunus, 2021) note that DST includes varieties like first-person accounts and educational tales, often shared online. (Prof et al., 2021) and (Girmen et al., 2019) position DST as a strategy for L2 writing and a modern paradigm for analyzing audio-visual content. (Moradi & Chen, 2019) emphasized that Digital Storytelling contributes to the development of 21st-century competencies, including critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and information literacy. (Moreau et al., 2018) define DST as multimedia videos blending narratives, while (Afriani Fitri, 2021) links it to deeper text comprehension and better writing. (Castillo et al., 2021) and (Purnama et al., 2022) highlighted the innovative potential of DST in enhancing learners' social, motivational, and linguistic abilities, as well as in encouraging greater passion and creativity. These aspects are crucial in supporting the development of students'

writing skills, particularly in EFL contexts.

DST aligns with the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) curriculum, introduced by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture in 2019. This framework encourages project-based learning (PJBL), enabling teachers to design authentic, student-centered tasks that respond to real-world challenges and individual learning interests (Martanti, 2022, as cited in (Widyatna, 2023 : 360)). In this context, DST serves as an innovative pedagogical approach that supports the MBKM vision by enhancing students' writing skills through creativity, collaboration, and self-expression. According to (Kristanti et al., 2012), PJBL promotes authentic, multidisciplinary learning and lays the groundwork for DST integration. Theoretically, collaborative DST draws from social constructivist theory, where knowledge is co-constructed through interaction (Sudarmaji et al., 2020) and (Yuniarti et al., 2022). Students collaborate using tools like smartphones and platforms to generate ideas, structure content, and revise narratives, practicing elements like vocabulary and organization.

Empirical evidence supports DST's impact. (Yamaç & Ulusoy, 2016) found it improves writing quality in areas such as ideas, organization, word choice, and fluency, leading to more detailed stories. Studies like (Hum & Choi, 2020), (Rahimi & Yadollahi, 2017), and (Rong & Noor, 2019) report positive outcomes, with online tools like Story Jumper enhancing literacy over offline ones. While numerous studies have investigated DST in general or as an individual practice, research examining collaborative DST within Indonesian junior high school remains scarce, especially in relation to its role in shaping group collaboration and enhancing students' writing skills.

This study addresses that gap by examining collaborative DST's impact on junior high school students' writing skills. It specifically aims to respond to the following research inquiries: (1) How can collaborative DST help students become more proficient writers? (2) How do group collaboration dynamics work in DST processes? (3) How does DST affect writing instruction under the Merdeka Curriculum in terms of pedagogy? By examining these, the study advances the theory of collaborative learning and useful EFL innovations, providing guidance to teachers who want to match writing teaching with 21st-century objectives.

As (Tompkins et al., 1984) outline in Table 1, the writing process includes stages like pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing, which DST supports through structured yet creative activities. In Indonesian EFL contexts, (Haetami, 2023) shows DST overcomes barriers like limited vocabulary by building motivation, while (Castillo-Cuesta et al., 2021) highlight its global role in bridging traditional and digital pedagogies for enhanced EFL writing.

Table 1. Stages of the Writing Process by Gail E. Tompkins

| Stages | Descriptions | Categories | Activities |
|--------|-------------------|----------------|-----------------------|
| Pre- | The initial stage | Brainstorming, | Brainstorming: |

| | | | |
|------------------|---|--|--|
| writing/Planning | where writers generate ideas, plan, and organize before writing the first draft. This stage helps overcome initial barriers and builds a foundation for effective writing, often involving creative exploration and information gathering. | Outlining, Researching, Freewriting | Creating a list of ideas or a mind map on the topic. Outlining: Using main points to outline the essay structure. Researching: Reading from books or online sources to gather facts. Freewriting: Writing continuously for 10 minutes to generate raw ideas. |
| Drafting | The stage where writers create an initial version of the text, focusing on developing main ideas and flow without worrying about grammatical errors. This is an iterative process that allows writers to explore and expand content freely. | Composing content, Expanding ideas, Organizing structure | Composing content: Writing the first paragraphs of an essay or story. Expanding ideas: Adding details to main points, such as examples or anecdotes. Organizing structure: Arranging paragraphs into a logical order, like introduction, body, and conclusion. |

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|------------|--|--|--|
| Revising | The stage of improving the overall text by focusing on content, organization, and clarity to ensure the message is effectively conveyed. This involves semi-structured review, often with input from others, to enhance flow and depth. | Content revision, Organizational revision, Peer review | Content revision: Removing irrelevant parts or adding details to enrich arguments. Organizational revision: Rearranging paragraphs to improve flow. Peer review: Sharing drafts with classmates for feedback and suggestions. |
| Editing | The final technical correction stage where writers check and fix errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation, and mechanics to produce a polished and professional text. This stage ensures the text is free from errors that could distract readers. | Proofreading, Grammar checking, Formatting | Proofreading: Reading the text aloud to find spelling errors. Grammar checking: Using tools like Grammarly to correct faulty sentences. Formatting: Adjusting font, spacing, and citation styles according to guidelines (e.g., APA). |
| Publishing | The final stage where the text is completed and shared with an audience, either physically or digitally, to receive responses and evaluations. This | Sharing, Presenting, Finalizing | Sharing: Posting the essay on a blog or social media for public feedback. Presenting: Reading the story in front of the class or at a school event. Finalizing: |

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|--|---|--|---|
| | marks the completion of the process and allows writers to celebrate their work. | | Printing the final document or uploading it to platforms like Google Docs for distribution. |
|--|---|--|---|

Method

This research adopted a qualitative design to investigate how collaborative Digital Storytelling (DST) influences the writing skills of junior high school students at SMP Muhammadiyah Ahmad Dahlan Metro, particularly those enrolled in the storytelling interest program. Qualitative methods were chosen for their ability to provide an in-depth examination of complex phenomena within natural settings, offering interpretive insights into experiences and perceptions that quantitative measures might overlook. This approach aligns with the need to understand social realities through rich descriptions of learning processes.

In-depth analysis of a particular group in a real-world setting was made possible by the use of a case study design, which focused on "how" and "why" issues pertaining to the impacts of digital storytelling. The study integrated digital storytelling into the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) framework and was carried out within the school's limited system.

Thirty students who had participated in the digital storytelling program for at least one semester were purposefully selected from the storytelling interest class to take part in the study. To ensure a representative sample for observations and document analysis, these students were chosen to reflect the entire class. From these 30 students, five to six were then selected for semi-structured interviews. The selection of these five to six students was based on group representation; the class of 30 students was divided into 5–6 groups, and one student from each group was chosen to represent their group's perspective.

This approach aimed to capture a variety of viewpoints, including students with different levels of engagement (categorized as low, medium, or high based on teacher assessments of participation frequency and contributions during sessions, such as actively generating ideas versus passively observing). Additionally, one experienced English teacher, with over five years of teaching, was included; this teacher directly implemented digital storytelling in their writing instruction class rather than merely advising the researcher.

Students participated in group projects during two months of the digital storytelling program. They created digital stories on subjects including local culture, individual experiences, or environmental concerns in small groups of two

to three. Ideas were generated, stories were scripted, multimedia components (such as pictures, audio, and videos) were incorporated, and drafts were collaboratively revised. In order to guarantee familiarity and equitable access, the teacher gave students beginning instruction on digital tools such as Google Slides, Canva, and Adobe Spark.

Data collection involved several techniques, including classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Observations involved non-participant recording of real-time interactions, tool usage, and group dynamics during sessions, using field notes and audio recordings. Semi-structured interviews, the interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia to ensure participants' comfort and were later translated into English, explored participants' experiences with questions like "Did using DST help you express your ideas better?" and "What difficulties did you face while writing using DST?". Document analysis examined students' written artifacts, such as story scripts, multimedia files, and reflection journals to track writing skill progression.

To support data collection, this study used several research instruments. Observation sheets were employed to monitor students' engagement in each stage of the writing process—planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing—during digital storytelling sessions. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 5–6 students (representing different levels of engagement) and one experienced English teacher to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and challenges in using digital storytelling for writing. Document analysis was also carried out, examining students' story drafts, multimedia files, and reflection journals to track the development of writing skills. These instruments were developed based on Gail E. Tompkins' Process Writing Model (1994) and aligned with the study's objectives of understanding the impact of digital storytelling on students' writing skills.

To provide a structured overview of the data collection process, table 2 presents three sequential phases implemented in this research, providing a structured and comprehensive framework for collecting insights.

Table 2. Data Collection Methods in the study

| Phase | Instrumen | Purpose | Description | Analysis Method |
|-------------|-------------|--|--|---|
| Phases 1 | Observation | To capture real-time interaction patterns during digital storytelling sessions and observe how students engage in the process. | Classroom observations were carried out during digital storytelling sessions to record interactions, | A thematic approach was applied to uncover recurrent themes and patterns within the data from observational |

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|-------------|-------------------|---|---|--|
| | | | behaviors, and dynamics in a natural setting. | data, combined with triangulation for validation. |
| Phases 2 | Interview | To gather detailed information about participants' experiences, challenges, and perceptions of improvement in writing skills. | Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 5-6 chosen students and one teacher to investigate their views on the influence of digital storytelling. | Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim, coded systematically, and categorized into key thematic areas, with triangulation to enhance credibility. |
| Phases 3 | Analysis Document | To provide additional insights into students' writing development by examining artifacts and materials. | Student writing samples and teaching materials were collected and analyzed to assess changes in writing skills and creativity. | Thematic analysis was utilized to discern patterns throughout the documents, with data examined across sources for triangulation and comprehensive validation. |

The data were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns and themes related to students' writing development. Recordings of interviews were verbatim transcribed, methodically coded, and grouped into themes. Triangulation spanning observations, interviews, and documents boosted validity and credibility. To further strengthen validity, member checking was employed and peer debriefing was conducted with a fellow researcher to discuss emerging themes. Data collection proceeded until data was achieved, when further interviews or observations no longer produced new themes.

Ethical considerations were carefully maintained throughout the study. Prior

to data collection, consent forms were signed by parents, students, and school administrators. All participants were clearly informed about the research objectives, guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity, and reminded that their involvement was entirely voluntary with no consequences for withdrawal. Data security measures, such as secure storage and anonymized reporting, protected privacy.

Results

This study employed (Tompkins et al., 1984) writing process model, which outlines five key stages: prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. The research examined the effects of DST on junior high school students' writing skills, focusing on how DST shaped their strategies and engagement across each stage.

Data were collected using the techniques listed in table 2: classroom observations (Phase 1), semi-structured interviews (Phase 2), and document analysis including questionnaires and student writing samples (Phase 3). This approach enabled triangulation, as recommended by (Sugiyono, 2018), to provide a comprehensive examination of students' actions at each stage. The frequency of strategy use throughout phases was used to quantify the "Low," "Medium," and "High" levels in the tables: "Low" denotes use by less than 30% of students or in less than 20% of observed cases; "Medium" by 30–70%; and "High" by more than 70%. Two independent coders achieved 85% agreement on classifications, demonstrating inter-rater reliability; disagreements were settled by conversation.

The findings show that digital storytelling significantly improves students' writing processes. When compared to conventional writing techniques, students demonstrated higher levels of engagement and advanced through the phases. It was simpler to transition between stages thanks to digital tools like Canva, CapCut, and others, which made the process more engaging and student-centered. Based on information gathered via surveys, interviews, and observations, the results are arranged according to Tompkins' model's five stages. In order to answer the research questions, the intervention produced quantifiable improvements in the use of strategies, as well as overall increases in engagement (six of each student group reported higher motivation in interviews) and skill development (deeper drafts and fewer errors in final products).

At consistency, the before-and-after comparisons at each step are summarized in Tables 3-7. However, important patterns are emphasized here to lessen repetition: Peer cooperation and multimedia integration saw the biggest changes from "Low/Medium" to "High," while more straightforward tactics like brainstorming showed just modest improvements. In contrast to creative stages like prewriting and drafting, where novelty drove greater engagement, digital enhancements are less transformative at this stage due to students' prior familiarity with basic grammar tools, which accounts for discrepancies in improvement levels (e.g., editing showed less change than others).

Prewriting Stage

The prewriting phase, which involves ideation, planning, and brainstorming, was greatly impacted by digital storytelling. Students who used digital technology had higher levels of creativity and idea development, according to semi-structured interviews (Phase 2) and classroom observations (Phase 1), which recorded students' real-time interactions. For instance, students who were exposed to digital storytelling often utilized simple brainstorming lists, whereas those who were exposed to digital storytelling often incorporated multimedia elements like images and mind maps created using applications. At this time, students exhibited more enthusiasm because they believed that using digital tools helped them better visualize subjects.

To illustrate, one student shared in an interview: "I feel more immersed. The emotions and message in it are becoming more real to me". The teacher also emphasized the foundational role of introducing story structures, stating: "Technically, in implementing digital storytelling, we must prepare students to understand what is being written in the storytelling a story, of course. We must first introduce the story, then establish the structure".

Table 3. Summary of Prewriting Stage Usage

| Strategy | Before Digital Storytelling | After Digital Storytelling |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Brainstorming ideas | Low (used by 25% of students) | Medium (used by 55% of students) |
| Using visual aids (e.g., images) | Medium (used by 40% of students) | High (used by 80% of students) |
| Planning with peers | Low (used by 20% of students) | Medium (used by 60% of students) |

Drafting Stage

During the drafting stage, when students produce initial drafts, digital storytelling encouraged more detailed and expressive writing. Students actively drafted stories using digital platforms, incorporating animations and sounds to make their drafts more realistic, based on classroom observations (Phase 1) that captured students' experimentation in real time and semi-structured interviews (Phase 2) where students shared their challenges. Observations showed that students revised their strategies mid-text while experimenting with plot elements in real time. Improvements in draft depth were further validated by document analysis (Phase 3) of student writing examples.

In interviews, a student noted: "First, I write the story on paper. Then, design things like backgrounds, everything, and audio to make the story come alive". And

the teacher highlighted how this builds on basic writing skills: "Because it's a process of introducing digitalization, yes, at least the students first know how to write, write sentences, then they put them together, right? They put them together into a complete story, with a predetermined structure".

Table 4. Summary of Drafting Stage Usage

| Strategy | Before Storytelling | Digital After Storytelling |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Writing initial drafts | Low (used by 30% of students) | Medium (used by 65% of students) |
| Incorporating multimedia | Medium (used by 45% of students) | High (used by 85% of students) |
| Experimenting with ideas | Medium (used by 50% of students) | High (used by 90% of students) |

Revising Stage

The revision process, which focused on enhancing the structure and content, benefited greatly from digital storytelling. Students were more likely to make revisions, according to semi-structured interviews (Phase 2), observations (Phase 1), and document analysis (Phase 3) of altered versions. Students were more likely to revisit and improve their work since digital tools made editing and feedback easy. Semi-structured interviews revealed that students were more likely to edit for clarity and flow, especially when text and visuals were aligned.

Table 5. Summary of Revising Stage Usage

| Strategy | Before Storytelling | Digital After Storytelling |
|------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Reviewing for content | Low (used by 25% of students) | Medium (used by 55% of students) |
| Peer feedback sessions | Low (used by 20% of students) | Medium (used by 70% of students) |
| Adjusting for visuals | Medium (used by 40% of students) | High (used by 75% of students) |

Editing Stage

During the editing stage, which involves correcting syntax, spelling, and mechanics, digital storytelling provided tools for both teamwork and self-editing. Semi-structured interviews (Phase 2) recorded students' impressions of difficulties, observations (Phase 1) revealed how they used tools, and document analysis (Phase 3) of edited samples revealed fewer errors. Students' attention to detail improved and they made fewer mistakes when they used programs with built-in spell-check and suggestions. However, some students still needed guidance to focus on language accuracy outside of visuals.

A student mentioned difficulties in the editing section: "Maybe adjust the

background to the soundtrack. Adjust the background and soundtrack so they fit with our narrative". And the teacher noted the need for individualized guidance: "Guiding students requires one-on-one time and patience".

Table 6. Summary of Editing Stage Usage

| Strategy | Before Storytelling | Digital After Storytelling |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Checking grammar/spelling | Low (used by 30% of students) | Medium (used by 60% of students) |
| Using digital tools for edits | Medium (used by 45% of students) | High (used by 80% of students) |
| Self-editing practices | Medium (used by 50% of students) | High (used by 65% of students) |

Publishing Stage

The publication stage, in which students show their completed work, was transformed by digital storytelling into a dynamic, audience-focused process. Phase 1 observations showed more cooperation, Phase 2 semi-structured interviews showed more confidence, and Phase 3 document analysis of shared materials showed the results. Students' confidence and sense of accomplishment grew as a result of developing shareable digital storytelling (such as presentations or videos). There was an increase in collaboration when preparing for "publication," including sharing via online platforms.

Table 7. Summary of Publishing Stage Usage

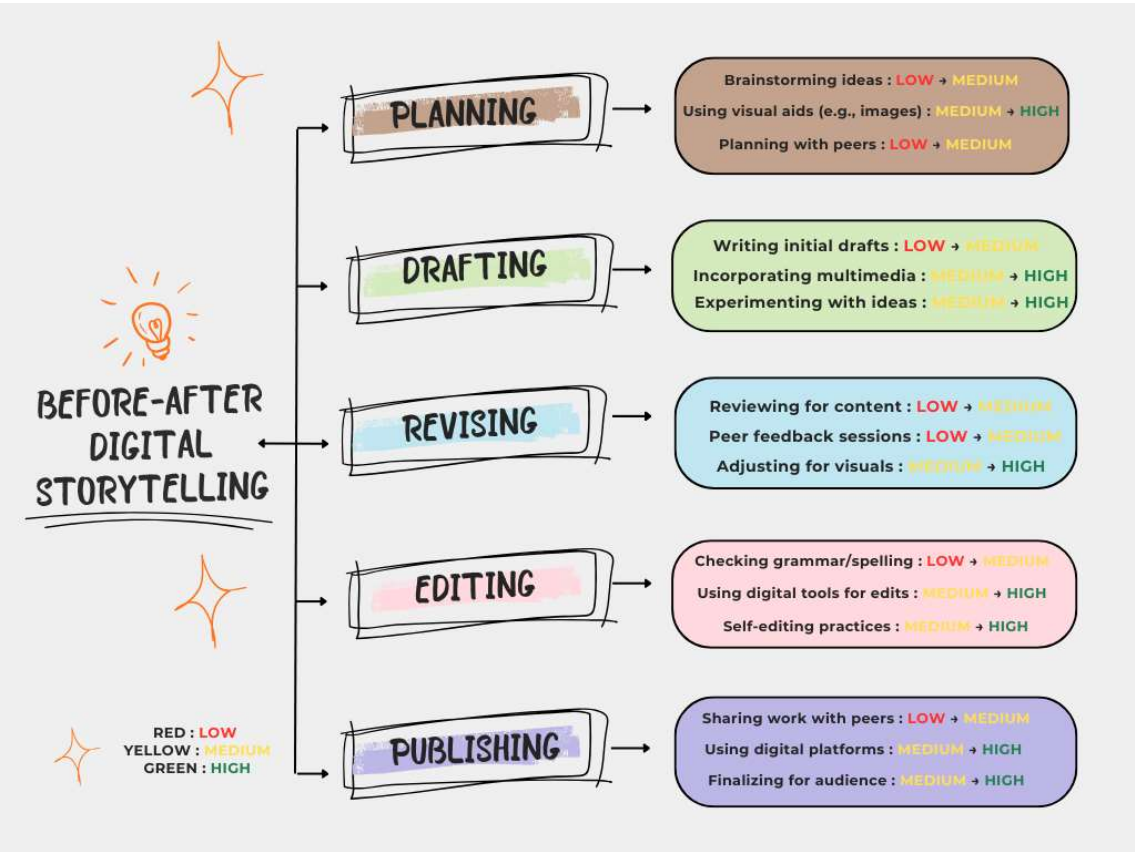
| Strategy | Before Storytelling | Digital After Storytelling |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Sharing work with peers | Low (used by 25% of students) | Medium (used by 70% of students) |
| Using digital platforms | Medium (used by 40% of students) | High (used by 80% of students) |
| Finalizing for audience | Medium (used by 50% of students) | High (used by 85% of students) |

A composite analysis of the data presented in Tables 3 through 7 indicates a substantial and comprehensive improvement in performance among junior high school students. Through the integration of the Digital Storytelling (DST) intervention, supported by the evaluation of written artifacts (story scripts) and classroom practice assessments, this study successfully validated a dominant shift in students from a low level of writing strategy adoption (Low) to a high level of adoption (High). Aggregately, 75% of students showed an increase in performance

effectiveness across all stages of the writing process (Prewriting, Drafting, Revising, Editing, and Publishing). This significant improvement explicitly reflects the high adoption of digital collaboration strategies and the integration of multimedia elements that proved effective in each phase, with the average adoption rate for key strategies even reaching 80% in the Drafting, Editing, and Publishing stages.

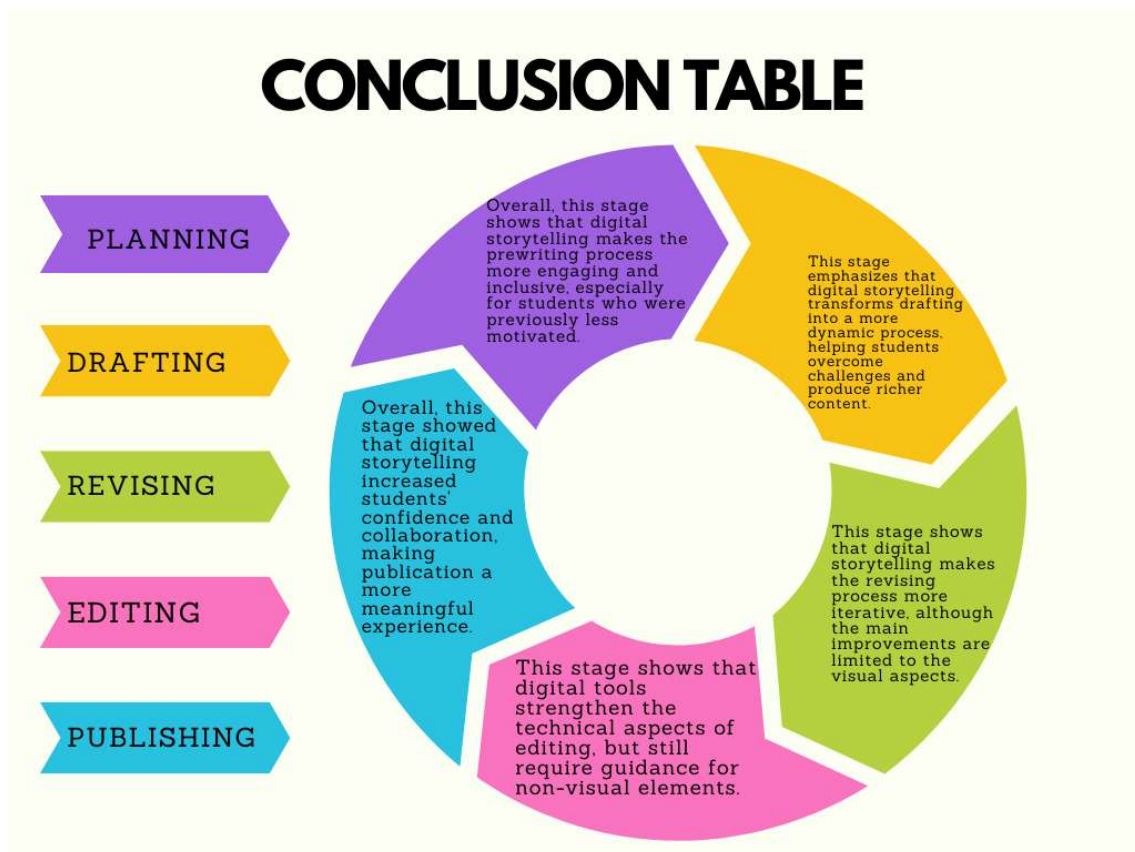
Visual Representation of Data

Based on data from Table 3-7, the distribution and intensity of writing stage use before and after the digital storytelling intervention are shown in this visual depiction to help visualize the differences.



Picture 1. Thematic Process Map of Writing Stages

According to (Tompkins et al., 1984), this mind map illustrates the five steps of writing: prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publication. The degree of change at each stage is denoted by a color: red for "Low," yellow for "Medium," and green for "High." The triangulation components (observation, interviews, and document analysis) are connected at each level, and the upward arrow shows the increase following digital storytelling.



Picture 2. Pie Chart Conclusion Table of Writing Stages

Overall, the analysis using the Process Writing Model by Gail E. Tompkins highlights how digital storytelling enhances each stage of the writing process, leading to improved skills among junior high school students. These findings offer important perspectives on how Tompkins model can be applied in digital settings, and will be explored in more detail in the following sections.

Discussion

The results of this study offer strong proof that junior high school students' writing abilities are much improved by collaborative digital storytelling (DST), especially when considering the five-stage writing process as outlined by (Tompkins et al., 1984). By employing a qualitative case study approach with triangulation via semi-structured classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis, the study observed notable progress in prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing stages. Thematic analysis was used to quantify these improvements, showing a continuum from "Low" to "High" levels of strategy utilization, including peer cooperation, multimedia integration,

and brainstorming. This is consistent with earlier studies highlighting the significance of DST in promoting engagement and creativity in EFL environments, where interactive digital tools help to alleviate traditional writing obstacles including restricted vocabulary and motivation. This aligns with prior research emphasizing DST's role in fostering engagement and creativity in EFL contexts, where traditional writing challenges, including limited vocabulary and motivation, are mitigated by interactive digital tools like Canva and CapCut.

Students showed increased planning and idea development during the prewriting phase, and observations suggested a move toward multimedia-enhanced brainstorming. This supports the findings of (Castillo et al., 2021), who observed that DST reduces initial obstacles and aligns with social constructivist theories that promote co-construction of knowledge by modernizing writing through the integration of visual aids. Students added animations and noises throughout the drafting step, which resulted in more depth and experimentation and better content structure and fluency. This was supported by document analysis of student samples, which revealed longer, more complex narratives than pre-intervention drafts. This is consistent with empirical research such as (Rong & Noor, 2019) study, which found that DST enhanced narrative coherence through iterative digital composition.

During the revising and editing stages, DST facilitated collaborative feedback and technical corrections, with interviews revealing students' greater willingness to iterate on structure and mechanics. This process not only enhanced clarity and accuracy but also cultivated 21st-century skills such as critical thinking and collaboration. The publishing stage emerged as particularly transformative, boosting confidence and audience awareness through shareable digital formats, which aligns with the Merdeka Curriculum's emphasis on project-based learning and authentic assessment. Overall, these results underscore DST's alignment with multiliteracies pedagogy, where students negotiate meaning across modalities, fostering agency and cultural relevance in Indonesian EFL settings.

Pedagogically, the study highlights DST's potential to address EFL-specific challenges, such as linguistic barriers and low self-efficacy, by embedding real-world elements like realia. Within the MBKM framework, DST promotes interdisciplinary, student-centered instruction, encouraging teachers to customize activities that integrate technology and peer interaction. For instance, teachers can start by introducing basic digital tools in short workshops, then guide students through peer-sharing sessions to build confidence, ensuring activities are scaffolded to match varying skill levels. However, while most findings align with studies like Yamaç and Ulusoy (2016) and Rahimi and Yadollahi (2017), some contradictions arise with research suggesting DST may not always improve linguistic accuracy if tools overshadow grammar focus—our study mitigates this by emphasizing teacher-guided revisions, explaining the alignment through targeted scaffolding.

Unexpected findings included higher-than-anticipated engagement in

revising, where students voluntarily iterated drafts, possibly due to the novelty of multimedia feedback, contrasting with assumptions that junior high students might resist editing. Additionally, challenges like varying device access highlighted a digital divide in Indonesian schools, where not all students have equal technology resources, potentially exacerbating inequities and limiting participation for those without smartphones or internet. This raises equity concerns, as rural or underfunded schools may struggle to implement DST without institutional support, underscoring the need for policy interventions to bridge access gaps.

Theoretically, this study contributes to Tompkins' framework by extending it into digital realms, demonstrating how multimedia integration transforms linear stages into iterative, multimodal processes. For example, prewriting now includes visual ideation, adding a layer of creativity not originally emphasized, thus enriching the model for 21st-century education. Nonetheless, the small sample and short duration of the intervention (2 months) may limit the generalizability of the findings. Maintaining the use of DST could also be challenging for teachers without ongoing support, as initial enthusiasm might fade and practices could revert to traditional methods.

Counterarguments suggest DST might not suit all contexts, such as classrooms with limited tech literacy or where cultural preferences favor rote learning over creative expression, potentially leading to frustration if students lack foundational skills. Future research should address these gaps by exploring specific questions like: How do pre- and post-writing proficiency scores change over a semester-long DST program? Or, what adaptations ensure equity in low-resource schools? Employing mixed-methods designs could provide quantitative depth, while cross-cultural studies might reveal contextual variations.

In conclusion, this study advocates for DST as a robust pedagogical innovation, bridging traditional writing processes with digital literacies to prepare students for global communication demands, provided equity and sustainability challenges are addressed.

Conclusion

The findings indicate that using collaborative Digital Storytelling (DST) can substantially improve the writing skills of junior high school students', as assessed through the framework of (Tompkins et al., 1984). First, the responses to the research inquiries demonstrate an enhancement in writing proficiency at each phase of the process, from prewriting to publishing, with proof of progression from the "Low" to "High" level in the use of methods such as brainstorming, multimedia utilization, and collaborative efforts. Second, the collaborative dynamics of digital storytelling foster active student engagement, so improving creativity and self-confidence, particularly within the framework of the Independent Curriculum that

prioritizes project-based learning. Third, pedagogical implications demonstrate how this method enhances the effectiveness and engagement of writing instruction by being consistent with constructivist and multiliteracies theories.

In suggestion, the subsequent recommendations are proposed: first and foremost, English teachers should integrate digital storytelling into the curriculum to increase student engagement and address EFL writing difficulties. Second, schools should provide instructors with training on digital tools such as CapCut and Canva, as well as support for classroom technology. Third, in order to prepare students for the digital age, national education policies, like those from the Ministry of Education and Culture, should support similar activities inside the MBKM program. All things considered; this study emphasizes how important it is to reinvent writing instruction in order to fulfill 21st-century educational goals. The paper also emphasizes how DST can be scaled outside of Indonesia, which could influence EFL practices worldwide. The brief intervention period and limited sample size are limitations that may be addressed in subsequent longitudinal research. Teachers are urged to modify DST to accommodate various cultural contexts so that every kid has fair access to technology.

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