

EFL Students' Experience of Using Storybird in Creative Writing Course: Case Study at UIN KH. Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan

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Abstrak

Menulis merupakan keterampilan dasar yang penting dalam mempelajari bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing. Namun, banyak siswa EFL yang memiliki minat menulis yang rendah. Oleh karena itu, tenaga pendidik di UIN KH. Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan memanfaatkan media digital untuk mendukung hal tersebut. Salah satu media digital yang digunakan adalah Storybird. Dalam hal ini Storybird digunakan dalam kursus menulis kreatif. Melalui penggunaan storybird, siswa mempunyai pengalaman baru dalam proses pembelajaran menulis kreatif. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi pengalaman mahasiswa EFL dalam menggunakan Storybird dalam kursus menulis kreatif. Penelitian ini merupakan jenis penelitian kualitatif dengan metode studi kasus pada Mahasiswa EFL UIN KH. Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan menggunakan wawancara mendalam sebagai teknik pengumpulan datanya. Melalui penelitian ini terlihat bahwa penggunaan storybird dapat membuat pembelajaran menulis menjadi menyenangkan. Selain itu, storybird dapat mengasah kemampuan kognitif siswa dengan mengembangkan kreativitas dan berpikir kritis. Namun terdapat kendala teknis yang dihadapi siswa dalam mengakses storybird. Namun hal tersebut bukanlah kendala yang berarti. Dengan demikian, storybird dapat menjadi alat yang efektif dalam melatih keterampilan menulis siswa EFL.

Kata Kunci: Pengalaman siswa EFL, mata kuliah Creative Writing, Storybird.

Abstract

Writing is an important basic skill in learning English as a foreign language. However, many EFL students have low interest in writing. Therefore, educators at UIN KH. Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan utilized digital media to support this. One of the digital media used is Storybird. In this case, Storybird is used in creative writing courses. Through the use of storybird, students have a new experience in the process of learning to write creatively. Thus, this study aims to explore the experiences of EFL students in using Storybird in creative writing courses. This research is a type of qualitative research with a case study method of EFL Students at UIN KH. Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan using in-depth interviews as the data collection technique. Through this research, it can be seen that the use of storybird can make learning to write fun. In addition, storybird can sharpen students' cognitive skills

by developing creativity and critical thinking. However, there are technical obstacles faced by students in accessing storybird. However, this is not a significant obstacle. Thus, storybird can be an effective tool in training EFL students' writing skills.

Keywords: EFL students' experience, Creative writing course, Storybird.

INTRODUCTION

Creative writing courses are important in the language education curriculum, especially in English. Therefore, creative writing courses are an integral and indispensable component of a university education (Smith, 2020). This has been applied in developed countries such as Australia, England, Ireland, and Canada, where their universities have courses that focus on creative writing. In addition, universities in Korea, Mexico, Spain, Norway, and the Philippines also support the program (Leahy et al., 2014). The same goes for Indonesia. Although Indonesia uses English as a foreign language, most universities in the country offer creative writing courses.

One of the universities that implements creative writing courses is UIN KH. Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan. It is one of the courses that must be studied by students in the English education department. This course not only focuses on writing various kinds of literary texts, but here EFL students are also invited to hone their critical and creative thinking by involving them in creative writing tasks. Thus, they are able to communicate ideas effectively through the written word. In addition, the creative writing course is also a place to explore the potential of EFL students through writing poetry, short stories, comics, narrative texts, journaling, peer feedback, group discussions, and presenting the results of their writing both in the form of mini magazines and digital. Thus, through this writing course, EFL students not only hone their cognitive abilities but are also given the opportunity to develop their four language skills, such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

However, this course has low interest. This is because Indonesia basically uses English as a foreign language. Therefore, it is possible for EFL students to

have low motivation to learn the language, making it difficult for them to learn the target language in a creative way. Therefore, there is a need for media that can support this course by increasing the interest of EFL students through fun learning. One of the media that can be utilized is Storybird. Storybird is a 2.0 website that refers to digital storytelling technology designed to motivate students to continue developing their abilities in creative writing, design, collaboration, communication, and reflection (Aminah and Syahputra, M. 2023). That way, through Storybird, EFL students can pour their ideas and imagination into the form of interesting and fun stories using the features provided and captivate their readers with the right choice of words. So that they can communicate messages clearly to their readers.

The use of this interesting learning medium can increase EFL students' interest and motivation in learning. This allows EFL students to have a new experience learning to write in a creative writing course. This is because experience has been recognized as having a relationship with learning or education (Roth, W., M., and Jornet, A., 2014). So, it can be said that in learning, every student will have different learning experiences, both positive and negative. Through this, the researcher is interested in exploring EFL students' experiences using Storybird in the Creative Writing Course at UIN KH. Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan.

There are several previous studies that have described the use of digital media to support students' writing skills. One of them is a study conducted by Aminah and M. Syahputra (2023). This study discusses the use of the Storybird platform for learning to write. It aims to find out the use of the Storybird platform in teaching writing. In his research, he used descriptive library research methods by analyzing the content of documents. In his research, it is stated that Storybird is one of the right digital platforms to be used in teaching writing. Storybird provides many advantages, such as collaborative work, easy-to-organize work, and the ability to allow students to publish their work, which can increase their motivation to write.

On the other hand, Zakaria, S., Yunus, M., Nazri, N., and Shah, P. (2016) also revealed in their research entitled "Students' experience of using storybirds in writing ESL Narrative Text" that the teachers in Malaysia are trying to improve the

way of teaching English (ESL) by using digital platforms to learn narrative writing. This study aims to identify students' experiences using a digital storytelling tool called Storybird to write English as a Second Language (ESL) narrative text. The methods used in this study were a semi-structured interview and observation of 15 diploma students at a Malaysian university. The research showed that most of the respondents reflected on their positive experiences using Storybird in writing ESL narrative texts.

This is further corroborated by research that reveals the use of media can support the learning of writing. This can be seen in the research conducted by Andryanus, Regina, and Zainal Arifin (2017) with the title "An Analysis on a Student's Experience of Using a Blog as a Learning Tool for Writing Activities." In their research, they used a qualitative research approach with a case study method. This research was conducted to find out how digital media blogs as a learning tool can help students learn to write. The findings showed that digital media can help students with writing activities through its features that provide writing media, provide motivating feedback, and create a critical thinking environment.

The above studies have similarities with this study, which discusses the role of the role of digital media in supporting writing learning. However, this study focuses on how EFL students experience using Storybird in creative writing courses at UIN KH. Abdurrahman Wahid. In addition, this study also explores the difficulties experienced by EFL students in using Storybird. That way, this research can be used as a guideline for future studies.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study is a type of qualitative research. Pahleviannur (2022) revealed that qualitative research is a type of research that sees and understands how an individual or group experiences social problems. Qualitative research also means research that has the aim of gaining an understanding of reality through an inductive thinking process (Adlini et al., 2022). This research can also be said to be a type of

research that produces new findings that may not be achieved through statistical procedures (Nugrahani, 2014). Thus, the focus of this qualitative research is to gain an understanding of the context conditions through a thorough and in-depth explanation of the learning experiences experienced by EFL students in the use of Storybird in creative writing courses. So that this research can explore what actually happens in the field.

In this case, the researcher uses the case study method to help better adjust so as to gain a deep understanding of the learning experience of an individual. The word "case" itself has the meaning of a particular study, event, activity, or program. So, this case study can be interpreted as an exploration of a case over time using data collected in depth and involving various sources of information needed (Assyakurrohim, 2023). In this case, the author explores the experience of EFL students in their activities using Storybird in a creative writing course, a case study based on the experience of EFL students at UIN KH. Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan.

Researchers use in-depth interview techniques for data collection. The in-depth interview technique is a data collection technique that involves extracting the main data in depth from informants, which allows researchers to obtain as much and complete information as possible (Nugrahani, 2014). That way, the writer here conducts interviews with EFL students of the English education department who have passed the creative writing course at UIN KH. Abdurrahman Wahid as a source of data needed in this study. In addition, the author also uses other literature that supports this research. In this case, the author also uses descriptive techniques to analyze the data that has been found. That way, the data that has been found is then processed and then described using meaningful words in describing the research results obtained.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Writing is one of the essential basic language skills in learning English as a foreign language (Graham, 2019). This is because writing is a form of

communication that can help EFL students convey messages to others clearly and effectively. Thus, it is important to include writing courses in universities. This is what UIN KH Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan does. The university offers creative writing courses to EFL students in the English education department. Through the course, EFL students can express their thoughts and feelings in an imaginative, unique, poetic, and fun way (El-Mahdi, 2018). Thus, in this case, the lecturer used digital storybird media to learn creative writing, which provides a meaningful learning experience for EFL students. Miss X has a new experience in learning creative writing. Miss X is an EFL student who has graduated from a creative writing course. Then she shared her experience while learning in the creative writing course class, as follows:

“Saya merasa senang belajar creative writing menggunakan Storybird. Pasalnya kita bebas menuangkan imajinasi dalam bentuk tulisan, jadi saya semangat belajar menulis” (I feel happy learning creative writing using Storybird. Because we are free to express our imagination in the form of writing, I am excited to learn to write)

Through this, it can be seen that learning can provide valuable experiences for EFL students. The experience referred to here is the involvement of EFL students' feelings during the learning process (Rakadena, 2021). In this case, students are able to express their feelings of pleasure and enthusiasm while participating in the learning process in the creative writing course using Storybird. This was also expressed by Miss Y, who also felt happy and inspired during the learning.

“Storybird membuat belajar menulis saya menjadi lebih menyenangkan dan saya merasa lebih terinspirasi untuk menghasilkan cerita yang unik dan menarik.” (Storybird makes learning to write more fun, and I feel more inspired to produce unique and interesting stories)

Not only feelings, but learning experience can also be seen through EFL students' involvement in learning activities. This is based on Miss X's experience expressed in the following interview:

“Pada awalnya, kita dikenalkan dengan macam – macam teks sastra. Kemudian kita diminta untuk menulis cerita bebas menggunakan storybird. Jadi, disitu siswa disuruh untuk berpasangan dan membuat cerita yang kreative dengan memilih gambar bebas pada template yang disediakan di storybird. Sehingga pembelajarannya seru, membuat kita bisa pilih – pilih gambar bareng teman, membuat cerita bareng, dan seru-seruan untuk bisa menciptakan tulisan yang indah.”
(*At first, we were introduced to various kinds of literary texts. Then we were asked to write a free story using Storybird. So, the students are told to pair up and create a creative story by choosing a free picture from the template provided in Storybird. So the learning is fun; we can choose pictures with friends, make stories together, and have fun to be able to create beautiful writing*)

The involvement of EFL students in learning activities is an important aspect that can be categorized as a learning experience (Rakadena, 2021). Through the involvement of EFL students in this activity, it helps students be active during the learning process. So that EFL students are not only passive recipients of subject matter, but they also become participants who play an active role in the teaching and learning process. In this case, it is shown that the involvement of Miss X as an EFL student in group discussions. Through the group discussion, they are given the opportunity to express their opinions and exchange ideas regarding the selection of images in the template that will be used as writing.

Storybird does offer features that can help EFL students develop their writing skills. Storybird has three account categories: regular users (any users), school/Edu users (students and educators), and professional users (artists and writers) (Anita, 2016). In addition, Storybird also provides various templates, where each template has many images that writers can choose to match the writing they make. Then they can publish it to others, so this makes it easier for EFL students to visualize creative stories that match their thoughts and imaginations. That way, this storybird can be said to be a medium that can increase the creativity of EFL students in learning to write. This is like the exposure of the experience felt by Miss Y, as follows:

“Setelah menggunakan storybird ini, saya merasa Storybird telah membantu saya untuk lebih kreatif dalam menulis. Melalui Platform ini, saya dapat menemukan banyak gambar dan animasi yang

menarik, sehingga ide-ide saya dapat tervisualisasikan dengan baik.” (After using this storybird, I feel that Storybird has helped me to be more creative in writing. Through this platform, I can find many interesting images and animations so that my ideas can be well visualized)

Producing interesting and unique stories requires cognitive abilities. This is because the writing process is related to intellect and creativity (Smith, 2020). This process involves imagination and the ability to organize ideas into an interesting and coherent narrative. In this case, EFL students are required to be able to create vivid characters, captivating settings, and storylines that captivate readers. By doing so, this will significantly increase the creativity of EFL students.

“Dengan menggunakan Storybird, saya didorong untuk berpikir kritis tentang cerita yang saya tulis, pasalnya, dalam hal ini saya dituntut harus mempertimbangkan plot, karakter, dan setting, agar pesan yang ingin saya sampaikan dapat diterima dengan baik oleh pembaca. Hal ini membantu saya untuk mengembangkan keterampilan berfikir kritis terhadap tulisan yang saya buat.” Ujar narasumber y. (By using Storybird, I am encouraged to think critically about the stories I write, because in this case I am required to consider the plot, characters, and setting so that the message I want to convey can be well received by readers. This helped me to develop critical thinking skills in my writing) Said Miss Y.

On the other hand, this writing process requires EFL students to think outside the box in solving all possibilities that arise in the process of producing beautiful writing. However, the production of texts produced in creative writing does not only prioritize aesthetic purposes but also pays attention to informative, instrumental, and pragmatic sides (Maninji, 2021). Thus, it gives EFL students the opportunity to hone their critical thinking. This has been proven according to Miss X's experience, who experienced development in critical thinking after using Storybird in a creative writing course.

Thus, overall, the use of Storybird in this creative writing course provides many benefits that can support EFL students in developing their writing skills. However, there are some difficulties or obstacles experienced by EFL students in its use. This is as stated by Miss Y, as follows:

“Penggunaan awal, saya sering mengalami kendala website yang terkadang sulit dibuka, lambat, dan macet. Ini membuat saya merasa frustrasi karena memperlambat proses menulis saya. Jadi, terkadang saya tidak melanjutkan menulis hanya karena perkara tersebut.” (In my initial use, I often experienced website problems that were sometimes difficult to open, slow, and stuck. This made me feel frustrated because it slowed down my writing process, so sometimes I didn't continue writing just because of that)

This proves that there are technical problems faced by EFL students. This is one of the negative experiences that EFL students have in creative writing courses. However, such technical obstacles were only experienced by Miss Y. So, it can be said that this obstacle is not so significant that it can hinder students from developing their writing skills.

CONCLUSION

Based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that students showed a positive learning experience in using Storybird in the creative writing course. This is shown by the feeling of excitement and enthusiasm that EFL students have during the learning process. In addition, through this, EFL students can also improve and develop their creativity and critical thinking. On the other hand, there was a negative learning experience, namely experiencing technical problems in accessing Storybird in the creative writing course. However, it was not a significant obstacle. Therefore, it can be said that Storybird can be an effective tool in training EFL students' writing skills.

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