Using Plotagon in Enhancing Secondary Four English Learners' Narrative Writing Skill

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Abstract

The frequent usage of digital tools and technology has motivated teachers and students to become more active, innovative and creative in the lesson, especially to those learning English as Second Language Learners. The implementation of 4Cs in classrooms, particularly Critical thinking, Creativity, Communication, and Collaborative is also being suggested to put into teaching and learning practice. However, students' interest level in writing English is extremely low as multiliteracies are not well practised in the writing skill. Therefore, in this study, researcher would like to determine the effectiveness of Plotagon, an animated video making application in enhancing Secondary students' narrative writing skill. 43 participants have participated in the study and created videos in group. Thematic analysis is used to analyse students' learning outcome after the story writing. The study found that students' narrative writing skill, which comprises Content, Communicative Achievement, Organisation and Language, had improved with the assistance of Plotagon tool. Nonetheless, students' vocabulary had increased while peer-learning takes place. Thus, the use of digital storytelling plays a significant role in motivating students to write narrative essays.

Keywords: 4Cs classroom, English as Second Language, Plotagon, Narrative writing skill.

1. Introduction

The integration of technology has brought many advantages to ease our lives, notably, learners are encouraged to use the languages as a tool to convey messages (Balaman, 2018). This has shown that students' interest in learning English language is developing obviously with the assistance of technology compared to textbook learning environment (Kristiawan et al., 2022). In addition, the emergence of Web 2.0 tools has rapidly proven that the possibility of using digital instruments will motivate students to be active learners (Rong & Noor, 2019) since they are exposed to self-directed and collaborative learning environment.

In 2018, English curriculum in Malaysia was revised and CEFR was used as the guideline to examine learners' language proficiency. This further indicates that literacy is not only incorporating reading and writing instruction, but it is also involving multimodality into writing process (Rong & Noor, 2019). In the other way, teachers are highly advised to implement digital tools into teaching and learning (Guzmán Gámez & Moreno Cuellar, 2019). With the utilisation of technology, educators can evaluate their students' writing performance creatively. Abundance of research have been carried out to identify the effectiveness of digital storytelling in promoting language learning. Undeniably, it has been

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proven that digital storytelling could benefit the students in all aspects. (Guzmán Gámez & Moreno Cuellar, 2019) had proven that digital storyboarding had enhanced students' vocabulary and English writing skill. Another significant study which was carried out in Singapore had shown that students' critical thinking skill was sharpened when they practised using digital storytelling tool (Mizusawa & Kiss, 2020).

Nevertheless, despite knowing the fact that digital tools created positive impact to English learners, yet most educators in our country were restricted to bring technology into the classroom. This statement is supported by (Rahim & Ahmadi, 2021) in their study that the periods of lesson were limited and teachers were being advised to cover the syllabus within their academic year. Not only that, (Al-Habsi et al., 2022) further emphasised that teacher spent more time to explain the terms to students as they were hardly to comprehend in the classroom. Therefore, students encountered the problem of not having sufficient exercises to practise English writing as they had limited vocabulary to express their ideas (Hasram et al., 2021). Thus, this caused teachers were reluctant to utilise technological tool into language teaching because both technology and language writing consume plenty of time in the classroom (Rong & Noor, 2019).

Although digital storytelling has been introducing successfully in other countries, yet there are very few studies to identify the use of digital storytelling in curriculum (Dehghanzadeh et al., 2021; Khan & Paiker, 2021; Mizusawa & Kiss, 2020; Rong & Noor, 2019). Therefore, there is a need to determine the effectiveness of using digital tool in enhancing English writing. With this objective, this study would like to determine the effectiveness of Plotagon in improving narrative writing skill.

2. Literature Review
Digital storytelling and Plotagon

Digital storytelling (DS) is highlighted as a powerful pedagogical tool to motivate students to learn writing and realise that writing is eventually a process-based task. Today, students were no longer practising monomodal to learn language as it is dull and not interactive (Kendrick et al., 2022). Thus, this has limited students' imagination and creativity in acquiring a language (Chan et al., 2021). A multimodal approach should be applied to hone English learners learning English from different methods. Hence, Plotagon is considered as a software which creates interactive environment for students to learn writing skill (Sa'diyah et al., 2021).

DS is an effective instrument for film making. The specialties of Plotagon are, it allows writers to design instant animation, background scenes, develop content and insert suitable audio and conversation to pair up with the situations in the story (Banegas & Lowe, 2021). Plotagon is eligible for both mobile and desktop versions for users. A free of charge choice is provided to first trials, however, users should opt for the paid version if they would like to use more features and access premium functions.

The results gathered from previous research showed that DS affected learners positively. An action research was done by (Rong & Noor, 2019) in using digital storytelling tool, Storybird, in promoting secondary 1 students' writing skill in Malaysia. The students' performance is evaluated by referring the Rubrics to Assess Digital Stories and analysed by using Friedman Ranks Test. The researchers conducted four treatments to the students. The result showed that

the students' writing skill has improved after using digital tool in the classroom. Obviously, students' grammar and language usage had improved when they were given chance to do amendment after the first treatment.

Another action research was carried out in Colombia by (Guzmán Gámez & Moreno Cuellar, 2019) with the purpose of implementing Plotagon in enhancing English writing skill. 18 students who learn English as Foreign Language were participated in this study. As a result, students created animated stories in pairs and their vocabulary has increased. This has shown that Plotagon is an effective tool in promoting English writing in a fun and meaningful way.

Moreover, an experimental study was conducted by (Sari et al., 2021) in Semarang, Indonesia. The purpose of the study is to investigate the effectiveness of short animation video in improving narrative writing skill among learning English as Foreign Language learners. The participants involved were the 8th Grade English Foreign learners in a Junior High School. A total of 64 students were divided into 2 groups, which were the experimental and the control group. The result was collected through survey after watching animation video online. The experimental group performed better compared to control group in narrative writing.

Based on the findings, it had shown that advancement in technology has changed students' learning approach (Kendrick et al., 2022). In 21st century, writing has transformed to multimodal where various instruments such as music and visuals were used to assist language learning. Even though DS was an interesting relic to be projected to audience, the most essential part of storytelling is the writing process. This was mentioned by (Spaliviero, 2022) and supported by (Kendrick et al., 2022) that good content makes digital storytelling more remarkable. Despite abundant advantages of DS, the lack of related literature determining the function and effectiveness of DS in English writing still existed. Thus, a research study is needed to investigate the impact of DS on English as Second Language learners' writing performance. This study aimed to answer the following research question to fill in the gap of the studies:

- What are the effects of using Digital Storytelling on English as Second Language learners' narrative writing skill?
- How do students perceive after using Plotagon to learn narrative writing?

3. Methodology

Research design

This study employed qualitative research method and case study research design in identifying the effectiveness of Plotagon in enhancing students' writing skill. To identify the effectiveness of the study, a pre-test was conducted to determine students' ability in writing narrative essays in class. Before writing, a 40-minute narrative story writing technique lesson was taught by the English teacher. Later, marking process based on the latest CEFR assessment criteria was used to determine students' writing level. By reading and marking those essays, the writing ability of each student could be analysed.

Students prepared their scripts in class and teacher assisted them to express their ideas in words. Then, animated videos were created by students using the free video-creating application, Plotagon. After designing the video, students would present their stories in classroom.

Participants

Purposive sampling was taken place in this study. 43 students, specifically 13 boys and 24 girls, who were sixteen years old, were selected to participate in this study. All students possessed and were learning Mandarin as their first language as it was their mother tongue. Generally, this group of students was classified as intermediate B1 English learners according to CEFR English assessment scale, yet their writing level was considered as in lower intermediate level. These 43 students were divided randomly into 8 groups, specifically 5 groups with 5 students while 3 groups with 6 students.

Data collection

All 43 students in a Secondary Four class had participated in this study. The teacher used 2 periods, which were equivalent to 80 minutes, to introduce the application, Plotagon to every student. Apart from that, the teacher will demonstrate the way of using Plotagon during the English Communication period. Five (5) themes from the Secondary Four: Full Blast textbook were chosen and used as a guideline to produce the scripts after the introductory lesson.

While drafting and writing the script, teacher would act as facilitator, guider, proof-reader and moderator to assist every group and ensure each of the members collaborate well in their groups. The students were given four (4) weeks to complete the script. Then, they were allowed to use two (2) weeks to insert and design their video in the classroom.

After completing the video, a period was used for each group to present the creative digital story to their classmates. Each group was given two votes to vote for the two best stories they had watched. The group with highest votes would receive small prizes as recognition. Lastly, researcher would focus on the effectiveness of using Plotagon in enhancing students' narrative writing skill by comparing the students' writing ability based on CEFR assessment scale before using the application and while using the application.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the students' script and reflection. students' script was analysed by adhering to the CEFR essay assessment scale. The assessment scale has divided into four main criteria, which are Content, Communicative Achievement, Organisation and Language. Each criterion consists of 5 points. Students would gain 5 out of 5 if their content is fully addressed, use accurate tone and the language selected can hold the readers' attention effectively. Moreover, they can use linking words, cohesive devices, paragraphing and punctuation and have different types of vocabulary, either basic or less common vocabulary, and impede communication in their writing task. Hence, to ensure the validity of the data, CEFR assessment scale was fully utilised to analyse the writing skill of the students.

To ensure the data collected was placed in the right category, theme or topic sentence would only be formed after reading the data collected. In this study, researcher would highlight the students' script writing and the students' reflection will be used to support the discussion students' writing ability and reflection will be linked to the research question of the study.

4. Result

Content

The students had picked deforestation, cyberbullying, ocean conservation, sea pollution, time transcendent and Winter Olympics as their titles of the story. From the script writing, the

information out of the textbook could be located. To describe deforestation, the students from Group 1 wrote '… the trunks are almost two metres in diameter.' and 'the thunderstorm and heavy mountain flood flushed away the machineries…' and students from Group 3 mentioned 'many loggers have cut down a lot of trees to build houses' in their writing. Moreover, Group 2 also narrated that 'your mum must have been cursed to give birth to an atrocity like you.' and '…she was diagnosed with paranoia when her parents brought her to a doctor' to show that the cursing words and the effects on the cyberbullied victims. Also, Group 6 could include the facts that '… the turtle's nose was clogged by the of plastic straws' and 'Look! the oil spills into the ocean…'. Those had completely stated the causes of sea pollution. Surprisingly, students in Group 7 were able to blend the imperative sports characters and mascots such as, Lee Chong Wei, Chen Long and Bing Dwen Dwen into the script.

Communicative Achievement

All groups had achieved 4 out of 5 points for this criterion. Most of the students were able to use different forms of sentences and accurate communicative purposes to convey the ideas in their storylines. Students could use compound and complex sentences appropriately and form sentences to express doubt, such as, 'Really? It seems the situation is getting worse' (Group 4), 'Are you sure you want to bring your pet along?' (Group 6) '…don't you have something to do except insulting others?' (Group 2) and 'Wait, so he did not get a chance to win the Olympics?' (Group 7) to show doubt. Interestingly, participants used '…What did I do to deserve this?' and '…I can't handle this anymore, bye forever' to express depression (Group 2). Furthermore, participants chose the phrase '…not to mention…' (Group 6), '…so nice of you…' (Group 8), '…is my pleasure…' (Group 8) and '…such a deed…' (Group 7) as exclamations in the dialogue.

Other than that, complex ideas and conditional sentences were found in the scripts. Students used 'after ensuring his friends' safety, Pepper went to his old friend Aldrich to check up on him' (Group 1) '…it is illegal. If you continue your action, many families will lose their homes.' (Group 3), '…if the reported statement is true, we will punish him' (Group 3), '…if our actions cause a rupture in the space-time continuum, we have to put our hands together to return back here…' (Group 5), '…if this will be his last match, I will make sure it will be one to remember.' (Group 7) and '…if not, the cave will submerge in water' (Group 8) to show likely conditions in the scripts. Amazingly, participants were also able to use impossible conditional tense too, such as, '…I wish not to fight with you, Bella.' (Group 8) and '…I wish I could have got out from the cave' (Group 8). Students had shown their knowledge of language competency in their collaborative writing task.

Organisation

The present study showed that students' ability in arranging their ideas had improved compared to pre-writing task. Students created and modified their content of presentation according to the Freytag's pyramid, which emphasised on Exposition, Rising action, Climax, Falling action and Resolution in a piece of writing. By adhering to the guideline, a smooth-reading story with suitable linking words and cohesive devices would be presented.

For example, Group 6 which wrote about technology had described the scene and characteristic of the protagonist as the exposition section appropriately. 'In a small town,

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there lived a young boy named Jervin. He is an adventurous and greedy boy. One day, Jervin heard that there was a diamond worth thousand being hidden in the temple. Thus, Jervin planned to steal the diamond as he needed money desperately. However, he met some challenges while searching the precious diamond.'

In the rising action part, students mentioned the condition which stimulated the main character to carry out the next action, such as '…it is time to start executing my plan to find the diamond!' Later, students moved the story to climax by writing '…He pressed the red button on the wall and unconsciously fell onto the floor.' and 'Ahh! My head is dizzy. Where am I? There are many high-tech facilities here! Let's give it a try.' To move the story to the falling action, students showed the consequence of being greedy such as '…you will not go back to the city you wish. I will insert a microchip in your brain to control your whole body. You are my servant now!' to conclude the story, students reminded the audience '…greedy does not pay in return.'

Language

Group 1 which focussed on deforestation used appealing word choice to narrate their stories. For example, students wrote'…humans are demolishing our home.', '…yelled at his friend who was halfway to the afterlife.', '…memories will never fade.', '…getting closer to the heart of the forest.', '…machines mowing down the trees…', '…tree trunk flushed down by the flood.', '…flattening the entire forest.', '…trunks were lifted away from his legs.'to describe the scenes.

Besides that, students in Group 2 who wrote cyberbullying were able to use attractive phrases such as '…vent his frustration…', '…such an abomination…', 'insulted Michelle in the comments…', '…give birth to an atrocity…', '…spread unsavoury rumours…', '…do not engage in prostitution.', '…started to be sceptical…', '…health condition deteriorated.', '…cheered in victory.', '…barged into Adam's house…' and '…investigate the perpetrator…' to move the plot forward with appropriate words.

5. Discussion

This study showed that DS writing approach was more effective and attractive to encourage English Second Language learners to gauge the writing skill. This is supported by (Brunner, 2021; Farihah et al., 2021; Kendrick et al., 2022; Khan & Paiker, 2021; Mizusawa & Kiss, 2020; Rizvic et al., 2020; Rong & Noor, 2019; Spaliviero, 2022) in their study that DS was a productive approach in developing students' language performance.

Creativity and comprehension

(Balaman, 2018) highlighted that DS allows learners to be creative in expressing their ideas. 2 out of 8 groups of students said that '… I am actually promoting the importance of saving our environment creatively' in their reflection. From the script writing, it is apparent that students had read through articles and done study online to consolidate the knowledge before they draft out their story. This was mentioned by 28 students that '…script writing teaches me to do deep research on the topic.' Additionally, student no.12 highlighted that 'I would rather do research online before arguing the details and plot of the story with teammates.'

Furthermore, DS also had improved students' understanding on the topic they wrote. (Abet et al., 2022; Spaliviero, 2022) mentioned in their research that students' comprehension skill had enhanced when students used DS tool collaboratively. This was supported by 6 students

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as they emphasised that '…I learned from the websites that not only plastic will pollute the sea, but the split oil will also destroy the sea creatures too.' Moreover, 23 students said that, 'I insert different characters and background to describe the scene clearly.' Remarkably, student no. 26 and 33 highlighted that '…deforestation is a serious issue, but we only learn limited knowledge from the book, now I know the issue better from reading other resources.' Thus, the use of Plotagon in language teaching gathered and merge students' knowledge on a particular topic.

Motivation

Obviously, DS was determined as an effective multimodal writing tool to secondary learners as it motivates students to produce their stories with the assistance of music, animations and voice over recordings ultimately. This was also mentioned by (Mirhosseini et al., 2020) and agreed by (Khan & Paiker, 2021) that multimodality motivates students to learn beyond using a language in written form. 25 of the students mentioned that 'Plotagon had motivated us to speak and write the language confidently.' Each of the students acted as a unique character in their stories. Thus, each student had to contribute their ideas in the script when working in group. From the activity, students were encouraged to learn English vocabulary. All 25 students wrote that '… I learn the new words from my friend and website. It is fun.' in the reflection. (TATLI et al., 2022) also agreed that DS could enhance students' grammar usage and sentence formation. Besides that, students no. 16, 22, 34, and 38 also mentioned that '… I am motivated to speak in front of my friends now.' Also, students no. 2, 18, 26 and 41 highlighted that, with the assistance of animation, '…the frequency of using and speaking English has increased.' This was supported by (Dewi & Sari, 2022) in their study that DS could boost students' confidence level in speaking.

Organisation and vocabulary

Apart from that, students' organisation and vocabulary had been developed. This was agreed by (DePape & Doyle-Thomas, 2022; Xu et al., 2022) in their study that DS let students learn more vocabulary and master their sentence structure. All students mentioned that '…I learned new words from the website and friends' and '…now I know how to structure my sentences accordingly.' These had shown that students were learning vocabulary and organisation skill while drafting and editing their script. Besides that, peer work and review were effective in training students to construct meaningful sentences. 30 out of 43 students noted in their reflection that 'Plotagon teaches us to work in a team when gathering ideas' and '…spirit of teamworking in my team helps me to sharpen my writing skill.' This showed that language learning would be more effective if it was conducted in a group (Abet et al., 2022). Through the practice of writing, students' ability in explaining the scenarios with proper register and tone had cultivated (Xu et al., 2022). The frequency of using conditional sentences had increased compared to the narrative essay in class. Students preferred to use simple sentences in conveying messages. This tool had in turn fostered the ability of drafting and structuring (Castillo-Cuesta, 2020). This could be proven by students' reflection. 35 of the students agreed that '…my leader teaches me to modify my sentences with beautiful words', 'I draft out my ideas after reading numerous articles…' and '…I learn to edit the script when we complete the script.' Thus, the use of DS should be considered to improve students' writing skill.

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Pronunciation

This study' intention is to motivate students in writing and speaking English language frequently in students' daily life. As students learned to use a variety of vocabulary, either simple or lexical, this had urged them to learn the pronunciation of the words when they recorded their voice for the digital storytelling purpose (Dewi & Sari, 2022). Through the practice, 20 out of 43 students highlighted that they learned the pronunciation of the vocabulary in this task. Students no 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 16, 20, 24, 30, 33 and 38 wrote that, 'I learned how to pronounce some words when I was recording my voice. I used Cambridge dictionary on website to help me.' Besides that, students no 8 and 18 mentioned that 'we need to record the voice for this story, so I learned to pronounce the words with different tone.' Surprisingly, student no 9 and 12 noticed that '…I mispronounce some words when I was having discussion with my friends. They corrected me patiently.' Also, student no 17 wrote that '…I learned a lot of skills to become a good voice over expert. Some words I had no idea how to pronounce them, but I learn it so I can use in essay writing next time.' Hence, it can be said that the use of digital storytelling tool is not only encouraging students in writing, but it has also stimulated students to learn the pronunciation of the words correctly. This is supported by (Dewi & Sari, 2022; Nair & Md Yunus, 2022) that digital storytelling improved students' pronunciation and grammar. It had been proven that digital storytelling encouraged them to speak and use the language more often as English is always neglected by our students in Malaysia due to the reason that it is the second language in education (Mirza, 2020).

6. Conclusion

This study has answered that DS is able to enhance students' narrative writing skill and they are motivated to learn the writing technique when technology is incorporated in the lesson. Despite numerous studies had shown the effectiveness of using technology in improving English writing skill, students should focus more on the writing process compared to the video recording, which counted as the final product of presentation. Moreover, it is hoped that teachers, school management and policymakers who are involved in education industry will implement more user-friendly technological tools in assisting our English lesson and classroom. Apart form that, future research should focus more on investigating and comparing both rural and urban areas students' English writing skill after introducing digital tools in teaching and learning pedagogy.

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