



EXPLORING ANIMAKER AS A MEDIUM OF WRITING A DESCRIPTIVE TEXT: EFL STUDENTS' CHALLENGES AND PROMOTED ASPECTS OF DIGITAL STORYTELLING LITERACY

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ABSTRACT: Animaker, as one of the digital storytelling tools to write a descriptive text in the learning intervention, is promoted in this pilot study. As a part of a classroom action research, this study is conducted to build the students' digital storytelling literacy. Firstly, it aims at investigating the students' challenges of using Animaker as a medium to write a descriptive text. Secondly, it is to describe how the aspects of digital storytelling were promoted by Animaker. A descriptive qualitative method is used to analyze the data gained from a questionnaire and the document of students' animated videos created by using Animaker. The results found that the process of inserting audio files was the most difficult to do for 80% of the students. Around 20%-40% of them were also challenged by the way of adjusting the duration and the volume of the audio inserted on each page. The use of Animaker also promoted the students' diverged digital storytelling literacy in 11 aspects; the topic, purpose, creator, audience, organization, narration, multimedia, educational value, mechanics, sources, and originality. Then, it is suggested that the use of Animaker should apply certain strategies to minimize the challenges and to increase the students' digital storytelling literacy. Finally, the researchers recommend this tool to be used frequently in EFL learning as a tool to reinforce the students' digital storytelling literacy.

Key words: *description, text, digital, storytelling, Animaker*

INTRODUCTION

Being skillful in using English has always been an objective of learning English. The learners are required to master the four language skills – listening, speaking, reading, and writing. However, so far EFL learners, especially ones in Indonesia and in East Nusa Tenggara province in particular still face challenges in the learning English language.

EFL students commonly experience difficulties not only in understanding but also in producing the language. They are hardly able to adjust their heart, mind, and attitude to the target language and its culture (Brown, 2000). This creates problems when the learners are constructing the language orally and written. In their classroom context, the researchers frequently find students difficult to speak English fluently, properly, and accurately. Lack of confidence, unfamiliar pronunciation, and complexity of the language structure are the problems frequently present among the students in oral communication (Hambandima, 2014). These problems cause students the researchers' context less responsive to any questions or instructions given in the classroom. They even tend to avoid interacting with their teachers (Ngadi, et al., 2018). Further, the students meet challenges in English writing. Commonly, they experience vocabulary shortage and insufficiency in grammar knowledge when producing written language expressions. These problems were also found among the research participants.

In this study the researchers were motivated to help their students overcome or at least minimize their

EFL learning difficulties. In line with the goal of today's learning in the digital era, the researchers made their students learn to write descriptive text structure by using one application of digital storytelling (Animaker) as a media to produce the English language orally and written. Moreover, this innovative learning benefited the learners in developing their digital literacy skills to fulfill today's workforce requirements. This was to support the policy stated by the Minister of Research, Technology, and Higher Education in 2018 saying that today's education should satisfy the demands of 4.0 industrial revolution one of which requires learners to be skillful in using computer and technology in learning. The researchers believe that their students as candidate teachers need to acquire this digital skill to help the students to be digital literate teachers in the future. They can use this skill to prepare a digitalized learning for their future students.

The research conducted was also a way of learning to stimulate the students to be active, responsive, and adaptive in learning as well as capable to use Animaker as a digital tool to produce their descriptive writing. Having the skill of using this digital storytelling (DST) application in learning, the candidate of teachers are expected to be more competitive in the digital era of education. Used as a media of learning English language, Animaker is facilitated with some features such as pictures, animated pictures, audio, and various templates to make digital storytelling products more interesting.

Animaker is used as a tool to write a descriptive text. It is important for the students to be able to write this text as it is the fundamental text type. In this study, the students are required to write the text with a topic familiar to them. A familiar topic can minimize challenges in writing. This helps the students to be more fluent in expressing their ideas using the language of description. The researchers believe that the research participants can write the text on a topic close to their life, culture, and experiences (Sasson, 2013). This closeness can encourage the students more engaged in what they are writing about. In this research, the participants were asked to write about one of their parents (mother or father).

However, the use of DST as a writing media creates another challenge in learning. Since students are aware of the internet, they should effectively use it for various purposes, especially in learning and academic matters. Digital tools provided for free or paid. To gain the maximum pleasure and benefits of digital tools, especially those of DST, students should start using them. However, the external challenge comes when the internet connection does not sufficiently support the students in using the online tools of digital storytelling. A further challenge may come internally from the students, especially when they do not have their computer and lack of ability to use digital tools. These problems somehow were present during the research. Willingness to help others then is needed in learning to ensure that everyone using the digital tools of storytelling can overcome the problems. A study mentions that another thing needed to solve these challenges is by performing patience, flexibility, and creativity (Nguyen, 2011).

RESEARCH METHOD

This study was the first cycle of a classroom action research conducted by implementing collaborative work in using a digital tool of storytelling called Animaker as a media of writing a descriptive text. The results of this study will be used as a reflection material to continue to the next cycle of the research. Applying a descriptive qualitative method, this study firstly describes the challenges faced by the research participants in using Animaker, and secondly describes how the use of Animaker as a medium of writing descriptive text has built the students' DST literacy.

A questionnaire and DST products as documents were used as the research instruments. The former instrument was used to gain data on students' perspective on challenges in the learning. The latter was assessed by an assessment rubric of digital storytelling literacy to gain data of students' DST literacy.

There were 19 students participated in the first cycle of the research. They were the fourth-semester students in academic year 2018/2019 at English Education Study Program of Artha Wacana Christian University who took a writing subject. The research

ran for six meetings. Two first meetings were used to introduce the students the generic structure of a descriptive text and its language features as well as to practice writing their first draft of the text. The next two meetings were used to introduce Animaker and its features and properties as well as to start exploring this digital storytelling tool. During the exploration, the students started making their first draft of digital storytelling. They picked a template, background images, and characters suitable to their text. In the last two meetings, they added background music and inserted their recorded voice to suit the text displayed on each page of their DST. Additional time was given to them to finalize their DST and publish it on YouTube.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After the learning was completed, the researchers distributed the questionnaire to find the students' difficulties in using Animaker. The researchers then downloaded all DST products uploaded by students on YouTube and shared them to all inter-raters together with the rubric of DST literacy.

The challenges of using Animaker as a digital storytelling tool

Every learning taught by researchers often raises its constraints. The diversity of students' abilities contributed to the emergence of difficulties in learning carried out in this study. Moreover, most of the students participating in the study claims to have never known and have used the Animaker application nor made DST.

Students with a lack of digital technology literacy experienced their first difficulty. Registering their email to make an account on Animaker before they could use it slowed down the learning process. It was because almost half of the students did not have their email address. When they created one, they needed help from others. Even a few students kept forgetting their password to log in their email or Animaker account. This situation made the researchers decided to ask other students to lend their account to help them make DST.

The data found that there were only 13% of those students who claimed to have used Animaker. This proves that the use of digital storytelling through Animaker in learning has not been implemented massively. The majority of them used the internet connection to find information or learning resources and to socialize or show their existence through media such as Facebook. Besides, the use of free internet facilities in the university with limited bandwidth has resulted in inadequate services for online access such as that of digital storytelling tool Animaker.

With all the limitations, researchers still carried out learning. After the students learned about the organization and language features of a descriptive text, the learning process continued by introducing Animaker features and properties and demonstrating

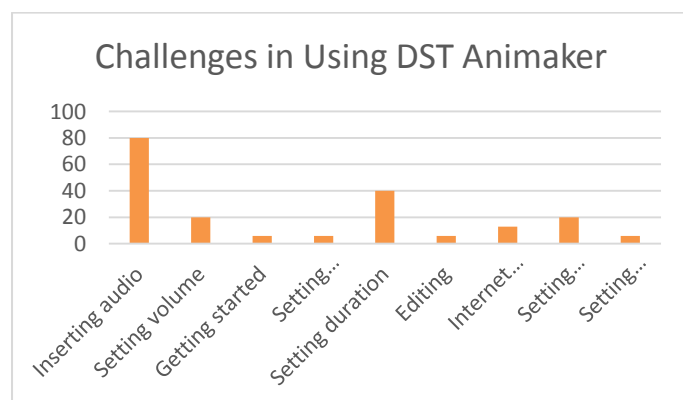
technical ways to create an animated video as the DST product. Another technical constraint aroused when the type of computer or personal laptop the students used was inadequate or compatible to run Animaker online. Thus, some students should use their friends' computer alternately. This is also one of the obstacles found by researchers that disrupts the efficiency of students' work.

Additionally, some other difficulties were associated with the technique of inserting sound or music and its settings according to the duration of each page displayed. These constraints were experienced by 80% of research participants who were categorized as beginner users of the DST tool of Animaker. Both of these obstacles also became the most disliked functions in Animaker.

Moreover, around 27% of the participants got difficulties when setting the characters and their transition to produce the expected animation. However, these obstacles were overcome by collaborative work. Learning in this way helped students with lower skills. The assistance was quite successful in the effort to insert the audio (background music and recorded voice), to adjust character transitions, and to upload DST to be published on YouTube.

Restricted access to more various items in each feature of Animaker was another challenge to the participants' preference and creativity. Animaker users of free access experience this limitation. This limitation made some characters used in their DST mismatch the description. The mismatch was also present in the actions performed by the animated characters. To overcome this problem, some participants decided to search for some images to suit their text on every page. However, they could not add animation to those images. What they could provide to make their DST better was by inserting the background template appropriate to the text on each page.

Graph 1 shows various challenges in using Animaker to create a DST product. One external challenge the participants could not control was the unstable signal and insufficient capacity of the internet connection to access Animaker online.



Graph 1.Challenges in Using Animaker

Having Animaker as a medium of writing their descriptive text, the research participants have meet challenges in getting started, setting the background, editing, setting transition, the internet connection, setting the character, setting the volume, setting the time duration, and inserting audio. To deal with those challenges, the researchers encouraged all participants to patiently work on their Animaker to create their first DST. Some of them successfully performed creativity and flexibility while building their digital storytelling literacy. Support to these potentials should be given to help them create better DST of Animaker in the future.

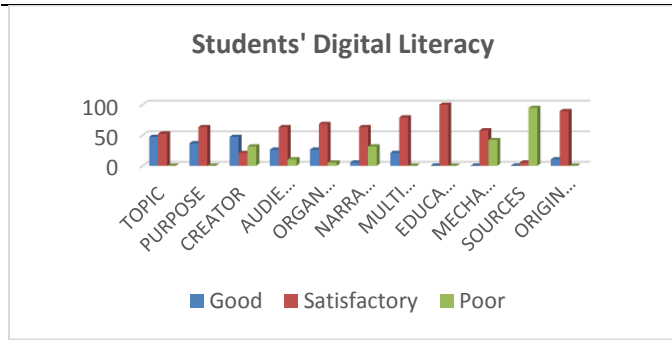
How the use of Animaker builds students' digital storytelling literacy

The use of Animaker brought its benefits for each research participant. All of them argued that using Animaker had a positive impact on them. Having Animaker as a tool to create digital storytelling, the participants admitted that they started developing their creativity and skills in making animation. When the researchers showed several examples of their students' Animaker products in the previous year, the research participants were interested and motivated to make ones.

The students mentioned that the features and properties of Animaker fascinated them. They also believed that if they gained the DST literacy by creating the animation. They also claimed that by making animated digital videos storytelling they could train their oral language skill. They were confident that this literacy can help them as future teachers. This is reasonable as their DST product can be used as learning media that may help the students understand the material presented better by visualization.

The use of digital storytelling Animaker application as a medium of writing descriptive text classrooms encourages the emergence of students' creativity in learning. It also has aroused their motivation to create one DST. They showed great interest and enthusiasm during the learning process to be able to produce one. The activity of writing a descriptive text becomes more exciting. Their writing product also turns to be more colorful and appealing for readers to read and watch. A strong desire to make DST then has made all participants able to surpass the existing limitations and constraints during their learning. With various results, they have gained a digital storytelling literacy.

The use Animaker builds the students' DST literacy in eleven aspects namely; the topic, mention the narrator's name, state the target audience, compile stories, narrate techniques, use audio-visual content, imply educational values, language mechanisms, state sources or references quote, and in presenting the authenticity of creative and inventive story ideas. The students' DST literacy vary as seen in the following graph.



Graph 2. Number of students achieving each component of DST literacy

The first aspect of DST is well-achieved by half of the students. These students are able to clearly state the topic on their animated video. Another half of them do not obviously state their topic on their video. However, viewers can still understand the topic from the image of parent the students inserted on the first slide of their video.

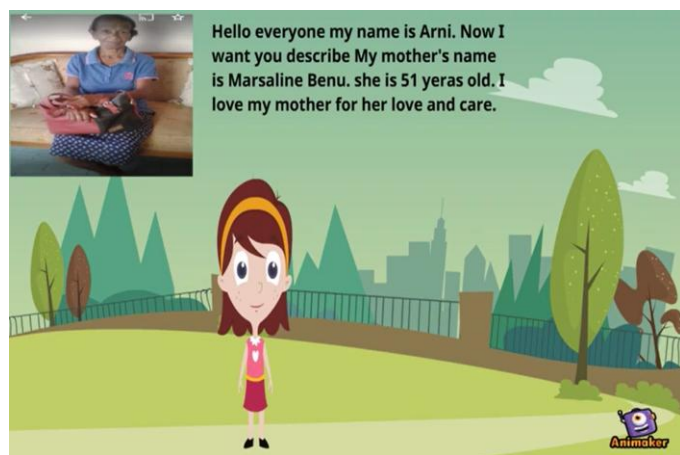


Figure 1. Writing goal stated in the text

The DST assessment results also show the ability of the students to bring up the second aspect of DST by stating the purpose of making the story and making the viewer understand the reason why they create the animated video, which is to express their love to the parent being described and to show some expectations to make their parent proud. Students who gain good skill in this aspect have good abilities in generating the writing goal in the text, both at the beginning and the end. In contrast, students with bad writing do not state their purpose clearly.

The author of the description text in Figure 1 states the purpose of the writing. Even though there is an error in the mechanical writing, the destination is seen in the text on the first page of the DST. The sentence ‘Now I want you (to) describe my mother’s’ shows to viewers that the writer wants to give an idea of his mother. The description of the object description is a goal that must be achieved in each writing of the description text.

Figure 1 is also a good example of writing stating the name of the creator. This third aspect is achieved by most of the students. Mentioning the creator’s name is important to give information to the

viewer who has created the animated video. Some of the students state their name as the creator at the beginning and some others do it at end of the video.

The fourth aspect of DST gained is being able to understand the target audience. This aspect is sufficiently achieved by most students. Most students do not clearly state or infer who their audience is. Good writing will include the audience as it can influence the language style of the text. Figure 1 is at the Good level because it says the word "everyone" at the beginning of the description text which aims to target everyone who watches, even though the person does not specify the criteria of the target audience.

Organization as the fifth aspect of DST carries the way how the text is delivered logically. The structure of writing assessed on the animated video is one of descriptive text. A good descriptive text is organized commonly by having these two structures; Identification and Description. The skill to organize the structure of the descriptive text was successfully achieved by few of the students. They also can manage each of their main ideas with well-composed sentences where they can provide supporting ideas to each of the main idea. Figure 2 is an example of Animaker animated video with good organization.

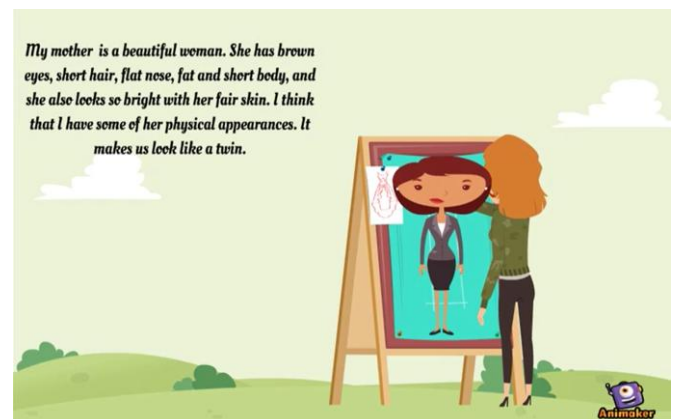


Figure 2. Good organization of a description

In the example above, the word ‘beautiful’ in the sentence ‘My mother is a beautiful woman’ is the main idea of the paragraph. The word is explained in more detail in the next sentence. The author of the text subjectively describes the word 'beautiful' with the phrase brown eyes, short hair, flat nose, fat, and short body. Apart from that bright words and fair skin phrases also complete the detailed description of the word beautiful at the beginning of the sentence.

Most students sufficiently manage the structure of their writing to fit the descriptive text. In this context, the students can adequately display two main parts of the description text. The main sentence is also quite clearly described. It shows less relevant detail description in their sentences. The following figure shows a part of bad description.

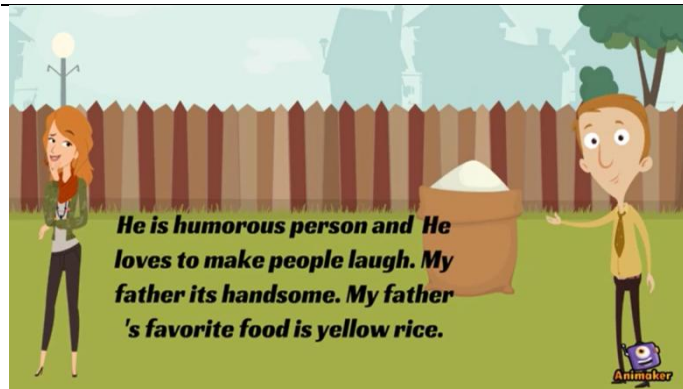


Figure 3. Poor organization of a description

In Figure 3, the text writer cannot express ideas in coherent sentences. The second and third sentences are not related to the ideas contained in the main sentence. The word ‘humorous’ should be clarified by giving examples of action or more detailed language expressions. Unfortunately, the phrase ‘My father is handsome’ and ‘My father’s favorite food is yellow rice’ in the sentences following do not match the main idea in the initial sentence. Each one better describes the physical appearance and preferences of the person described.

Good writing will relate to good narration as the sixth aspect of DST literacy. Good narration can certainly make the audience enjoy the storyline from a text. A narration on DST is related to the production of sounds attached on each page of the text. Students with good narration are able to narrate the story properly to suit each animation slide and easily for the viewer to understand. The clarity of the narration is also influenced by audible voice production and precise language pronunciation. Intonations when narrating are also given by the students who good in this aspect. This makes the narration more interesting to the viewer. The speed of the narration is also well-set to match the display duration of each slide text.

On the other hand, bad narration are present on some videos. Mostly, it is because of the inability of the students in setting the narrating speed to suit the length of each video slide displayed. Another case is caused by the lack of oral skill, especially the clarity of voice production. Related to certain challenges, some videos do not present the narrating voice clearly as the background music is set in the high volume and cover the students’ voice.

The sixth aspect of DST is the skill in using multimedia. This skill includes the ability to insert images, animation, music, and sound in each page of Animaker DST. Most of the students can perform satisfactorily in this aspect. The students can suit the background music with their emotion. This shows that with all the limitations or constraints existed in DST tool of Animaker, all research participants have succeeded in having literacy in using multimedia even though this skill still needs to be improved to reach maximum level. However, some of the students have problems to adjust their voice recording to the speed of

each text displayed. This problem affects the narrating performance.

Seen in Graph 2, all research participants satisfactorily can display the seventh aspect of DST, educational value, on each DST product. The value of love and respect for the parent described, either father or mother, is expressed explicitly or implicitly.

Also, a sense of pride and hope to be able to make the parent happy is the last note contained in those DST products. With the presence of educational value, each of them is potential to be used in relevant learning, especially one of early learners.

Good mechanic of writing which becomes the eighth aspect of DST requires no error in spelling and grammar. Most students have problems in this aspect. Other technical problems of writing are relating to capitalization, spacing, and punctuations. Figure 4 is one example of bad mechanics carrying several writing mistakes.



Figure 4. Mechanics problems in a student’s part of text

The text in Figure 4 shows a mistake in grammar in sentence “...she always caring to me.” This sentence is missing an auxiliary verb ‘is’ after pronoun ‘she’. Other mistakes are dealing with the initial capital letter for ‘she’ and spelling for the word ‘support’ in the sentence “she always supports to me”.

Another aspect of which the students do not perform well is in presenting any sources in the text. This aspect is not really benefited in such a text written by the students in this study. It is because the topic is about something personal to the creators and they become the main source of their writing.

The last aspect described in this paragraph is the originality of the work. The descriptive text contained in each Animaker product is the result of the original idea of each student. Even so, in the editing process of the text, the researchers provided some minor corrections to improve the composition in sentences and to add more meaningful technical terms. The authenticity of the text can be seen from the main ideas of each sentence contained in each page display of the Animaker.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

In conclusion, the use of Animaker in this study has faced the research participants to several challenges in getting started, setting the background, editing, setting transition, the internet connection, setting the character, setting the volume, setting the time duration, and inserting audio. Among those challenges, inserting audio and setting the time duration have become the most challenging to them. Despite all the challenges, the students have built their literacy in digital storytelling in terms of the ability make clear the topic, setting the purpose, showing the creator, targeting the audience, organizing the text, scripting and recording the voice of narration, managing the multimedia, including the educational value, working with the mechanics of the written text, using sources, and performing originality in their Animaker final product. These literacy vary from one student to the others. The animated video created by using Animaker tool has proven that they are potential human resources in this digital era.

Reflecting from the findings of this pilot study, the researchers should continue using Animaker in the next cycle of the research. They also should consider to use this digital tool as a medium of writing a descriptive text or any other type of texts by giving additional treatment such as intensive collaborative method or experiential learning strategy to help maximize the students' skill. The researchers further suggest that EFL learning in today's demand utilizes Animaker and/or any other digital storytelling tools. Thus, supporting facilities such as compatible computer and the maximum capacity of the internet networks should be sufficiently available for learning. Moreover, they expect that together with the students, innovative learning can take place by having us create a digital storytelling tool or application in which more features and properties of local content can be creatively created.

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