Research Article

STUDENTS' ENGAGEMENT IN NARRATIVE WRITING SKILLS THROUGH DIGITAL STORYTELLING PLATFORMS

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Abstract

This research was aimed to find out students' engagement in improving narrative writing skills through the use of digital storytelling platforms. As writing continues to be a core component of academic success, finding innovative and engaging instructional methods has become increasingly important. Digital storytelling (DST), which combines text, visuals, audio, and multimedia elements, offers a student-centered approach that supports creativity, motivation, and deeper learning. This research employs a quantitative survey method involving 20 undergraduate students of English Education Department. The study focuses on analyzing three dimensions of engagement behavioral, emotional, and cognitive as well as students' perceptions of how Digital story telling influences their narrative writing abilities. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics. The results show that students demonstrated high levels of engagement across all three dimensions, with emotional engagement scoring the highest. The findings suggest that integrating digital storytelling into writing instruction can effectively foster student engagement and support the development of key writing skills. This study emphasizes the importance of providing adequate technical support to maximize its effectiveness. Future research could adopt longitudinal designs or classroom-based observations to investigate sustained improvements in writing performance and digital literacy.

Keywords: *Digital Storytelling; Narrative Writing; Students' Engagement*

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INTRODUCTION

The advancement and integration of digital technologies into educational contexts have significantly transformed pedagogical practices, particularly within the domain of language learning. Among these developments, Digital Storytelling has indicated as a dynamic, multimodal instructional strategy that enables learners to construct narratives by

synthesizing various media elements, including written text, images, audio, and video (Robin, 2016). This fusion of traditional storytelling with digital media tools not only modernizes the writing process but also aligns with 21st-century literacy demands, offering learners a platform for expressive, interactive, and reflective composition.

In the context of higher education, DST has garnered increasing scholarly attention for its potential to enhance student engagement and foster the development of narrative writing skills (Nofitasari & Zulikhatin, 2024). Through its multimedia affordances, DST facilitates deeper levels of emotional and cognitive involvement, enabling students to produce personal or imaginative narratives that are richly layered and contextually meaningful. This pedagogical approach transcends the limitations of conventional writing assignments, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings, where students often struggle with motivation and expressive depth. As argued by Barrett (2023), DST empowers learners to integrate textual, visual, and auditory components, thus cultivating a multimodal communicative competence and encouraging more holistic language development.

Narrative writing, by its very nature, demands a complex interplay of linguistic proficiency, creative imagination, emotional nuance, and logical sequencing of events. Traditional writing pedagogy, often limited to static, decontextualized tasks, may not sufficiently nurture these competencies. DST, in contrast, provides learners with authentic, engaging opportunities to narrate stories that are both personally resonant and pedagogically rigorous (Wardah & Triyoga, 2024). By leveraging platforms such as Adobe Spark and Canva, students can design compelling digital narratives that promote critical thinking, emotional investment, and sustained motivation in writing activities (Rosyid et al., 2025).

Student engagement an essential determinant of academic success—is typically conceptualized as comprising three interconnected dimensions: behavioral (manifested through active participation and effort), emotional **(**characterized by interest and enjoyment), and cognitive (reflected in strategic thinking and self-regulation) (Wang & Pekrun, 2021). Recent empirical inquiries have indicated that DST can positively influence all three dimensions of engagement, particularly in tasks that demand narrative creativity and personal expression.

Despite its promising affordances, the application of DST in university-level narrative writing remains an underexplored area, especially with regard to its effects on student engagement. While previous studies have investigated DST across various educational levels, there is a noticeable gap in research specifically examining how university students engage behaviorally, emotionally, and cognitively in DST-based narrative writing tasks. Therefore,

this study seeks to address this lacuna by systematically exploring the extent and nature of student engagement with DST in higher education, with the ultimate goal of informing pedagogical design and enhancing writing instruction in EFL contexts.

Student engagement is widely recognized as a critical factor in academic success. Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004) identified three key dimensions of engagement; Behavioral engagement, Emotional engagement, Cognitive engagement. Engagement in writing tasks is especially important in language learning, as writing requires sustained attention, creativity, and motivation (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2020). However, studies show that students often disengage from traditional writing practices due to lack of relevance, visual appeal, and personal expression (Walsh, 2022).

The Role of Narrative Writing in Language Development

Narrative writing supports both linguistic and cognitive growth. It enables students to use past tense structures, connect ideas with logical sequence, and convey meaning through personal or fictional experiences (Hyland, 2016). In second language contexts, narrative writing also promotes vocabulary expansion and grammar application. Nevertheless, many students struggle to construct coherent narratives, especially when writing feels abstract or unrelatable (Anderson et al., 2022).

Recent pedagogical research has encouraged the use of contextualized and multimodal techniques to make narrative writing more engaging and effective (Lee, 2021). Among these innovations is Digital Storytelling, which combines personal voice with visual literacy.

Digital Storytelling as a Writing Strategy

Digital Storytelling is a teaching approach that enables students to create multimedia stories using platforms such as Canva, Adobe Spark, or Microsoft Sway. According to Robin (2016), DST supports active learning by integrating writing, speaking, technology, and creativity. Students use narration, visuals, music, and effects to present meaningful stories.

Multiple studies support DST's positive impact on writing skills. Nofitasari and Zulikhatin (2024) found that DST improved the organization and coherence of students' narratives, as learners were better able to visualize the structure of their stories. Similarly, Rosyid et al. (2025) reported that DST platforms enhanced students' motivation and attention span, especially when they had autonomy in selecting topics and designing digital content.

Digital Storytelling and Student Engagement

The use of DST platforms has demonstrated a strong correlation with increased engagement. Behavioral engagement improves as students participate actively in script writing, recording, and editing their stories (Sari & Kurniawati, 2023). Emotional engagement is also enhanced when students feel proud of their digital creations and connect stories to personal experiences (Wardah & Triyoga, 2024). Cognitive engagement develops as students reflect deeply on their message, sequence, and media choices—often revising their work with greater intentionality (Alqahtani, 2023). Unlike previous studies that primarily emphasize writing proficiency, Huda et al. (2023) demonstrate the novelty of Digital Storytelling **(**by showing its potential to simultaneously enhance writing quality, collaboration, critical thinking, learner motivation, and confidence, offering a more holistic and engaging pedagogical approach than traditional essay-based methods.

METHOD

Design

This study adopted a quantitative survey research design to investigate university students' engagement in narrative writing through digital storytelling platforms. The survey method was selected due to its effectiveness in capturing the perceptions, behaviors, and attitudes of participants in a systematic and quantifiable manner. Specifically, the study focused on three key dimensions of engagement, behavioral, emotional, and cognitive as conceptualized by Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004), and later expanded by more recent digital learning engagement models (e.g., Lee, 2021; Henrie et al., 2015).The purpose of this research was to assess the extent and nature of students' engagement when using digital storytelling as a tool to enhance narrative writing skills

Instruments

The main instrument was a self-report questionnaire adapted from established engagement frameworks (Fredricks et al., 2004; Reeve & Tseng, 2011; Henrie et al., 2015). The questionnaire was designed to assess three core engagement dimensions, each consisting of five items, rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). The questionnaire underwent expert validation and a small-scale pilot test (n = 5) to refine item clarity. The Cronbach's alpha reliability score was 0.86, indicating a high level of internal consistency.

Data Collection Procedure

After the completion of a digital storytelling assignment in a narrative writing course, the questionnaire was administered via Google Forms. Prior to this, participants were informed of the purpose of the study and assured anonymity and confidentiality. Participation was voluntary, and all 20 students completed the survey, resulting in a 100% response rate. To ensure data quality and ethical standards, consent forms were distributed, and no identifying information was collected in the responses.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The following section presents the findings of a survey-based study conducted among **university students (N = 20)** who participated in narrative writing activities using digital storytelling platform such as Canva. Data were collected using a 5-point Likert-scale questionnaire and analyzed by engagement dimensions.

Behavioral engagement

Table 1. Percentage of behavioral engagement

Item	Agree/strongly agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree/strongly disagree (%)
Contribute ideas during group planning	85	10	5
Complete narrative assignments on time	95	5	0
Revise stories after feedback	85	5	10
Stay focused during writing tasks	80	10	10
Explore platform features	85	10	5
Try design elements to enhance stories	80	15	5
Participate in peer feedback sessions	90	5	5
Manage time well during writing activities	75	20	5
Average agreement (behavioral)	**86.88**	**8.13**	**5.00**

Note. N = 20.

A large majority of students demonstrated high behavioral engagement, with over 86% indicating consistent participation, timely submission, and interaction with storytelling tools and peers. The high agreement on peer feedback and revising stories indicates responsiveness to collaborative and reflective writing practices. A small portion (5–10%) expressed either distraction or time management difficulties.

Emotional engagement

Table 2. Percentage of emotional engagement

Item	Agree/strongly agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree/strongly disagree (%)
Enjoy using digital storytelling	95	5	0
Writing stories is exciting	90	10	0
Confident in digital expression	85	10	5
Feel proud of their digital stories	90	10	0
Feel connected through story sharing	90	10	0
Motivated by the format	90	10	0
Feel less anxious writing digitally	85	10	5
Look forward to writing digitally	90	10	0
Average agreement (emotional)	**90.00**	**8.75**	**1.25**

Note. N = 20. The mean of the eight items is 89.38% (agree) and 9.38% (neutral). Please check the averages.

Students show a strong level of emotional engagement, with 90% of students affirming positive feelings toward digital storytelling. Most felt motivated, proud, and emotionally connected to their work and peers. Only a few reported moderate anxiety or lack of confidence, suggesting overall emotional acceptance and enjoyment of the platform.

Cognitive engagement

Table 3. Percentage of cognitive engagement

Item	Agree/strongly agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree/strongly disagree (%)
Think carefully about plot and characters	90	10	0
Use structured storytelling	85	5	10
Reflect on writing process	85	10	5
Plan multimedia integration	85	10	5
Revise based on reflection	80	15	5
Research before writing	75	15	10
Compare stories with examples	80	15	5
Explain creative decisions	85	10	5
Average agreement (cognitive)	**83.13**	**11.25**	**5.63**

Note. N = 20.

Cognitive engagement was also strong, with over 83% agreeing they actively planned, reflected, and thought critically during storytelling. However, researching before writing had the lowest agreement (75%), suggesting room to further cultivate pre-writing research and planning habits. The majority still demonstrated thoughtful engagement with the writing process.

Table 4. Percentage and average of agreement by engagement dimension

Engagement dimension	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Mean score	Interpretation
Behavioral engagement	86.88	8.13	5.00	4.22	Very high
Emotional engagement	90.00	8.75	1.25	4.08	High
Cognitive engagement	83.13	11.25	5.63	4.31	Very high

Note.

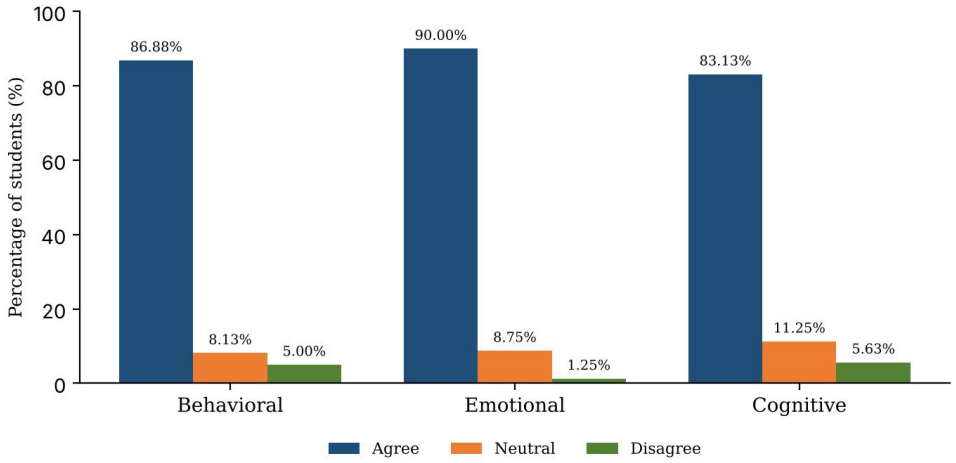


Figure 1. Students' engagement in narrative writing by dimension (redrawn from the values in Table 4)

Discussion

The results of this study provide clear evidence that the integration of digital storytelling platforms significantly enhances university students' engagement in narrative writing across behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions. The data collected from 20 university students reveal encouraging trends that reflect both active participation and deep learning processes facilitated by digital storytelling.

Students demonstrated a high level of behavioral engagement. The majority (95%) reported completing tasks on time, while 90% actively collaborated with peers during the digital storytelling process. Additionally, 80% designed elements to enhance stories, and 75% managed time well during the process. These results indicate that digital storytelling activities encourage students to take ownership of their learning and increase their participation in writing tasks. This supports prior research suggesting that project-based learning tools like digital storytelling promote active involvement and time-on-task behavior (Chen et al., 2020). The combination of visual, audio, and narrative components appears to help students remain focused and responsible throughout the writing process.

The emotional aspect of student engagement was also notably positive. An overwhelming 95% of participants enjoyed using digital storytelling, while 90% expressed

pride in their final products. Additionally, 85% indicated that they felt less anxious about writing due to the support of visuals and narration. These emotional responses suggest that the integration of multimedia elements reduces writing-related anxiety and increases motivation.

Cognitive engagement was equally evident in the findings. A substantial 85% of students reported thinking more carefully about the plot and characters, and another important indicator was the planning and integration of multimedia elements (images, audio, video, transitions), which 85% of students agreed they thoughtfully considered. However, the item with the lowest agreement (75%) was related to conducting research before writing. While still a majority, this indicates that some students may not consistently seek external sources or background knowledge to enrich their stories. This suggests an area for improvement — perhaps through scaffolding activities that encourage or require students to gather ideas, cultural context, or before composing their narratives.

The results show that digital storytelling is a useful way to improve students' writing skills while also keeping them engaged in learning. Students became more active in class, showed stronger interest, and thought more deeply about their writing. This supports Fredricks et al.'s (2004) idea that engagement has behavioral, emotional, and cognitive aspects. Similar to past studies (Chen et al., 2020; Huda et al., 2023; Walsh, 2022), the findings suggest that digital storytelling makes writing more motivating, creative, and reflective by letting students use stories, visuals, and technology together. Other research (Alqahtani, 2023; Rosyid et al., 2025) also showed that digital storytelling helps students develop higher-order thinking skills.

CONCLUSION

This study examined university students' engagement in narrative writing through digital storytelling platforms by analyzing behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions. Students exhibited 86.88%, reflected in timely task completion, contribution of ideas, and active peer feedback participation. While, emotional engagement was also 90%, with students reporting enjoyment, pride, and motivation in digital writing tasks and Cognitive engagement showed a very high level 83.13%, with students thoughtfully planning plots, integrating multimedia, and reflecting on their process. Based on the research findings, digital storytelling is an effective, student-centered instructional strategy. It supports active learning, reduces writing anxiety, and encourages multimodal creativity. Educators should consider

incorporating scaffolding for research and planning phases, ensuring students not only express creatively but also enrich their narratives with context and evidence.

AI USE AND DISCLOSURE

The authors used ChatGPT to assist with language editing, grammar checking, and improving the clarity and readability of the manuscript. All AI-assisted content was carefully reviewed and verified by the authors, who take full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and final content of the article.

ETHICAL STATEMENT AND INFORMED CONSENT

Participants were informed of the purpose of the study and assured of anonymity and confidentiality. Participation was voluntary, consent forms were distributed, and no identifying information was collected in the responses.

CRediT AUTHORSHIP CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Nur Ima: Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal Analysis, and Writing – Original Draft; Dian Fera Pratiwi: Investigation, Data Collection, and Writing – Original Draft; Sinta Dewi Anggung: Investigation, Data Curation, and Writing – Review & Editing; Rahmah Julianti: Validation, Formal Analysis, and Writing – Review & Editing. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this article.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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