

Authentic Reading Materials in Storybirds for Reading to Write: The Students' Voices

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Abstract. The purpose of the study is to describe the students' opinion on the use of storybird for writing narrative in classroom context. The design of the study was case study design. The subjects of the study were the students who join creative writing class in a private university in Pasuruan. The instrument used to collect the data was mainly interview and documentation. The result of the study shows that (1) most of the students learn how to create short stories in the storybird from reading the stories published in the platform, (2) the problems the students encounter were technical problem and writing problem. (3) the solutions were among others, making use of the best way of free the trial version, writing a draft before writing, and checking grammatical issues by using grammar online application as well as classroom feedback. The students believed that storybird is suitable to be used for creative writing course.

Keywords: *Authentic Materials, Short Story, Storybird, Writing*

1 INTRODUCTION

With the advancement of technology nowadays, language teaching has undergone a revolution in the teaching and learning process. In this 21st century, books are not the only source of learning as internet has provided abundant sources for language teaching and learning which are accessible for almost everyone. Internet has provided a lot of authentic materials [1] which can be used in the classroom. Storybird is a web application for artful story telling. As a web-based application, storybird offers a lot of feature which are engaging for its users. In the storybird, there are many short stories written by other writers, students and teachers which are readable and accessible for any level of students. These stories (comic books, flash fiction, long form stories) and poems are considered literature in its sense and authentic in terms of its creation.

Putting ideas on the paper is not always easy. To write well, it is not enough for a student writer to have only ideas. To be able for a student writer to write a story, he/she needs to have sufficient practical knowledge how to write them. When one wants to tell stories to somebody else in writing mode, there are many things to consider to make the writing readable and comprehensible for the readers, among others are the topic, the creation of the storyline or the plot as well as the creation of the character. Thus, having a model story can help students writer to write the story themselves. Storybird offers this opportunity since it has reading feature in its menu. The reading feature in the storybird gives not only the overall description of how a story should be created, but also step by step guidance to write a well-created story. As

an online storytelling platform, storybird is believed to be able to enhance the students' literacy skill as it offers the users to read stories, create stories, and share stories [2]. She further states that with a wide variety of stories genre, ranging from mysteries, tales, adventures, among others, storybird does give its users to experience different journey.

[3] states that storybird supports both the students and the teacher in learning storywriting for classroom context. Furthermore, in comparison to other storytelling website, storybird was found to be the most appropriate both for young language learners and the teacher [4]. Until today, the use of storybird for language classroom has attracted many researchers and practitioners. [5] conducted a study to find out the students' opinion toward the use of storybird for their writing class. The subjects of their study were diploma students of a private university in Malaysia. The finding shows that most of the students being studied show positive opinion toward storybird for their writing course. Within Indonesia classroom context, storybird was found to be able to improve the students' ability in writing narrative text. [6] conducted a classroom action research study for vocational high school students in writing narrative text. They found out that storybird was able to enhance the students' writing skill in writing narrative text. It can be concluded that, no matter what language the students learn, storybird is suitable and beneficial for the students of all ages and all level of education.

Many of the previous studies have investigated the students' opinion toward the use of storybird platform. Yet, reserach has not adequately investigate the problems the students might encounter when they use storybird and how to solve the problems. This present study is considered worth doing because more information needs to be acquired to help learners to be a better writer by identifying their problems and its solution as seen from their point of view. Thus, this research is aimed at to find out the students' perception on the use of storybird for their writing course. The reserach questions are formulated as follow. (1) What do the students learn from reading in the storybird platform? (2) What are the students' problems in using storybird platform for writing short story? (3) What are the students' solution to overcome the problems they may encounter in using the storybird platform? (4) What are the students' opinion toward storybird suitability to be used in creative writing class?

2 RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses qualitative approach focused on cases study design. As stated by [7], a case can be individuals, a group of people or an organization. The subjects of the study are the fourth students who joined creative writing course in the academic year 2018-2019. The data was collected from March to April 2019. The instruments used were interview and document analysis. During the interview, the researchers asked the students one by one about their feeling in using the storybird platform for writing short story in creative writing class. The data collection was stopped when the researchers got similar answers from fifteen students. To help the reseracher analyze the data, some simple codification was used. The data was coded by using the students' name initials, and the class. For example if the student's name was Fitrotul Khodijah from 2016 A, the codification would be FK/2016A. Since the data form were words and sentences, qualitative data analysis was employed.

3 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 What the Students Learn from Reading in the Storybird

Based on the interview result, most of the students confessed that they read the stories in the storybird first before they started to write their own. They read the stories in picture story books, and flash fictions to get the general idea what to write and how to write it.

I read some stories in the storybird to find out how to write the plot, and how to make the picture story book. I learnt that we have to adjust our stories in mind with the pictures available. (M/2016B)

I read some stories in Storybird too. Because Storybird gives random pictures, I want to know how other writers created their storie. I learn that we have common difficulty. (Mas/2016B)

I read the stories written by other writer in the storybird. It becomes my reference of how to write good stories

Most of the students gave almost similar answers. The stories that they read in the reading feature of the storybird gave them a few things to learn. Firstly, they learned that other writer who used the storybird has similar difficulties as them. As a result the students did not feel 'alone'. Secondly, they learned that they had to adjust their storyline with the pictures available in the storybird. And thirdly, they learned how to write their own stories well, both for the picture story book and flash fiction. For a student writer to write well, he/she needs to have sufficient background knowledge and a model from the existing texts [8]. She further states that as the students get more familiar with a particular genre, they can be more autonomous in writing their own. In addition, [9] states that when one studies other person's writing, he/she can get many things to learn in terms of organization, words, and its structure. The reading feature in the storybird promotes its authenticity as its creations are not meant for teaching purposes. As stated by [10], the use of authentic materials for language learning is very important to enhance the students' language skill. This means that, the storybird stories can be applied in both in reading class and writing class so that the students can learn the idioms, vocabulary and grammatical structure which are used by the native speaker of the language.

3.2 The students' problem in using storybird

The result of the interview shows that some problems were found during the implementation of storybird for short story writing. Based on the data, the problems were classified into technical problem and writing problem. Technically, the problems are identified as follow. Firstly, storybird has 30 days free trial mode which gave difficulties for the students to keep on writing when the free trial mode was over. Second, storybird offers artful and beautiful pictures, yet the pictures are random and 'limited'. Thirdly the pages in pictures storybook are limited to 20 pages at the maximum. Fourthly, storybird requires online network to be able to use it. Fifth, the storybird lacked of the 'undo' button and 'autosave' software. This cause problem because when the application was used too long in one day, it would refuse to save as the screen would say 'save failed'. And finally, the storybird application can be used only with laptop or personal computer (PC).

If I want to write picture storybooks in the storybird, I must use my laptop or my computer. It is impossible for me to use my smartphone because the application is not intended to be open for smartphone. (MDR/16A).

The pictures provided in the storybird are many, yet limited. In the end, we must write the story creatively with the limited pictures provided. The second problem lies in the limited pages provided by storybird. My storybird version is different from my friends'. So, some of us have 16 pages at the maximum, some other have 20 pages at the maximum. The limited pages provided by storybird make us difficult to improve the storyline, so we often stucked in 16th or 20th slide. (D/16B)

The students' problem with the pictures were quite irritating. They confessed that sometimes the storyline they have in mind did not match with the expectation after they searched the pictures in the storybird. 'The pictures are many yet limited' was the phrase that the students often said to one another. In term of the writing element, the problem mostly laid in the choice of words and syntactical structure.

My problem lays in grammar. Sometimes I got confused what type of tense I should use. And I'm not sure if I used correct grammar. (F/2016A)

Instead of the writing element problem, the data shows that most of the students had technical problems in using storybird for their narrative writing. They thought that these technical problems gave them interference in writing, but it did not discourage them to continue writing the story.

3.3 The students' solution to overcome the problems

There are some steps that the students took to overcome their technical problem. First, to overcome the free trial mode which lasted only in 30 days, the students made use of its time for 30 days maximumly if they did not want to use the paid application.

So far, the best way is touse the free trial as best we can and write in it as often as we can for 30 days before the site update itself dan we lost the free trial mode. (Ma/16B)

Based on the data, the 'limited pictures' problem was solved by using the drafting technique prior they wrote in the storybird. The first thing to do was to carefully choose the topic, then they studied the random pictures provided in the storybird. After that, they select the pictures, they created the storyline. When they were ready, they wrote in the storybird pages.

For those who have difficulty to create the story in the storybird, it is better to choose the pictures first, then make the draft or the storyline. After that, write them doen on the storybird. (S/16B)

To solve that problem, we need to select the pictures first, then write the story. Not the other way around. To avoid failed save, we need to save regularly everytime we have finished writing in each slide.(As/16A)

Smilarly, to cope with the problem of the limited pages provided by the free trial version, the students needed to select the pictures carefully for at least 16 pages. Then if they still had a chance to write more, they could expand the story to more pages. The next problem that the students encountered was the inavailability of the 'undo' button and the 'auto save' feature in the application. To solve this problem, the easiest way is to save the work often so that they

would not lose their work. But in case they faced the problem, the students suggested to copy paste the writing in every page, and imported it into Microsoft word. If they by accident faced the 'save failed' problem, they still could copy their writing in MS word, and reimported in the storybird.

To cope with 'save failed' problem, I copy paste after every page in the storybird, and import it to Ms word. So, if suddenly I faced the 'save failed' problem, I just copy paste from Ms Word and put it back again in the storybird. (F/2016A)

And the last technical problem the students' face was the requirement for being online to use the storybird. The solution for this problem is actually quite easy. The students can find free internet hotspot in cafes or the campus area. Better yet, they can go to internet provider offices which offer free internet connection or go to a friend's houses who owns wifi connection. In terms of the writing element problem, the students faced with vocabulary choice and grammar problem. Storybird does not provide features to automatically check grammar problem, although it has the feature of spelling automatic checker if the composition is written in English. To cope with the vocabulary and grammar problems, the writing teacher could establish peer feedback, teacher-student conference, or introduce other software application to check the grammatical issue, such as grammarly.com.

To recheck my grammar, especially in spelling, and the use of preposition, I use grammarly.com. This online application helps me a lot. (F/2016A).

Grammarly.com is an online software which can help the writer to check grammatical problems, usually in spelling, the use of articles, preposition, tenses, and paraphrasing. Using this application can trigger the students autonomous learning as they can learn independently outside the classroom.

3.4 The students' opinion toward storybird suitability to be used in creative writing class

The data shows that all students agree that storybird is useful and suitable for short story writing. The availability of pictures, although many of them are random and have no connection, forced them to think critically to create a fiction worth to read.

Storybird is very useful for us. It makes us creative in making a story. It does have some challenges but the pictures are undeniably very appealing and motivate us to create stories and to write something (S/2016B).

Of course it is very suitable for us. Story bird required us to write narrative text by adjusting the images provided. This makes us become more creative and have more expanded imagination. (F/2016A)

All the data shows that the students have positive view on the use of storybird for creative writing activity. Although they had problems in using the storybird, they could manage the solution themselves and continue writing to finish the writing task. The students' opinion that storybird is suitable to enhance their narrative writing skills are similar to the research result conducted by other researchers or practitioners. [6] states that storybird is able to improve the

students' skill in writing narrative text for senior high school students as well as younger students [4] Meanwhile, the students' positive opinion on the use of storybird for their writing course confirms previous finding on similar issue [5]. As stated by [2] digital story telling platform has a big oppurtunity to improve the students literacy skills. All in all, the result of this present study shows that storybird give advantageous for student writer to sharpen their reading skill as well as their writing skill.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The result of this present study shows that the challenges in using the storybird for creative writing activity mostly lay in the technical problems. Writing in any language context is not always easy. It requires continued practice to create a skillful writer. Storybird gives opportunities for any language learners to sharpen their writing skills and to continue learning outside the classroom.

This research, however, has some limitations. Firstly, the result of this study cannot be used as generalization. To find out the effectiveness of storybird for writing, further studies need to be conducted by using experimental design. Secondly, this study does not explore the students' linguistic problem in writing the short stories. Thus, future researchers are suggested to investigate the grammatical problems the students make for their writing through storybird platform. Thirdly, this present study also does not explore the students' ability in fictional story writing seen from the generic structure of narrative text. Therefore, future researchers are encouraged to have a content analysis study to find out whether the students have adequate ability to write their story with acceptable generic structure. Despite of the limitation of the research, this present studies does give insights for any language teachers about the problems the students might encounter when storybird is used for classroom teaching. As authentic reading materials, storybird creates a bridge that connects the gap between what students learn in the classroom and what they can find outside the classroom. The invention of storybird platform as digital storytelling does help both teachers and students to promote autonomous teaching and learning in the 21st century.

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