

The Optimization of the Potential of Digital Storytelling: A Curriculum for Teaching Creative Writing

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Abstract

This study aims at examining the extent to which digital storytelling utilizes Storybird (a web tool for writing story) to mediate students' learning activities. Through netnography, there are three beneficial aspects of students' creative writing learning, which are: 1) Storybird is a platform for collaborative writing activities, 2) digital storytelling can develop students' higher order thinking skills, and 3) digital storytelling becomes a method for implementing creative and innovative language learning. This study contributed to provide the understanding of how digital storytelling can be a learning method that provides broader thinking space for students. In addition, the purpose of this study is to invite students to participate in the process of learning creative writing.

I. Introduction

Technological development has helped teachers to access the flow of information and media as a tool to increase the quality of language learning. Various innovations in the field of technology, such as social media, mobile applications, software, website, etc. can be integrated into learning, so that it can generate new culture in the learning process (Weert and Tatnall, 2005). For example, transformation in language learning can be seen from the learning process that is no longer limited by time and space. Technology allows students and teachers to have access to the

knowledge outside of school (Kent and Facer, 2004). Moreover, it also allows students to have independence, creativity, collaboration in the learning process (Zakaria, Yunus, Nazri, & Shah, 2016; Boholano, 2017).

In language learning, the experts inferred that the technological utilization can provide enormous benefits, especially in the teaching of writing. Technological involvement in teaching writing can enhance students' learning motivation inside and outside school (Thomas & Reinders, 2010). In addition to enhancing students' learning motivation, the existence of

technology and online learning environment is very helpful in increasing students' participation in doing assignments (Pascopella and Richardson 2009), and also providing effectiveness in giving instructions in the teaching of writing. Graham and Perin (2007) state that effective writing instruction has an influence on the success of students' learning.

At present, the teaching of writing puts much emphasis on social collaboration and interaction. Writing is not only considered as a process of making information/notes on a media. Related to communication matter, writing is generally classified as communication tools including several sub-skills, such as spelling, punctuation and grammar (Harris, McKenzie, Fitzsimmons, & Turbill, 2003). Writing is a thought process focusing on an individual's ability to put ideas and concepts into cohesive and coherent writings (Dagher, 1976; Cox, 1999). Furthermore, before writing, the brain has been working, finding, choosing, formulating, and combining words

or ideas, thus creating meanings that could be understood by others (DePorter & Hernacki, 2001). Social interaction, work in groups and collaboration are useful to be a strategy that can support the students' thinking process.

One of the teaching writing strategies that can be used in classroom is digital storytelling. Digital storytelling is a process of creating a story in digital form (Ohler, 2008) by combining the audio, visual and music elements (Hett, 2012). The core process of digital storytelling is to write a story, and then develop it into a video, film, picture book, etc. with the assistance of technology or computers. In the implementation of digital storytelling, collaboration among student is involved in completing tasks instructed by the teachers. Olthouse and Miller (2012) explain that collaboration in the digital world can improve students' writing skills.

Digital storytelling is an effective strategy in teaching narrative writing, or in a creative writing process. It can help students

to be a strategic writer (Yamac and Ulusoy, 2016), which can help the writing process with the existence of audio and visual aspects. Digital storytelling has many advantages in increasing student learning motivation and developing critical thinking and problem solving analysis (Bumgarner, 2012; Hung, Hwang, & Huang, 2012), and also developing multimedia literacy and writing skills (Bumgarner, 2012; Kulla-Abbot, 2006; Sylvester & Greenidge, 2009).

In order to apply digital storytelling in teaching writing in the classroom, teacher is expected to able to use digital storytelling tool. One of the tools that can be used is Storybird. Storybird is an online platform for creating story, which provides features that allow us to create illustrated storybooks, poems, and long-form book. Mark Ury, the founder of Storybird, has invited readers, writers, artists and educators to collaborate and share their talents into the virtual writing world (West, 2013).

One interesting feature of Storybird is the availability of

interesting illustration that can be used to help us create a story. Students only have to put the illustration into the story page, and then arrange it into a whole series of stories. Therefore, it is possible to use Storybird in collaboration-based learning, which can help students' writing skills improve (Kwan & Yunus, 2014).

Many studies on the use of digital storytelling in teaching creative writing had been conducted. Derly and Johana (2019) conducted the study on the use of Plotagon (a software for creating 3D animation) in creating digital story. Meanwhile, Yuk, Wui-Xin, Qin and Yunus (2019) conducted the study on the use of Paw-Modo in improving students' ability to write paragraphs. Zakaria, Yunus, Nazri, and Shah (2016) conducted the study on students' experiences using Storybird in writing narrative text. This study aims at investigating the implementation of digital storytelling in mediating the creative writing learning.

II. Literature Review

Digital Storytelling in Creative Writing

The development of technology and innovation in digital cameras, editing software, writing tools, blogs, and social media can provide more opportunities to help students build their own knowledge and ideas to be presented and shared effectively (Standley 2003). One powerful approach in multimedia is digital storytelling.

Digital Storytelling is a process of creating animated story by utilizing multimedia tools, such as motion graphics, audio and video content (Smeda, Dakich, & Sharda, 2014). In line with Benmayour (2008), digital storytelling is a digital short story that combines the use of audio, visual, music elements.

Moreover, Conrad (2013) explains that digital storytelling is a new method to express an idea through the creations of multimedia videos, blogs, podcasts, and activities on social networks, or other forms of stories. Therefore, practically, digital storytelling can be categorized as a powerful technological tool for

accommodating the 21st century teaching (Robin, 2008).

Digital storytelling is a pedagogical tool that can provide many advantages, for example, improving students' motivation, and creating conducive learning atmosphere through active students' participation in collaboration, reflection, and communication with their friends. Students can apply multimedia software and other technology skills to create digital stories (Smeda et al., 2014).

In addition to developing traditional literacy, such as reading, writing, speaking and communicating, digital storytelling can also develop new literacy skills that are needed in the 21st century. Several studies showed that digital storytelling has the potential to improve the 21st century skills, such as technical writing, presentation, research, editing, which are needed in the writing skills (Dogan & Robin, 2009; Dogan, 2012; Dogan, 2007). Some related studies also showed that the digital storytelling developed multimedia and digital literacy (Kulla-Abbot, 2006) and

good cultural literacy and knowledge (Skinner & Hagood, 2008).

In writing activities, creative writing activity becomes more dynamic, because digital storytelling is able to create a context that is suitable for the daily life, attracts students' interest and increased students' participation in the learning process (Van Gils, 2005). Sukovic (2014) says that digital storytelling helps students develop higher order thinking skills on a text by allowing students to create new forms of writing, and construct their own original meanings.

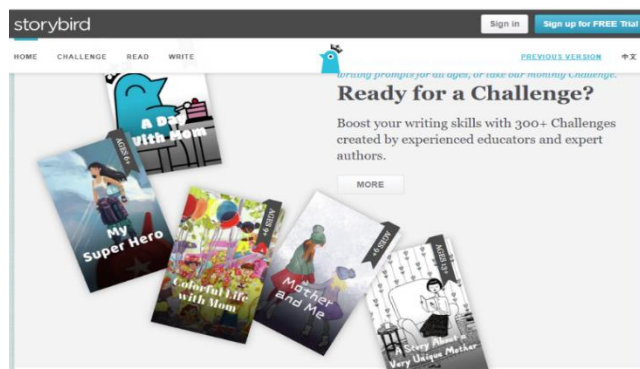
Creative writing is a process involving someone's experience, memory and imagination (Bruner, 1991). Characterizing and building character in a story become the main point in building stories, either fiction or non-fiction (Garrard, 2011). Digital storytelling can provide students with a help of building story ideas, concepts, and storylines, because it is assisted by technological tools that contain images, sounds, and videos. The group collaboration process makes

the creative process and knowledge be built more real and easier. Therefore, digital storytelling becomes interesting to use in teaching writing (Zakaria et al., 2016).

Storybird as Tools to Implement Digital Storytelling in the Classroom

Storybird is an online website that can be used to write (Walsh, 2010). This website contains many artworks with good visualization that can easily be used (Pop, 2012). Menezes (2012) explains that this website is a web-tool that can facilitate collaborative writing, and be used by all ages. It is very easy and safe to use to support the learning activities. The following is the illustrated images from Storybird website.

Figure 1 Login Storybird



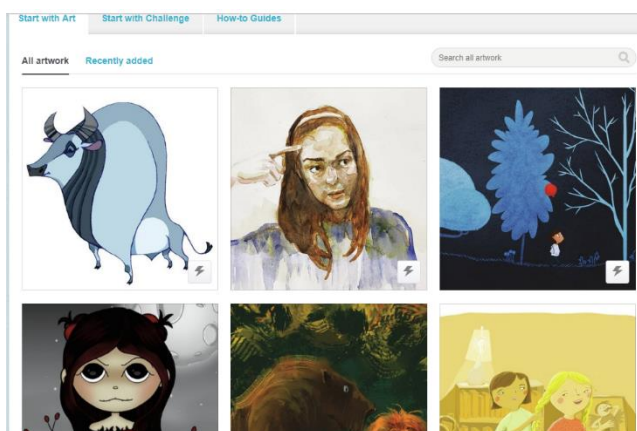
As a website, Storybird has many features that allow us to use as teaching media, especially in creative writing. It is because Storybird has more than five millions attractive artworks and illustrations that can be used to inspire students when making a story. Gakhar and Thompson (2007) express that Storybird is a technology for digital storytelling that can motivate students to develop skills in creating creative writing, designing, collaborating, communicating and reflecting.

In addition, Storybird also has special features that can be used as learning media. There are three types of accounts that can be selected on this website, namely regular user (common account), school/educator user (teachers and students account), and professional user (artists and writers). The user can utilize various kinds of themes to write. Each theme has many illustrations that can be arranged into a story. Each theme has three types of options for creative writing: picture book (contains many illustrations, few words), long-form

book (contains few illustrations, many words and pages), and poetry (contains one illustration, choice of words).

Konert et al. (2011) state that Storybird as a web-tool allowing us to create collaborative story. Menezes (2012) adds that there are three main ideas in Storybird, which are reading, writing and sharing. It cannot be denied that these ideas have become their own strength in helping students learn to write. Ideas and concepts can be obtained from seeing others' artwork shared in this web-tool. Furthermore, students have many examples to use in the creative process. Another benefit is shy students can also be helped. Sometimes, they are afraid and hesitant to convey their opinions, but this issue can be overcome by involving them into the learning that stimulates them to participate in the technology-based learning.

Figure 2 Artwork on Storybird



Since Storybird is a combination between writing and art (Giacomini, 2015), teachers can help students to develop other skills, such as critical thinking, creativity, even higher order thinking skills (Manezes, 2012). They can also provide various additional activities, besides writing a story, such as giving opinions about others' works, assessing others' publications, and continuing stories from texts compiled by others. It is because Storybird is equipped with features for posting and commenting like other social media sites. Herera (2013) shows that writing activities in Storybird can improve the students' linguistic abilities in terms

of grammar, vocabulary, and constructing sentences.

With all facilities owned by this website, it certainly can be manipulated by teachers to create the learning activities that are meaningful and useful for the students in mediating their writing activity. Therefore, this website can be utilized in the process of digital storytelling, which is a learning method in accordance with the framework of the 21st century learning.

3. Methods

Research Design

This study employed qualitative netnography as a research method. Netnography is an ethnographic approach to learn the communities that exist entirely in the online world (Kozinets, 1998). Furthermore, Kozinets (2010) expresses that netnography uses communication mediated through computer as the data source to convey ethnographic understanding and representation of cultural or communal phenomena. This study examined the online communities, which was the online class on the

website of Storybird.com that used this website as a media for creative writing learning.

Participant

This study involved 30 students from a private university in Bandung as the participants. The participants were students majoring non-English that took the course of English for Communication I.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

This study used three types of instruments as data collection techniques, namely ethnographic observation, semi-structured interviews, and students' writing products. These three instruments aim at investigating the use of Storybird in mediating the creative writing learning. Ethnographic observation was conducted by observing the students' creative writing learning mediated by Storybird. Semi-structured interview was conducted to lecturers and six students to strengthen the findings that were not obtained from the observation process. Students interviewed were selected based on their achievements (high-achieving

students, moderate-achieving students, and low-achieving students). While the students' writing products were analyzed to know students' abilities in creative writing. The students' learning outcomes were assessed through the creative writing rubric, which is presented below.

Creative Writing Rubric: Criteria for
Evaluating Creative Writing

Adopted from the website:

www.newpaltz.k12.ny.us/cms/lib/ny01000611/centricity/.../rubric--creativewr

Meaning/Content: the extent to which the assignment exhibits sound understanding/interpretation/analysis				
Story Structure	Strongly establishes all elements.	Adequately establishes plot/setting/character /point of view	Several elements of story structure; little blending of dialogue and narration	Few/no story structure elements present
Characterization	Complex characters developed through dialogue, narration, and action.	Characters developed through dialogue, narration, and action.	Several character development	Characters are not developed

Development: the extent to which ideas are elaborated, using specific and relevant evidence				
Ideas	Clearly and fully develops ideas with a wide range of relevant details.	Clearly develops ideas with relevant details.	Briefly develops ideas with some details.	Incomplete or undeveloped details.

Organization: the extent to which the assignment exhibits direction, shape, and coherence				
Designing Organization	Maintains clear focus with a logical, coherent structure through appropriate transitions.	Establishes but does not always maintain focus; some inconsistencies.	Establishes but does not always maintain focus; some inconsistencies.	Lacks focus but suggests some organization.
Specific Assignment Directions	Exceeds all specified requirements.	Meets all specified requirements.	Meets some specified requirements.	Meets few or no specified requirements

Language Use: the extent to which the assignment reveals an awareness of audience and purpose				
Description	Uses creative, concrete language with literary devices and rich sensory details.	Uses concrete language, literary devices, and sensory details.	Some use of concrete language, literary devices, and sensory details.	Little use of concrete language, literary devices, or sensory details.
Word Choice	Uses sophisticated precise vocabulary	Makes effective word choices.	Several effective word choices	Few effective word choices
Sentence Variety	Well-varied sentence structure throughout	Good sentence structure and variety	Occasional use of sentence variety	Little sentence variety

Voice/Sense of Audience	Unique voice; strong sense of audience	Evident awareness of voice and audience	Several awareness of voice and audience	Mechanical or unsuitable voice; lacks awareness of audience.
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Conventions: the extent to which the assignments exhibits conventional grammar/spelling/word usage				
Grammar/ Punctuation	Smooth, fluid, error-free.	Mostly correct grammar; errors do not interfere with communication	Occasional errors interfere with communication; verb tense errors	Frequent grammatical errors that interfere with communication.
Spelling and Word Usage	Correct spelling; error-free word usage	Mostly correct spelling and word usage	Errors in spelling and word usage	Misspelled and misused words throughout the text
Overall Assignment Presentation	MLA heading; unique title; professional presentation	MLA heading; appropriate title; neat presentation	Incomplete heading; average title/presentation	No heading/title; no attention to presentation

The process of data analysis used a strategy proposed by Creswell (2013). In analyzing data, this strategy involved processing data, reading, memo, describing, classifying, interpreting, representing, and visualizing (Creswell, 1998, 112 - 113). The further steps were to label and to categorize the data into a theme so that the data can be presented in detail and clearly. Triangulation was then conducted to confirm the data obtained from each instrument, thus the bias that potentially occurred could be reduced. This was also conducted to ensure every data used had related to each other.

4. Results

This section discusses the findings regarding the extent of digital storytelling in mediating the students' creative writing activity. There were three instruments used, which were ethnographic observation, semi-structured interviews, and students' writing products.

Based on the results of instrument analysis, the findings from the research data were then classified into three themes, including: Storybird becomes a platform for doing collaborative writing activity; digital storytelling is able to develop the students' higher order thinking skills; and

digital storytelling becomes a method for implementing creative and innovative language learning.

Storybird becomes a platform for doing collaborative writing activity

In implementing the digital storytelling method in mediating students' creative writing activities, Storybird was able to be a platform that could provide benefits for collaborative writing activities. Learning activities became more meaningful, since students obtained many variations of learning, such as writing collaboratively.

The features in this web-tool were intended to facilitate collaborative activities in learning, especially creative writing learning. When collaborating on Storybird, students could log in, and make and edit stories whenever they wanted, however, they could also arrange collaborations alternately. Someone started Storybird, and when they wanted to share it with their friends, they confirmed Storybird, and email would be sent to their friends in order to notify them that it was their turn.

Based on data obtained from observations, students really enjoyed the collaborative learning process, especially when they started activities in pre-writing discussions. Before creating a story, students had to discuss with their friends regarding the artwork used to make a story in this web tool. The following is a picture of students' discussion activity.

Figure 3 Students' Discussion Activity



Furthermore, they together discussed the creation of storyline, characters and plots, and conducted a research on the story that would be built. This could be conducted by observing existed story or reading form other sites. In while-writing activity, students were students felt comfortable when doing collaborative writing activities. They stated that the activities of

collaborative writing through Storybird helped them develop their writing skills. Following are the excerpts of the interview, which showed that students felt comfortable with the activity.

Interviews with the low-achieving students

Student I

“I am very happy with the activities of writing collaborations through Storybird. I can ask for help from my friends to improve my writing.”

Student II

“Sometimes, I have difficulties in determining proper words in writing. Through collaborative writing, I can ask for help from my friends to determine proper words, edit grammar and construct good sentences.”

In post-writing activity, students could publish their writing products, so that they could be read by other groups. Furthermore, the learning process could be directed to give comment to each other, or appreciate the writing products from other groups.

Data from interviews with lecturers also showed the similar

results, that collaborative creative writing activities mediated by Storybird could help students develop their language abilities. They experienced development, because the learning activities obtained were meaningful, and it was supported by authentic learning media. The following is the data of student’s writing product.

Figure 4 Student’s Writing Product



on arrival Adhit arrived at the port, one of the residents on guard saw a group of pirates wanting to head towards his ship Adhit

The findings above were in line with the studies conducted by Dogan & Robin (2009), Dogan, (2012) Dogan (2007) in which digital storytelling was able to improve editing skills, presentations and research needed in writing activities. Moreover, the activity of creative writing became more dynamic because digital storytelling was able to create a context that is suitable for the daily life, attract

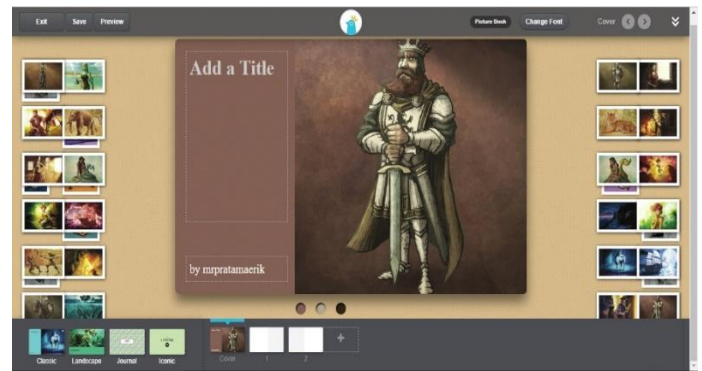
students' interest and increase students' participation in the learning process (Gils, 2005).

Digital storytelling is able to develop the students' higher order thinking skills

One of the skills in this century that must be mastered by students is thinking skills. The learning activity must be directed to be able to help students improve these skills. Digital storytelling is a method that is considered being able to help students develop thinking skills through the creative writing activities.

The empirical data showed that the process of digital storytelling could mediate students' thinking skills, so that they were able to be directed to think in a fair way. In making a story on Storybird, students were not only asked to make writing, but interestingly, there was a challenge that students do, which was writing based on the illustrations (artwork) that they chose on Storybird. Following is one of the challenges that was assigned to one group to write a story through an artwork on Storybird.

Figure 5 Challenge to write stories through artwork on Storybird



This challenge was not easy because they had to enliven a story and imagine the artwork while completing it with a story. The sequence of sentences must be arranged based on the available illustrations choices that made students not only develop a story, but also the creative process and thinking. The findings from the interview data supported the fact that digital storytelling activities mediated by the Storybird web-tool helped students develop their process of thinking. Following are the excerpts of interviews with students.

Interviews with the smart students

Student V

“To write on Storybird, it requires a process of thinking to compile stories from the available illustration choices.

This process makes learning more fun and exciting because we cannot write based on our own desires, but it must be in accordance with the illustrations we choose.”

Student VI

“First thing first, we must choose artwork, and then we have to choose the available illustrations on the artwork. Next, we must arrange them to make a storyline, and then complete it into a story. It is very complicated but fun.”

The process of making stories on Storybird made this activity more challenging and unique for students. There were many steps are passed by students before making it into a writing. However in the end, these stages made students able to make original and interesting creations. This can be seen from the choice of themes and story ideas developed by students, which are presented below.

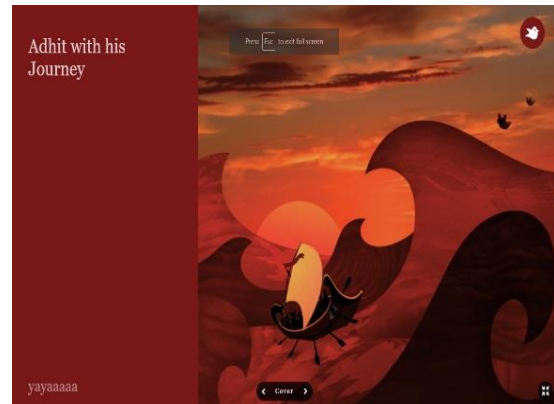
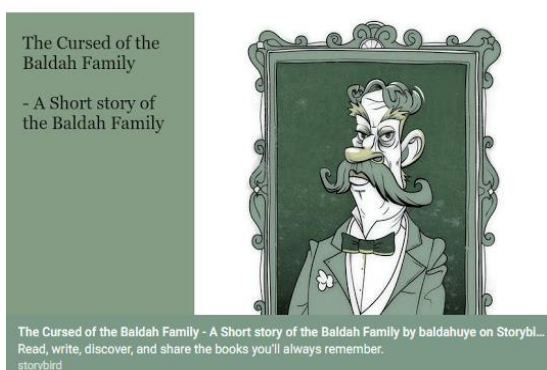


Figure 6 Student's Story Idea

Sukovic (2014) states that that digital storytelling helps students develop higher order thinking skills on a text by allowing students to create new forms of writing, and construct their own original meanings. Since Storybird is a combination between writing and art (Giacomini, 2015), teachers can help students to develop other skills, such as critical thinking, creativity, even higher order thinking skills (Manezes, 2012).



Digital storytelling becomes a method for implementing creative and innovative language learning

When writing a story, students must imagine enlivening the illustrations they choose. At the

same time, they also must hone their sensitivity, feelings and knowledge. The illustrations of the artwork they choose encourage their imagination, and help the creative process.

Through the process of digital storytelling learning, students got much meaningful experiences. They learned through the combination of several aspects, such as art, culture, technology and language skills. The results of observation showed that they had a positive behavior on the process of creative writing learning. Lecturers were successful to bring students into conducive learning atmosphere through the learning process mediated by technological tools that was able to achieve learning inside and outside the classroom.

Storybird as a media to implement digital storytelling had the ability to attract students' motivation to learn, and as a tool that could be manipulated to create a pleasant atmosphere in learning.

The excerpts of interviews obtained with students showed that they enjoyed the learning activities

obtained inside and outside the classroom. They mentioned that they were greatly helped by the existence of integrated technology tools in learning activities. Following are excerpts of interviews conducted with students.

*Interviews with the moderate-achieving students
Student III*

"This learning activity is an interesting experience because we learn to use media to help us learn. We enjoy learning using Storybird."

Student IV

"The learning process becomes very unique and creative. We feel comfortable learning by using technology. So that, learning does not become boring."

In evaluating students' learning outcomes, this method provided a more fair and comprehensive assessment because it did not only focus on cognitive aspects, but also students soft-skills. Several studies also showed that digital storytelling was able to develop multimedia and digital literacy (Kulla-Abbot, 2006), as well as good cultural and knowledge literacy (Skinner &

Hagood, 2008). Digital storytelling made writing learning very interesting (Zakaria et al., 2016).

5. Conclusion

Creative writing learning with digital storytelling presented several successful stories and challenges. First, this learning did not only develop the cognitive aspects, but also soft-skills that can be beneficial for students. Second, digital platforms, e.g. Storybird, helped lecturers provide broader thinking space for students in which it can be directed to train students in order to develop their high order thinking skills. Third, this method can help students practice digital literacy properly to help students use technology tools wisely.

On the other hand, the implementation of digital storytelling has several challenges that must be passed. First, students are not used to using technological tools in learning, because students tend to be familiar with the use of technological tools for personal activities, such as using social media, playing games, and communicating. Second, there is a

lack of students' understanding of the importance of learning outside the classroom. The challenge requires energy from lecturers in order to be able to condition students to get used to these activities. Innovations in technology, such as advanced smartphones, have not been able to make the students as users use these devices to learn, both inside and outside the classroom

When talking about the educational aspects, technology-based learning can provide many great advantages and opportunities for teachers to improve the quality of learning. Digital storytelling as a method integrating technology in the learning is able to create good learning condition, and provide opportunities for students to obtain authentic learning material in accordance with the context of everyday life. Another benefit is the more humanistic evaluation and assessment process in which it is not rigid, so that it can provide comfort for students, and have an effect on increasing their motivation and performance in learning.

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