THE USE OF DIGITAL STORYTELLING (DST) TO HELP STUDENTS IN LEARNING MULTIMODAL WRITING

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Abstract

This article explores the use of DST and the explicit teaching in one of universities in Indonesia on how students use it to help the learning process. Using a digital story to teach English and Based on multimodal theory, the term of DST has been increasingly used by scholars to illustrate various forms of support of learning to help students learn successfully in a classroom. Despite being widely used in educational context of many countries, DST has received scanty attention from teacher especially in ESP classes. This article specifically describes our experience of using DST as a learning aid with students of 18 to 19 years old. In this project they individually created collected the photographs based on their interest related to the specified theme as multimodal text. In the process they utilized two linguistic resources (Bahasa Indonesia and English) to help them in understanding the process of creation. Several supports from machine translation and machine pronunciation software were employed during the creation of DST project. The result shows that DST helps students in composing narrative writing by analyzing the visual prompts. This proves that DST is impending to support the writing process as students were engaged during the process.

Keywords: *digital story, narrative writing, multimodal, ESP.*

Introduction

The present study aims to document the use of DST in English learning process, particularly is for writing. In many classes, writing comes in the form of copying and answering teacher's instruction. In some cases of Universities in Indonesia, writing at times appears in mono mode system where students transform ideas based on certain topic given by teachers and it is emphasized more in the arrangement of vocabulary and structure hence they find writing in English to be difficult because they have to use the correct English grammar and vocabulary, apply the writing skills they have learnt, and incorporate these knowledge with their previous experience on the topic given when writing (Abas & Aziz, 2016). Yet, writing has "shifted from a relatively static and rigid approach to the teaching of writing (as a single lesson exercise) to consider writing as 'a process' with a widening focus on the stages of writing" (Groves, 2010) that it is must not always be presented in the form of single mode as it can be in the form of multi modal by using images along with words (Bezemer & Kress, 2010; Lemke, 1998; Saidy, 2018). The use of image and word in printed or online text receives great attention as by using visual explanations students may reach better understanding (Bobek & Tversky, 2016), experience meaning making communication (Jewitt & Kress, 2014) and provides students to develop creativity and imagination (Groves, 2010).

Another problem in writing is on the writing frame. Students are merely recopying information from teachers' material, thus awareness to give supportive environment for students to make them engaged is needed (Blikstad-Balas, Roel & Klette, 2018). An idea of implementing multimodal in the teaching and learning (Kress, 2001) stresses the need of interdisciplinary of mode to accompany each resource or mode, for instance textual, aural, linguistic, spatial, and visual mode as well following the Halliday's theory of Multimodal Social Semiotics (1978) stating 3 points: 1) communication happens as a response to a prompt; that 2) communication has happened when there has been an interpretation and 3) that communication is multimodal. Some specific research in multimodal writing have been conducted by Bezemer & Kress (2008), Joy (2016), Wahleithner (2012), while research on multimodality and motivation has been conducted by Siegel (2012), Darrington & Dousay

(2015) & suggested that school literacy curricula have to change to integrate multimodality because: 1) literacies are changing, 2) youths bring multimodal practices to school, and 3) multimodal practice can reframe at-risk students as learners of promise. This indicates that the students as the generation of 21st century own different character to the previous generation which means that the learning materials should be revised. Another research are Jewitt, 2005 (the need to expand school literacy for young people to make them literate in the digital era of the 21st century – not only emphasizing on handwriting and spelling); Bezemer & Kress, 2008; Groves, 2010 (the need to swift from mono writing skill to multimodal writing); Howell, Reinking & Kaminski, 2017; Mulatsih, 2016 suggesting that multimodal learning provides new opportunities for learning, however her research does not explain deeper explanation on the multimodal implementation and the latest suggests that more critical investigations need to be undertaken, how different creative writing pedagogy can be implemented beyond the traditional classroom. For this reason, to fill the gap, this study seeks to examine the use of DST as the combination of more than mono modal to help students in their writing process.

DST for Multimodal Writing

Writing is not only counted on words, it comes up in combination of words and images (Bezemer & Kress, 2010). This indicates that writing is no longer a representation of chained words, not only composing sentences into paragraph, rearrange verbal text nor completing empty words. It is a representation of what students have learned before as the filling of the empty words, in the same vein writing is a meaningful process of recalling the memory of learners, to remember what a student has already acknowledged in the past regarding to the text. According to this, there has been considerable research on the use of image as learning resources especially how it is used by students to recall memory and how image as prompt is used by students in the writing process (Groves, 2010 & Mc Lean, 2012). Thus, image is not only a decoration of a text but it is a potential of meaning accordingly the combination of image along with the words can reinforced what is written and this

relationships indicates coherence (Jewitt, 2005). Several studies have revealed how multimodal writing differ from traditional writing, as students individually may choose their own text not only rely on teacher's instruction, that multimodal text mediates students to ease the process of generating ideas in writing stage, can be a more powerful aid to support argument, and engage students in the learning (Fraiberg, 2012; Howel, Reinking & Kaminski, 2015). The term of multimodal writing reveals that a student choose a text, not only in verbal form as s/he may use a visual text as a prompt and continue to the narrating the visual text into a verbal one.

For DST, it is the form of multimodal writing as it involves more than one mode (verbal, visual, and audio text) the modernization of storytelling in the past as what Porter (2005) points out that DST "takes the ancient art of oral storytelling and engages a palette of technical tools to weave personal tales using images, graphics, music, and sound mixed together with the author's own story voice". DST differs to film making as the later requires sophisticated equipment, it is more exclusive, requires more expertise, sometimes it emphasizes on creating spectacular special effects; while DST is more autonomous that any one has mobile phone can create a story for DST. From this, we can say that DST focuses more on story telling, not only in arts of film (Stanley, 2018: 1).

In the process of composing those blend, DST requires students' creativity as in the learning process DST helps the students to learn something by doing something. This is supported by Reinders (2011) who points out that digital storytelling is basically the telling of stories in electronic form. This means that students can combine two or more forms. While Robin (2012) mentions that DST refers to a short form of digital film-making that allows students to recreate a story relating to their field of study. As the context is in English for Economics Study, the story deals with the marketing theme. Students compose stories dealing it, following the procedures of composing a DST, in this case is by following Lambert's 7 elements. Lambert (2002) identifies 7 elements to name an effective digital story. There must be (1). a point of view (DST should be constructed based on students' own experience and understanding), (2). a dramatic question (narrative, resolved by the end of the

story), (3). emotional content (evoke emotion from audience), (4). economy (short, two – three minutes vignette). (5). Pacing (avoid to be monotonous), (6). The gift of your voice (student records their voice to tell story), and (7) soundtrack (music to accompany story). Point no 2 in some students' DST projects was aborted as student created descriptive text instead of narrative.

3. Context

DST was implemented in the ESP learning process as it has been included as an enganging aspect in English learning. 38 students from the discipline of Syariah Economics who have enrolled in English II were selected as the participants in the study to participate in this project. They are both males (18) and females (30), having homogenous age but different social background. The process of collaborating into the project was started by working in group to compose DST project on the theme of Marketing and certain topics related to their study. The site of this study is a State University located in a town in Central Java, Indonesia. This university has a population of more than 1,500 students with different socio cultural backgrounds. Most of the students are bilingual (e.g. Bahasa Indonesia and Javanese). This study covered for two months from April to Juli 2017. English as Specific Purposes (ESP) is a core subject in the curriculum.

Method

The DST project contained certain data gathered from several data collection methods : observations and informal conversations with students. The prime aim of observations is to identify difficulties, which students are encountered in the learning process. All process was recorded and pictured to be narrated as the research data. Informal interview was conducted with students before / after the class session, lasted for 15 - 30 minutes. The interview was conducted in the mix of Bahasa Indonesia and English, depending on students' ability and comfort in using it. This was a reflective process, as an evaluation for the next stage, and this is able to inform students' attitudes about the newly developed materials.

Following the concepts of Action Research of Kemmis and Taggard (1988), we located the modified work of Stringer, Christensen & Baldwin (2010) as our research foundation; that the approach to action research as applied to teaching is based on a simple LOOK > THINK > ACT heuristic that frames both the instructional work of the teacher and student learning activities.

After observing the reality in the classroom, the teacher did a reflection; "what should be done?" In this stage the teacher and the students negotiated how to form groups. The students were offered two options of whether they will choose their own group members (student-chosen) or whether the teacher should pick group members (teacher-chosen). It was hoped that the group would vary in ability therefore those having high proficiency may support their low proficiency peers; as this is the core of collaborative work. From this point the teacher also did a reflection, "what is the problem by having the system of working the assignment like this?" to overcome the problems in the future.

The next stages were starting from the previous stage: Act – Observe – Reflect – Think – Act – Reflect. Starting from pre-reading activity by using students' own subject of interest in two themes used (this is called the visual reading stage) - the purpose is to build students' critical thinking, by posing wh-questions, as: "What do you see first?, Why do you choose it?, Who are there in the picture?, What do you feel about the picture?, Is there any problem there?, Is there any solution regarding it?, What will you do?". In this act, the teacher did an observation, continued by the reflective stage to see whether students experience difficulties or not. This stage was completed in certain meetings, joining more than one visual image to be a chained story. The point of stages was always reflective stage in each process. While other stages of drafting the concept of story were started after that, followed by inserting voices, music, and the final stage was digitizing the text.

Result and Discussion

The action research was started by transferring reading the visual text into drafting the written text. In this case, learners connected the image prompts as the guidance. They started by following some questions such as
1. What do you see first in the picture?
2. Why do you choose the picture?
3. Who are there in the picture?

4. What do you feel about the picture?
5. Is there any problem there? Please relate to the theme
6. Is there any solution regarding it? What should be done?
7. What will you do (to solve the problem)?"

Ideally, those seven questions must be answered by students, however, during the observation process, we found out that some students did difficulties in reading the prompts and were not able to answer all of the the seven questions. Some students were able some questions, such as "What do you see first in the picture?' - three girls; "What do you feel about the picture?" - Dangerous; "Is there any problem there? Please relate to the theme" - not wearing helmet. Another problem was in the sentence formation, as in lexicogrammatical problems such as 'she is drive in the road, she drives don't apply helmet." To answer these problem, therefore, the teacher needed to scaffold her as well as other students in lexicogrammatical features. The teacher let the students read the prompts (visual reading stage), consulted the assignment individually and did a reflection process noted or presented through the slide.

In 'finding the moment' stage, students as the storytellers found the identifying a single moment that they can use to illustrate

their insight. describe within a scene that is regarded as the starting point to telling the story as a story. In this stage, students composed the story, narrated the visuals and inserted audio to shape their story.

Pic 1. Finding the Moment

In the process of inserting audio to the images of the story, the students used applications to choose, especially to help students to explore English sound: Google Translate, Online Dictionary to Offline Dictionary.

While in joining the images into meaningful story, students were free to use any supporting application, from Photo Story, Ice Cream Screen Recorder, Viva Video, Windows Movie Maker or any supportive aids. The point was that the series of pictures as visual texts united each other, along with the spoken and or written narrative to explain details of the story.

Another media students employed was power point to combine certain pictures. In a DST entitled 'marketing" a student compared traditional stall to modern minimarket. It was a work using combination of visual text, verbal text, and audio text in one single frame. "I use Power point (as the media), save in jpeg format Ms.". Her intention to save the power point sheet was to make it as picture (jpeg). She then combined the pictures into a Viva Video application, hence the result of the work will be in video of mp4.

Problems hampered in the DST process covered the difficulties in picking real pictures, bad signal of internet connection, and noise in audio record or inserting audio process. In pictures selection, one of students, Mawar explained that the pictures were authentic taken from the real place. "I took the pictures from real place." This brought her into some difficulties, such as that she must take the items secretly in the minimarket to get the price tag - she asked for the cashiers' permission and mentioned that it was part of the assignment in ESP. When picturing the stall, she captured the photo by parking the motor in front of it.

The other problem she faced was when she inserted her voice as she used laptop and she needs a microphone as an aid, and she must find peaceful place hence the noise

would not be captured. Mawar mentioned that at first she did a recording process in a bathroom, however the voice was echoed. She then repeated the process of recording voice at night to reduce the noise in her recording.
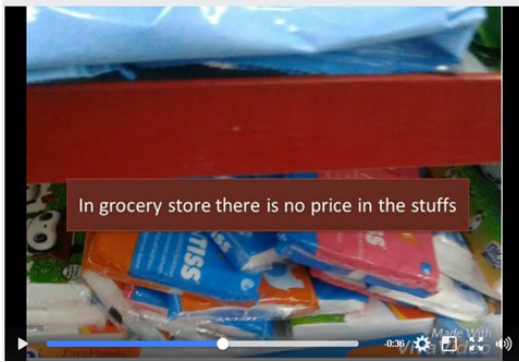
Pic 3. Real objects

In a DST project, there is a need to meet the criteria of joining visual, verbal, and audio text. In one example, Mawar combined visual and verbal text, in between she added her voice recording. She narrated the story, not only reading it loud, but giving comments in the digital story. Dealing students' problem in arranging logical sentence, the teacher permitted them to consult the sentence in certain ways: pair discussion, or lecture conversation. Mawar explained further "I use google translate to check the pronunciation, sometimes I check my sentence, too." The use of *Google Translate* was permitted to help the students checked the way they should say words (pronunciation checker), and in some cases they also were permitted to have it as the aid for checking word translation in one condition: that the Indonesian structure must be logical and make sense so the result will be better. Editing was a must in this case. As the last step was sharing the story, the student considered that her targeted audiences would be her friends. "It's just for sharing," so that's why she uploaded her work in the facebook group.

Conclusions

The Digital Storytelling (DST) project in two themes was performed well by the students as they found that it was an engaging media to support their learning process. Students did not only memorize English structures as usual nor waited for teacher feeding them. The project was calling their attention not merely arranging sentences without relating it to the real-life context, but it came in the integration of visual texts analyzed based on the English grammar, based on the appropriate context therefore it became a meaningful learning materials. DST enabled the students

learned that learning English is not only learning skill in mono mode, for example listening, speaking, writing, and reading in a single way; but it enables them to use all skills in integrated way. To support them in the skills, the used of supporting application for instance to check pronunciation is a must therefore their English sounds logic.

Related to obstacles experienced by students in the activity, no one is low-run wifi in the classroom hence the use of personal gadget with personal data support is a must; and number two is dealing with students' motivation to perform the best project for them as students' activeness is needed in the creation of the DST project.

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