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**PROMOTING LITERACY SKILLS THROUGH STORYBIRDS  
AS WEB-BASED TECHNOLOGY**Lestari Setyowati<sup>1✉</sup>, Sony Sukmawan<sup>2</sup>, Ana Ahsana El-Sulukkiyah<sup>3</sup>

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**Article Information****Article History:**

Accepted May 2019

Approved June 2019

Published July 2019

**Keywords:***learning, literacy skills,  
storybird, technology***How to Cite:**

Lestari Setyowati, dkk (2019).  
Promoting Literacy Skills  
Through Storybirds as Web-Based  
Technology: JurnalDimensi  
Pendidikan dan  
PembelajaranUniversitas  
Muhammadiyah Ponorogo, Vol 7  
No 2 : Halaman  
99 - 108.

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**Abstrak**

Di era abad ke-21 ini, teknologi memainkan peran penting dalam proses pengajaran dan pembelajaran bahasa baik di dalam maupun di luar kelas. Penelitian ini dimaksudkan untuk mendeskripsikan pendapat dosen pendidikan bahasa dan pendapat mahasiswa tentang penggunaan storybird untuk keterampilan literasi dengan menggunakan desain studi kasus. Subjek penelitian adalah dosen pendidikan bahasa dan mahasiswa yang mengikuti matakuliah menulis di STKIP PGRI Pasuruan pada tahun akademik 2018-2019. Instrumen yang digunakan adalah wawancara dan analisis dokumen. Terdapat tiga temuan dari penelitian ini. Pertama, 81% dari dosen bahasa di STKIP PGRI Pasuruan menggunakan teknologi berbasis web untuk pengajaran, tetapi hanya sedikit dari mereka yang akrab dengan storybird. Para dosen ini sepakat bahwa storybird bermanfaat untuk mempertajam keterampilan baca tulis siswa. Kedua, mayoritas siswa (73%) percaya bahwa penggunaan storybird membantu mereka menulis lebih baik. Dua aspek menarik dari storybird yang mendorong siswa untuk membaca dan menulis adalah gambar-gambarnya yang indah dan kebebasannya untuk digunakan semua orang, sementara kelemahannya terletak pada persyaratan untuk selalu online dan kesulitan dalam mengunduh cerita yang telah ditulis

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**Abstract**

*In this 21st century era, technology plays a significant role in language teaching and learning process both inside and outside the classroom. This study is intended to describe the language education lecturers' opinion and the students' opinion on the use of storybird as web-based technology for literacy skills by using case study design. The subjects of the study were the language education lecturers and the students who joined writing class in STKIP PGRI Pasuruan in the academic year 2018-2019. The instruments used were interviews and document analysis. Three findings were revealed from the study. Firstly, 81% of the language lecturers used web-based technology for their teaching, but only very few of them were familiar with storybird platform. These lecturers agreed that storybird was beneficial to sharpen the students' literacy skill. Secondly, the majority of the students (73%) believed that the use of storybird helped them to write better. Two appealing aspects of storybird which encouraged students to read and write were its beautiful pictures and its freedom for everyone to use, while the weakness laid in the requirement to be online and the difficulty to download the story.*

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## INTRODUCTION

In this modern era, technology plays an important role in all aspects of human life. The rapid advancement of technology has changed the way people to communicate, to learn, and to gain knowledge and information. Internet gives people opportunities to stay connected, to give and share information and knowledge. In the language classroom, it becomes typical for teachers/lecturers to use technology to reach the goal of their teaching (Sun & Yang, 2015). In the past, language teachers/lecturers present their subjects by using paper-based media, such as books and worksheet. Nowadays, technology has allowed language teachers/lecturers to be paperless, as most materials, assignments, and projects are written, reported, and published online, and shared through social media, or other web-based technology platform.

Internet eases both language teachers/lecturers to present topics, and for students to learn. They can learn independently to sharpen their language skills. This fact should trigger awareness among teachers/lecturers that an adaptation in the use of technology is becoming a must. If language teachers/lecturers are aware of this, they should create a bridge to connect what the students experience in the classroom and what they could learn and do outside the classroom. In short, technology triggers autonomous learning as they can self-access the information, and finish any given task (Warschauer, & Liaw, 2011). Digital media in the internet has given a lot of opportunities for language learners to sharpen their literacy skills. Among other, the technology which are considered to be beneficial for language learning are blogs, podcasts, online writing sites, text-scaffolding software, and multiplayer games (Warschauer, & Liaw, 2011). Storybird platform, as one of the online writing sites, offers its users to gain more literacy skills, as the site has a lot of reading materials, tutorial, and writing challenges through visual storytelling.

Basically, the idea of learning beyond the classroom is quite simple. Every place and every situation offer learning experiences for any learners (Harding, 2015). A

classroom gives a particular learning experience, while outside the classroom, there are enormous learning experiences that learners can exploit. In fact, most teachers in general, perhaps, have a common wish that their students will continue learning even after the subject they take in the classroom has already over. With the advance of technology nowadays, learners can acquire knowledge not only in the classroom. They have unlimited access to gather information and to facilitate learning (Hashim, Yunus, & Embi, 2016). As learning is no longer limited by walls, there is a strong demand for language teachers to be innovative for teaching language skills. Language teachers in this millennial era should adapt and make use of the technology for teaching benefits (Daniel, 2014). As the use of web-based technology for classroom context has gained its popularity nowadays, more research need to be conducted to find out how they benefit learners. In relation to the language teaching, one of the web-based technology that steals the attention of the language teachers/lecturers is the storybird platform.

The use of storybird for teaching language skills has attracted attention from researchers and practitioners. Mostly, storybird is utilized for writing narrative either collaboratively (Ramirez, 2013; Zakaria, Yunus, Nazri, & Shah, 2016), or individually (Setyowati, 2019), and for creative writing class (Thonghattha, Kittichartchao-walit, & Kittisunthonphisarn (2017). Yet, some gaps can be found in relation to the use of technology for teaching literacy skill, particularly writing, both in native and second/foreign context. Firstly, most previous studies give more focus on the learners, and did not give sufficient information about the teachers'/lecturers' opinion toward the use of storybird for their classroom teaching. Secondly, most studies discussed the use of storybird within classroom context. The students, or subjects under previous studies, used storybird in the classroom. While in the present study, the students were given opportunities to use the storybird outside the classroom with time limit. They were given two weeks to write narrative texts outside the classroom and

were given control for their own learning. Thus, they had their own decisions to solve the problems they may encounter, such as what to write, when to write, where to write, and how to write it, as well as solving their own problems dealing with technical issues, such as when to download, how to download, and what to do to finish their writing tasks. And thirdly, most previous studies did not reveal the strengths and weaknesses of the storybird platform from the point of view of the students. Having the information about positive and negative points about storybird can help the teachers/lecturers to take careful action and decision about what, when and how to optimally make use of the platform for the benefit of teaching and learning process. As this study is considered 'unique' in its term, it is considered worth doing. The result of this study would enrich the body of knowledge in relation to the teaching of writing and the use of web-based technology for teaching literacy skill that would trigger autonomous learning.

Therefore, the present study is aimed at describing 1) the language lecturers' opinion in STKIP PGRI Pasuruan toward the use of web-based technology, and storybird in particular, to promote literacy skills; 2) the students' responses toward the use of storybird for promoting their literacy skills, with writing in particular; and 3) the aspects of storybird that encourage and discourage students to write narrative by using storybird platform.

## **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

### **Storybird for Language Learning**

Incorporating technology for language teachings has several benefits. Among them are it provides unlimited resources for language learning (Bull & Ma, 2001) and it supports learners' enhancement for their language competence (Hashim, Yunus, & Embi, 2016). Furthermore, Ahmadi (2018) states that technology provide opportunities for language learners to improve their language learning skills and motivates them to learn more. And finally, the use of technology provides control for the students about their own learning activities (Hashim, Yunus, & Embi, 2016). They can manage

themselves what they want to learn, when and where they want to learn the subject, as well as how to learn it.

Storybird is an artful story telling which is provided by storybird.com. It has beautiful and colorful illustrations for kids/students to tell. Anybody can sign up for free, and all the stories students create would remain private unless they make them public. Some research has been conducted to find out the effectiveness of storybird for writing class. Firstly, a research conducted by (Ramirez, 2013), shows that Collaborative Writing work supported with storybird enable learners to write narrative text creatively as well as offers positive attitude to write more stories. Similarly, Hapsari, Seniwegasari, & Fauzi (2016) conducted a quasi experimental study to find out the effectiveness of storybird. In spite of the weakness in the design and the small sample size, the result of the research shows that storybird was effective to improve the students' writing ability in recount text. Other research conducted by Thonghattha, Kittichartchaowalit, & Kittisunthonphisarn (2017) also reveals similar result. They conclude that storybird can improve the students' creative writing ability. The result also reveals that the students have positive response toward the use of storybird for their writing course.

Other studies focus on the students' experiences toward the use of storybird. Zakaria, Yunus, Nazri, & Shah (2016) investigated 15 diploma students' experience in using storybird for their writing class. In their study, the students were asked to work collaboratively to make stories on storybird platform. The result of the study reveals that all students show positive responses toward the use of storybird for writing narrative text. Within the scope of teaching the native language, Bahasa Indonesia in particular, Storybird has gained its popularity among teachers. Ramadhani (2017) designed a model for teaching reading by using storybird for elementary students. By using a research and development design, the result of her study shows that storybird-based learning model is proven to be effective to improve the students' learning achievement in Bahasa

Indonesia. Some community services have also been done by lecturers to train elementary school teachers in some part of Indonesia to create children stories which later on can be used for their own teaching (Rahmawati, Sudrajat, & Widyawulandari (2017). The result of the previous studies shows that storybird application can be used for any language teaching and learning and for all level of education with mostly focused on personal narrative and fictional narrative.

### Literacy Skills

Learning to read and write are basic skills that everybody should acquire (Genlott & Grönlund, 2013). However, writing is considered to be the most difficult skill to master. Writing in any languages, either native or second/foreign language context, offers challenges not only for the learners but also for the teachers/lecturers. It is common knowledge that learners have several difficulties to perform writing task well (Setyowati & Sukmawan, 2017; Setyowati & El-Sulukkiyah, 2017). They mostly hardly have confidence and experience as well as have low grammatical and vocabulary competence (Abdel-Hack & Abdel-Hamid, 2014). Furthermore, writing itself is also a demanding and complex skill because to produce an acceptable piece of writing requires a long and winding process (Setyowati & Sukmawan, 2016). From the teacher's side, the challenges come not only from how to present the teaching and learning process which is engaging, but also how to keep the students on task and continue practicing even though they are not in the classroom. As one of online writing sites, storybird offers opportunities for both teachers and students for engaging teaching/learning as well as promoting literacy skills.

### METHOD

This study uses qualitative design focused on case study. Case study was chosen because the main intention of the researcher was to describe the existing phenomenon of a particular subject. As stated by Creswell (2012), the 'case' can be a program, events or activities. He further

states that a uniqueness implementation of a program can also be studied as a case. There were 18 lecturers who became the subjects of the study. They came from Indonesian and culture education department (9 lecturers) and English education department (9 lecturers) of STKIP PGRI Pasuruan. However, only the lecturers who are familiar with web-based technology and storybird platform who were interviewed and became the data source. Meanwhile, the total number of the students who became the subjects of the study was 43 students of 2017 batch in the academic year 2018-2019. These students have experienced the use of storybird for their writing course. The instruments used to collect the data were classroom observation, interviews, and document analysis. To help the researchers analyzed the data, simple codification was used. For the students, the data codification was written by using their initials and the last two digit of students' registration number, for example, if the student's name was Ana Ahsana, and her registration number is 13188203053, the codification would be AA/53. While for the lecturers, the codification also used their initials and the department. As mostly the data was in the form of words and sentences, qualitative data analysis was considered appropriate.

### FINDING AND DISCUSSION

#### Lecturers' Opinion Toward the Use of Storybird for Literacy Skills

The use of storybird in language classes is not something new. Although not all lecturers are familiar with the storybird platform, most of them confessed that they used other web-based technology for their teaching language skills, such as blogging, you tube, and journal sites. The data reveals that most of the lecturers (81%) used web-based technology for their teaching. However, only very few (4 lecturers) of language leacturers are familiar with storybirds. In this study, the lecturers who were familiar with the storybird platform were young lecturers who either often used the social media platform or actively participate in academic discussion, such as seminar and conferences. They said that

storybird was very useful for teaching language skills, especially for teaching reading and writing.

*Storybird eases the lecturer to teach some language skills to the students. The students would be more interested in learning reading and writing because there are so many pictures in it. (DW/Bing).*

*If I'm not mistaken, it is an application to write stories. Storybird has beautiful pictures, so users can create stories based on the pictures and arrange them freely. One of the advantages is we can adjust the creation of the story based on age. Storybird is very beneficial for teachers/lecturers because we do not need much effort to ask students write stories creatively. Moreover, this application is online-based, so it is suitable with millennium learners. (BW/Bindo)*

*Students can develop their writing and create a composition appropriate with the pictures (AA/Bing)*

In this millennium era, where everything can be accessed and done digitally, storybird is indeed very appropriate for young generation. It has appealing features which ease both students and teachers/lecturers to maximize its use. As stated by Rahmawati, *et al* (2017) storybird has the power to enrich teachers' practical knowledge in relation to material development for teaching. They further state that the material is not confined only in language teaching but also in other subjects, such as biology, math, science, as well as character development. The finding also shows that the lecturer believed that storybird may trigger the literacy skill in reading and writing. In relation this, Warschauer, & Liaw (2011) state that technology supports the language development and literacy skills of any language learners. This being the case, storybird is useful not only for teaching writing, but also for teaching reading. Yet, the use of storybirds is not only confined to

language skills. Storybird platform can be used to teach literary appreciation, such poem (reading poems and writing poems), prose analysis, and creative writing (picture storybook and flash fiction). Therefore, language teachers/lecturers are encouraged to maximize the use of storybird both in the language classroom and outside the classroom.

**The Students' Responses Toward the Use of Storybird**

The students gave their responses either in the form of short paragraph which described about their feeling after using storybird, or stated their feeling and opinion orally. The researchers divided the responses into two broad category, namely positive responses and negative responses. The students' response was considered positive if they stated explicitly their feeling in writing by using these key words, *like, fun, useful, and helpful*. On the other hand, the students' response was considered negative if they stated explicitly in their writing the following keywords, namely *difficult, not useful, and hard*. The result of the students' response is presented in **figure 1**.

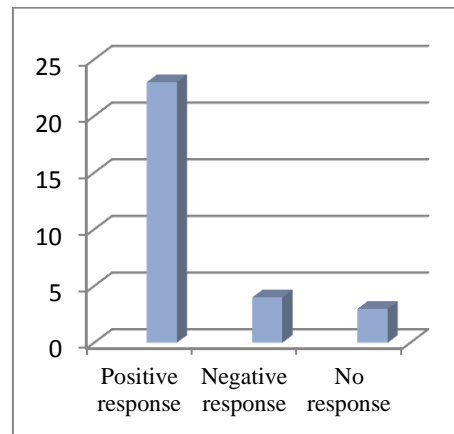


Figure 1. The Students' Responses

**Figure 1** shows that the majority of the students (73%) have positive responses toward the use of storybird for their writing course. While the rest of them (17%) feels differently. The students who are in the latter category complain that storybird is difficult. Looking at the data, it shows that the majority of the students have positive view

toward the use of storybird for their writing task. It is not a surprising that most students have positive view toward the use of storybird. The web is engaging and easy to use, both for the teacher and the students Abdel-Hack .& Abdel-Hamid (2014).The result of this study is similar to Zakaria *et al* (2016) in which the students show positive response on the use of storybird for writing narrative text. This shows that, regardless of the language context, storybird is able to give interest and motivation for the students to write.

#### **Aspect that encourage Learners to write**

The data also reveals that there are certain aspects in storybird that draw students' attention to like the application. Among them are story bird offers beautiful pictures, while at the same time, it is free for everyone to use.

*The storybirds was fun because I like to write, and I like to describe a picture. When I do this assignment, I can develop my imagination through the image of the story. (AM/29)*

*This website is so simple to use because there are so many templates available. There are so many pictures which are ready to use as a story book, poem, etc. And the most important thing is this website is free for everyone! (MR/04)*

*Storybirds is very important for me. With storybirds, I can learn writing, with some pictures. It makes me easy to write. (A/12)*

Two aspects of storybird which are mostly appealing are its picture and its freedom for everyone to use. As stated by Anita (2016), all level of students, (both high and low-income students) can access the website and make use of the platform easily and freely. She further states that the inspiring images in storybirds encourage students' creativity even if they open the website with nothing to write in mind. The same images picked by the students might have different story line. Storybird, as Digital Story telling, is considered to be a

student-centered language learning activity as it focuses more on the story production and sharing based on the personal experience and emotions (Abdel-Hack .& Abdel-Hamid, 2014). Digital Story telling can be used for different kinds of personal stories (Iambert, 2010) such as character stories, memorial stories, adventure stories, the story about a place in one's life, a story about one's activity, recovery stories, love stories, and discovery stories. The beautiful images provide by storybird enable the students to express their ideas to creatively write their own personal stories as they can choose which type of story that appeals them more.

#### **Aspects that Discourage Learners to Use Storybird**

Despite of the strengths the storybird have, it does have some 'weaknesses' from the students' point of view. Among them are the requirement to be online to use the story bird, the requirement to write a lot before being able to download one story, and sometimes, the picture limit the students' ideas to write.

*My experience about storybird is difficult because I must think of good ideas for my writing (JNB/10)*

*My experience when I wrote in storybirds is at first I did not know at all about storybirds. The first I know it from my lecturer in writing class. My feeling when I was writing is a challenge for me. The challenge was in making a story I must appropriate with the images. I got confused. There were so many images for the story to complete. (WF/21)*

*My opinion about storybirds is it makes us to be a better writer.*

*But why we must connect to the internet when we use storybirds?*

*That is not effective for us. (MFH/18)*

Just like two sides of a coin, there are always strengths and weaknesses from something. Aside from the its strengths, in terms of images, ease, and freedom, storybird also has some weaknesses from the students'

stand point. Not all students seemed to be happy with the images provided by storybird. Some of them think, the pictures did not suit their ideas/the story line they wanted to present in the writing. Aside of linguistic, cognitive, and psychological problems (Rahmatunisa, 2014), generating and tailoring ideas are basically common problems in writing (Setyowati & El-Sulukkiyah, 2017). Theoretically, the use of pictures ease students to generate ideas for writing narrative text (Khotimah, Daud, Burhansyah, 2017; Wening, Cahyono & Iragiliati, 2017). However, some of the students in the study did not feel the same way.

Some possible causes of the students difficulties were identified. Firstly, in storybird, the pictures are random pictures which often have no connection between one and another. To select and create stories, the students are required to have creativity and imagination about the pictures. Students with low imagination will definitely have difficulties to create an interesting story. Secondly, the pictures offered by storybird are so many yet limited. This might confusion for the students to select which picture suitable with the storyline they have in their mind. As stated by Anita (2016), however beautiful and artful the pictures provided in the storybird, they are still quite limited. Students might get frustrated to select pictures that are almost similar to their storyline. There is always a case when they find no picture appropriate with the plot in mind, that is why some students say 'limited pictures'. To solve these problems, the students can make a plan or storyboard before they start to write. Research has shown that planning during the pre-writing stage is beneficial to improve the quality of the students' writing (Setyowati & Sukmawan, 2017; Setyowati & El-Sulukkiyah, 2017). Secondly, they should study the pictures provided by storybird which appropriate with the plan in hand. If they could not find the pictures they need, they should have plan B to select other pictures, or revise the storyboard. Writing is indeed a process. As stated by Flower & Hayes (1981), a writer is doing 'an orchestra'

during the writing process. They can go back and forth between plan, write, revise, and edit.

From technical point of view, it is not easy to download one story created by the writer on the storybird. The rule says that the writer should gather some crowns and rewards from storybird to download one's own-created story in the storybird platform. Or the writer can join writing challenge offered by storybird or pay some amount of money to get the downloaded story. The requirements many stories only to download one story or to pay their own story, seems discouraging for the students. But if it is seen from the bright side, 'forcing' the students to write a lot of different stories is good enough to make them practice writing outside the classroom and give them purpose why they should write everyday. However, if the students intend to get the story that they have written in the storybird without paying them, the students can screen-captured the intended pages and copy them in the Microsoft word

Another difficulty that the student face was the requirement for being online for writing in the storybird. The result of the present study is similar to Setyowati (2019) in which she found out that the requirement to be online to use the storybird is discouraging for the students. It is common that not all students come from high-income family background,. Therefore, not all students have internet facility at home. To cope with this problem, as suggested by Sukmawan & and Setyowati (2019), the students can find free internet spots which are widely accessible in some parts of the campus or around the campus.

Having said all these, it can be concluded that the aspects that discourage the students to use storybird are minor problems which still can be handled and solved. Storybird offers a lot of advantages and suitable for students of all ages and all level of proficiency. It is just a matter of willingness to write more and make use of the facility even if they are not in the classroom. After all, learning outside the classroom is more fun as they can have their own control of what they want to achieve.

## CONCLUSION

The use of technology in the classroom this digital era is unavoidable. Thus, the lecturers should be adaptable to change as they deal with the millennial generation. Based on the result of the study, it can be concluded that the lecturers both in Indonesian and English education department, have positive view on the use of web-based technology for teaching. Even though only very few of them are familiar with storybird platform, they have positive attitude toward storybird considering its use for literacy skills. The positive attitude is also shown by the students who use storybird for their writing class. Despite of the challenges and difficulties in using the platform, storybird does give a fresh air for teaching and learning in any language context. In short, it can be concluded that language teachers/lecturers should make use of storybird platform in their teaching, as it promotes autonomous learning not only in the classroom, but also beyond the classroom. It challenges the students' creativity, critical thinking ability, and the habit to read and write or to promote their literacy skills.

This study, however, has some weaknesses. This study does not give information about the students' ability in writing narrative by using storybird platform seen both from writing elements, story elements and grammatical elements. Thus, further study needs to be done to find out the students' ability in writing narrative by using storybird seen from the organization and the idea development. Further study also needs to be conducted to find out the students' ability in writing narrative, both personal narrative and fictional narrative, in terms of its plot structure, theme, characterization, and the use of figurative language. More information also needs to be obtained in terms of the students' problems in writing seen from the grammatical point of view.

All in all, the present study gives an insight and valuable information that storybird is appropriate and applicable for teaching literacy skills in any language context. When learning is no longer confined by four brick walls, then learning should go beyond the classroom. Facilitating the

students' curiosity and creativity by making use of the technology are becoming a demand in this era. It is not an exaggeration to say that the millennial generation should have millennial teachers who will take risks in being innovative in teaching.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research was funded by Directorate General of Higher Education (Ditjen DIKTI) 2019, under contract number 1499.i/STKIP/KS/IV/2019

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