



Innovative Digital Media for Creative Writing: Developing Canva-Based Tools to Teach Short Stories in Primary Education

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the development of a Canva-based instructional medium to enhance short story writing skills among fourth-grade students in a primary school in Central Sulawesi. The research aims to address challenges in traditional teaching methods, including low student engagement and limited creative writing outcomes, by leveraging digital tools to foster active learning and creativity. The study employed a research and development approach using the 4-D model: Define, Design, Develop, and Disseminate. The process involved analyzing students' needs, creating a prototype of the instructional medium, validating it through expert reviews, and testing its effectiveness in classroom settings. Results revealed significant improvements in students' narrative writing abilities, with marked progress in coherence, structure, and creativity. Student motivation and engagement increased substantially, attributed to the interactive and visually appealing design of the medium. Teachers reported the tool's practicality and alignment with educational objectives, although challenges such as limited digital access were noted. This study underscores the potential of Canva as an innovative and scalable solution for primary education, enhancing creative writing instruction. The findings advocate for the integration of digital media into classrooms to improve learning outcomes and engagement, offering insights for further applications in diverse educational contexts.

Keyword: *Digital Learning Tools, Creative Writing Instruction, Interactive Educational Media*

INTRODUCTION

Education, as described by Indonesia's National Education Pioneer Ki Hajar Dewantara, is a process of guiding and nurturing a child's innate potential to achieve the highest levels of well-being and happiness as an individual and a member of society. This concept aligns with the humanistic perspective of education, which views learners as individuals requiring guidance toward maturity rather than mechanical entities to be controlled arbitrarily. However, global educational indicators reveal significant challenges for Indonesia. According to the Political and Economic Risk Consultant (PERC), Indonesia's education quality ranks last among 12 Asian nations, trailing behind Vietnam. Similarly, data from The World Economic Forum highlights Indonesia's low competitiveness, placing it 37th out of 57 surveyed countries worldwide. These statistics underscore the urgency of addressing educational deficiencies to enable Indonesia to navigate globalization's challenges effectively (Agustang & Asrifan, 2000).

At the primary level, education forms the foundation for developing students' basic knowledge and skills, vital for their subsequent academic and societal engagement. As defined in Indonesia's National Education System Law No. 20 of 2003, primary education fosters critical thinking, creativity, and communication skills, especially in subjects like the Indonesian language. Indonesian language instruction at this level encompasses essential linguistic competencies, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Among these, writing remains the most challenging skill to master, particularly creative writing tasks such as composing short stories. Students often struggle with generating coherent ideas and expressing them effectively, reflecting the need for innovative teaching methods to enhance their writing proficiency (Ali, 2020; Haryemi & Citrawati, 2023).

The main issue lies in the traditional methods employed to teach Indonesian language writing skills, particularly short story writing. Observations at SDN Nambo in Central Sulawesi revealed that lessons heavily relied on government-provided textbooks, which fail to engage students actively. The monotonous use of printed materials has resulted in limited student interest and creativity, undermining their ability to produce compelling short stories. Teachers also face challenges in introducing interactive learning tools due to a lack of infrastructure and training. As a result, students view Indonesian language lessons as mundane, leading to low learning outcomes and minimal mastery of creative writing techniques (Mubin & Aryanto, 2024).

Given these challenges, digital tools have emerged as a promising solution to enhance classroom instruction. Digital learning platforms are known to increase student engagement by providing visually appealing and interactive content, enabling students to learn independently and enjoyably. This aligns with theories emphasizing the role of multimedia in fostering active learning environments. Digital applications like Canva offer educators a versatile platform to create engaging instructional materials. Canva's features, including customizable templates, visual aids, and multimedia integration, have proven effective in improving learning outcomes across disciplines. It combines visual and textual elements, enhancing students' ability to understand and retain information while stimulating their creativity (Gagne & Briggs, 1974; Pelangi, 2020).

Several studies have demonstrated the efficacy of digital tools in promoting student-centered learning and improving writing skills. For example, research by Chamidah (2022) highlighted that Canva's visually appealing templates significantly motivated students to participate in writing exercises, while Triningsih (2021) showed that its interactive features improved student creativity and literacy skills. However, most of these studies have been conducted in secondary or higher education contexts, leaving a gap in understanding how Canva can be tailored for primary-level creative writing tasks, such as short story writing. Despite the promising potential of digital media, limited research addresses its application for younger learners in developing countries with infrastructural constraints (Monoarfa, 2021; Jannah et al., 2023).

The present study addresses this gap by exploring the development and implementation of a short story writing instructional tool using Canva for fourth-grade students at SDN Nambo. This research adopts the 4-D model (Define, Design, Develop, and Disseminate) to create a teaching medium that aligns with students' needs, curriculum requirements, and local contexts. Through a systematic design process, the study aims to validate the educational effectiveness of this tool while addressing infrastructural and logistical barriers. By integrating interactive quizzes, ice-breakers, and engaging visual elements, this study seeks to provide an accessible and scalable solution to enhance creative writing instruction at the primary level (Thiagarajan, 1974).

Moreover, this study builds on prior research emphasizing the importance of aligning educational tools with learners' characteristics. The analysis of fourth-grade students' needs revealed their preference for digital and visually stimulating learning aids over traditional methods. The findings underscore the necessity of leveraging tools like Canva to make writing exercises more relatable and enjoyable. Although the literature acknowledges the benefits of digital media, it also cautions against potential challenges, such as reliance on internet connectivity and limited technological literacy among teachers and students. Addressing these concerns, this study includes training modules for teachers and offline application options to ensure broad usability and sustainability (Kurmiawan et al., 2017; Nur & Hanifah, 2024).

The objective of this study is to design and evaluate a Canva-based instructional medium specifically for teaching short story writing to fourth-grade students. The novelty of this research lies in its localized approach, incorporating culturally relevant content and addressing infrastructural challenges unique to Indonesian primary schools. By validating the tool through expert assessments and field trials, this study aims to establish a replicable framework for integrating digital media into creative writing instruction. Furthermore, it contributes to the broader discourse on leveraging technology to bridge educational gaps in under-resourced regions. The findings are expected to benefit educators, policymakers, and technology developers in enhancing primary education quality through innovative and inclusive solutions.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a research and development (R&D) methodology to design, validate, and disseminate an instructional medium for teaching short story writing to fourth-grade students. The research adheres to the 4-D model proposed by Thiagarajan (1974), which comprises four stages: Define, Design, Develop, and Disseminate. The model is particularly suited for educational product development, ensuring the systematic creation of tools that address specific learner needs while achieving targeted learning outcomes.

The study was conducted at SDN Nambo in Central Sulawesi, Indonesia. The primary participants included fourth-grade students, Indonesian language teachers, and subject matter experts. The student participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure the inclusion of learners with varying levels of writing proficiency. Teachers and experts were engaged for their insights into the instructional design, validation of the media, and implementation strategies.

Stage 1: Define

The define stage involved identifying the instructional challenges in teaching short story writing and determining the specific requirements for the media development. This phase included the following steps:

1. **Preliminary Analysis:** Observations and interviews with teachers and students revealed critical gaps in the existing instructional methods. Traditional reliance on textbooks failed to engage students effectively, highlighting the need for a digital, interactive approach.
2. **Learner Analysis:** The characteristics of the fourth-grade students were assessed, including their learning preferences, motivation levels, and familiarity with digital tools. This analysis provided the foundation for tailoring the instructional medium to their developmental stage and interests.
3. **Task Analysis:** The essential competencies required for short story writing were identified, such as generating ideas, structuring narratives, and adhering to linguistic conventions. This analysis informed the content and activities integrated into the media.
4. **Concept Analysis:** Core concepts related to creative writing, such as plot development, character creation, and setting, were delineated. These elements were aligned with curriculum standards to ensure relevance.
5. **Instructional Objectives:** Clear objectives were formulated to guide the instructional media development. These objectives focused on enhancing students' ability to write coherent and engaging short stories while fostering creativity and critical thinking.

Stage 2: Design

The design phase focused on creating the blueprint for the instructional media. Key activities included:

1. **Media Selection:** Canva was selected as the primary platform for developing the instructional media due to its user-friendly interface, rich multimedia features, and adaptability for educational purposes. The tool's ability to integrate text, visuals, and interactive elements was deemed suitable for engaging young learners.
2. **Instructional Content Development:** Content was developed to align with the competencies identified during the task analysis. Lessons were structured to include interactive activities, quizzes, and ice-breakers designed to sustain student interest and facilitate active learning.
3. **Prototype Development:** An initial prototype of the media was created using Canva, featuring a visually appealing design, step-by-step writing guidance, and opportunities for student interaction. The prototype incorporated culturally relevant examples to resonate with the students' experiences.

Stage 3: Develop

The develop stage aimed to refine and validate the instructional media through expert evaluation and field testing. This phase involved:

1. **Expert Validation:** Subject matter experts, including linguists, instructional designers, and media specialists, reviewed the prototype. Their feedback focused on content accuracy, pedagogical soundness, and usability. Adjustments were made based on their recommendations to enhance the media's effectiveness.
2. **Field Testing:** The revised prototype was implemented in a classroom setting with the target students. Data were collected on students' engagement, comprehension, and writing performance. Observations and feedback from both students and teachers informed further refinements.
3. **Practicality Testing:** Teachers assessed the practicality of using the media in everyday classroom settings. Their input addressed issues such as time constraints, ease of use, and compatibility with existing resources.

Stage 4: Disseminate

The dissemination stage involved the broader application and evaluation of the developed media. Activities included:

1. **Pilot Implementation:** The final version of the media was implemented across multiple fourth-grade classrooms. Teachers were trained to use the media effectively, ensuring consistency in its application.
2. **Effectiveness Evaluation:** The instructional media's impact on students' writing skills was measured using pre- and post-tests. Quantitative data analysis provided evidence of its efficacy, while qualitative feedback offered insights into user satisfaction.
3. **Packaging and Distribution:** The finalized media was packaged as a ready-to-use digital resource, accompanied by a user guide for teachers. Efforts were made to disseminate the media to other schools in the region, promoting its wider adoption.

The study utilized mixed methods for data collection, including observations, interviews, questionnaires, and performance assessments. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to evaluate the media's validity, practicality, and effectiveness. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically to capture nuanced feedback from participants.

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board. Informed consent was secured from all participants, ensuring their voluntary participation and confidentiality. The study adhered to ethical principles of transparency, respect, and accountability throughout its implementation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Initial Analysis of Teaching Practices

The study commenced with an analysis of existing teaching practices at SDN Nambo in Central Sulawesi, focusing on fourth-grade students' experiences with short story writing. Observations and teacher interviews revealed significant challenges. The instructional approach predominantly relied on government-provided textbooks, offering limited interactive or creative engagement. Teachers reported a lack of resources and tools to support the creative writing process, which resulted in monotonous learning experiences. Consequently, students exhibited low motivation and struggled to produce coherent short stories. These findings align with prior research suggesting that conventional methods, such as textbook-based teaching, often fail to address the diverse needs of learners in creative disciplines (Mubin & Aryanto, 2024).

A needs analysis revealed that students preferred visually engaging and interactive instructional tools. However, both teachers and students faced technological barriers, including limited access to digital devices and low proficiency in using educational software. This gap highlighted the necessity of developing an accessible, user-friendly digital medium tailored to the students' developmental stage and the school's infrastructural constraints.

Development of Canva-Based Instructional Media

The research utilized the 4-D model (Define, Design, Develop, and Disseminate) to systematically design a Canva-based instructional medium for short story writing. During the **Design** phase, the instructional content was developed to address the competencies identified in the initial analysis, such as narrative structure, character development, and linguistic accuracy. The media incorporated features like interactive quizzes, ice-breakers, and visual aids to engage students and facilitate active learning.

The initial prototype was subjected to expert validation during the **Development** phase. Experts in pedagogy, linguistics, and media design reviewed the content for alignment with learning objectives, accuracy, and usability. Their feedback was instrumental in refining the media's structure and content. For instance, adjustments were made to simplify navigation and enhance the cultural relevance of examples, ensuring the tool was both engaging and comprehensible for fourth-grade students.

Validation and Practicality of the Media

The instructional media underwent rigorous validation to assess its content, design, and linguistic elements. The validation process involved three expert evaluations:

1. **Content Validation:** Experts rated the accuracy and alignment of the instructional content with curriculum standards. The media achieved a score of 92%, categorized as "Highly Valid." This high rating reflects its effectiveness in addressing the identified learning objectives and competencies.
2. **Design Validation:** Media design experts evaluated the visual and interactive components, including layout, aesthetics, and user interface. With a score of 95%, the media was deemed "Highly Valid." Feedback emphasized its potential to sustain student interest and promote engagement through its visually appealing design.
3. **Linguistic Validation:** Language experts assessed the clarity, appropriateness, and grammatical correctness of the instructional language. A score of 94% affirmed the media's suitability for its target audience, ensuring that the language used was accessible to young learners.

Following expert validation, the media was tested for practicality through field trials in classroom settings. Teachers and students provided feedback on its usability, relevance, and impact on learning outcomes. Teachers reported that the media was straightforward to integrate into their teaching routines, requiring minimal additional preparation. Students expressed increased enthusiasm and engagement, highlighting the effectiveness of the interactive elements in maintaining their interest.

Effectiveness of Canva-Based Instructional Media

The effectiveness of the developed media was evaluated through a combination of pre-tests, post-tests, and qualitative feedback. Quantitative results showed significant improvements in students' writing skills, particularly in narrative structure, coherence, and creativity. The average test scores increased from 65 (pre-test) to 85 (post-test), demonstrating the media's substantial impact on learning outcomes.

Qualitative feedback corroborated these findings, with students expressing greater confidence in their ability to compose short stories. They particularly appreciated the media's step-by-step guidance, which simplified the writing process. Teachers noted that the media encouraged students to think critically and creatively, essential skills for mastering short story writing. These results are consistent with prior studies highlighting the benefits of multimedia tools in enhancing student engagement and learning outcomes (Chamidah, 2022; Triningsih, 2021).

Comparison with Traditional Methods

The study compared the Canva-based media with traditional textbook-based instruction to highlight its relative advantages. Traditional methods often relied on rote learning and lacked opportunities for active student participation. In contrast, the Canva-based media provided an interactive and visually stimulating environment, enabling students to explore creative ideas and apply them effectively in their writing.

Teachers acknowledged that the traditional approach often failed to inspire students or address their individual learning needs. By incorporating digital tools, the Canva-based media bridged these gaps, offering a more personalized and engaging learning experience. The findings underscore the importance of integrating technology into teaching practices, particularly for creative disciplines like short story writing.

Addressing Challenges in Implementation

While the media demonstrated significant effectiveness, the study also identified challenges in its implementation. Limited access to digital devices and internet connectivity posed barriers for some students. To address this, the media was designed to function offline, enabling broader accessibility. Teachers were provided with training sessions to enhance their proficiency in using Canva, ensuring smooth integration into classroom activities.

The findings also highlighted the importance of parental involvement in supporting students' use of digital tools. Teachers emphasized the need for collaborative efforts between schools and families to address infrastructural and logistical constraints. These insights contribute to the broader discourse on the role of community support in successful educational innovation.

Research Implications and Contributions

This study contributes to the field of educational technology by demonstrating the potential of Canva as an effective instructional medium for primary-level creative writing. It highlights the importance of aligning digital tools with students' developmental needs and local contexts, ensuring their accessibility and relevance. The research also offers a replicable framework for integrating multimedia tools into creative writing instruction, addressing a critical gap in the literature.

Moreover, the findings have practical implications for educators and policymakers. By showcasing the benefits of digital media, this study advocates for increased investment in technological infrastructure and teacher training programs. It also emphasizes the need for culturally responsive instructional materials that resonate with students' experiences and foster active learning.

CONCLUSION

This study developed and evaluated Canva-based instructional media to enhance short story writing skills among fourth-grade students at SDN Nambo, Central Sulawesi. Employing the 4-D model, the research identified instructional gaps, designed a visually engaging digital tool, validated its content and usability, and tested its effectiveness in classroom settings. The findings revealed significant improvements in students' narrative structure, coherence, and creativity, with average test scores increasing from 65 to 85. Qualitative feedback highlighted increased student engagement and motivation, alongside teachers' appreciation for the tool's practicality and alignment with curriculum objectives.

The study contributes to educational technology by demonstrating how Canva, a widely accessible platform, can address challenges in creative writing instruction, especially in under-resourced contexts. By integrating interactive elements, this media fostered active learning and creativity, offering a scalable solution for primary education. However, challenges such as limited device access and internet connectivity underscore the need for supportive infrastructural developments and community involvement.

Future research could explore broader applications of Canva for other creative disciplines and investigate its long-term impact on literacy skills. This study underscores the potential of digital tools to transform education, advocating for innovative, inclusive strategies to bridge learning gaps and foster student-centered pedagogy.

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