

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF STORYBIRD FOR WRITING: MAKING NOVICE WRITERS PRACTICE INDEPENDENTLY

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Abstract: Writing is an essential skill for language production. It enables a person to express feelings and ideas through a well-conducted text. In this pandemic situation, the teacher's writing in the EFL context faces more challenges because of the limited direct interactions between the students and teachers. Thus, the teachers need to make some innovations to make the teaching of writing fun and engaging during the outbreak of COVID 19. One of the innovations is the usage of an app called Storybird for teaching writing. This paper aims to describe the implementation of teaching creative writing course in the sixth semester of University of PGRI Wiranegara Pasuruan during the pandemic of COVID 19 by using the Storybird application. The research used a mixed-method exploratory design. The subjects of this study were two lecturers and the 6th-semester students of a creative writing course class at the University of PGRI Wiranegara Pasuruan. There were 33 students, which consisted of 26 female students and seven male students. The instruments used were interviews, questionnaires, and documentation. The finding shows that the lecturers have implemented Storybird for creative writing well. The lecturer made some preparations before using Storybird for writing as reflected in the course syllabi. The students made picture books and mini fictions using Storybird application with a wide variety of topics. The finding implies that the use of writing platform like Storybird should be maximized for online learning to provide students with more practice and to make them independent learners.

Keywords: implementation, writing, Storybird

INTRODUCTION

Having the ability to write is very important in this global era. Through writing, our thoughts and ideas will be clearly seen when they are written on paper. Since most jobs requires writing, students need to continually sharpen their skill. However, writing is a very difficult language skill to master. It is not enough just to have an idea to write. There are many other elements that must be mastered by writers to be able to produce good writing. One of them is, the writer must be able to process the idea so that later it can be formed into a coherent and easy-to-understand writing for others who read it. As stated by Hedge (2005), writing is more than outputting the accurate sentences and paragraph.

Creativity plays an important part in life. As stated by Boden (2001), creativity is one's ability to develop or generate insightful, valuable, and understandable new ideas. In a school environment, the consideration of the student's creative aspects is primarily reflected in the texts that the student creates through the act of writing. For this reason, creativity and writing ability are very close and identical (Demir, 2013). Creative writing, which is directly related to creativity, means freely using the imagination to write down ideas and feelings on a particular topic.

Teaching writing can encourage students to apply their creative processes and support the development of writing in all its components (Barbot, Tan, Randi, Donato & Grigorenko, 2012). Writing is a creative activity. Students can use their linguistic abilities and go to places they cannot do in oral expression. They can express more of their thoughts and mental pictures or personal experiences on a paper. Thus, creative writing activities exist with a purpose to enable

the students express their emotions and thoughts in a unique, fluent, and interesting way from what is usually boring, repetitive, and monotonous writing activity (Temizkan, 2010). Some example of creative writing activities is writing letters to their favorite heroes, creating comics, picture story book, and fictions.

Technological advances today allow learners to acquire knowledge outside the classroom. They have unlimited access to collect information that facilitates learning (Hashim, Yunus, and Embi, 2016). In short, learning is no longer confined by classroom walls. Textbooks become tertiary because knowledge and information are abundant in the internet. As a result, language teachers are strongly urged to innovate in teaching their language skills. In this millennial era language teacher, needs to adapt and use technology to teach (Daniel, 2014). Incorporating technology into language teaching has several advantages. Among them is to provide unlimited resources for language learning (Bull & Ma, 2001) and helps learners improve their language skills (Hashim, Yunus & Embi, 2016). In addition, Ahmadi (2018) states that technology provides language learners with the opportunity to improve their language skills and motivate them to learn more. Finally, technology allows students to manage their learning activities (Hashim, Yunus, and Embi, 2016). They can govern what, when, where and how they learn it.

The teaching of writing in the University of PGRI WIRANEGARA Pasuruan has incorporated the use of Storybird platform since paragraph writing course, essay writing course, and creative writing course. The use of Storybird was applied when the students need to practice paragraph writing, narrative writing, and fictional writing. Creative writing itself is a new course that has been conducted since 2019 and has become a compulsory subject since then. Because of the pandemic, the teaching and learning were shifted from the offline classes to online classes. The course objective of this course is to enable the students have competences in creative writing and produce literary works in the form of short stories, poems, travel diaries, drama scripts and other literary works using English. Because of its novelty, the lecturers who were assigned by the department to teach this course has to make a lot of preparations from the syllabi development, teaching materials, instructional strategies, learning media, and its assessment. Aside from that, when the pandemic hit in 2019 and got worse in 2020, the teaching and learning process was highly affected. All the writing lecturers in this university used the Storybird platform to achieve the learning objectives and to keep the students learning at home.

Research Questions

1. What are the writing lecturers' perceptions on the use of Storybird for their writing classes?
2. What are the students' perceptions on the use of Storybird for their writing course?

Review of Related Literature

Storybird

One way of making the students creative in writing class is by using Storybird. Storybird is an online application that helps students improve their writing skills in story writing. Storybird offers writing products such as picture books, flash fiction, comics, long-form stories, and poetry. Students can practice their writing because they need to provide their own story based on the images given. The platform provides many pictures without text, so the students need to use their creativity and imagination to arrange the story. Storybird is a new way for creative writing. It offers many opportunities to start the story writing process. Giacomini (2015) recommends using Storybird as another tool for teaching creative or narrative writing. The result of her study shows that the platform gives learning opportunities through meaningful learner involvement. Storybird also helps (reluctant and shy) students take on their

responsibilities (Menezes, 2012). Creating stories, reading, and publishing them is done because it is a fascinating activity.

VanderBorgh(2018) has her views on using Storybird to compose a writing composition. She agrees that Storybird has a huge collection of curated art provides student authors with distinct and inspiring illustrations. On the other hand, her critical view also states that it is a drawback that students cannot add their own art to stories, which limits creativity a bit. Moreover, students need subscriptions to be able to utilize the application. However, it is still a great fit for teachers looking to develop students' writing and digital citizenship skills through storybook creation.

METHOD

The research used a mixed-method exploratory design. The exploratory design starts with the qualitative data, and then collects the quantitative information (Creswell, 2012). Creswell (2012) also says that this design presents the research in two stages. The first phase is collecting qualitative data (e.g interviews and observations), followed with quantitative data collection (e.g survey) to randomly chosen participants. Taken into the context of this study, the researchers collected the qualitative data to the lecturers in the beginning and give the questionnaire to the students for the qualitative data collection.

Participants

The participants of the study were three lecturers who were assigned to teach writing in the academic year 2016 to 2021.

Table 1. Demographic of the Participants

Demographic	F	%
2016	15	18.3
2017	15	18.3
2018	3	3.8
2019	10	12.2
2020	24	29.3
2021	15	18.3
Male	12	14.6
Female	70	85.4

Table 1 shows that most of the students who filled out the questionnaire are the female students. The data also shows that the 2020 cohort has the most percentage who fill out the questionnaire (29.3%), while the 2018 cohort has the least number of students who filled out the form.

Procedure

Instruments

The researchers used a semi-structured interview to obtain an in-depth information about situations and conditions of the teaching and learning of writing course amidst the pandemic. The interview consists of 10 questions. The questions are about the lecture's preparation in teaching a creative writing course, the implementation, the materials, and the product expected from the students. The second instrument was the questionnaire. The questionnaire

was distributed to the students. The questionnaire is the form of a close-ended question which consists of 10 questions. The questions are about the student's opinions toward the use of Storybird for writing. From the total respondents, 82 students fill the questionnaire. Some students were also asked to write their opinion in a short essay about the use of Storybird for writing. And the 3rd instruments were documentation. The researchers documented the students' opinion on the use of Storybird and their product. Students wrote their answers in the form of short opinion paragraphs explaining their feelings after using Storybird.

Data Analysis

The data from the interview were analyzed qualitatively. The researchers use simple codification strategy to categorize the data. There were three categories of the qualitative data, namely the preparation, the implementation, and the expected product from the students. The result of the students' opinion in short paragraphs quantified. The researchers have divided the answers into two major categories: positive and negative. The students responded positively when they wrote down their feelings such as "like," "fun," and "useful." On the other hand, the student's answer was considered negative if the following sentence was explicitly formulated in negative words and phrases like 'difficult', and 'dislike'. The data from the questionnaire were analyzed quantitatively in the form of percentages.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The Lecturers' Perceptions

The lecturers have positive views on Storybird. Two lecturers used Storybird for teaching essay writing and paragraph writing class. They taught the students how to register and sign in themselves in Storybird. And gave models how to use the writing platform. The lecturers also give a model picture storybook made in Storybird. The other lecturer did not teach the students how to use the application because the students who join her Creative writing course were already good in using it. Yet, she shared positive views on the use of the platform.

"During the pandemic of COVID 19, I used What's App Group for my online class. But I did not follow the class schedule strictly. It is very flexible. The students are familiar with the Storybird. Now I made them write story and publish it in Story.co" (DA/Lecturer 1).

"I taught the students how to use the Storybird. The project is to write some picture stories and two flash fictions in Storybird. They can do this at home, and they will practice writing a lot". (LS/Lecturer 2)

"Storybird is awesome. I use it for writing narrative. I even made a short video how to make an account in Storybird. I have uploaded it in my You Tube channel. I want the students write in Storybird." (AA/Lecturer 3)

The lecturers also have made some preparations for using the Storybird. They have planned the use of this application in their semester lesson plan.

They have practice it (Storybird) last semester when they write paragraphs and essay for narrative writing. For my Creative writing course, I did not need to teach them how to use it. They are good already (DA/Lecturer 1).

"I have included the use of Storybird for paragraph writing, essay writing and creative writing course in my lesson plan. Firstly, I taught the students how to register, then I showed them how to use it. The students' stories are quite imaginative and interesting". (LS/Lecturer 2)

"I include the use of Storybird in my semester course outline. And I taught the students how to use register and use it. Their writing products are awesome." (AA/Lecturer 3)

The second lecturer who taught essay writing and creative writing course used the Storybird for narrative essay and fiction writing. The Storybird application has other feature for story writing, known as the Flash Fiction page. The second lecturer introduced the Flash fiction to the students, and required them to write the story in it. Based on the course learning outcome, the students need to write a short story in the form of a flash fiction in 500 words. To make the students get used to with the application, before the students wrote in the Storybird independently, they created the story in group.

“The students need to watch my tutorial video first, then they discussed it. After that, they had to practice online”. (AA/Lecturer 3)

Teaching in the pandemic situation requires creativity. When direct face to face interaction is limited, the lecturers need to find ways to deliver and explain the materials to the students. This is the place where technology plays a crucial role in achieving the learning objectives.

Yet, Storybird also has challenges. The lectures admit that they used the free trial mode for writing class. The free trial only lasts for 7 days. To be able to write more, the users need to become the member of Storybird community and must pay around \$8.99/monthly for the lowest rate. To help solve the issue, the students and lecturers need to produce the story at least every day to maximize the free trial mode.

The Students’ Perceptions

Reasons Why Writing in Storybird

The students have different perceptions on the use of Storybird for writing. But, the majority of them show positive opinion on the application. They believed that Storybird helps them a lot in writing imaginatively. One cause is the artful picture provided by Storybird. The pictures are cute and awesome.

“Storybirds is very important for me. With storybirds, I can learn writing, with some pictures. It makes me easy to write”. (Data 1, Benefit 1)

The pictures are beautiful. I like Storybird” (Data 1, Benefit 2)

“The storybirds is 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 pictures in it” (Data 2, Benefit 3)

The qualitative data is also supported with the quantitative data from the survey. Most students agree that Storybird is fun and helpful.

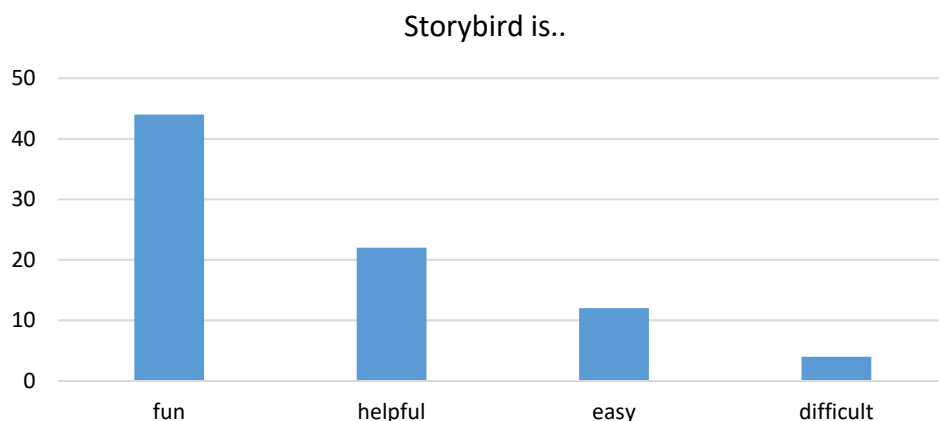


Figure 1. Students’ opinion on Storybird

Students also had various reasons why they use Storybird for writing. Interestingly, most of the students (53%) stated that they used the platform because the writing lecturer made the do it. The second reason is to practice the writing skill (20.5%).

I like Storybird for practicing my writing

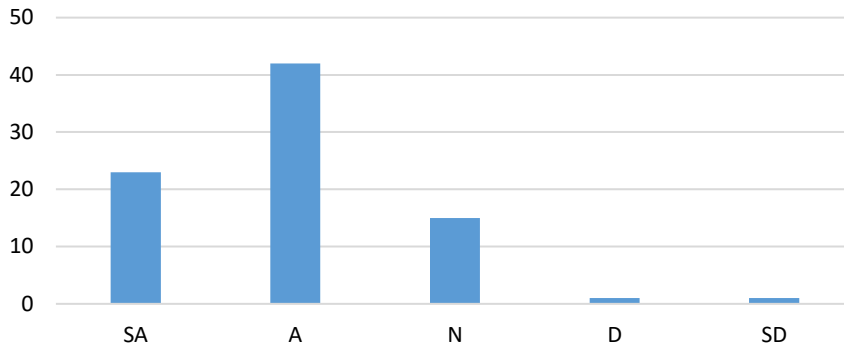


Figure 2. Storybird for writing Practice

Figure 2 shows that the majority of the students agree that Storybird is beneficial for practicing their writing 76% (SA 26% + A 50%). The students can practice their writing by using Storybird platform. The trend is positive, even though only a very small number of the students disagree with its use for practice writing.

Storybird helps me in sharpening my writing skill

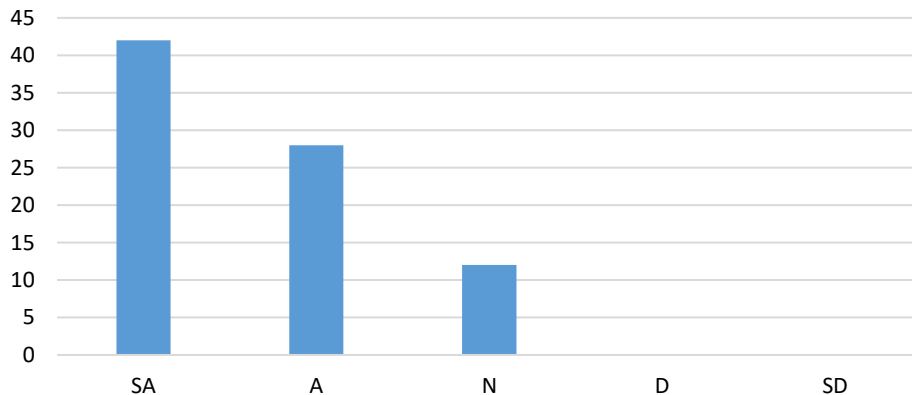


Figure 3. Storybird for Sharpening Writing skill

Figure 3 shows that almost all of the students agree that Storybird is useful for sharpening their writing skill (SA 51% + A 33%). Even though some students are undecided, the data shows a positive direction about the matter.

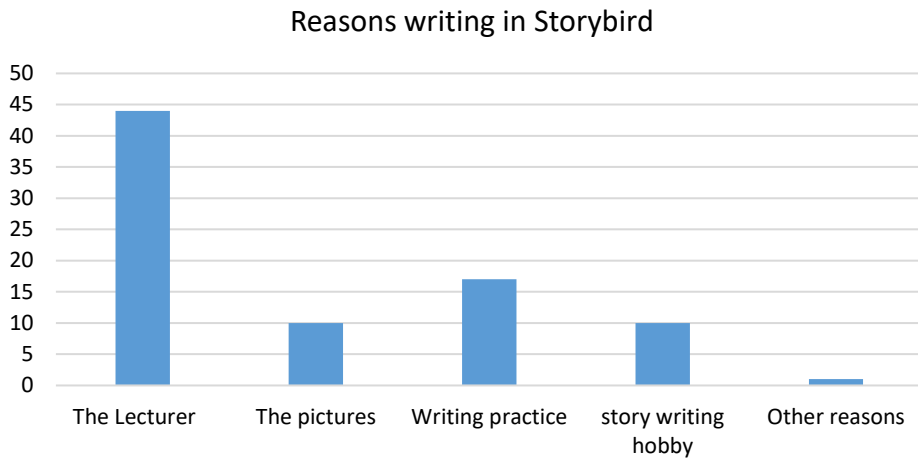


Figure 4. Students’ Reasons of Using Storybird

Next reasons were because of the beautiful pictures provided by Storybird (12%) and to satisfy the story writing hobbies (10.8%). Students also presented other reasons why writing in Storybird. Unfortunately, the students did not write what their other reasons were.

The Challenges in Using Storybird

Though technology has been there in the students’ surrounding, it is still not always an easy task to practice writing through an application. Here are two of the students’ thought about it:

“I like to write, for Storybird is quite difficult because to download one story, I must make 11 stories” (Data 2, Challenge 1)

“Making stories in Storybird need imagination. The problem is to match the picture with our storyline.” (Data 2, Challenge 2)

Writing in Storybird is undeniably challenging. The qualitative data shows that the challenge comes from how to download the story and the second is the pictures which sometimes do not compatible with the students’ storyline.



Figure 5. Challenges in Using Storybird

The result of qualitative data is supported with the quantitative data. The diagram above shows that the difficulty to match the pictures with the storyline is the second-high percentage from all negative reasons of using the Storybird (26%). Other challenge that the students feel is the use of language. Many of them feel not confident in using English for writing a story (31%).

Storybird for Independent Writing

Again, writing is an independent activity done by each student based on their own creation and imagination. However, one of the questions given to the students is whether they can write their story independently by using Storybird.

I can write a story (stories) independently in Storybird

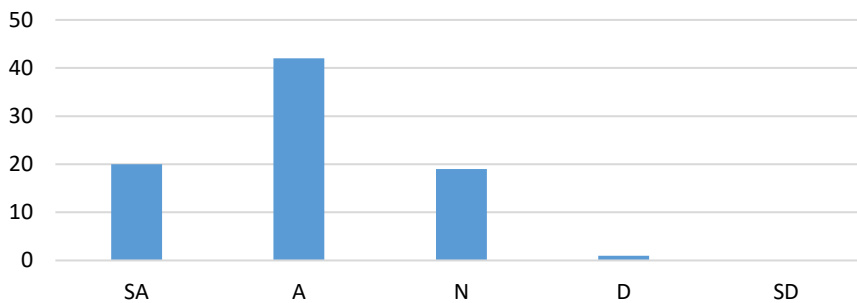


Figure 6. Storybird and Independent Writing

The students felt that they can write a story or stories in the Storybird independently (SA 24% + A 51%). This means that they can operate and use the Storybird platform without the guidance of the lecturer. It implies that once they are familiar with the application, they will be able to use it independently.

I need the lecturer’s help to write a story (stories) in Storybird

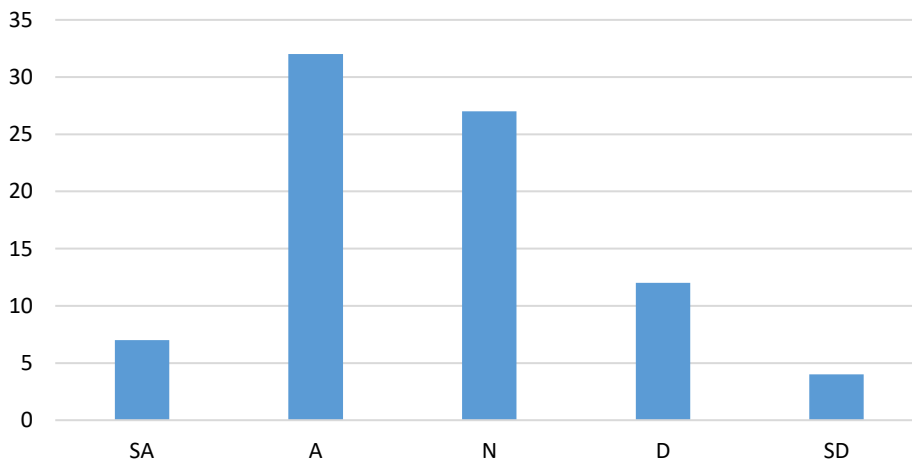


Figure 7. Storybird and Lecturer’s Help.

Interestingly, even though they said that they could write the story independently in Storybird, almost half of the students felt that they still need the lecturer’s help to write a good

story (SA 7% + A 39%). Some of them were unsure, and some of them were confident enough to say that they did not need the lecturer’s help in writing the story (D 15% + SD 5%).

Future Projection

Having the experience on using Storybird during the writing class, might trigger the students’ interest to continue writing practice using this application. Hence, a question about future projection is given to gather further information.

I Will Use the Storybird Even though I have passed my Writing Course

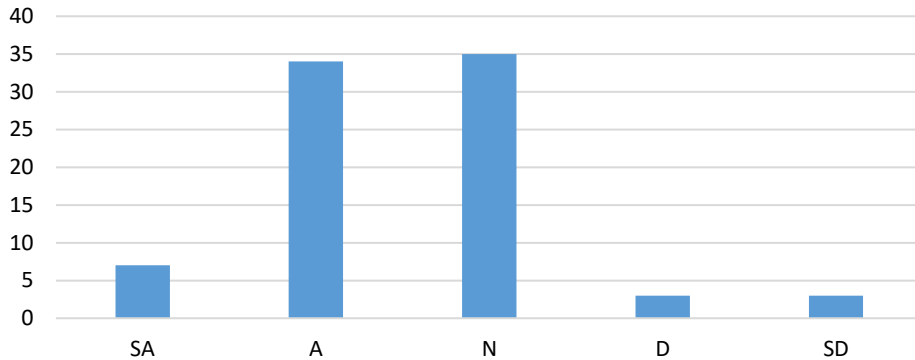


Figure 8. Storybird and Future Use

Though students have the experience of using Storybird during their writing course, it is not totally all students would like to use this application in the future. At almost half of the students would possibly use Storybird to continue practicing their writing, whereas a bit less than them would likely to sharpen their writing using this application (N 38% + A 35%). However, very few of the students who are not willing to use Storybird application at any chance in the future (D 5% + SD 5%).

I will recommend Storybird to other students/colleagues

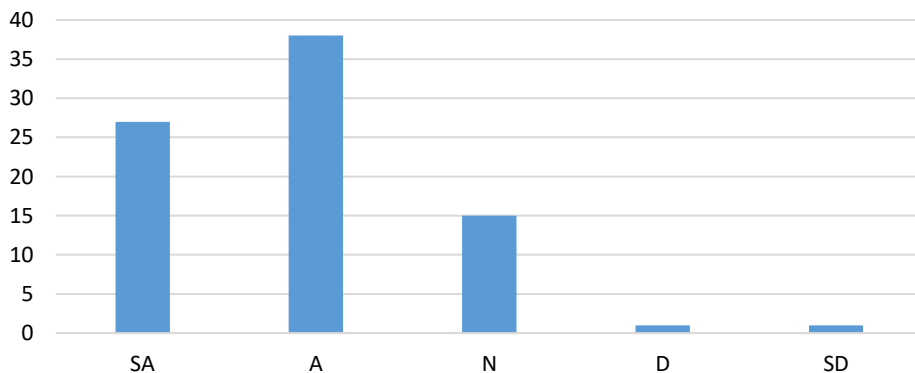


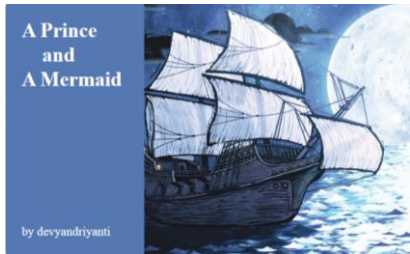
Figure 9. Storybird recommendation to other People

As a natural act of human being, a good thing will be spread up or shared to other people or users. In terms of Storybird, the majority of students agree to recommend this application to other students or colleagues who are probably need a writing tool to practice (A

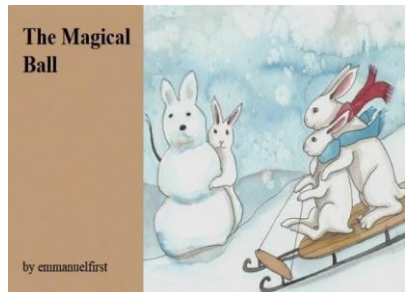
42% + SA 32%). While only a little number of students who are not willing to show this writing application of Storybird to others (D 3% + SD 3%).

Students’ Product

Below are some of the students’ writing products by using Storybird. Students can write the desired plot of the story based on the chosen pictures provided in the application. Again, only the given pictures can be utilized by the students.



The weather just was not good. The sky grew dark and the waves grew higher. Alex saw something strange “What happened? What is that terrifying creature?” Suddenly, Alex's boat was attacked by a giant octopus. Alex tried to save himself until he fell and drowned.



Bonny is a lazy rabbit. His hobby is having fun. He does not like to help his family to gather food. He likes to play with butterflies in meadow. If he plays, usually never know time. He can do that all day long from morning to evening. He does not think about what his family does.



“I will catch you, cute butterfly” said Bonny while jump up and down.

The students’ product above is the implementation of technology adaptation. As stated by Daniel (2014) that it is needed to adapt and use technology to teach. The lecturer of the writing course is as well incorporating the existence of technology into the language teaching, which helps learners improve their language skills. In accordance with Hashim, Yunus, and Embi (2016), the use of technology allows students to manage their learning activities. By doing so, students have the opportunity to improve their language skills and motivate them to learn more.

CONCLUSION

As the result of the finding above, it implies that the use of writing platform like Storybird should be maximized for online learning to provide them with more practices and to make them independent learners. These are proven as seen in the questionnaire that 65% of the students are able to use the Storybird application independently. Though only 38% of the students who will continue using Storybird in the future, at 75% of the students are willing to recommend this application to other people, especially students.

Coming into the conclusion of what the writing lecturers' and students' perception on the use of Storybird for their writing course are, there are some aspects based derived from the questionnaire given to the students earlier as well as the interview to the writing lecturers. As most students considered Storybird as a fun writing application, they can use it to practice and sharpen their writing skill. Although students are often not having the confidence to publish their writing due to grammar boundaries, the lecturers had their assistance to help the students able to practice writing independently. In the future after the writing course over, most students would like to recommend Storybird application to anyone in need of writing practice. Nevertheless, the recommendation is not necessarily happened to themselves, which means that almost half of the students are not willing to keep using Storybird after they finish the writing course. The suggestions that researcher offer here is Storybird can be maximally used during writing course, though students might not be using it again after the course ended, but it can expose highly experience of composing a writing composition creatively.

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