

EXPLORING CANVA-BASED DIGITAL STORYTELLING FOR EFL WRITING MOTIVATION IN SECONDARY CLASSROOMS

Muji Rahayu¹), Indah Arvianti²).

Faculty of Language and Culture

AKI University

Semarang, Indonesia

muji2989@gmail.com

Abstract

Digital platforms have increasingly shaped the way language teachers design and deliver writing instruction in EFL classrooms. This study aims to describe the use of Canva as a digital storytelling medium to enhance writing motivation among high school EFL learners. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed, involving 30 tenth-grade students at a public high school in Central Java, Indonesia. Data were collected through classroom observations, writing-motivation questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews conducted during a six-week storytelling assignment using Canva. The findings indicate that students demonstrated increased enthusiasm, creativity, and confidence in writing after engaging in Canva-based activities. Students reported that the visual features, ease of use, and creative freedom offered by the platform reduced their anxiety about writing assignments. Further classroom observations revealed higher levels of active participation and collaborative engagement compared to conventional writing sessions. This study concludes that Canva is a practical and accessible digital tool for fostering writing motivation in secondary school EFL classrooms, particularly in schools with limited technological infrastructure. These findings contribute to the growing body of literature on technology-supported language learning and offer practical insights for ELT practitioners seeking to integrate digital media into writing instruction. Further research is recommended to examine the long-term impact of Canva-based learning on EFL writing performance.

Keywords – Canva, digital storytelling, EFL, technology-based learning, writing motivation

Introduction

The use of digital technology in education has increased in recent years, including in EFL classrooms. Canva is a digital platform often used in learning activities because it is simple and easy to use. Canva is a digital design platform that helps users create visual content easily, even without advanced design skills. The platform also supports creative learning activities in EFL classrooms.

Many EFL students still find writing difficult and less interesting, especially at the secondary school level. Many Indonesian high school students still feel unmotivated and anxious when doing English writing activities, often due to limited creative freedom, repetitive formats, and an overemphasis on grammatical accuracy. Motivation is important because it influences students' participation and engagement in learning

activities. As Efendi et al. (2019) observed, quality education demands the active involvement of teachers in creating effective learning processes, and motivating students is central to that effort. When students have low motivation, they often become less active in writing activities.

Digital storytelling combines writing activities with pictures and digital media to help students express their ideas creatively. When integrated into EFL writing instruction, digital storytelling can help students feel more confident and interested in writing tasks. Research by Fitria (2022) demonstrated that using Canva as a medium in English Language Teaching (ELT) effectively developed students' creativity and enhanced the quality of their written outputs. The visual features in Canva help students focus on both writing and creativity.

Several previous studies have shown that learning media can improve students' motivation. Hapsari and Zulherman (2021) found that animated video media developed using Canva improved learning motivation and academic achievement among elementary school students in Indonesia. Similarly, Puspitarini and Hanif (2019) emphasized that the use of appropriate learning media is a decisive factor in increasing student motivation, particularly when the media align with learners' interests and technological preferences. In the Indonesian secondary school context, where students are often described as belonging to a digitally literate generation, the integration of platforms like Canva into writing instruction has potential benefits for writing instruction that teachers and curriculum designers are increasingly recognizing.

Although many studies have discussed digital learning media, research on Canva-based digital storytelling in EFL writing classrooms is still limited. Most existing studies have focused on Canva's impact on presentation skills, visual literacy, or general learning outcomes, with relatively few investigations into its specific role in motivating EFL writing at the high school level. Therefore, this study focuses on students' motivation during Canva-based digital storytelling activities in EFL classrooms. The study was conducted at a public high school in Central Java with tenth-grade students who had no prior experience with digital storytelling. The researcher hoped to find out whether using Canva could make writing feel less difficult and more enjoyable for these students.

Indonesia's national curriculum for senior high school English emphasizes the development of communication skills and 21st-century skills, including creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking. Writing instruction, however, has historically been treated in a product-oriented manner that

privileges correctness over communication. Digital storytelling using Canva represents a process- and product-oriented hybrid approach that can bridge these competing imperatives, nurturing both linguistic accuracy and communication and creativity, while aligning with national curricular goals.

This study aims to explore students' motivation during Canva-based digital storytelling activities and identify how Canva helps students engage in writing tasks. Specifically, the study looks at what students experienced during the activities, whether their motivation changed, and what features of Canva they found most useful for writing.

Methodology

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to investigate the motivational experiences of EFL learners engaged in Canva-based digital storytelling activities. A qualitative approach was chosen because the primary goal of the study was to describe, interpret, and understand students' experiences rather than to quantify or generalize outcomes across large populations. Qualitative research is particularly appropriate for exploring motivational constructs in classroom settings because it helps researchers understand students' experiences and participation during learning activities (Saputra et al., 2018). The descriptive nature of the design further allowed the researchers to present a detailed and clear description of the instructional process and its motivational effects without focusing too much on fixed theoretical categories.

The study was conducted at a public senior high school (Sekolah Menengah Atas Negeri) in Central Java, Indonesia. The school was selected through purposive sampling based on two primary criteria: first, it represented a typical Indonesian public secondary school with limited technological infrastructure, thereby

allowing the researchers to assess the feasibility and motivational impact of Canva in a resource-constrained environment; and second, the school's English teachers had expressed interest in integrating digital tools into their writing instruction. The participants consisted of 30 tenth-grade students (16 female, 14 male) enrolled in a regular English class. All participants were between 15 and 16 years of age and had no prior formal experience with digital storytelling assignments. Participants were informed of the study's purpose and provided verbal consent to participate in the research activities.

Data were collected using three complementary instruments over the course of a six-week instructional program. The first instrument was a structured classroom observation conducted by the researcher during each of the six weekly Canva storytelling sessions. Observations were guided by a pre-developed observation checklist focusing on indicators of student motivation, including on-task behavior, level of active participation, collaborative interaction, and visible expressions of enthusiasm or disengagement. Detailed field notes were also recorded to capture contextual details and spontaneous student behaviors that the checklist did not anticipate, providing more detailed information about what happened during the sessions.

The second instrument was a writing motivation questionnaire adapted from established scales used in EFL motivation research. The questionnaire consisted of 25 items organized around five areas: intrinsic motivation, creative confidence, attitude toward writing tasks, perceived usefulness of the learning media, and willingness to invest effort in writing. Items were scored using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), consistent with the quantitative assessment approach described by Efendi et al. (2019) in their study of learning media and student outcomes. The

questionnaire was administered at two points: before the start of the six-week program (pre-intervention) and immediately following its conclusion (post-intervention). This was done to see whether there was any change in how students felt about writing after doing the Canva activities.

The third instrument was a semi-structured interview conducted with eight purposively selected students at the end of the intervention period. The eight interviewees were selected to represent a range of engagement levels observed during the classroom sessions, ensuring that both highly motivated and less engaged learners' perspectives were captured. Each interview lasted approximately 20 to 30 minutes and was conducted in a combination of Indonesian and English to ensure clarity of communication. Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and subsequently transcribed in full for analysis. The interviews were important because they helped the researcher understand the students' feelings and opinions in more depth, beyond what the questionnaire could capture.

The program was conducted for six weeks through Canva-based storytelling activities, including individual and collaborative writing tasks. Students created and presented digital stories using Canva during the program. Each week had a different focus, starting from getting familiar with the platform and moving toward more independent storytelling tasks.

Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework. The researcher began by familiarizing herself with the data through repeated reading of observation notes, questionnaire responses, and interview transcripts. Initial codes were generated from the data, followed by the clustering of related codes into potential themes. Themes were reviewed and refined repeatedly until a clear and comprehensive thematic

structure emerged. Member-checking was employed as a credibility strategy: a summary of the identified themes was shared with four of the eight interview participants, who confirmed whether the themes accurately represented their motivational experiences. Minor adjustments were made to the thematic descriptions based on participants' feedback.

Finding and Discussion

The findings of this study are organized around three major themes that emerged from the combined analysis of classroom observation data, writing motivation questionnaire results, and semi-structured interview responses. The three themes are: (1) increased enthusiasm and creative engagement, (2) reduced writing anxiety and improved confidence, and (3) enhanced collaborative participation. Together, these themes provide a comprehensive picture of how Canva-based digital storytelling functioned as a learning tool in the EFL writing classroom over the six-week program.

Students Became More Interested in Writing

The most consistently observed motivational effect of the Canva-based storytelling program was a marked increase in students' enthusiasm and creative engagement with writing tasks. During the first week of the program, several students appeared hesitant and unfamiliar with the platform. However, from the second session onward, classroom observation data documented a clear shift in student behavior: students arrived at sessions with ideas already prepared, voluntarily spent additional time refining their designs, and frequently shared their work with classmates without being prompted. These behaviors showed that students became more motivated during the activities. Even students who were usually quiet in regular writing classes seemed more willing to participate and share their work.

Interview responses strongly reinforced the observational findings. Participants consistently described Canva as more engaging than traditional writing tasks, using terms such as “menyenangkan” (enjoyable), “bebas berekspresi” (free to express oneself), and “tidak membosankan” (not boring). One student explained that she looked forward to English class in a way she had not previously experienced, specifically because of the opportunity to design and share her own visual story with classmates. This showed that students genuinely enjoyed the activity, as also found by Hapsari and Zulherman (2021) in their study of Canva-based animated video media, where students' motivation and learning achievement improved significantly when visual design elements were integrated into the learning process.

The creative features in Canva helped students express their ideas more freely, and this appeared to be a key reason for their increased enthusiasm. Unlike conventional writing assignments that constrain student expression to text on a blank page, Canva invited students to think about their stories visually and multimodally, selecting images, fonts, colors, and layouts that reflected their personal aesthetic sensibilities and expressive goals. This aligns with the argument advanced by Fitria (2022) that Canva's use in ELT effectively develops student creativity by providing an open-ended creative space that encourages experimentation and personal expression. The questionnaire data supported this finding: mean scores on the students' intrinsic motivation scores increased from 3.12 (pre-intervention) to 4.21 (post-intervention), representing a substantial gain in students' internally driven desire to engage with writing tasks.

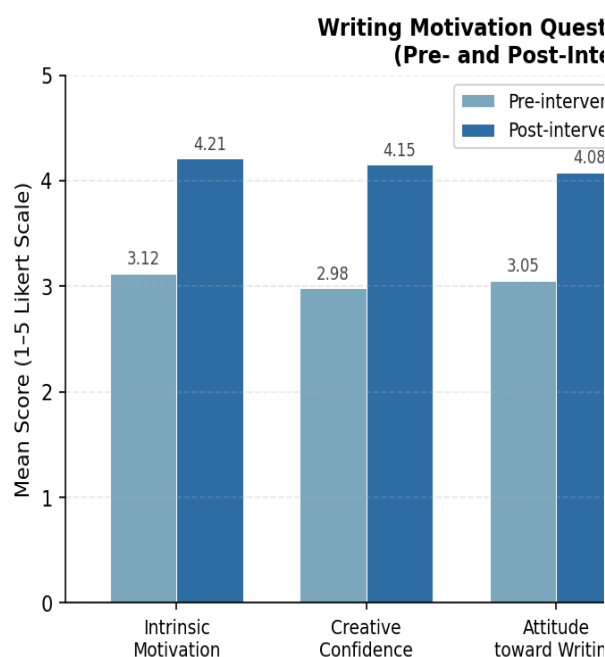


Figure 1. Pre- and Post-Intervention Writing Motivation Scores (N=30)

Interestingly, the novelty effect of the platform did not appear to account fully for the sustained enthusiasm observed across all six weeks. If novelty alone were responsible for the motivational gains, one would expect engagement to peak in the early sessions and decline thereafter. Instead, observation data showed consistent or increasing engagement levels throughout the program, with the highest levels of on-task behavior and creative investment recorded during weeks five and six. This pattern suggests that the motivational benefits of Canva-based digital storytelling extend beyond mere novelty, reflecting genuine task engagement driven by the features of the platform and the increasingly complex and personally relevant storytelling assignments. Several students also mentioned that they felt proud when their stories looked visually good, which made them want to keep improving their writing.

Students Felt More Confident in Writing

Writing anxiety is widely recognized as one of the most significant barriers to EFL writing motivation and performance, and it was prominently present among the participants at the outset

of this study. In the pre-intervention questionnaire, a majority of participants (73%) indicated moderate to high levels of anxiety about writing in English, citing fear of making grammatical errors, difficulty finding ideas, and a general sense of inadequacy as the primary sources of their anxiety. By the post-intervention administration, this proportion had decreased substantially to 41%, suggesting a clear reduction in writing-related anxiety attributable, at least in part, to the Canva-based instructional intervention.

Interview data provided qualitative depth to this finding, with students describing how the visual and multimodal nature of Canva made writing feel less intimidating and more manageable. Several students explained that when they focused on designing the visual elements of their stories, they felt less preoccupied with making grammatical errors in the written text. Students felt less stressed because they could combine writing with pictures and design. This observation is consistent with Andriani and Rasto (2019), who established that learning motivation functions as a key determinant of learning outcomes, and that reducing anxiety is an essential prerequisite for building sustainable motivation in the classroom.

The improvement in writing confidence was also evident in the observable quality of student outputs across the six weeks. While writing performance was not a primary variable of this study, the researcher's observation notes consistently documented improvements in the length, coherence, and descriptive richness of students' written narratives over time. Students who had produced brief single-sentence image captions in week two were composing multi-paragraph visual narratives with developed characters and coherent plot structures by week six. This progression reflects what Risabette and Astuti (2017) described as the positive effect of appropriate learning media: when media align with learners' creative interests

and support their confidence in expressing ideas, students invest more effort and produce higher-quality work.

The ease of use of the Canva platform was another important factor contributing to reduced anxiety and improved confidence. Unlike more technically complex digital tools, Canva's interface is designed explicitly for non-specialist users, which means that students could focus their attention on the creative and writing aspects of their storytelling rather than on navigating difficult software. This aligns with findings reported by students who found Canva easy to use, and this helped them engage more actively in the learning activities. In contexts where technological infrastructure is limited, the low barrier to entry offered by Canva represents a particularly important and inclusive benefit.

Students Participated More Actively

The third major theme concerns the role of Canva-based digital storytelling in fostering collaborative engagement and social motivation among students. During weeks four and five, when students worked in pairs to co-design visual stories on an assigned theme, classroom observation data documented exceptionally high levels of peer interaction, mutual feedback exchange, and joint problem-solving. Students were observed in animated discussions about narrative choices, negotiating design decisions, and providing both technical and linguistic assistance to their partners. This level of collaborative engagement was markedly higher than that observed during conventional writing sessions conducted before the study. Students seemed to enjoy the process more when they could work together and share ideas, rather than writing alone. Some students also mentioned that they learned new vocabulary and expressions from their partners during these sessions, which was an added benefit they did not expect.

The collaborative dimension of Canva-based storytelling appeared to create a dynamic social learning environment that amplified individual motivation in ways that individual work alone could not achieve. Students who reported lower levels of intrinsic motivation in the pre-intervention questionnaire showed noticeably higher engagement scores during collaborative sessions, suggesting that the social structure of the task partially compensated for lower individual motivation. Some students still had difficulties with grammar and vocabulary, but they were more willing to participate in writing activities. This suggests that when students feel comfortable with the tools they use, they are more likely to try even if they are not fully confident in their language skills yet. This finding is consistent with Law, Geng, and Li (2019), who demonstrated that social presence in blended learning environments influences the relationship between student motivation and learning performance, and that cooperative task structures can activate motivational resources that remain latent in individual learning contexts.

Interview participants described the collaborative storytelling sessions as among the most enjoyable, memorable, and motivating experiences of the entire program. Several students noted that working with a partner made them feel more personally accountable for the quality of their written contributions to the shared story, which in turn motivated them to invest greater effort in their writing. Others described how observing their partner's enthusiasm and creative ideas inspired them to expand and enrich their own contributions beyond their initial intentions. This showed that students became more motivated when they saw their classmates actively participating. This is in line with Emda (2017), who explained that the social environment plays an important role in sustaining student motivation in the classroom.

The final week's presentation activity, in which students shared their completed digital stories with the full class, further reinforced collaborative motivation by providing a real audience for students' written work. The prospect of presenting completed stories to peers appeared to function as a powerful external motivation in the program's final stages, with many students voluntarily revising and refining their narratives in the days preceding the presentation session. This aligns with Puspitarini and Hanif (2019), who argued that effective learning media not only enhance intrinsic motivation but also create conditions that sustain external motivations by providing social purposes for learning.

Discussion

The findings show that Canva-based digital storytelling helped students become more motivated in writing activities. The findings confirm and extend previous research on the motivational benefits of digital learning media in Indonesian educational contexts, while also highlighting several context-specific factors that shaped students' motivational experiences in the public secondary school setting examined.

One important finding of this study is that Canva changed students' views toward writing activities. Rather than experiencing writing as a difficult writing activity that made students afraid of making mistakes, students who engaged in Canva-based storytelling came to perceive writing as an integrated component of a broader creative and communicative process. This reframing is consistent with the perspective on motivation, which holds that learners are most motivated when they perceive their tasks as personally relevant, creatively open-ended, and used in real communication activities (Maryunani & Hasan, 2022). By situating writing within the creative and social context of visual storytelling and peer presentation, the Canva program created precisely this supportive learning environment.

The reduction in writing anxiety found in this study is also worth highlighting, given the well-established relationship between anxiety and writing performance in EFL contexts. The finding that Canva's visual and multimodal features helped reduce anxiety suggests a novel mechanism through which digital design tools can address affective barriers that have long frustrated EFL writing instruction. When students are granted control over the aesthetic and expressive dimensions of their communication, they develop a greater sense of creative agency, which in turn reduces fear and anxiety about writing. This insight has direct and actionable implications for EFL teachers: incorporating design-based digital tools like Canva into writing instruction may be a particularly effective strategy for addressing the affective barriers that prevent many students from fully engaging with writing tasks. Teachers can start with simple tasks, such as asking students to create a short illustrated story, before moving on to more complex assignments.

The collaborative dimension of the findings is also important to discuss in relation to established theories of social motivation. Collaborative activities also helped students become more active and motivated during the learning process. Working with peers gave students a sense of shared responsibility, which encouraged them to contribute more to their writing tasks. This has concrete implications for the instructional design of future Canva-based learning activities: deliberately structuring collaborative tasks may be a key factor in maximizing the motivational benefits of the platform.

It should also be noted that the motivational benefits observed in this study were achieved in a school with limited technological infrastructure, where students accessed Canva primarily through shared school computers and personal smartphones. As Maryunani and Hasan (2022) found in their study of Canva-based

learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, the platform demonstrated effectiveness even under conditions of technological constraint, underscoring its robustness as an educational tool across a wide range of learning environments in Indonesia and comparable contexts globally. This study is not without limitations. The small sample size and single-school design limit transferability. Future research should employ quasi-experimental designs with larger, more diverse samples and include control conditions.

Conclusions

This study set out to explore the use of Canva-based digital storytelling as a medium for enhancing EFL writing motivation among tenth-grade secondary school students in Central Java, Indonesia. Drawing on a descriptive qualitative design and data collected through classroom observations, writing motivation questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews over a six-week instructional program, the study identified three major motivational themes: increased enthusiasm and creative engagement, reduced writing anxiety and improved writing confidence, and enhanced collaborative participation.

The findings demonstrate that Canva-based digital storytelling functions as an effective and inclusive learning tool in secondary school EFL writing classrooms. By transforming writing from a solitary, text-only, anxiety-provoking task into a more creative and interactive learning activity, Canva created conditions in which students felt greater confidence and freedom in expressing ideas, lower anxiety, and stronger intrinsic and social motivation to engage meaningfully with writing. These motivational effects were sustained across the full six weeks of the program and were observed even in a school with limited technological infrastructure, highlighting the accessibility and broad applicability of the platform. This shows that Canva does not require a special or expensive setup,

making it a realistic option for most schools in Indonesia.

For EFL practitioners working in Indonesian secondary schools and comparable international contexts, this study offers a clear and practically grounded endorsement of Canva-based digital storytelling as a simple and useful strategy for addressing the motivational challenges that frequently undermine secondary school writing instruction. Teachers seeking to increase student engagement, reduce writing anxiety, and help students develop a more positive attitude toward writing are encouraged to integrate Canva into their teaching activities. Particular attention should be paid to the design of collaborative storytelling tasks and authentic audience presentation opportunities, as these structural features appeared to increase students' motivation more effectively.

For researchers, this study opens several directions for future investigation. Studies employing experimental or quasi-experimental designs with larger and more diverse samples would help establish the direct effect of Canva-based storytelling in motivational and writing performance outcomes. Longitudinal studies tracking the persistence of motivational gains over extended periods would contribute valuable knowledge regarding whether enthusiasm for Canva-based writing activities is sustained as the platform becomes routine. Comparative studies examining the relative effectiveness of Canva-based storytelling versus other digital tools and conventional writing approaches would further situate Canva within the broader and rapidly evolving landscape of technology-based EFL writing learning. It would also be useful to look at whether students from different grade levels or school types respond to Canva-based activities in similar ways.

References

- Andriani, R., & Rasto, R. (2019). Motivasi belajar sebagai determinan hasil belajar siswa. *Jurnal Pendidikan Manajemen Perkantoran*, 4(1), 80–88.
<https://doi.org/10.17509/jpm.v4i1.14958>
- Efendi, R., Gustriani, D., & Siregar, P. S. (2019). Pengaruh Manajemen Kelas Terhadap Hasil Belajar Siswa SD Negeri 002 Kecamatan Rambah Samo. *Journal Basicedu*, 3(2).
<https://doi.org/10.31004/basicedu.v3i2.103>
- Emda, A. (2017). Kedudukan Motivasi Belajar Siswa Dalam Pembelajaran. *Lantanida Journal*, 5(2), 93–196.
- Fitria, T. N. (2022). Using Canva as media for English Language Teaching (ELT) in developing creativity for informatics students. *ELT Echo: The Journal of English Language Teaching in Foreign Language Context*, 7(1), 58–66.
<https://doi.org/10.24235/eltecho.v7i1.10789>
- Hapsari, G. P. P., & Zulherman. (2021). Pengembangan media video animasi berbasis aplikasi Canva untuk meningkatkan motivasi dan prestasi belajar siswa. *Journal Basicedu*, 5(4), 2384–2394.
<https://doi.org/10.31004/basicedu.v5i4.1237>
- Law, K. M. Y., Geng, S., & Li, T. (2019). Student enrollment, motivation, and learning performance in a blended learning environment: The mediating effects of social, teaching, and cognitive presence. *Computers and Education*, 136, 1–12.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2019.02.021>
- Maryunani, & Hasan, N. (2022). Peningkatan prestasi belajar melalui aplikasi Canva selama pembelajaran daring masa pandemi Covid-19. *Inteligensi: Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan*, 4(2), 91–96.
<https://doi.org/10.33366/ilg.v4i2.2888>
- Puspitarini, Y. D., & Hanif, M. (2019). Using learning media to increase learning motivation in elementary school. *Anatolian Journal of Education*, 4(2), 53–60.
<https://doi.org/10.29333/aje.2019.426a>
- Risabethe, A., & Astuti, B. (2017). Pengembangan media pembelajaran untuk meningkatkan motivasi belajar dan karakter semangat kebangsaan siswa kelas V SD. *Jurnal Pendidikan Karakter*, 7(1).
<https://doi.org/10.21831/jpk.v7i1.15498>
- Saputra, H. D., Ismet, F., & Andrizal, A. (2018). Pengaruh motivasi terhadap hasil belajar siswa SMK. *INVOTEK: Jurnal Inovasi Vokasional dan Teknologi*, 18(1), 25–30.
<https://doi.org/10.24036/invotek.v18i1.168>