



Optimizing Students' Arabic Writing Skills through Project-Based Learning Based on Digital Storytelling

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) integrated with digital storytelling to develop students' Arabic writing skills (Mahārah Kitābah). The study employed a descriptive qualitative approach and was conducted with third-semester students of the Arabic Language Education Program at Universitas Ma'arif Lampung. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, documentation, and analysis of students' digital storytelling projects. The findings indicate that the integration of digital storytelling into PjBL supported the development of students' ability to compose Arabic narrative texts in a more structured, communicative, and contextual manner. The project-based activities also increased students' engagement and motivation to write by providing opportunities to produce authentic texts and publish their work through digital and social media platforms. Furthermore, the learning model facilitated the development of several 21st-century competencies, particularly digital literacy, creativity, collaboration, and communication. These findings suggest that the integration of digital storytelling into PjBL can serve as an innovative learning strategy for developing students' Mahārah Kitābah in Arabic language education, particularly in response to the demands of digital learning environments.

Keywords: Arabic writing skills; Digital storytelling; Project-Based Learning; Mahārah Kitābah; Arabic language learning.

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INTRODUCTION

Writing skills (*Mahārah Kitābah*) are an essential component of Arabic language proficiency, particularly in academic contexts. Proficiency in writing requires not only mastery of linguistic aspects such as grammar (*nahw*), vocabulary (*mufradāt*), and sentence structure, but also the ability to express ideas systematically and communicatively (Ardea Pramesti et al., 2023). However, learning outcomes in the Arabic Language Education Program at Universitas Ma'arif Lampung, particularly among third-semester students, indicate that students' writing skills remain relatively low. Students experience difficulties in organizing simple narrative texts coherently and expressing their ideas effectively.

This condition reflects limitations in the learning approach currently employed, which remains largely teacher-centered and relies on lectures and structured writing exercises (Munawarah & Zulkifli, 2021). Such an approach provides limited opportunities for students to develop critical thinking, creativity, and written communication skills. Furthermore, Arabic writing instruction has not yet extensively utilized digital technology as a medium for learning and self-expression, despite the significant opportunities offered by current technological developments to facilitate more interactive and contextualized learning experiences (Dzakiroh et al., 2025). In addition, recent studies have emphasized that integrating technology-based project learning can significantly improve students' motivation and writing performance in foreign language learning. Digital storytelling, in particular, enables students to combine text, images, audio, and narration into meaningful learning products, thereby encouraging them to

plan, draft, revise, and publish their writing in a more authentic communicative context. Through this process, students are not only trained in linguistic accuracy but also in organizing ideas coherently, developing creativity, and engaging in reflective learning. Consequently, the integration of Project-Based Learning with digital storytelling is considered a promising pedagogical alternative for enhancing Mahārah Kitābah among university students in Arabic language education programs

One learning model that is relevant to addressing these challenges is Project-Based Learning (PJBL). This model emphasizes students' active engagement in authentic projects, encouraging collaboration, problem-solving, and reflection throughout the learning process (SPRING et al., 2022). When integrated with digital storytelling, PJBL not only encourages students to produce written texts but also enables them to express their ideas through engaging and communicative visual and audio formats. Digital storytelling is a method that combines the art of storytelling with multimedia technology to convey messages through narrative forms. In the context of language learning, this approach has been shown to be effective in enhancing students' motivation, meaning-making, and digital literacy (Adawiyah & Jennah, 2023).

Nevertheless, studies integrating PJBL with digital storytelling in Mahārah Kitābah instruction remain limited, particularly within Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia. Such integration has the potential to serve as an innovative strategy for developing students' creative, collaborative, and adaptive written communication skills in response to the demands of the digital era (Nabila Arif & Sukarno, 2024).

This study aims to address this gap by proposing an applicable and contextual approach to Mahārah Kitābah instruction. The primary focus of this study is the implementation of a PJBL model integrated with digital storytelling in Arabic writing instruction. A descriptive qualitative approach is employed to provide an in-depth description of the process and outcomes of implementing this model among third-semester students of the Arabic Language Education Program at Universitas Ma'arif Lampung. This study is expected to contribute to the development of more innovative and contextually relevant Arabic language learning strategies that are responsive to the needs of contemporary digital learning environments.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to obtain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PJBL) integrated with digital storytelling to develop students' Arabic writing skills (Mahārah Kitābah). The study involved third-semester students of the Arabic Language Education Program at Universitas Ma'arif Lampung. This approach was selected because it was considered appropriate for capturing the learning process in its natural and contextual setting, while also allowing for an in-depth interpretation of students' learning experiences (Maolida et al., 2025). In this study, the researcher was not merely an observer but also served as a facilitator throughout the learning process, which was conducted over one full semester during the 2024/2025 academic year.

The participants consisted of 20 third-semester students enrolled in the Mahārah Kitābah I course. They were selected using purposive sampling based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. The criteria included: (1) students who had completed the Mahārah Kitābah I course, (2) students who possessed basic Arabic writing skills, and (3) students who were able to operate digital devices and actively use online publishing platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, blogs, or Instagram. These criteria were considered important because the writing projects were designed to produce works that would be published through digital platforms. Data were collected through three main techniques: participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Participant observation was used to examine students' engagement and activities during the learning process. Semi-structured interviews with students and the lecturer explored their experiences, perceptions, and challenges in implementing Project-Based Learning (PJBL) integrated with digital storytelling. Documentation included students' Arabic narrative texts and digital storytelling products published through online platforms (Qomaruddin & Sa'diyah, 2024).

Data credibility was established through source and method triangulation and member checking. Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. Observation and interview data were categorized into themes such as student engagement, writing development, motivation, collaboration, and digital literacy. Students' narrative texts were analyzed in terms of sentence structure, vocabulary, cohesion, and coherence, while digital storytelling products were examined based on their integration of written, visual, and audio elements (Nafi'ah Muamaroh & Fikri, 2022). This analysis focused on both the development of students' Arabic writing skills and the learning process facilitated by the integration of PJBL and digital storytelling.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of Project-Based Learning (PJBL) integrated with digital storytelling was conducted through several stages, including project planning, narrative writing, text revision, digital production, publication, and reflection. Data were obtained through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation of students' Arabic narrative texts and digital storytelling products. The findings were organized into five main themes: (1) students' initial difficulties in Arabic writing, (2) the development of Mahārah Kitābah through an iterative writing process, (3) motivation and engagement following digital publication, (4) the development of students' learning independence and digital literacy, and (5) technical challenges and adaptive solutions.

1. Students' Initial Difficulties in Arabic Writing

The initial interview findings indicated that students experienced difficulties in organizing Arabic narrative texts coherently and expressing their ideas in writing. These difficulties were associated with a learning environment that was previously perceived as predominantly teacher-centered and focused on lectures and structured exercises. One student explained: "Before this project, we honestly had great difficulty organizing simple narrative texts coherently and expressively. Learning felt very teacher-centered, with lectures and structured exercises, so we were passive and found it difficult to put our ideas into writing." (Student 1, interview)

This perception was reinforced by another student, who stated: "At the beginning, we did have difficulty forming cohesive and coherent paragraphs and were often confused about choosing the appropriate *mufradāt* (vocabulary)." (Student 2, interview)

These statements indicate that students' difficulties were not limited to vocabulary mastery but also involved the organization of ideas, paragraph coherence, and the ability to express ideas systematically in Arabic. The findings provide a contextual basis for implementing a learning model that gives students greater opportunities to actively construct and develop their own written texts (Munawarah & Zulkifli, 2021).

The findings are consistent with the rationale of Project-Based Learning, which emphasizes active student participation and the production of meaningful learning products. In the context of Arabic writing instruction, PJBL provides opportunities for students to move from receiving linguistic input toward producing and revising language through authentic tasks.

2. Development of Mahārah Kitābah Through an Iterative Writing Process

The interview data show that the development of students' writing occurred through repeated stages of drafting, revising, and transforming written texts into digital narratives. Rather than completing writing in a single stage, students repeatedly examined their texts as the project progressed.

Student 1 described the process as follows: "The process took place gradually. From writing a narrative script based on personal experiences, we revised the grammar, including correcting conjunctions (*rabith*) and the appropriate use of tense (*zamān al-māḍī*). As the project progressed from planning and writing to digital conversion, there was significant development in the structure of our writing." (Student 1, interview)

Another student highlighted the linguistic demands created by the digital production stage: “When we entered the digital conversion stage, such as creating videos and graphics, we learned to condense meanings and choose appropriate words so that the visual and audio narratives were synchronized. We also became more accustomed to applying grammatical features such as *ism al-ishārah*, *ḍamīr*, and simple sentence structures appropriately.” (Student 2, interview)

These statements indicate that digital storytelling did not merely function as a medium for presenting students’ writing. The process of converting written narratives into multimedia products required students to reconsider word choice, sentence structure, meaning, and narrative sequence. Thus, the digital production stage became an extension of the writing process.

The observed development can be summarized as follows:

Table 1. Stages of Mahārah Kitābah Development

No. PJBL Stage	Observed Development
1 Idea identification and planning	Vocabulary selection and thematic organization
2 Narrative writing	Basic sentence structure and use of <i>ḍamīr</i>
3 Text revision	Conjunctions, grammar, and tense consistency
4 Digital conversion	Concise expression and appropriate word choice
5 Publication and reflection	Narrative consistency and confidence

The findings support previous research emphasizing the potential of technology-supported learning to provide opportunities for language and writing development. In this study, however, technology was integrated into a project cycle in which students were required to write, revise, adapt, and communicate their narratives.

3. Digital Publication, Motivation, and Student Engagement

Another significant finding concerned students’ responses after their digital storytelling products were published online. Publication through platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram provided students with an audience beyond the classroom and changed the perceived purpose of writing from completing an academic assignment to producing content that could be viewed by others (Nur, 2023).

Student 1 expressed this experience as follows: “We were very proud! Knowing that our digital storytelling products were published online through social media platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram gave us a particular sense of satisfaction and directly increased our motivation to learn.” (Student 1, interview)

Student 2 similarly emphasized the change in the meaning of the writing task:

“This project made us feel that the assignment was no longer merely an academic burden or an obligation to obtain a grade. There was intrinsic satisfaction and a sense of pride because our writing became a means of self-expression that could be enjoyed by many people. Some of us even became enthusiastic about planning a series of subsequent contents.” (Student 2, interview)

These statements suggest that digital publication contributed to students’ sense of ownership and meaningful engagement with their writing. The public nature of the products gave students a communicative purpose and created an authentic audience for their Arabic narratives.

This finding is consistent with research on digital storytelling, which highlights its potential to support motivation and learner engagement. The present study further indicates that publication can function as an important component of project-based writing because students are encouraged to consider the quality, clarity, and attractiveness of their writing when it is intended for an actual audience (Alfalah et al., 2023).

4. Learning Independence and Digital Literacy

The project also encouraged students to take greater responsibility for managing their own learning activities. Students were not limited to following the lecturer’s instructions but

were required to organize project schedules, develop scenarios, record content, edit videos, and distribute the final products (Al Ghaithi et al., 2023).

Student 3 explained: "We were required to become independent project managers. We managed our own time, designed the scenarios, recorded footage, edited the content, and distributed it. Previously, we tended to be passive and wait for instructions, but in this project we were encouraged to take the initiative to explore editing applications such as Canva and CapCut." (Student 3, interview)

This statement provides direct evidence of a shift in students' roles during the learning process. The students were increasingly required to make decisions concerning both the linguistic and technical dimensions of their projects. Their use of Canva and Cap-Cut also indicates that digital literacy became integrated into the writing activity rather than being treated as a separate skill.

The development of independence was also reflected in the division of responsibilities during project production. Students had to coordinate writing, recording, editing, and publication activities. Consequently, the project created opportunities for the development of responsibility, collaboration, communication, and creativity alongside Arabic writing skills.

These findings support Bell's (2010) argument that Project-Based Learning can facilitate the development of competencies relevant to 21st-century education. In the present context, these competencies emerged through the combination of Arabic writing, collaborative project management, and digital content production.

5. Technical Challenges and the Use of Automatic Translation

Although the implementation provided meaningful learning experiences, students also encountered several challenges. One of the most prominent challenges was the disparity in digital literacy among students. In addition, students' reliance on automatic translation tools, particularly Google Translate, affected the linguistic quality of some initial drafts.

Student 2 explained: "Besides differences in digital literacy among our classmates, the main challenge was our dependence on automatic translation, particularly Google Translate. Some of our initial drafts sounded artificial and rigid because they were directly translated from Indonesian into Arabic without adapting them to the appropriate linguistic rules." (Student 2, interview)

This finding is important because it demonstrates that the use of digital technology does not automatically guarantee better language production. Technology can facilitate the writing process, but students still require linguistic awareness and guidance to evaluate the accuracy and contextual appropriateness of machine-generated translations.

The project also required more time than conventional classroom-based writing activities. Students had to complete several additional stages, including recording, editing, and publication. Therefore, effective implementation required structured guidance and careful time management.

6. Lecturer Perspective and Source Triangulation

The students' accounts were triangulated with the perspective of the lecturer. The lecturer confirmed that the implementation of PJBL integrated with digital storytelling changed the orientation of classroom learning from teacher-centered to student-centered learning (Kusumandaru & Rahmawati, 2022).

The lecturer stated: "The implementation of PJBL based on digital storytelling has proven to change the orientation of learning from teacher-centered to student-centered. Students became more active, creative, and collaborative. However, from the teacher's perspective, the main challenges were the greater amount of time required compared with conventional learning and students' tendency to use automatic translation tools such as Google Translate." (Lecturer, interview)

The lecturer further explained that these challenges were addressed through structured guidance, strict assessment rubrics, and project templates. These strategies were intended to help students gradually master Arabic linguistic rules while reducing excessive dependence on automatic translation tools.

The convergence between students' and lecturer's perspectives strengthens the credibility of the findings. Both sources indicate a similar pattern: the project promoted greater student activity, creativity, and collaboration, while simultaneously presenting challenges related to time, digital literacy, and automatic translation.

The findings demonstrate that the integration of PJBL and digital storytelling provided a contextual environment for students to practice Arabic writing through an iterative and communicative process. The development observed in students' Mahārah Kitābah involved vocabulary selection, sentence structure, grammatical accuracy, conjunctions, tense use, and narrative organization (Syafei & Syukriya, 2020).

More importantly, the writing process was connected to authentic digital production. Students did not merely write texts for classroom assessment; they transformed their narratives into multimedia products and published them through digital platforms. This process provided an authentic audience and strengthened students' sense of ownership over their work (Atika Puspitarini et al., 2024).

The findings also demonstrate that the implementation of the model extended beyond linguistic development. Students reported greater motivation and pride after publication, while the project required them to take greater responsibility for planning, production, editing, and distribution. These activities provided opportunities for developing independence, creativity, collaboration, communication, and digital literacy.

Nevertheless, the findings should be interpreted within the qualitative and contextual nature of the study. The participants consisted of 20 third-semester students in one Arabic Language Education Program. Therefore, the findings should not be generalized to broader populations without further investigation. Future studies could employ mixed-method or quasi-experimental designs to examine changes in Arabic writing performance using measurable indicators and comparative data.

Overall, the findings suggest that PJBL integrated with digital storytelling represents a promising approach to Mahārah Kitābah instruction. Its contribution lies not only in providing opportunities for students to practice Arabic writing but also in connecting writing with authentic digital communication, collaborative learning, creativity, and independent learning.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the integration of Project-Based Learning (PJBL) and digital storytelling provides a contextual and communicative learning environment for developing students' Arabic writing skills (Mahārah Kitābah). The findings indicate that the project-based writing process, which involved planning, drafting, revision, digital production, publication, and reflection, provided students with opportunities to develop their ability to organize ideas, select appropriate vocabulary, apply grammatical structures, and produce more coherent Arabic narratives. The integration of digital storytelling also extended the function of Arabic writing beyond conventional classroom assignments. Students were encouraged to transform their written narratives into visual and audio products and publish them through digital platforms. This process fostered students' motivation, sense of ownership, creativity, collaboration, communication, learning independence, and digital literacy. The findings were supported by students' and lecturer's perspectives, which indicated a shift from predominantly teacher-centered learning toward more active and student-centered learning.

However, the implementation also presented challenges, particularly differences in students' digital literacy, reliance on automatic translation tools, and the relatively high time requirements of digital projects. Structured guidance, project templates, assessment rubrics, and continuous feedback were therefore important in supporting the implementation of the model. Overall, PJBL integrated with digital storytelling represents a promising approach to Mahārah Kitābah instruction in higher education. Its contribution lies not only in supporting the development of Arabic writing practices but also in connecting language learning with authentic digital communication and 21st-century competencies. Since this study was conducted qualitatively with 20 third-semester students in a single Arabic Language Education Program, further research involving larger samples and quantitative or mixed-method designs

is recommended to examine the development of Arabic writing skills using measurable indicators.

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