

Digital Storytelling-Based English Learning as an Effort to Preserve Local Literary Works in the Oemah Baca Warna Warni Community

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Abstract

This community service program was implemented to address low English literacy levels and the gradual decline of storytelling traditions in Pegirikan Village, Tegal Regency. The program builds upon previous initiatives that aimed to increase children's reading interest and strengthen the local literacy community. The implementation procedures included partner needs mapping, multimodal literacy training, digital content creation workshops, participant development observation, and documentation of learning outcomes. The participants involved in this program consisted of community volunteers, university students as facilitators, and children as the main target group. Observations were conducted by examining participants' engagement during training sessions, their ability to use digital applications, and children's responses during English learning activities. The indicators of success included increased active participation, improved technical skills, and positive changes in learning motivation. The program outcomes demonstrated a noticeable increase in participant engagement, particularly in storyboard design skills and the production of digital fairy tale videos. Children also showed improvement in their mastery of simple English vocabulary, accompanied by positive responses toward storytelling activities based on local content. The most significant impact of the program was observed among community volunteers, who were able to independently develop digital learning products after receiving mentoring. These findings support multimodal literacy theory, which emphasizes the integration of text, visual, and audio elements to enhance learning effectiveness. In conclusion, the development of folklore-based digital fairy tales proved effective in improving English literacy while simultaneously preserving local culture. In addition, the program strengthened the community's capacity to independently utilize technology. Therefore, it is recommended that future activities focus on expanding content production and developing promotional strategies to ensure program sustainability.

Keywords: literacy, English folklore, community empowerment, digital storytelling

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1. Introduction

Beyond the issue of English literacy, the socio-cultural context of Pegirikan Village reflects a growing concern regarding the gradual decline of local storytelling traditions. Traditionally, storytelling functioned as an essential medium for transmitting moral

values, collective memory, and local cultural identity across generations. However, folklore that was once narrated by parents or community elders has become increasingly rare due to limited documentation and the weakening of cultural regeneration processes. At the same time, children's exposure to global popular culture through digital media—often without cultural mediation—has resulted in greater familiarity with foreign narratives than with Indonesian folklore. This situation underscores the urgent need to preserve local literary works through learning approaches that are relevant to contemporary contexts, particularly digital media that align with children's everyday experiences (UNESCO, 2021; Nugroho & Arifin, 2022).

In response to these challenges, community-based literacy spaces play a crucial role in providing alternative learning opportunities. The Oemah Baca Warna Warni Community serves as an informal educational setting that promotes literacy development among children, especially those with limited access to formal learning resources. Nevertheless, the community faces several constraints, including the limited availability of instructional media, insufficient digital devices, and the lack of experience among volunteers in utilizing educational technology. Moreover, English learning activities conducted through conventional methods have not sufficiently engaged learners or sustained their motivation. These conditions indicate a mismatch between learners' needs for innovative, engaging learning experiences and the community's capacity to deliver them, highlighting the importance of technology-supported interventions in community literacy programs (Rahman et al., 2023; Widodo & Nuryanto, 2021).

To address this gap, this community service program (PkM) implements a digital storytelling approach that integrates English learning with the preservation of local folklore. Digital storytelling has been widely recognized as an effective pedagogical strategy for enhancing multimodal literacy, creativity, and language skills by combining text, visuals, audio, and narration into meaningful learning experiences (Robin, 2021; Yang & Wu, 2022). The program was conducted through several stages, including initial coordination, digital media training, English language workshops, and the collaborative production of digital folklore videos. Throughout these stages, children, volunteers, lecturers, and university students were actively involved as co-creators, positioning learners at the center of the learning process.

The participatory design of the program aligns with community empowerment principles, which emphasize that sustainable transformation must be built through

collaborative engagement and capacity development rather than short-term outcomes (Ife, 2022). However, the implementation process was not without challenges. Limited access to digital devices, varying levels of digital literacy among participants, and unstable internet connectivity emerged as significant obstacles. To address these issues, adaptive strategies such as the use of offline applications, individualized mentoring, and shared device usage were applied. These approaches demonstrated that contextual flexibility and collaborative problem-solving are critical to the success of technology-based learning initiatives in community settings (Putri & Santosa, 2023).

Preliminary observations during the program indicate that the community possesses strong potential to independently develop technology-enhanced learning media when supported by structured and continuous guidance. The integration of digital folklore into English learning not only contributes to improved learner engagement but also reinforces cultural identity by reintroducing local narratives in contemporary formats. This finding supports the view that culturally grounded digital pedagogy can simultaneously enhance language learning outcomes and cultural sustainability (Gay, 2021; Sari et al., 2024).

Theoretically, this program is grounded in the concept of multimodal literacy, which emphasizes that meaning-making in modern learning environments involves the interaction of linguistic, visual, auditory, and digital modes (Kress, 2021). In addition, culturally responsive language learning theory provides a strong foundation for integrating local cultural content into English instruction, as it promotes relevance, learner motivation, and cultural affirmation (Gay, 2021). Based on the needs analysis and these theoretical perspectives, three main problems were identified: (1) the limited capacity of the community to utilize technology for learning, (2) the lack of innovative media for English language instruction, and (3) the ongoing decline of folklore as a learning resource. Therefore, this article aims to describe the implementation outcomes of a digital storytelling-based English learning program as a strategy for strengthening literacy development, preserving local literary heritage, and empowering the community.

2. Method

This community service program was conducted in the Oemah Baca Warna Warni Community, Pegirikan Village, Tegal Regency, from July to October 2025. The program was designed using a participatory approach that actively involved community administrators, volunteers, university students as facilitators, and children as the main

target group. This approach was adopted to ensure that each stage of the program responded to the actual needs of the community while providing sufficient opportunities for active participation and capacity building (Ife, 2022).

The implementation began with a needs-mapping stage conducted through focused discussions with community managers and village officials. This stage resulted in the identification of key problems, participant selection, the development of an activity schedule, and the preparation of logbooks as operational guidelines for program implementation. Following this phase, participants engaged in a series of training sessions focusing on the introduction of multimodal literacy concepts and the use of simple digital technologies for digital fairy tale development. The training covered basic principles of digital storytelling as well as hands-on practice using the Canva and StoryJumper applications to create illustrations and storyboards, as digital storytelling has been shown to effectively support literacy development and learner engagement (Robin, 2021).

The subsequent stage involved content production assistance, during which participants were guided in developing scripts, narration, and visual elements into bilingual (Indonesian–English) digital fairy tale videos. Throughout this process, volunteers and children worked collaboratively to gain a comprehensive understanding of the digital content production workflow. In addition, the program included a folklore-based English learning workshop that applied the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach. This approach enabled children to actively use language for meaningful communication and to interact with digital fairy tale products as learning media (Richards, 2021).

To ensure the quality of program implementation, participatory observation was employed to assess participant development. The observed aspects included levels of engagement, technical proficiency in operating digital applications, and children's responses to story-based learning activities. The data were analyzed through triangulation by comparing observation results, the quality of the digital products produced, and feedback from community partners.

The indicators of program success included increased active participation, greater volunteer confidence in using technology, the availability of initial digital fairy tale products, and improved learner motivation in English learning. Overall, the integration of

participatory methods, technical training, and continuous evaluation enabled the program to effectively address community needs while strengthening local capacity in utilizing educational technology grounded in local cultural content.

3. Results and Discussion

The community service program implemented in the Oemah Baca Warna Warni Community resulted in meaningful achievements in enhancing digital literacy, English literacy, and the preservation of local literature among children and community volunteers. Overall, the findings indicate that the digital storytelling approach successfully addressed two key needs of the Pegirikan Village community: the availability of engaging learning media for children and the revitalization of cultural transmission through the re-documentation of folklore in accessible digital formats. The four-month program not only improved participants' technical skills but also contributed to positive changes in their attitudes, motivation, and levels of involvement in the learning process.

At the initial stage of implementation, needs-mapping activities revealed substantial gaps in access to technology and digital competencies within the community. These findings served as an essential foundation for designing appropriate training interventions. Prior to the program, most volunteers had limited experience with digital content design and media-processing applications, while children had never engaged in English learning through visual, story-based media. This condition reinforces the core principle of community-based empowerment, which emphasizes the importance of participatory needs assessment before implementing interventions. Following the training phase, noticeable progress began to emerge. Participants gradually developed the ability to create digital fairy tales, starting from storyboard development and illustration selection to narrative text writing and the integration of audio narration into video formats. This progress highlights the effectiveness of user-friendly applications such as Canva and StoryJumper in supporting the development of multimodal literacy.

Observations during the English learning workshops showed that children demonstrated higher enthusiasm and engagement when learning materials were presented in visual and narrative forms. When local folklore stories such as Princess Mandalika, Timun Mas, and Batu Cryis were introduced in digital formats, children showed increased interest and improved understanding of simple English vocabulary. The application of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach further

strengthened these outcomes, as English learning that was closely connected to cultural contexts proved to have a strong motivational impact. Children became more confident in pronouncing new vocabulary, interpreting visual illustrations, and actively participating in question-and-answer activities.

From the perspective of cultural preservation, the program produced bilingual (Indonesian–English) folklore scripts that were subsequently transformed into digital fairy tale videos. This outcome is particularly significant given the limited documentation of local literary works in Pegirikan Village. Although locally specific folklore remains scarce, the re-documentation of Indonesian regional folk literature still contributes meaningfully to community-level cultural preservation efforts. By digitizing these stories, the program enables younger generations to reconnect with local literature through media platforms that align more closely with their everyday digital practices.

To illustrate participants' development throughout the program, the following table presents a comparative summary of engagement levels and technical skills before and after the training activities.

Table 1. Comparison of Participant Engagement and Ability

Aspects assessed	Conditions before the Program	Conditions after the Program
Volunteer Digital Literacy	Most are not yet able to operate design applications	The majority are able to create simple storyboards and fairy tale videos
Children's Learning Motivation	Low, tend to be passive in learning English	Tall, enthusiastic about participating in digital story sessions and vocabulary exercises
Folklore Understanding	Lack of knowledge about Indonesian folklore	Improving, recognising folklore through digital media
Content Production Capabilities	No experience creating digital content	Able to create bilingual fairy tale videos for publication
Community Engagement	Undirected and unstructured participation	Able to create bilingual fairy tale videos for publication

The findings in the table strengthen the theoretical concept that multimodal literacy is able to encourage the transformation of participants' learning abilities and technical abilities. The changes that have occurred in volunteers, especially their ability to operate digital applications, show the increasing technological literacy as a new social capital for the community. This change is in line with the assumption that community empowerment

is not only about skills transfer, but also about building the capacity of the community to solve problems independently.

In the aspect of content production, the results of the service showed that participants successfully completed several digital fairy tale videos which were then uploaded to the community's social media. Although the number of products is still limited, the quality of the narrative and visuals has met basic standards. The community's response to the video also showed positive support, shown by the number of viewers and responses on the community's digital platforms. This indicates that content based on local culture can be well received when it is packaged attractively.



Figure 1 FGD with core management and Canva Training

In terms of program sustainability, the community demonstrated strong potential to independently continue developing digital fairy tale content. Community volunteers were able to generate story ideas, design storyboards, record narrations, and edit simple videos without intensive external assistance. These outcomes indicate that the program succeeded not only in achieving its short-term objectives but also in laying the foundation for long-term development. In particular, the production of digital content opens opportunities for future initiatives, such as content dissemination or monetization, which

may serve as an alternative source of income to support ongoing literacy activities within the community.

Furthermore, the finding that children have begun to recognize Indonesian folklore as a meaningful medium for learning English represents an important contribution to language education practice. This challenges the prevailing assumption that foreign language learning must rely solely on cultural content from English-speaking countries. Instead, the program demonstrates that locally grounded cultural narratives can be effectively integrated into English learning while simultaneously strengthening learners' cultural identity. Through this approach, language learning becomes more contextual, relevant, and meaningful for young learners.

Overall, the discussion of program outcomes confirms that integrating technology, local culture, and English learning through digital storytelling is not only feasible but also highly effective in rural community contexts. The convergence of these three elements produces a learning model that is adaptive and relevant to local needs while generating tangible social, cultural, and educational benefits for the community. This model therefore holds strong potential for replication and further development in similar community-based literacy initiatives.

4. Conclusion

Digital fairy tale-based community service programs have proven to be effective in enhancing English literacy, preserving folklore, and strengthening community capacity in digital content production. This innovation contributes to the development of a multimodal literacy-based community empowerment model by integrating technology, language learning, and local cultural heritage in meaningful and sustainable ways.

Based on the implementation results, several recommendations can be proposed. First, future programs should focus on expanding the quantity and diversity of digital fairy tale content by involving a wider range of local stories and age-appropriate language levels. Second, advanced training in video editing, audio production, and visual design should be provided to further improve the quality of digital outputs. Third, the integration of digital promotion strategies, such as the use of social media platforms and community-based digital channels, is recommended to broaden audience reach and enhance community visibility. Fourth, collaboration with schools, local cultural institutions, and regional libraries could strengthen the impact of the program and support the systematic use of

digital folklore in formal and informal English learning contexts. Finally, follow-up mentoring and periodic evaluation are recommended to ensure the sustainability of community capacity development and continuous improvement of digital literacy practices.

Despite its positive outcomes, this program has several limitations. The duration of the program was relatively short, which limited the depth of skill development and the opportunity to measure long-term impacts on English proficiency and literacy behavior. In addition, the number of participants was limited and focused on a single community, which restricts the generalizability of the findings to other contexts. Technical constraints, such as limited digital devices and unstable internet access, also affected the consistency of program implementation. Furthermore, the evaluation relied primarily on observational data, which may not fully capture measurable changes in language achievement.

Future studies and community service initiatives are therefore encouraged to involve longer implementation periods, larger participant groups, and mixed-method evaluation designs to provide more comprehensive evidence of effectiveness. By addressing these limitations, digital storytelling-based programs have the potential to become a scalable and impactful model for community-based English learning and cultural preservation.

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