



Digital Storytelling: How Canva Helps Students Build Visual and Written Narratives

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Abstract. This study aims to explore students' perceptions of using Canva as a digital storytelling platform to enhance their visual and written narrative skills in English writing. The research employed a descriptive qualitative method involving 34 students who participated in a questionnaire consisting of eight closed-ended statements and two open-ended questions. The data were analyzed descriptively, using percentages to support qualitative interpretation. The findings revealed that most students perceived Canva as an accessible, enjoyable, and effective tool for developing writing skills. Students agreed that Canva helps them visualize ideas, organize stories logically, and combine words with images creatively. Moreover, Canva was found to improve students' motivation, confidence, and emotional expression in English writing. These results are consistent with previous studies by Utami and Suriyani (2022), Febriansyah et al. (2023), Siregar et al. (2024), Herwani (2024), Eragamreddy and Joseph (2025), Hafidzin et al. (2025), and Jayanti et al. (2025), which collectively highlight Canva's role in supporting writing engagement, creativity, and organization. The study concludes that Canva transforms traditional writing into a multimodal and meaningful process, combining linguistic and visual literacy. Therefore, Canva can be considered an innovative pedagogical tool that promotes creative thinking, digital competence, and expressive communication in the English writing classroom.

Keywords: Canva; Digital Storytelling; Descriptive Qualitative Research; English Writing; Visual Narrative.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the modern educational context, the integration of digital tools has significantly influenced how students communicate, think, and express creativity. Writing, once confined to traditional pen-and-paper methods, is now evolving into a multimodal practice that combines textual and visual expression. Among various platforms, Canva has emerged as a powerful digital storytelling tool that enables students to design visual narratives while composing written texts. It provides a bridge between literacy and technology, helping learners organize, express, and visualize their ideas more effectively. This study is grounded in three major theoretical perspectives that explain how Canva contributes to students' development of visual and written narratives. First, the Digital Literacy Theory (Eragamreddy & Joseph, 2025) emphasizes that literacy in the digital age extends beyond reading and writing it involves the ability to interpret, create, and communicate meaning using digital media. Canva supports this literacy by enabling students to integrate images, color, and design elements into their written narratives, fostering creativity and reflective communication.

However, despite the growing integration of digital tools in education, research that specifically explores how Canva supports digital storytelling in developing both visual and written narratives remains limited. Most previous studies have focused on Canva merely as a

design or writing platform rather than as an integrative medium that enhances students' digital literacy and narrative competence. According to Mayer (2009), learning becomes more effective when information is processed through both verbal and visual channels, as this dual representation helps learners retain and interpret ideas more deeply. In contrast, Febriansyah et al. (2023) highlight the pedagogical impact of Canva in writing classes, noting that its use enhances students' fluency, organization, and motivation by transforming traditional writing into a more engaging and creative activity. Building on these insights, this study seeks to bridge the gap by examining Canva not only as a digital design tool but also as a learning medium that fosters multimodal storytelling skills.

Therefore, the main objective of this research is to analyze how Canva helps students build visual and written narratives through digital storytelling. Specifically, it aims to identify how Canva facilitates the integration of visual and textual elements in narrative construction, examine students' perceptions of Canva as a tool that promotes creativity and digital literacy, and evaluate how Canva contributes to the development of coherent, structured, and meaningful written narratives. Through this investigation, the study intends to provide valuable insights for educators in designing more engaging and innovative writing practices in the digital era.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Digital storytelling has become a central approach in supporting students' creative expression and multimodal learning. It allows learners to combine written text with visual elements, enabling deeper comprehension and richer narrative construction. As Eragamreddy and Joseph (2025) explain, digital tools significantly enhance creativity, collaboration, and autonomy by providing spaces where students can engage with both visual and verbal modes. This aligns with Mayer's Multimedia Learning Theory (2009), which highlights that learning becomes more effective when information is processed through dual channels.

Canva has emerged as one of the most widely adopted platforms for both language learning and digital literacy development. Research consistently demonstrates its positive impact across educational levels. Febriansyah et al. (2023) show that Canva improves students' fluency, organization, and motivation, transforming writing from a static activity into a more engaging form of creative production. Similarly, Hafidzin et al. (2025) report that Canva enhances writing proficiency across different learning styles by improving content development, vocabulary accuracy, and paragraph organization.

Other studies also highlight Canva's ability to connect visual design with narrative skills. Jayanti et al. (2025) found that combining the POWER writing strategy with Canva increased students' creativity and emotional engagement. Herwani (2024), through a qualitative investigation, found that Canva helped students plan and structure news texts more clearly. Siregar et al. (2024) further showed that Canva improved descriptive writing performance by enabling students to visualize their ideas and build more structured paragraphs.

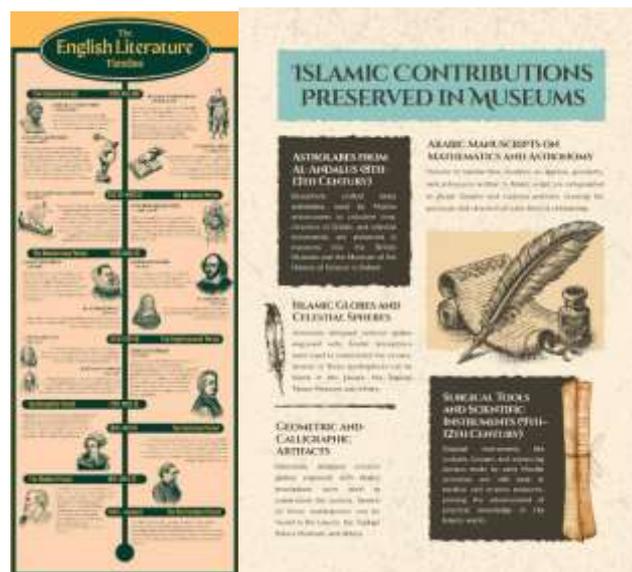


Figure 1. Examples of using narrative writing in Canva.

Beyond narrative and descriptive writing, studies have explored Canva's use in specific subject areas. Dmitrenko et al. (2024) investigated Canva in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classes for engineering students, finding that its templates and visual features supported students in designing coherent visual stories and technical writing. Rezkyana and Agustini (2022) affirmed that editable Canva templates helped students generate ideas, organize procedural texts, and strengthen critical thinking. Paulia et al. (2021) also demonstrated significant improvement in students' narrative writing performance through Canva-based writing tasks.

Several studies reinforce that Canva increases learning motivation and confidence. Utami and Suriyani (2022) reported that Canva made writing tasks more enjoyable, leading to higher student engagement. A BEST Conference study (2021) similarly concluded that Canva increased motivation and helped students overcome writing difficulties by providing accessible visual tools.

Canva is also widely used in material development. Aliyah et al. (2025) designed Canva-based teaching materials for short story writing and found improvements in students' communication and writing abilities. Permatasari and Widagdo (2025) developed a Canva-based E-Book Story (E-Boci) and showed that the visual narrative format improved comprehension and learner motivation. Studies on media development (Lailiyah, 2021; Priyatna, 2023) also emphasize Canva's practicality and accessibility for creating visually engaging learning materials.

Taken together, these studies consistently confirm that Canva supports multimodal literacy by integrating visuals, text, organization tools, and interactive templates. It enhances idea generation (Rezkyana, 2022), improves narrative structure (Paulia, 2021; Siregar, 2024), increases motivation (Utami & Suriyani, 2022; BEST Conference 2021), and strengthens both linguistic and visual components of writing (Dmitrenko et al., 2024; Jayanti et al., 2025). Therefore, Canva can be considered an effective pedagogical tool that supports narrative construction, digital literacy, and meaningful writing experiences across contexts.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This research employed a descriptive qualitative design, which aims to describe and interpret students' perceptions without manipulating variables or testing hypotheses. The focus of the study was to explore how Canva helps students build visual and written narratives through digital storytelling activities. Although the questionnaire contained Likert-scale items, the numerical percentages were used only as supporting data, while the main analysis emphasized students' descriptive responses, interpretations, and meaning-making. In qualitative research, the goal is not to measure but to understand a phenomenon from the participants' point of view; therefore, the use of numbers in this study serves a complementary rather than statistical function. The participants of this research were 34 students who responded voluntarily to an online questionnaire distributed through Google Forms. The students were selected purposively, based on their experience using Canva in learning activities that involved writing and visual design. They were considered suitable as data sources because they had direct engagement with the digital storytelling process, which allowed them to provide relevant insights regarding the use of Canva as a learning tool.

The instrument used in this study was a questionnaire consisting of two parts: closed-ended statements in the form of a five-point Likert scale and two open-ended questions. The Likert items were designed to identify the general tendency of students' perceptions toward Canva, while the open-ended responses provided deeper explanations about how

Canva supported their writing and storytelling process, as well as the challenges they encountered. The inclusion of both types of items enabled the researcher to obtain descriptive numerical tendencies and rich qualitative explanations in the same instrument. The data were collected through an online form, which allowed students to answer anonymously and independently. The use of digital distribution also ensured accessibility, flexibility, and natural responses in students' own wording. All responses were exported and organized into written form for analysis. The Likert data were converted into percentages to map the general tendency of students' responses, but the interpretation of findings was based primarily on qualitative description rather than statistical testing.

The qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, in which students' answers were read repeatedly, categorized, and grouped into emerging themes related to Canva's role in narrative construction, creativity, motivation, and challenges. The percentages from the Likert items were used to reinforce the themes by showing the level of agreement or disagreement among students. The combination of thematic interpretation and percentage-based support strengthened the credibility of the findings without shifting the study away from its qualitative nature. To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, the researcher applied methodological transparency, descriptive validity, and respondent honesty through anonymous participation. The use of direct student responses and descriptive explanation allowed the findings to reflect authentic perspectives rather than researcher assumptions. Since the aim of this study was not to generalize, but to describe and interpret, credibility was established through clarity of procedures and consistency between data and interpretation.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study explored students' perceptions of using Canva to develop visual and written narratives through digital storytelling. The data were collected from 34 students through a questionnaire consisting of eight statements and two open-ended questions. The results were analyzed descriptively, supported by percentage data, and interpreted qualitatively based on the respondents' responses. The following discussion presents the results for each statement, connected with relevant theories and studies.

Findings from the Questionnaire

The seven Likert-scale items were grouped into four major categories that reflect the core aspects of students' experience with Canva: usability, narrative construction, creativity & engagement, and motivation & expressive development. The percentages presented in each

section function only as supporting evidence, while the interpretation focuses on the qualitative tendency of student responses.

I understand how to use Canva's tools (templates, text, images, animation) to design a story.

I understand how to use Canva's tools (templates, text, images, animation) to design a story.

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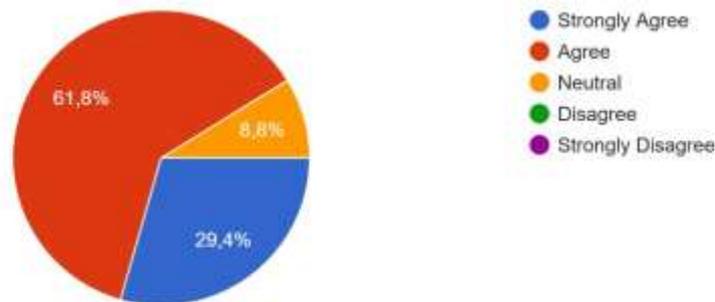


Figure 2. Respondents' Level of Understanding of Using Canva Features in Story Design.

The findings show that most students demonstrated confidence in using Canva's features, such as templates, text tools, images, and animations. Approximately 91.2% of students either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. This indicates that Canva is perceived as an easy-to-use and accessible digital platform for educational purposes. Students' familiarity with Canva allows them to focus on narrative development rather than on technical difficulties.

This finding is consistent with Febriansyah et al. (2023), who revealed that Canva positively influences students' writing performance because of its practical design features. Similarly, Hafidzin, Muzammil, and Sulisty (2025) found that Canva supports different learning styles, especially visual learners, by providing an interactive platform that fosters digital creativity. In addition, Utami and Suriyani (2022) emphasized that user-friendly digital media like Canva make the learning process more enjoyable and reduce writing anxiety. Therefore, Canva's accessibility contributes significantly to students' confidence and readiness to create digital stories.

Canva helps me visualize my story ideas more clearly.

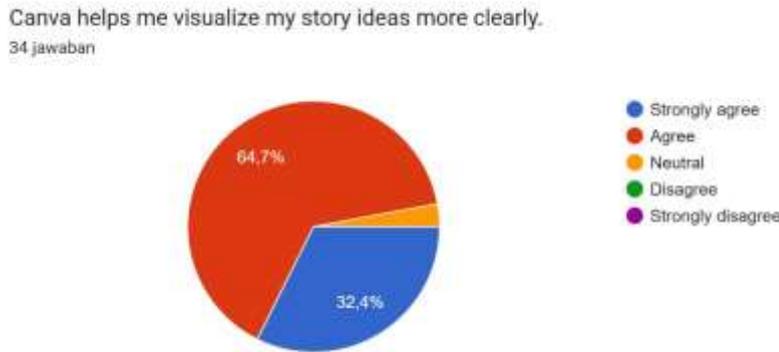


Figure 3. Respondents' Perceptions of Canva's Role in Helping Visualize Story Ideas.

A large proportion of students (97.1%) agreed that Canva helps them visualize their story ideas more effectively. Students expressed that visual templates and image integration allowed them to see how their stories unfold, which made it easier to connect ideas and create logical flow. This suggests that Canva serves as a bridge between imagination and expression, transforming abstract ideas into structured visual narratives.

The result is in line with Herwani (2024), who found that using Canva in writing classes helps students organize their thoughts more clearly because the tool provides visual structure to the writing process. Likewise, Siregar et al. (2024) showed that Canva improves idea clarity and helps students plan their text composition systematically. According to Jayanti, Kusuma, and Marsakawati (2025), Canva also enhances emotional involvement by allowing students to translate ideas into visual form, making their stories more meaningful. Hence, Canva functions not only as a writing aid but also as a visualization tool that strengthens coherence and creative design in storytelling.

Canva encourages me to think creatively about how to combine words and images.

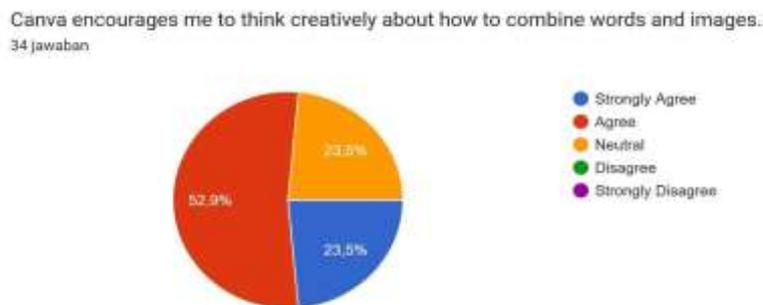


Figure 4. Canva Encourages Creative Thinking About Combining Words and Images.

The findings reveal that 76.4% of students agreed that Canva stimulates their creativity in combining written and visual elements. Students mentioned that they could explore colors, layouts, and font styles while writing, which made them think more imaginatively about how to communicate ideas. This shows that Canva enhances students' creative and critical thinking by providing a multimodal learning environment.

This finding supports Eragamreddy and Joseph (2025), who argued that digital platforms promote creativity by allowing learners to express meaning through various modes. Similarly, Jayanti et al. (2025) concluded that integrating Canva into the POWER strategy improved students' emotional literacy and creative expression in storytelling. In addition, Hafidzin et al. (2025) found that Canva fosters motivation and creativity through visual participation. Therefore, Canva effectively encourages students to think beyond traditional writing boundaries by merging linguistic and visual communication modes.

The visual design options in Canva make my storytelling more engaging and meaningful.

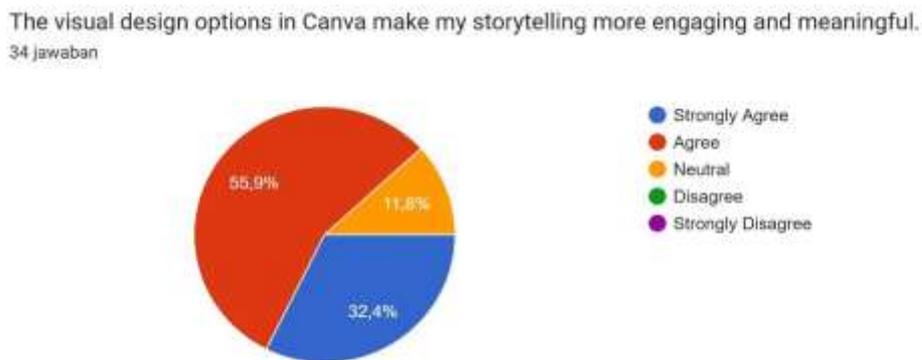


Figure 5. The Visual Design Options in Canva Make My Storytelling More Engaging and Meaningful.

Most respondents (88.3%) agreed that Canva's visual design features make their stories more engaging. They felt that the combination of visual templates, colors, and animations made storytelling more enjoyable and helped them convey emotions effectively. Canva transformed the writing process into an interactive and artistic experience, motivating students to produce more meaningful work.

This finding aligns with Utami and Suriyani (2022), who found that Canva enhances students' motivation and reduces anxiety by making learning tasks more attractive. It also supports Jayanti et al. (2025), who emphasized that Canva helps students express emotion and meaning in creative ways through multimodal storytelling. According to Herwani (2024), Canva's design features provide a stimulating learning environment that keeps students

interested and engaged throughout the writing process. Therefore, Canva's visual affordances play a central role in deepening students' emotional connection with their narratives.

Canva supports me in organizing my ideas logically for written storytelling.

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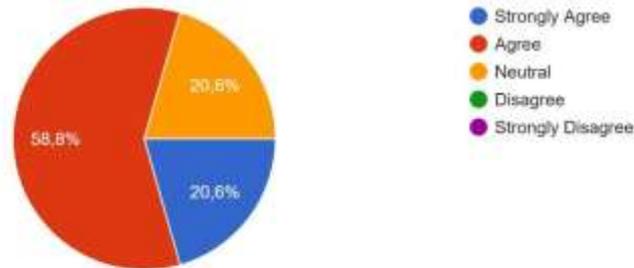


Figure 6. Canva supports me in organizing my ideas logically for written storytelling.

About 79.4% of respondents agreed that Canva helps them organize ideas in a more structured way. The drag-and-drop layout enables them to sequence story elements clearly, such as the beginning, middle, and ending. Students mentioned that Canva assisted them in planning and connecting ideas, which led to better narrative organization.

This result corresponds with Herwani (2024), who found that Canva helps students understand textual structure through its visual framework. It also supports Febriansyah et al. (2023), who reported that Canva promotes logical organization and coherence in narrative writing. According to Siregar et al. (2024), Canva's visual layout functions as a cognitive scaffold that helps students connect different parts of their stories smoothly. Thus, Canva provides structural support that enables learners to manage their thoughts effectively during the writing process.

Using Canva helps me improve my ability to write coherent and creative stories.

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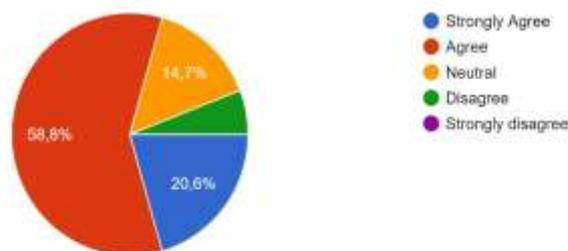


Figure 7. Using Canva helps me improve my ability to write coherent and creative stories.

The data indicate that 79.4% of students believed Canva improved their ability to write coherent and creative stories. Students explained that combining visual and textual elements made their writing more organized and engaging. Canva's templates helped them develop ideas step by step, leading to improved coherence and flow in their storytelling.

This finding aligns with Siregar et al. (2024), who found that Canva strengthens writing fluency and structure in descriptive and narrative tasks. Moreover, Febriansyah et al. (2023) reported that students who used Canva demonstrated better content organization and idea connection. Jayanti et al. (2025) also emphasized that Canva promotes creativity and reflection, which are crucial in developing coherent digital stories. Therefore, Canva enhances students' writing ability by combining structural guidance with creative freedom

Creating digital stories in Canva enhances my motivation to learn English writing.

Creating digital stories in Canva enhances my motivation to learn English writing.

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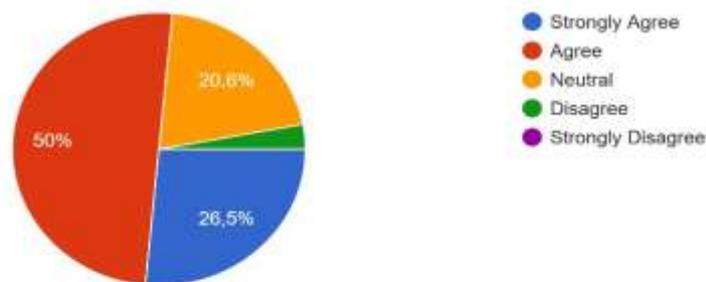


Figure 8. Creating digital stories in Canva enhances my motivation to learn English writing.

The results show that 76.5% of students felt that using Canva increased their motivation to learn English writing. Students expressed that Canva made the writing process less stressful and more enjoyable. The interactive and colorful design of the platform encouraged them to participate actively in writing tasks.

This result supports Utami and Suriyani (2022), who found that Canva increases student motivation and confidence by creating a fun learning atmosphere. Likewise, Hafidzin et al. (2025) demonstrated that Canva enhances engagement across different learning styles, improving students' willingness to write. Furthermore, Eragamreddy and Joseph (2025) highlighted that digital tools foster active learning and self-expression, leading to greater motivation. Therefore, Canva plays an important role in sustaining students' positive attitudes toward writing in English.

Canva help me express emotional or cultural aspects of my stories more effectively.

Canva helps me express emotional or cultural aspects of my stories more effectively.
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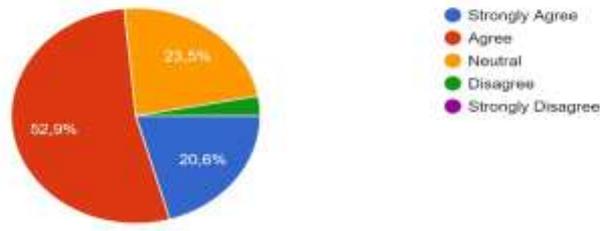


Figure 9. Canva help me express emotional or cultural aspects of my stories more effectively.

The findings show that 73.5% of students agreed that Canva allows them to express emotional and cultural meanings through visual storytelling. Students used colors, symbols, and images to represent feelings and cultural backgrounds that might be difficult to describe through words alone.

Table 1. Survey Results: Canva's Impact on Creativity, Writing, and Storytelling.

No	Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD
1	Understand Canva's tools	29.4%	61.8%	8.8%	0%	0%
2	Visualize story ideas	32.4%	64.7%	2.9%	0%	0%
3	Think creatively (words & images)	23.5%	52.9%	23.5%	0%	0%
4	Visual design makes storytelling engaging	32.4%	55.9%	11.8%	0%	0%
5	Canva helps organize ideas logically	20.6%	58.8%	20.6%	0%	0%
6	Improve coherent & creative writing	20.6%	58.8%	14.7%	5.9%	0%
7	Motivation to learn English writing	26.5%	50%	20.6%	2.9%	0%
8	Express emotional/cultural aspects	20.6%	52.9%	23.5%	2.9%	0%

Understand Canva's tools



Figure 10. Canva's main toolbar interface displaying essential tools such as Templates, Elements, Text, and Uploads, demonstrating the platform's user-friendly and easy-to-Visualize story ideas



Figure 11. A selection of Canva storytelling templates that provide pre-designed visual structures, enabling students to convert abstract story ideas into clear and engaging visual narratives.

Think creatively (words & images)

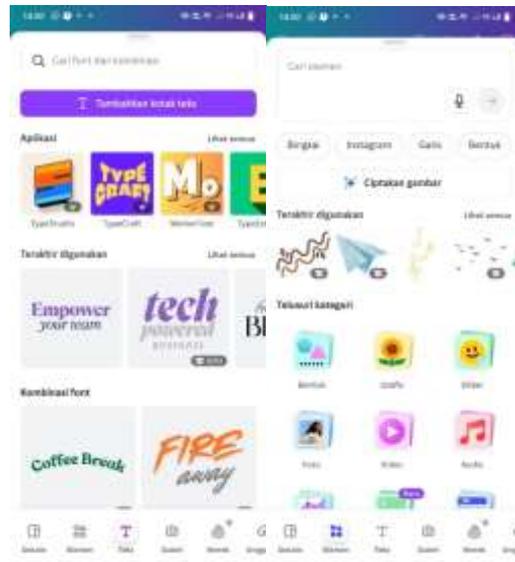


Figure 12. The Elements and Text panels in Canva, showing various illustrations, icons, and text styles that support students' creative thinking through the combination of words and images.

Visual design makes storytelling engaging



Figure 13. Story-based and visually rich Canva templates that illustrate how design elements such as color schemes, illustrations, and layout enhance the engagement and appeal of storytelling projects.

Canva helps organize ideas logically

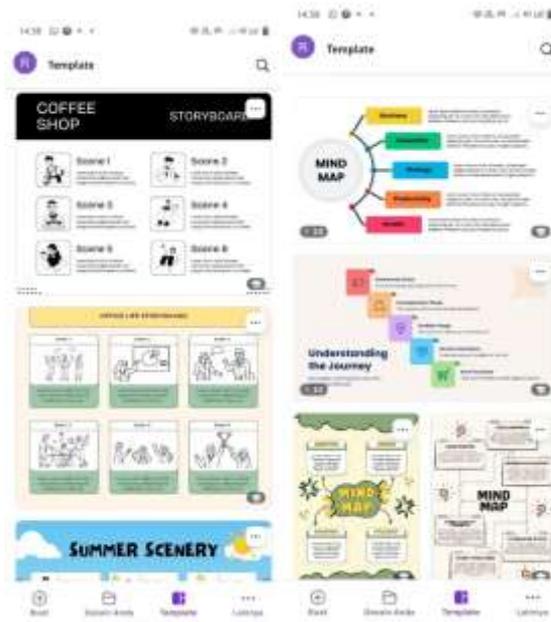


Figure 14. Storyboard, mind map, and infographic templates in Canva that provide structured layouts, helping students arrange ideas logically and present information coherently.

Improve coherent & creative writing

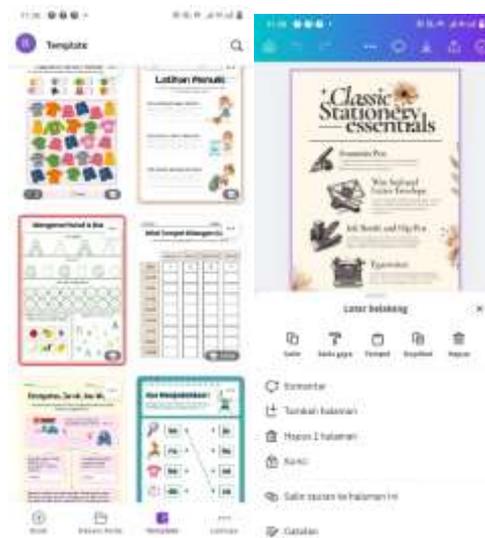


Figure 15. Writing organizer templates and the Page Manager feature in Canva, which help learners develop coherent writing flow and support the planning of creative written content.

Motivation to learn English writing



Figure 16. A visually appealing Canva design interface with colorful and modern templates that can increase students' motivation and positive engagement in learning English writing.

Express emotional/cultural aspects

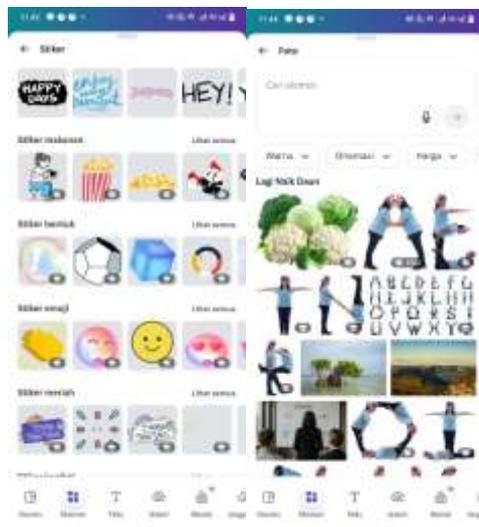


Figure 17. Canva's Elements and Photos categories displaying emotion-based and culture-themed visuals, enabling students to express emotional nuances and cultural contexts in their creative work.

This is consistent with Jayanti et al. (2025), who concluded that Canva-based storytelling enhances emotional literacy and reflective awareness in learners. Similarly, Eragamreddy and Joseph (2025) found that digital storytelling promotes self-expression and identity formation. Siregar et al. (2024) also argued that Canva helps students connect personal and cultural perspectives with academic writing. Consequently, Canva enables students to develop not only linguistic competence but also emotional and cultural sensitivity through visual expression.

Findings from Open-Ended Responses

The qualitative data from open-ended questions were analyzed thematically. Three main themes emerged from students' written reflections.

Theme 1: Canva as Support for Narrative Building

Students described Canva as helpful for organizing stories and turning ideas into structured narratives. One student stated, "It is easier to arrange my storyline when I can see it in pictures and words together." Another wrote, "I can plan my story slide by slide, so the flow becomes clearer." This indicates that Canva functions as a cognitive organizer that supports both planning and drafting.

Theme 2: Canva as a Source of Creativity and Enjoyment

Many students emphasized that Canva made writing "more fun," "less boring," and "more creative." One response said, "I enjoy writing more because Canva lets me design the look of my story." Another commented, "It feels like I am making a real book or animation, not just writing an assignment." This theme confirms that Canva transforms writing into a multimodal experience, not just a linguistic task.

Theme 3: Challenges in Using Canva

While most responses were positive, students also reported limitations. Some mentioned restricted free features, others noted the need for a stable internet connection, and some felt that designing layouts required extra time. Example responses included: "Some features are premium, so I cannot use the best design," and "It takes time to arrange everything nicely." These challenges reveal that Canva's advantages are sometimes limited by access, skill level, and time constraints.

Summary of Discussion

Overall, the findings reveal that Canva significantly supports students in developing their visual and written narrative abilities. The results confirm that Canva is an accessible, motivating, and creative digital platform that enhances storytelling skills. These findings are consistent with previous studies particularly Utami & Suriyani (2022), Febriansyah et al. (2023), Siregar et al. (2024), Herwani (2024), Eragamreddy & Joseph (2025), Hafidzin et al. (2025), and Jayanti et al. (2025) which collectively highlight Canva's effectiveness in improving organization, creativity, motivation, and expression in writing.

The overall findings indicate that Canva supports students' development of visual and written narratives by providing a platform that is both accessible and creatively stimulating. Students did not experience Canva primarily as a "design tool," but as a narrative space where images, text, sequencing, and meaning could interact. The qualitative and percentage-supported data consistently showed that Canva helped students visualize ideas, structure stories, increase writing motivation, and express emotional or cultural meaning.

These findings align with multimodal learning theory, which states that meaning becomes stronger when verbal and visual modes are combined. They also support previous studies on digital storytelling, which argue that digital tools improve motivation, narrative clarity, and creativity. Although technical limitations were identified, they did not outweigh the overall benefit of Canva as a learning medium.

In conclusion, Canva functions not merely as a design application but as a pedagogical tool that integrates visual, linguistic, and emotional literacy. It transforms writing into a multimodal experience that encourages students to think critically, express creatively, and communicate meaningfully through both words and visuals.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the findings and discussions, it can be concluded that Canva has a significant impact on developing students' visual and written narratives through digital storytelling. The results from the questionnaire show that the majority of students responded positively toward Canva's integration in writing activities. They found Canva easy to use, engaging, and helpful in organizing ideas logically and expressing emotions creatively. The findings also revealed that Canva enhances students' motivation, confidence, and creativity in English writing by transforming traditional writing into a multimodal process that involves both linguistic and visual skills.

These findings confirm and strengthen the results of previous studies such as Utami and Suriyani (2022), Febriansyah et al. (2023), Siregar et al. (2024), Herwani (2024), Eragamreddy and Joseph (2025), Hafidzin et al. (2025), and Jayanti et al. (2025), which collectively emphasize that Canva supports students' engagement, idea organization, and motivation in writing. The use of Canva as a digital storytelling platform provides an interactive learning environment where students can merge creativity with cognitive development. It also enhances emotional literacy and cultural awareness by enabling learners to express meaning through images, symbols, and colors in addition to words. Therefore, Canva can be viewed not merely as a design application, but as a pedagogical tool that bridges creativity, technology, and language learning.

For pedagogical implications, English teachers are encouraged to integrate Canva in writing instruction to stimulate students' interest and engagement. Teachers can use digital storytelling projects to encourage students to combine visual and textual elements, which promote critical and creative thinking. For students, Canva can serve as a medium to practice writing more expressively and to explore multimodal literacy beyond conventional essay formats. Future researchers are suggested to conduct broader studies involving experimental or classroom action designs to examine the long-term effects of Canva on writing performance, motivation, and emotional engagement. Additionally, further research could explore how Canva supports collaborative storytelling and intercultural communication in English learning contexts.

In conclusion, Canva has proven to be an effective and innovative digital platform that supports the development of students' writing competence and creativity. Its multimodal nature allows learners to engage cognitively, emotionally, and aesthetically in the writing process, making it a valuable educational tool for 21st-century English language learning.

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