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EXPLORING STUDENTS' CHALLENGES IN USING ROBLOX FOR NARRATIVE WRITING

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ABSTRAK

Artikel ini mengeksplorasi tantangan yang dialami siswa EFL kelas IX ketika Roblox digunakan sebagai prompt pengalaman untuk menulis teks naratif. Penelitian dilakukan di salah satu kelas sekolah menengah pertama di Indonesia dengan desain studi kasus kualitatif. Data diperoleh dari empat catatan observasi guru-peneliti dan tiga wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan siswa fokus yang dikodekan sebagai S1, S2, dan S3. Rangkaian pembelajaran mengikuti empat tahap, yaitu Building Knowledge of the Field, Modeling of the Text, Joint Construction of the Text, dan Independent Construction of the Text. Analisis tematik menunjukkan bahwa Roblox membantu siswa memperoleh ide, latar, tokoh, konflik, dan urutan peristiwa yang konkret, tetapi pengalaman bermain tidak secara otomatis menghasilkan tulisan naratif berbahasa Inggris yang runtut dan akurat. Lima tantangan utama ditemukan, yaitu hambatan teknis dan akses, kesulitan mengubah pengalaman bermain menjadi kalimat bahasa Inggris, kesulitan memilih dan mengorganisasi unsur naratif, ketegangan antara keterlibatan dan distraksi, serta perbedaan tingkat kemandirian siswa. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa Roblox dapat mendukung pembelajaran menulis naratif apabila dipadukan dengan scaffolding berbasis genre, LKPD terarah, dukungan kosakata dan simple past tense, kegiatan menulis segera setelah bermain, serta persiapan teknis yang adil bagi siswa.

Kata kunci: *Roblox, Menulis Naratif, Menulis EFL, Pembelajaran Berbasis Gim Digital, Pedagogi Berbasis Genre*

ABSTRACT

This article explores the challenges experienced by ninth-grade EFL students when Roblox was used as an experiential prompt for narrative writing. The study was conducted in an Indonesian junior high school classroom through a qualitative case study design. Data were drawn from four teacher-researcher observation field notes and three semi-structured interviews with focal students coded as S1, S2, and S3. The learning sequence followed four stages: Building Knowledge of the Field, Modeling of the Text, Joint Construction of the Text, and Independent Construction of the Text. Thematic analysis revealed that Roblox provided vivid ideas, settings, characters, conflicts, and chronological events, but it did not automatically lead to coherent English narrative writing. Five major challenges emerged: technical and access barriers, difficulty transforming gameplay into English sentences, difficulty selecting and organizing narrative elements, tension between engagement and distraction, and different levels of student independence. The findings suggest that Roblox can support narrative writing when it is combined with clear genre-based scaffolding, guided worksheets, vocabulary and past-tense support, immediate post-game writing activities, and equitable technical preparation. Thus, the main pedagogical issue is not whether students enjoy Roblox, but how teachers help them transform game experiences into organized and linguistically accurate narrative texts.

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Keywords: *Roblox, Narrative Writing, EFL Writing, Digital Game-Based Learning, Genre-Based Pedagogy*

INTRODUCTION

Writing narrative text is a demanding task for EFL learners because students must generate ideas, organize events chronologically, construct characters and conflicts, and use appropriate English language features at the same time. In a narrative genre, students are expected to develop a clear orientation, complication, and resolution, while also attending to word choice, grammar, organization, and conventions. Recent work on EFL narrative writing assessment emphasizes that narrative writing involves both content organization and language control (Pourdana & Asghari, 2021). Therefore, students' writing problems are not limited to a lack of ideas; they also include the difficulty of turning ideas into a coherent and accurate written text.

A genre-based approach is relevant to this problem because it makes the social purpose, structure, and language features of a text explicit. Zhai and Razali (2023) show that genre-based writing pedagogy has become an important approach in ESL/EFL writing research because it helps learners recognize rhetorical patterns and linguistic expectations in target genres. In narrative writing instruction, recent Indonesian classroom research also reports that the genre-based approach helps students understand narrative structure, although teachers still need to address practical challenges in classroom implementation (Ashari & Novita, 2025). This suggests that narrative writing instruction requires structured stages, teacher guidance, and repeated opportunities to move from model texts to students' own texts.

Digital media have been used to make writing instruction more concrete. Studies on digital storytelling show that multimodal and technology-supported story tasks can improve EFL learners' writing performance, motivation, engagement, and story construction (Ajabshir, 2024; Alemi et al., 2022; Andhini & Santosa, 2025). Similarly, visual technology such as digital picture series can help students improve narrative writing because learners receive visual cues for setting, events, and sequence (Clarita et al., 2023). These studies are relevant to Roblox-based writing because Roblox also provides visual, interactive, and narrative-like experiences that can become raw material for story writing.

Digital game-based learning is also associated with engagement and language learning. Nadeem et al. (2023) report that digital game-based learning can increase student engagement and motivation compared with traditional online activities. In language learning, Su et al. (2021) found that digital games have been widely studied in relation to language acquisition and learners' affective states. More specifically, contextualized game-based language learning is often connected to situated and sociocultural views of learning because learners interact with meaningful contexts, goals, tools, and other participants (Yang & Li, 2024). Vocabulary learning is another potential benefit, as digital games may provide contextual vocabulary and repeated exposure to words in meaningful situations (Vnucko & Klimova, 2023).

Roblox is one platform that can be used in this context because it allows students to move through virtual spaces, interact with characters and objects, follow game events, and experience a shared story world. Research on Roblox as a learning medium notes that Roblox can increase student involvement and interest through interactive features (Faridah & Deng, 2024). At the broader level, reviews of virtual reality and gamification in education also show that immersive and gamified environments can offer active learning experiences, although their success depends on pedagogical design and implementation conditions (Lampropoulos &

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Kinshuk, 2024).

However, the use of Roblox in narrative writing is not free from challenges. Game-based learning requires stable devices, internet access, clear task design, and teacher mediation. Smartphone-based English learning research shows that mobile learning may be limited by technical, pedagogical, and learner-related challenges (Metruk, 2022). In a writing classroom, students may enjoy playing and gain ideas from the game, but they may still struggle with English sentences, past tense, and story sequencing. This study therefore focuses on the challenges students experienced when Roblox was used as a source for narrative writing.

The article addresses two research questions. First, what challenges do students experience when using Roblox as a prompt and source for narrative writing? Second, how do teacher scaffolding and writing tasks mediate those challenges during the movement from gameplay to English narrative text? This study contributes to the literature by specifically examining the challenges of transforming game-based experiences into linguistically accurate narrative writing within a genre-based framework.

METHOD

This study used an exploratory qualitative case study design to investigate the pedagogical challenges of using *Roblox* as an experiential prompt for narrative writing instruction. The research was conducted in a ninth-grade English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom at SMPN 4 Tarogong Kidul, focusing on a deep interpretation of classroom observation notes and semi-structured interviews. To gather precise contextual data, the teacher-researcher closely observed the whole class and tracked 3 focal students coded as S1, S2, and S3 to maintain identity anonymity. The instructional sequence was implemented across 4 distinct pedagogical meetings following a genre-based approach. These stages included Building Knowledge of the Field (*BKOF*), Modeling of the Text (*MoT*), Joint Construction of the Text (*JCoT*), and Independent Construction of the Text (*ICoT*). This specific sequence served as the primary framework to help students transform interactive digital gameplay into structured text formats without any experimental manipulation of classroom variables.

The qualitative data collection instruments consisted of 4 comprehensive teacher-researcher observation field notes and 3 semi-structured interview transcriptions. The instruments focused on documenting concrete textual elements like characters, setting, and chronological events, alongside student behavior, spontaneous comments, and learning difficulties. For data analysis, the study applied a systematic thematic analysis method consisting of 5 practical operational steps (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The researcher repeatedly read the compiled documents and assigned descriptive labels, including *technical problem*, *language production*, and *scaffolding*. These initial labels were then categorized into broader narrative themes while cross-checking the observation notes against interview evidence to ensure strict interpretive consistency. To guarantee academic credibility and prevent subjective bias, data triangulation was applied by comparing the field observations, interview accounts, and completed student worksheets. This holistic analytical process ensured that the challenges of converting gaming experiences into accurate English writing were captured reliably and comprehensively.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings show that Roblox provided students with a concrete story world that could be used as material for narrative writing. Students remembered visual and experiential details such as a boat, forest, camping area, tent, campfire, cabin, characters, zombies or monsters, and

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tense events such as being chased or attacked. The interview data indicate that the game helped students imagine what to write before producing the text. For example, S1 explained that the scenes were stored in the mind and could be recalled when writing, while S2 said that the game made places, characters, and events visible before writing. S3 similarly stated that Roblox helped the student imagine events, places, and atmosphere. These responses are consistent with digital storytelling and digital game-based learning studies which suggest that multimodal experiences can support engagement, idea generation, and story construction (Ajabshir, 2024; Alemi et al., 2022; Nadeem et al., 2023). However, observation and interview evidence also shows that Roblox did not automatically solve students' narrative writing problems. Five major challenges emerged.

Technical and Access Barriers

The first challenge was technical access. At the beginning of the BKOF meeting, several students were still trying to join the teacher's Roblox account. The observation notes recorded that some students had not added the teacher's account, some had difficulty joining, and some did not have enough internet quota. Students' spontaneous comments included questions and complaints such as;

> *"Which one, Ma'am?"; "Wait, Miss, I have not added the account yet"; "Miss, I have no data quota"; "Miss, it is lagging"; "Miss, connection failed"; and "The Wi-Fi is lagging." (Students, observation, BKOF, translated)*

These problems affected the writing process because Roblox was not merely entertainment in this lesson; it was the source of story experience. Students who could not enter the game smoothly had fewer opportunities to observe setting, characters, events, and conflicts. During JCoT, one student commented that those who did not play did not know what happened in the game. S3 also confirmed this issue in the interview by explaining that students with phones and access to Roblox would be helped more, whereas students with poor internet or lagging phones might experience difficulty.

> *"Students who have phones and can enter Roblox will be more helped, but if the internet is difficult or the phone lags, it may be difficult." (S3, Interview)*

This finding supports Metruk's (2022) observation that smartphone-assisted English learning may face practical challenges related to technology, access, and learner readiness. It also qualifies optimistic claims about digital game-based learning. Although game-based learning can increase engagement and motivation (Nadeem et al., 2023), it requires technical preparation. In this study, lag and connection problems did not completely stop engagement, but they interrupted the flow of learning and reduced some students' chance to gather narrative material. Therefore, a Roblox-based writing lesson should include pre-class device checks, backup screenshots or teacher-provided visual notes, pairing strategies that ensure active participation, and a worksheet that can still be completed by students who experience temporary access problems.

Transforming Gameplay Into English Sentences

The second challenge was language production. Students often knew what happened in the game but struggled to express it in English. In the BKOF observation, students could mention events such as being bitten by a zombie, running, being attacked, or being chased. However, the teacher still needed to help students convert these ideas into English words and action verbs. For example, when students said that they were running, the teacher prompted the past-tense form "ran." In ICoT, students also asked whether the text had to be written in English and whether they could write in Indonesian first and then translate it. These questions show that the main problem shifted from idea generation to English expression.

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"I know what I want to tell, but I am confused about the English words." (S2, Interview)
"Roblox helps the ideas, but arranging correct and readable English sentences is still rather difficult." (S3, Interview)

The interview data confirm this pattern. S1 said that Roblox helped a little with word choice and sentences, but the student still found it difficult to write in English. S2 explained that the main difficulty was finding appropriate English words. S3 similarly stated that ideas, setting, and sequence became easier, but sentence construction and word choice still required practice. Thus, Roblox provided content, but students still needed linguistic resources.

This finding is consistent with digital game-based vocabulary research. Vnucko and Klimova (2023) report that digital games can provide contextual vocabulary and motivating exposure, but vocabulary learning through games still needs pedagogical support. Su et al. (2021) also show that game-based language learning is often linked to affective and language outcomes, but game experience alone does not guarantee productive language accuracy. In narrative writing, students needed explicit support for simple past tense, action verbs, adjectives, time connectors, and sentence expansion. Teacher scaffolding and vocabulary lists were therefore essential to help students transform experiential knowledge into written English.

Selecting and Organizing Narrative Elements

The third challenge involved narrative organization. Roblox gave students many events, but too many events could also create confusion. S1 stated in the interview that the conflict was helpful, but there were too many conflicts, making it difficult to choose the main one. This was also visible during classroom observation. Students mentioned dramatic events such as being killed, attacked, chased, or facing a monster, but they still needed guidance to decide which event should become the complication and how that problem should be solved.

"The conflict was quite helpful, Miss, but because there were too many conflicts, I was confused about which one should become the main conflict." (S1, Interview)

During JCoT, the teacher repeatedly asked students to think about orientation, complication, resolution, and optional coda. Students asked whether coda was required and how to use it. They also asked whether the story could be free or had to follow the notes from the gameplay. In ICoT, students asked whether the story should start from the beginning of the game and where the resolution should be placed. These questions indicate that the difficulty was not only remembering gameplay, but organizing gameplay into the expected structure of narrative text.

"Pay attention to everything"; "Remember the events; this is material for making a narrative text"; "Tell it from the beginning"; "How was the ending?"; and "First paragraph: who? where? why?" (Teacher, observation, BKOF and ICoT, translated)

This finding aligns with genre-based writing theory. Zhai and Razali (2023) emphasize that genre-based pedagogy helps learners understand the purpose, structure, and language features of texts. Ashari and Novita (2025) similarly show that narrative writing instruction benefits from a structured teaching cycle, particularly for students who struggle to organize ideas and apply language features. In this study, Roblox functioned as an idea generator, but genre-based scaffolding functioned as an organizer. Without the worksheet and teacher questions, the game events could remain fragmented. With scaffolding, students could map the game experience into orientation, complication, and resolution.

The difficulty with resolution was especially important. S1 reported that the ending was still difficult because the student was confused about coda. S2 said the beginning and ending were easier, but the middle events were difficult to connect clearly. S3 felt the conflict and ending became easier because the game provided a storyline, but still needed language support.

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These differences show that Roblox did not produce the same writing benefit for all students. Some students needed help selecting the main conflict, while others needed help developing the middle or ending.

Engagement, Enjoyment, and Possible Distraction

The fourth challenge was managing the relationship between engagement and distraction. Observation data showed that students were excited, active, and often eager to show their position in the game. They made spontaneous comments, asked for help, and tried again when they experienced technical problems. S1 showed persistence when the student initially could not move upward in the game and later succeeded. This was recorded in the observation when S1 said, "I cannot go up," and after trying again said, "Now I can."

> *"I felt very happy, Miss. It was exciting and crowded, and I became more enthusiastic." (S1, Interview)*
>
> *"It is more interesting because it is interactive, not only sitting and writing. There are stories, pictures, events, and tense parts." (S2, Interview)*

This engagement is pedagogically valuable. Research on digital game-based learning suggests that games can increase motivation, enjoyment, and participation (Nadeem et al., 2023). Roblox as a learning medium is also reported to increase student involvement because of its interactive features (Faridah & Deng, 2024). In the present study, engagement helped students pay attention to settings, characters, and events. It also made students more willing to write because they had something memorable to tell.

However, engagement needed direction. S3 admitted that Roblox could sometimes become a slight distraction because the student wanted to continue playing or explore other places. In MoT, some students outside the focal group appeared less engaged when the lesson moved from game experience to text analysis. This suggests that game-based excitement does not automatically transfer into sustained writing focus. The teacher had to remind students to pay attention to events because they would become material for narrative writing. The worksheet also helped change the activity from playing into observing, noting, and preparing to write.

> *"Sometimes it was a little distracting because I wanted to keep playing or go around to see other places." (S3, Interview)*

This finding supports Yang and Li's (2024) argument that contextualized game-based language learning depends on meaningful learning contexts and instructional design. The game becomes educational when gameplay is connected to language tasks. In this classroom, the connection was made through teacher prompts such as remembering the events, identifying what happened from the beginning, and writing the ending. These prompts helped students treat Roblox as a narrative resource rather than only a game.

Different Levels of Student Independence

The fifth challenge was variation in student independence. S1, S2, and S3 all responded positively to Roblox, but they did not use it in exactly the same way. In BKOF, S1 was excited and persistent, and the observation showed that S1 could complete the worksheet without many questions. However, in ICoT, S1 initially needed clarification about the relationship between Roblox and the writing task before beginning correctly. S2 was engaged and willing to ask for confirmation, for example by asking how to fill a section of the worksheet. S3 appeared more task-oriented and independent, writing neatly and focusing on the task with fewer verbal questions.

> *"I cannot go up" and "Now I can" (S1, observation, BKOF, translated); "How about this part, Miss?" (S2, observation, BKOF, translated); and "One person, one story; do not*

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make the story the same" (Teacher, observation, ICoT, translated).

The interviews show similar differences. S1 found the middle part easiest to remember but still needed help with the ending and English. S2 found the beginning and ending easier, but the middle events and English sentences more difficult. S3 felt that ideas, setting, characters, and sequence were strongly supported by Roblox, but still needed practice in English sentence construction. This means that students did not experience one single challenge. Their needs differed across planning, organizing, language production, and independence.

These differences have implications for teaching. A Roblox-based lesson should not assume that all students who play the same game will produce equally strong narratives. Some students need help understanding the task, some need help selecting events, some need vocabulary and grammar support, and some need guidance to develop the resolution. Digital storytelling studies also suggest that technology-supported stories are most effective when learners receive structure and support, rather than being left to construct texts without guidance (Ajabshir, 2024; Alemi et al., 2022; Andhini & Santosa, 2025). In this study, the worksheet, model text, group writing, and teacher questioning served as a bridge between game experience and independent writing.

Pedagogical Implications

The findings suggest several practical implications. First, teachers should prepare technical access before the lesson. Students need stable internet, sufficient data quota, and a clear procedure for joining the teacher's game. Backup materials such as screenshots, short video clips, or shared teacher notes can help students who experience lag or cannot join the game. Furthermore, educators should proactively develop multimodal competencies to effectively utilize secondary tools like text-chat or emoticons, ensuring that diverse student needs are acknowledged even when technical platforms falter (Shi & Stickler, 2021).

Second, Roblox should be integrated into a genre-based writing cycle. The four-stage sequence used in this study was useful because gameplay was followed by modeling, group writing, and independent writing. This sequence is consistent with genre-based pedagogy because students first build context, then study a model, then write collaboratively, and finally write independently. Game experience should therefore be treated as the beginning of writing instruction, not as a replacement for writing instruction. By scaffolding these digital experiences with overt instruction and critical framing, educators can help students move beyond simple gameplay to deconstruct the multimodal production and underlying power structures of their virtual creations (Mills et al., 2024).

Third, language scaffolding should be prepared before and after gameplay. Students need vocabulary banks for setting, characters, action verbs, adjectives, feelings, and time connectors. They also need support for past-tense verbs and sentence patterns. This is important because the interviews show that students' ideas were often clearer than their English expression. By providing these linguistic resources, teachers can bridge the gap between students' sophisticated interactive experiences and their ability to articulate these non-verbal modalities into formal written texts (Sinar et al., 2023).

Fourth, teachers should provide a resolution guide. In this study, several students found the ending, coda, or solution difficult. A simple guide asking what the problem was, who solved it, how the character escaped or survived, what changed after the problem, and what lesson can be learned could help students develop stronger endings. By integrating these structured prompts, educators facilitate a more intentional transition from immersive virtual exploration to the formal requirements of narrative writing (Weng, 2024). Finally, educators should consider fostering mixed-ability groups or pairing students with diverse linguistic backgrounds to

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enhance intercultural awareness and maximize collaborative learning potential within the metaverse (Lee & Ahn, 2024).

Limitations and Future Research

This study was limited to one ninth-grade classroom and three focal students, so the findings should be understood as context-specific rather than generalizable to all EFL classrooms. The study also focused on students' challenges and classroom responses, not on a statistical comparison of writing scores. Future research may examine students' actual pre-test and post-test writing products to identify how Roblox affects specific writing components such as organization, elaboration, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics. Further studies may also compare students with different levels of digital access to understand how technical readiness influences participation and writing outcomes.

CONCLUSION

This study explored students' challenges in using Roblox for narrative writing in a ninth-grade EFL classroom. The findings show that Roblox provided a strong experiential prompt because it helped students imagine settings, characters, conflicts, and sequences of events, and it increased engagement by giving students a shared and memorable experience to write about. However, five challenges were identified: technical and access problems, difficulty transforming gameplay into English sentences, difficulty selecting and organizing narrative elements, tension between engagement and distraction, and different levels of student independence. The study concludes that Roblox can support narrative writing when it is embedded in a clear pedagogical design that includes genre-based instruction, guided worksheets, model texts, group writing, individual writing, vocabulary and past-tense support, and teacher questioning. Roblox should not be viewed as a stand-alone solution for writing difficulties; its main contribution is to provide concrete experience and memorable story material, while the teacher's role is to help students transform that material into structured, coherent, and accurate English narrative writing.

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