Self-experienced storytelling in an authentic context to facilitate EFL writing

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Introduction

- Writing in a foreign language is one of the most challenging and complex tasks that language learners confront (Bayat, 2014; Kroll, 1990)

- Learning this difficult skill requires conscious effort and a great deal of practice in several areas, including
  - **Writing process** (Prewriting, outlining, drafting, revising, editing)
  - **Writing type** (expository, descriptive, persuasive, and narrative)
  - **Vocabulary** (should be able to contextualize the vocabulary terms and use them in their everyday lives)
  - **Context of language usage** (more stimulus. Ex. writing in authentic contexts)
Introduction

- Authentic writing activities in the familiar context are often described as “fun” or “motivating.”
- When writing authentically, students can have and develop a sense of being audience and an understanding of how to prepare writing to go into the world (Ray, 2001).
Theory and Backgrounds
Enactivism is a theory wherein cognition and environment are inseparable, and learning is drawn from the interaction between learner and environment.

The learner is shaped by the multitude of lived experiences from her history.

Consequently, this embodied understanding has the potential to shape, enable, or limit her learning.
Inspired from *Enactivism* theory,

- what if we allow students to interact with their real world and bring their own experience into learning?
- Is it helpful for students’ learning performance?
- Authentic learning is real-life learning. It engages all the senses allowing students to create a meaningful, useful, shared outcome.
Technology supported language learning

- Technology and EFL Writing skill
  - Writing in a foreign language is one of the most challenging and complex tasks that language learners confront (Bayat, 2014; Kroll, 1990).
  - Hwang et al., (2014) proposed EFL writing system, inspired students to not only write more sentences, but to describe the target objects clearly and thoroughly.
In this study, we proposed the idea called “Authentic supported Learner-oriented Language Learning” (ALLL) and tried to provide a simple but fully-authentic learning environment for students to learn EFL writing. Two writing type (narrative or descriptive) activities were designed.

Supported by an app called ezVision, students can:

- **Write in their** actual/lived world and still receive help or scaffoldings on writing content (vocabulary) and writing process.
- **Move freely around their** surroundings and write about their authentic experiences while interacting with the environment.
Authentic learning environment

Cloud computing service

Speech Recognition

Speech translation

Image processing

Text to speech

The weather is nice today

Strawberry Cake

Red Building

今天天際很好

The weather is nice today

 Strawbery Cake

Red Building

今天天際很好
Step 1: Tap the area to capture a photo.

Step 2: After processing the photo from Step 1, the English words appear here:
- To delete the word: tap on ‘x’ icon.
- To add a new word: tap on ‘Add new’
- To revise the word: tap on the word.

Step 3: Students can:
- listen to those words
- write notes for the photo
- add this into the flashcard set.

Technology:
- Image content analysis
- Text to speech
We investigate the following research questions:

1. Which type of writing (narrative or descriptive) get better performance in authentic learning contexts?

2. How does ezVision facilitate two writings in authentic learning contexts with analysing the influences of learning behaviours on learning performance using Pearson correlation.

3. Study the styles and quality of narrative and descriptive writing in authentic contexts.
Activity Design

Experimental group

- **Story-telling activity**
  - Select one scenario, for example “My classroom”, “Walking around campus”, “Spring and Sakura”, “Refreshing atmosphere at the lake” “My sunny weekend at NCU”…..
  - Use ezVision to take several photos to illustrate a story via note writing function
  - all photos were used to constitute one story.

Control group

- **Photo description activity**
  - Use ezVision to take several photos regarding your surrounding context
  - Add description for those photos via note function individually.
Writing rubric: Five general writing dimensions: Content, Organization, Grammar, Vocabulary, Cohesion (Logical) (Klimova, 2011).
Research Variables

- **Research variables**
  - **Learning behaviors**: Quantity of “Listen” “Photo taking”, “Note”
  - **Assignments performance**: assignment 1, 2 and 3
  - **Learning performance**: Pre-test and Post-test
  - **Writing rubric**: logic organization (structure complexity), concepts (main ideas of content), accuracy (grammar), we used the rubrics for evaluating writing skills based on the study (Klimova, 2011). Five general writing dimension:
    - Content, Organization, Grammar, Vocabulary, Cohesion (Logical)
The rubrics for evaluating writing by Klimova (2011).

- **Content:** use of description and expression - development of ideas - appropriate subject matter
- **Organization:** introduction – explanation – conclusion - appropriate length
- **Vocabulary:** choice and range of words - richness - appropriate register - word-form mastery
- **Grammar:** accuracy (in use of articles, word order, tenses, prepositions, and sentence constructions)
- **Cohesion:** logical sequence of ideas

The usages of eZvision were automatically recorded in a log file. These included:

- **Listen:** number of times a student listened to suggested vocabulary words
- **Photo:** number of photos taken by a student during the experiment
- **Note:** number of notes created by a student.
A- Experimental group
  **Storytelling**
  **Narrative writing**
  N=24

B- Control group
  **Photo description**
  **Descriptive writing**
  N=22

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Week 1

- **Pre-test**

Week 2

- **Campus/Class**
  - Use EzVision to write contextual stories

- **Campus/Class**
  - Use EzVision to describe contextual pictures

Week 3

- **Food/Restaurant**
  - Use EzVision to write contextual stories

- **Food/Restaurant**
  - Use EzVision to describe contextual pictures

Week 4

- **Study in NCU**
  - Use EzVision to write contextual stories

- **Study in NCU**
  - Use EzVision to describe contextual pictures

Week 5

- **Post-test**

- **Questionnaire and Interview**

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Assignment 1

Assignment 2

Assignment 3
Results and discussions

1. Result 1 – Pretest and Post-test between Control and Experimental group.
2. Result 2 - Person correlation among research variables.
3. Result 3 – Assignment evaluation and comparisons
4. In-depth investigation by Interview
### Result 1: writing comparison of Pre-test and Post-test

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In order to create a story with photos, the students in the experimental group had to concentrate on the revision process. (construct and reconstruct their stories to make the connections clear and consistent among their photos).

Compared to descriptive writing, narrative writing activity made the students focus more on the revision process, especially regard to logical organization. In other words, the narrative writing activity helped students produce higher quality writing.

This result is in accordance with the results of (Alkaaf & Al-Bulushi, 2017), showing that the ‘storytelling strategy provides learners with a visual plan, almost a graphic organizer, helping them to organize, link and remember information’. 
### Result 2: Pearson Correlation among research variables.

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From the table, both groups were given the full functionality of ezVision, but only the students in the experimental group benefitted from the ‘photo’ and ‘note’ functions.
In writing process: Prewriting, outlining, drafting, revising, editing, the ‘photo’ function was designed for helping prewriting process, while the ‘note’ function supported the drafting, revising, and editing processes to connect different scenarios meaningfully.
## Result 3: Assignment evaluation

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Sample report.

Control group

Experimental group
**Experimental students**

“I rode on my bike and wanted to appreciate the scenery with breeze. The first place I went through was here, courts. When I saw this view, I was astonished by the light of the sun and the trees. How beautiful it I […] . Next place, I came to here near the lake. I think this place just like a park. There are trees, grass, and bridge, which may also exist in other parks.”

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**Control students**

“[The campus of NCU is a quite big and beautiful place that everyone likes. Many people would like to have a little walk in campus. Children can have picnic with parents at the grasslands on weekends. There are many department in NCU, so we can see many buildings here. Students take class in the classrooms of these buildings. They will stop their bikes around the building.]”
Result 3: Difference in senses

Experimental student

Individual experience.

“On Sunday, my mom cooked curry. This is one of my favorite dishes, especially the spicy tastes. Because a mild curry really makes me can’t tolerate to stop eating. The most special tip from my mom is that we add raisins to increase chewy. Today, I eat curry with my friend. When the curry is on the table, it smells good. But the sauce is not enough to match with rice. However, I think the price is reasonable. Instant noodles is the food what I often eat when I were busy. I always think that waiting for three minutes is very tough. Convenience and smell are the reasons why I like it”

Control student

General description

The steak restaurant and the sweat soup peddler are near the 新明 night market. They are the most famous in that area. You can have free drinks and corn soup if you have ordered a steak. You can also buy some sweet soup after dinner.
Question 1: What did you do to improve your first draft writing?

As abovementioned before, many students in experimental group mentioned in the interview that they did two tasks: “revise for organization” and “revise for coherence”. *Storytelling with a series of authentic photos helps to organize EFL writing better and motivate EFL writing more.* While, the students in the control group responded that they mostly check for grammar.
Question 2: How ezVision and writing activity improve your English study?

Most of students expressed the photo recognition of ezVision is helpful to practice English writing. Some student answers are following:
- After taking photos, I know a lot of vocabularies.
- Easy to describe photo in English
- See photo and practice more.
- Help myself to use more words instead of using an amount of familiar words. Know more words.

Around lots of students’ response that ezVision help student to connect English and their life. Some answers are following:
- Connect real-life and English.
- Know many words that can use in some life contexts and use the app anytime anywhere.
Question 3: Provide your suggestion/idea to improve the writing activity.
With this question, most students provided responses on how we should improve ezVision app like:
- Fix bugs.
- Friendlier interface.
- Improve recognition function.
- Should suggest different kinds of words (adj, adv…)
- Create shareable note so that students can learn from each other.
- Provide Chinese translation to each English word.
The results found that activity “storytelling” has positive effect on learning performance.

Storytelling group write more content with more vivid words and vocabulary to describe context than control group because storytelling usually motivates learners’ own experiences to write more and organize better.

=> Authentic experience with storytelling activities, working in combination, can promote EFL writing.
Authentic learning and storytelling activities, working in combination, can promote EFL writing.

Supported by ezVision, teachers may be willing to use innovative approaches in their classes. Teachers may find ezVision valuable in their EFL composition lessons, especially in the case of students who encounter difficulties in organizing their stories, creating content, and finishing a draft.

Teachers can design lectures with examples about the theme of storytelling and encourage students to write their personal story/diary. This will help the student to write and to practice EFL writing more frequently.
LIMITATION & FUTURE STUDY

- The size of the sample was relatively small, short duration.
- The techniques employed in the study (i.e., automatic image recognition) are not mature enough. In most cases, the vocabulary words that are assigned for the photos are nouns and phrases.
- Artificial intelligence in photo recognition should also be considered to make more sentence and fluency through cloud service in near future.
- For more interesting learning activities, we could design another collaborative opportunity for authentic tasks.
THANK YOU!