

Transforming Narrative Text Instruction in Senior High School: Integrating Digital Storytelling and the SFL-GBA Approach

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Abstract

In the digital era, learning increasingly involves multimodal resources, yet explicit teaching of how images and texts contribute to meaning-making through digital storytelling remains underexplored. This study examines the integration of Systemic Functional Linguistics Genre-Based Pedagogy (SFL-GBA) into the teaching of multimodal narrative texts at a private senior high school. A case study was conducted with 28 tenth graders through a team-teaching approach involving an English teacher and a lecturer, with data collected from eight classroom observations. Findings reveal that SFL-GBA effectively supported multimodal learning: during the Building Knowledge of the Field (BKoF) and Modeling of the Text (MoT) stages, students analyzed Field, Tenor, and Mode across texts and images, while in the Joint and Independent Construction stages, they composed narrative texts and transformed them into digital storytelling projects. The study concludes that explicit scaffolding and culturally responsive teaching within SFL-GBA enhance students' multimodal literacy and narrative competence through digital storytelling. These findings also have important pedagogical implications, indicating that SFL-GBA can guide teachers in designing multimodal instruction and inform future curriculum development for integrating digital storytelling.

Keywords

Digital Storytelling; Genre-Based Pedagogy; Multimodality; Narrative Texts; Systemic Functional Linguistics

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1. INTRODUCTION

Narrative text is a cornerstone of English language instruction, fostering students' analytical skills, creativity, and cultural literacy. By engaging with narratives, learners develop their understanding of cause-effect relationships, character development, and moral value (Fajriah et al., 2021; Pacheco-Costa & Guzmán-Simón, 2020; Suryani et al., 2021). Beyond individual skill development, narratives serve as a powerful medium for transmitting and exploring diverse cultural values, thereby enhancing students' cross-cultural awareness (Simel, 2024). This dual function makes narrative instruction crucial for fostering not only logical reasoning and creative thinking but also deeper cultural understanding (Nurmawarni et al., 2022; Qatrinada & Apoko, 2024).



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Despite this clear importance, teaching narrative writing remains a persistent challenge, particularly for students in Asian contexts like Indonesia, who often struggle with organizing the schematic structure of English narrative texts (Kitajroonchai et al., 2022; Wale & Bogale, 2021). These difficulties highlight a critical need for innovative and effective pedagogical approaches that address structural challenges and enhance student engagement and creativity. Traditional methods often fail to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge of narrative structure and the practical application of imaginative writing (Emilia & Hamied, 2015; Hyland, 2019). Consequently, many students find the process tedious and are unable to produce compelling and well-structured narratives (Amelia & Zulfitri, 2024).

Digital Storytelling (DST) has emerged as a promising solution to these challenges by combining verbal, visual, and auditory elements to engage learners actively (Meier, 2022). This integration of multiple media formats taps into the visual and aural learning styles of today's digital natives, making the learning process more intuitive and stimulating (Davey & Benjaminsen, 2021; Özkaya, 2022). Importantly, DST aligns with the principle of multimodality, a concept central to the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) perspective on meaning-making across various semiotic resources (Fajriah et al., 2021). While digital tools can boost motivation and creativity, they require a systematic pedagogical framework to achieve sustainable learning outcomes (Ahada et al., 2024; Maolida et al., 2025).

The Systemic Functional Linguistics Genre-Based Approach (SFL-GBA) provides this framework through a structured teaching and learning cycle: Building Knowledge of the Field (BKoF), Modeling of the Text (MoT), Joint Construction of the Text (JCoT), and Independent Construction of the Text (ICoT) (Nagao, 2023; Zhai & Razali, 2023). This approach guides students to analyze and produce contextually meaningful writing critically (R. A. Fitri, 2024; Sinta Dewi, 2021). SFL-GBA's explicit scaffolding ensures that learners are equipped with the linguistic tools necessary to construct coherent and effective narratives (Emilia & Hamied, 2015). By combining the creative power of DST with the structural guidance of SFL-GBA, educators can address both the imaginative and analytical demands of narrative writing (H. A. Fitri et al., 2021; Goestina et al., 2022).

Recent research in the Indonesian context highlights the effectiveness of DST in enhancing narrative writing. Studies by Riani et al. (2021) and Fitri (2024) have demonstrated that DST significantly improves writing skills, motivation, and creativity among EFL learners. Similarly, Amelia & Zulfitri (2024) and Sartika & Syafryadin (2025) show that DST supports both writing and reading comprehension in narrative learning. However, these studies have largely treated DST and SFL-GBA as separate domains, without fully exploring the potential of integrating a structured, genre-based approach with the creative and multimodal affordances of digital storytelling. There is a notable gap in the literature on how these two powerful instructional frameworks can complement each other to create a more holistic learning experience (R. A. Fitri, 2024).

This study addresses that gap by investigating the integration of SFL-GBA and DST to enhance narrative writing instruction. By bridging linguistics, pedagogy, and technology, this research aims to provide an evidence-based instructional model that shows how explicit scaffolding within SFL-GBA, when combined with the creative power of DST, can transform narrative text instruction for EFL learners. The goal is not merely to describe the effectiveness of two separate approaches but to demonstrate the synergistic benefits of their deliberate combination. This research not only offers an innovative pedagogical model but also contributes to the field of English language education by demonstrating a comprehensive, integrated approach to teaching multimodal literacy (Fajriah et al., 2020; Zhai & Razali, 2023).

2. METHODS

Research Design

To achieve its purpose, this study employed an instrumental case study design, which is well-suited for exploring teaching practices within authentic classroom contexts without data manipulation (Çalışkan Kılıç & Bumen, 2024). The choice of a case study was based on two main considerations. First, the research was conducted in a natural classroom setting, ensuring that the teaching and learning process unfolded authentically. Second, the study was not intended to produce generalizable findings but rather to generate a rich, contextualized account of how Digital Storytelling can be integrated with the Systemic Functional Linguistics–Genre-Based Approach (SFL-GBA) to transform narrative text instruction in senior high school. The SFL-GBA framework is effective in supporting multimodal meaning-making in narrative learning (Fajriah et al., 2021). Digital Storytelling has proven to enhance students' narrative speaking skills and engagement (Ningsih, 2023). More recent studies also demonstrate how GBA can strengthen cohesion and coherence in text construction at the senior high school level (Emilia & Hamied, 2015) and highlight the broader impact of genre/SFL theory in advancing literacy education (Unsworth & Mills, 2020). Additionally, research on Digital Storytelling underscores its capacity to promote students' creativity, collaboration, and multimodal communication (Smeda et al., 2014). Taken together, these insights establish a strong theoretical and methodological foundation for this study's case-based exploration.

Research Participants

This research was conducted at a private Islamic senior high school in West Java, Indonesia. The school was purposefully selected because it has begun adopting digital platforms to support teaching and learning, making it a relevant context for investigating the integration of Digital Storytelling in English instruction. The participants were 28 eleventh-grade students enrolled in the English subject, representing a typical classroom size in the local educational context. Their participation was particularly meaningful, as they are at a stage where narrative text learning is emphasized in the curriculum and digital literacy skills are increasingly essential. In addition, the instructional process was facilitated through a collaborative team-teaching model involving one English teacher from the school and one English lecturer from a university. The English teacher contributed practical classroom expertise and contextual knowledge of the students, while the lecturer provided pedagogical insights grounded in the SFL-GBA framework and Digital Storytelling. This collaboration ensured both pedagogical relevance and methodological rigor, allowing the research to capture the practical implementation of innovative approaches in a real-world classroom setting.

Instrument

The primary instrument used in this study was classroom observation, conducted over eight meetings in a senior high school English class. The observations were framed under the stages of the Systemic Functional Linguistics–Genre-Based Approach (SFL-GBA), which guided the sequence of learning activities and allowed the researcher to capture how Digital Storytelling was integrated into the teaching of narrative texts. The topic of school bullying was chosen as the central theme for the narrative project because it reflected a pressing social issue in the local community, thereby ensuring both relevance and authenticity in the learning experience. The instructional process unfolded across the four main stages.

First, Building Knowledge of Field (BKoF) for two meetings. In this stage, students explored school bullying by discussing real cases reported in local media, sharing their own experiences, and analyzing its causes and consequences in school settings. They were also introduced to relevant vocabulary and expressions for talking about bullying in English, ensuring they had sufficient background knowledge to engage meaningfully with subsequent tasks.

Second, Modelling of the text for three meetings. In this phase, students were exposed to several narrative texts—both printed and digital—centered on bullying scenarios. Together with the teacher and lecturer, they analyzed the generic structure (orientation, complication, resolution, and coda) and the linguistic features (use of the past tense, material and relational processes, conjunctions, and evaluative language) of these narratives. At this stage, visual and multimodal resources were also examined, enabling students to see how images, sounds, and words could work together to convey meaning in digital stories.

Third, Joint Construction of the Text for two meetings. The class collaboratively constructed a narrative text about bullying. Guided by the teacher and lecturer, students worked in groups to draft a storyline, develop characters, and design visual elements that highlighted both the problem of bullying and possible solutions. The joint activity not only reinforced their understanding of narrative structure but also fostered collaboration, meaning negotiation, and critical reflection on social issues. Fourth, Independent Construction of the Text for 1 meeting. Independent Construction of the Text (2 meetings). In the final stage, students independently created their own digital stories on bullying, drawing from the knowledge and skills acquired in the previous phases. Each student developed a script, selected or created images, recorded narration, and compiled the multimodal elements into a cohesive digital narrative. This stage demonstrated students' ability to transfer learning into independent production, showcasing their competence in both narrative writing and multimodal digital literacy.

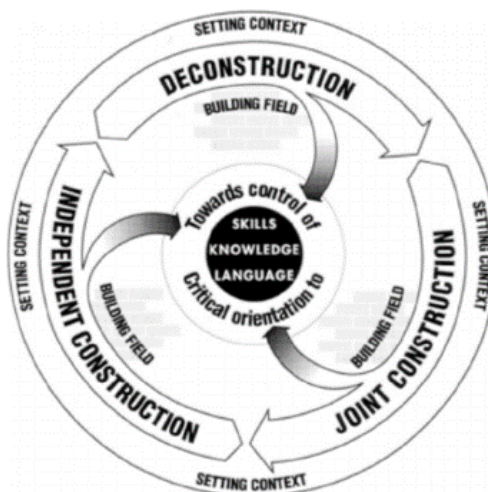


Figure 1. Teaching Cycle of SFL-Genre-Based Approach

Data Analysis

The data obtained from classroom observations were analyzed qualitatively using an inductive thematic approach, allowing recurrent patterns and themes to emerge from the instructional process, consistent with the principles of case study research. To strengthen analytical rigor, the emerging themes were interpreted using complementary theoretical perspectives. *First*, the Systemic Functional Linguistics–Genre Based Approach (SFL-GBA), particularly Nagao (2019), served as an interpretive lens for understanding how students progressed through the pedagogical stages of building knowledge, modeling, joint construction, and independent construction. Rather than functioning as a linguistic analytical framework, SFL-GBA helped explain how the instructional design supported students' engagement with narrative text learning. *Second*, to account for the multimodal dimension, multimodal discourse theory (Bateman et al., 2017; O'Halloran et al., 2016, 2021) was used to interpret how students integrated written text with images and other semiotic resources as they created digital stories. By triangulating thematic patterns with these interpretive lenses, the study captured both the pedagogical processes and students' multimodal meaning-making practices. This multi-layered analytical approach aligns with the nature of case study research. It supports the study's aim of exploring how Digital

Storytelling, informed by SFL-GBA, could transform narrative text instruction in a resource-constrained EFL context.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Findings

This section elaborates on the findings and discusses how SFL-GBA pedagogy facilitated the use of Digital Storytelling (DST) in the teaching of narrative multimodal texts.

Building Knowledge of Field (BKoF)

The implementation of BKoF unfolded across two meetings, each designed to gradually establish students' conceptual and linguistic readiness for narrative writing through Digital Storytelling. In the first meeting, the teacher introduced the lesson with a video on school bullying, a topic deliberately chosen for its high contextual relevance to students' everyday realities. By anchoring the lesson in a familiar and socially significant issue, the activity aligned with the principles of culturally responsive pedagogy, ensuring that students perceived the learning task as both meaningful and authentic.



Figure 2. A sample scene of the video (taken from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cYgiud-PCIQ>)

At this stage, the teacher encouraged students to participate in discussions about bullying actively, inviting them to share personal stories and reflect on their experiences as witnesses or participants. This dialogic approach not only fostered engagement but also scaffolded students' critical awareness of social issues. Through guided vocabulary generation, learners compiled terms related to bullying (e.g., "victim," "verbal bullying," "cyberbullying") as well as lexical items connected to narrative sequencing ("first," "then," "finally"). Such vocabulary-building activities laid the groundwork for both content knowledge and language resources, which are central to the SFL-GBA pedagogical cycle. Furthermore, the activity was not limited to oral discussion. Students began interacting with the video's multimodal script, examining how images, narration, and textual elements shape meaning. This practice allowed learners to develop a preliminary awareness of multimodal construction, preparing them to critically interpret how stories can be told beyond verbal language alone.

The second meeting further consolidated this foundation. The teacher replayed a segment of the video featuring a monologue on bullying, which became the focal point for deepening students' conceptual understanding.



Figure 3. The sample scene of the video emphasizes the bullying types (source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pDG1-BCZvTE&t=36s>)

In this session, students brainstormed different types of bullying—physical, relational, verbal, and cyber—and linked them to incidents that might occur in their school environment. Such activities expanded their vocabulary repertoire while situating learning in personally resonant contexts. The teacher then directed students toward a text analysis task, requiring them to examine short written passages describing bullying scenarios. This was followed by a categorization activity in which learners identified key participants (e.g., bully, victim, bystanders), settings (e.g., classroom, playground, online), and types of bullying.

The combination of these tasks indicated that the BKoF stage functioned as more than a knowledge-preparation phase; it served as a space for critical engagement where students connected their lived experiences with academic literacy practices. By the end of the stage, students not only possessed richer vocabulary and thematic awareness but also began developing the analytical lens necessary for moving into the subsequent stage, Modelling of the Text (MoT).

Modelling of the Text (MoT)

The MoT stage was conducted over three meetings, each aimed at deepening students' understanding of the narrative genre by closely engaging with the theme of bullying through both visual and verbal texts. During these sessions, the teacher scaffolded students' comprehension of narrative structure, guiding them to identify the social purpose of narrative texts (to entertain, to inform, or to deliver moral lessons) and the generic stages of the narrative (orientation, complication, resolution, and coda). By analyzing the characters and events presented in the Digital Storytelling (DST) videos, students were encouraged to recognize the typical features that distinguish narratives from other text types. At the same time, the teacher introduced the metafunctional dimensions of the texts. Students analyzed the Field by examining the storyline and key events; the Tenor by identifying the participants (bully, victim, bystanders) and exploring their power relations as reflected through facial expressions, gestures, and interactions in the video; and the Mode by discussing how the multimodal presentation, such as the positioning of participants in the images and the interplay between script and visuals shaped meanings.



Figure 4. The example of a picture analyzed to show the material process and the Given-New concept
As illustrated in the image above, the teacher explicitly highlighted the meaning-making process

that emerged from the integration of images and script. This approach encouraged students to perceive the narrative not only as a written or spoken text but also as a multimodal construction of meaning, where visuals and language work together to build the story. In addition to exploring the text's contextual aspects, students were systematically introduced to the linguistic features of narratives. They examined the use of past tense to recount events, action processes to describe behaviors, mental processes to capture feelings and thoughts, relational processes to establish identities and conditions, and dialogic expressions to represent interactions. Attention was also drawn to the role of adjectives and adverbs in adding descriptive depth and evaluative stance to the story.

Furthermore, the students also engaged in activities that highlighted the linguistic features of the narrative text while simultaneously aligning them with the visual elements of the DST. For example, when encountering action verbs such as *hit*, *push*, or *ignore*, students were encouraged to connect these to the corresponding scenes in the video, thus recognizing how language and image mutually reinforce meaning. Similarly, the use of adjectives and adverbs to describe characters' emotions or the intensity of their actions was cross-checked against the story's facial expressions, gestures, and visual cues. Through this process, students gradually developed an awareness that texts and images must complement each other in constructing coherent meanings, which fostered their ability to interpret and produce multimodal narratives critically.

Taken together, these activities underscored the functional orientation of grammar teaching within the MoT stage. Rather than treating grammar as a set of isolated rules, the teacher explicitly demonstrated how grammatical elements contribute to meaning-making in narrative texts. As a result, students came to understand the narrative genre not only at the level of structure and vocabulary but also in terms of its contextual, interpersonal, and linguistic functions. This deliberate and scaffolded engagement positioned students to apply their knowledge purposefully in the subsequent stages of the learning cycle.

Joint Construction of the Text (JCoT)

In this stage, students engaged in a scribing activity in which the teacher provided sample texts and guided the class in collaboratively constructing a script. The main purpose of this activity was to strengthen their understanding of the narrative genre by allowing them to actively participate in shaping the text. As the script was being developed, the teacher and students worked together to ensure that the emerging text captured the essential elements of a narrative, such as orientation, complication, and resolution, while also connecting the storyline to the visual resources from the DST materials.

Once the text had been co-constructed, the teacher facilitated a reflective discussion, drawing attention to how well the students' script aligned with both the narrative's generic structure and the multimodal representations in the pictures. For instance, when students mistakenly used the simple present tense instead of the past tense to recount an event, the teacher provided corrections and clarified the rule, emphasizing that narratives conventionally use past-tense verbs to recount actions. In addition, the teacher highlighted the importance of incorporating dialogic expressions (such as direct speech or conversations between characters) to make the narrative more vivid and authentic.



Figure 5. The scribing activity

Through this collaborative writing process, students not only learned how to construct a coherent narrative text but also received immediate teacher feedback that helped them refine their linguistic choices and narrative strategies. This stage functioned as a bridge between analyzing existing texts and independently producing their own multimodal stories, reinforcing their grasp of both the linguistic features and the meaning-making potential of visual-verbal integration.

Independent Construction of the Text (ICoT)

In the final stage, Independent Construction of the Text (ICoT), students worked in groups to independently create their own stories on the theme of school bullying. Each group was responsible for producing both the visual design (through drawings or illustrations) and the written narrative scripts. This stage provided opportunities for students to transfer and apply the knowledge they had gained in previous stages (BKoF, MoT, and JCoT) into a more autonomous meaning-making practice.



Figure 6. The sample of students' drawings in the ICoT Stage

The visual products revealed a clear attempt by students to translate their narrative ideas into images, thereby illustrating the dynamic process of meaning-making across modes. As shown in Figure 6, the drawing highlights the bully's central role, prominently positioned in the composition, with exaggerated facial expressions that convey aggression and dominance. Meanwhile, the sad expressions of the victims are deliberately drawn to emphasize vulnerability and emotional impact. In addition, the participants on the right and left were illustrated in a more blurred, less detailed manner, which served to foreground the main conflict and direct viewers' attention to the central interaction. The presence of verbal bullying signals in the image—such as mocking words or speech bubbles—further demonstrated how text and image worked together to construct meaning. Through these combined strategies, students conveyed relational power between participants in the story, which closely aligned with the field, tenor, and mode dimensions they had previously explored in the MoT stage. This suggests that students were beginning to recognize that texts and images must mutually support one another in order to produce a coherent and impactful narrative.

In developing their stories, students not only considered the generic structure and linguistic features of narrative texts but also thought carefully about how visual elements could support and extend their written scripts. For example, their illustrations captured action verbs by depicting characters in motion, represented the story's focal participants through positioning and perspective, and expressed emotions through facial expressions and body gestures. In addition, several groups experimented with integrating dialogic structures by visually representing conversations between characters, reinforcing the oral exchanges already scripted in their texts.

Throughout this process, the teacher continued to provide targeted feedback to each group, ensuring that the narratives adhered to the expected textual conventions and maintained coherence between the visual and verbal components. This highlights that, even in the ICoT stage, the teacher's role remained crucial—not only as a facilitator but also as a controller of classroom activities, offering

explicit guidance to refine both linguistic and multimodal aspects of the students' work.



Figure 7. Teacher's feedback activity

The picture above illustrates how the teacher actively provided feedback to each group's work, ensuring that the relation between image and text was meaningfully fulfilled. In doing so, the teacher guided students to pay closer attention to key aspects, including the types of bullying that needed to be clearly visualized, the use of dialogic expressions in the narrative, and the representation of power relations among participants. This scaffolding emphasized that multimodality is not simply about placing pictures beside text, but about constructing complementary layers of meaning in which images and written language work together to reinforce the message. Through this feedback process, students were encouraged to refine both their visual and verbal representations, resulting in a clearer, more coherent narrative that conveyed the story's intended meanings.

Discussion

The activities in the Building Knowledge of the Field (BKoF) stage, as described above, align with Syarifah & Gunawan (2016), who argue that this stage is designed to provide students with a strong foundation of topic knowledge before moving into more complex tasks. In this study, the teacher did not merely play the video but also explicitly emphasized the interconnection between image and text from the very beginning. This resonates with more recent findings by Lim et al. (2022) and Carcamo & Pino (2025), who found that integrating multimodal resources early in instruction helps students to develop awareness of how meanings are co-constructed across modes. The Modeling of the Text (MoT) stage further demonstrates the significance of scaffolding and explicit teaching. The teacher guided students in analyzing narrative texts, both visual and verbal, and made the genre's stages, linguistic features, and multimodal aspects visible. This echoes Yawiloeng (2022) and recent studies (Danielsson & Selander, 2016; Parangu et al., 2024; Unsworth & Mills, 2020). MoT is a critical point for explicit modeling and scaffolding in multimodal literacy pedagogy. These studies show that when teachers foreground multimodality, learners are better equipped to analyze and replicate multimodal texts.

In the Joint Construction of the Text (JCoT) stage, the teacher's role as feedback provider was evident. Through collaborative text construction, students received guidance and corrections—for example, on verb tense and dialogic expressions—while simultaneously reflecting on the interplay between image and text. This aligns with the view of Van Hoe et al. (2024) on the importance of dialogic scaffolding, and is reinforced by more recent evidence from Parangu et al. (2024) and Unsworth et al. (2022), who underline that formative feedback in joint construction supports students in transitioning toward independent multimodal production. The Independent Construction of the Text (ICoT) stage highlighted students' multimodal competence. Here, students independently created multimodal narratives on the theme of bullying, combining images and texts to express meaning. The visual

products showed their ability to represent narrative stages, power relations, and dialogic structures through both linguistic and visual choices. This demonstrates what Linder & Falk-Ross (2024) has long argued that images and language complement one another in meaning-making. More recent works Lim & Querol-Julián (2024; Unsworth & Mills, 2020) have also confirmed that tasks requiring students to integrate multiple modes foster deeper literacy practices in contemporary classrooms.

Overall, the four stages (BKoF, MoT, JCoT, and ICoT) reveal that the SFL-GBA cycle remains highly relevant to multimodal literacy pedagogy while also adaptable to contexts where digital or visual resources are central. This study adds to the growing body of (Danielsson & Selander, 2016; Parangu et al., 2024) that multimodal approaches not only enhance genre-based writing instruction but also provide learners with opportunities to build critical awareness of how meanings are shaped across semiotic modes.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that the SFL-GBA pedagogy effectively accommodates multimodal teaching by integrating the dimensions of field, tenor, and mode not only in linguistic texts but also in their visual representations. Through scaffolding and explicit teaching at each stage of the cycle, students were guided to understand how images and words can jointly construct meaning, for instance, in visualizing types of bullying, expressing dialogic interactions, and representing power relations among participants. This process highlights that multimodal literacy is not simply about adding images to text, but about fostering students' awareness of the complementary relationship between modes in creating coherent narratives. Ultimately, integrating visual and verbal semiotic resources within the SFL-GBA framework enriched students' meaning-making practices and equipped them with the skills to design and interpret multimodal texts critically.

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