

Research Article

The Effect of the Tale-Tweaking Tool on Students' Narrative Writing Performance

Noraziah Mohd Amin^{1,*}, Anwar Farhan Mohamad Marzaini², Muhammad Haziq Abd Rashid³, Nur Fatin Shahmina Mohd Fauzey⁴, and Mohd Firdaus Abdullah⁵

¹ Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Pulau Pinang Branch, Malaysia; noraziahm@uitm.edu.my;  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6430-4412>

² Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Pulau Pinang Branch, Malaysia; anwarmarzaini@uitm.edu.my;  ORCID ID (register at <https://orcid.org/>)

³ Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia; haziq rashid@uitm.edu.my;  ORCID ID (register at <https://orcid.org/>)

⁴ Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Pulau Pinang Branch, Malaysia; fatinshahmina@uitm.edu.my;  ORCID ID (register at <https://orcid.org/>)

⁵ Faculty of Electrical Engineering, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Pulau Pinang Branch, Malaysia; f.abdullah@uitm.edu.my;  ORCID ID (register at <https://orcid.org/>)

* Correspondence: noraziahm@uitm.edu.my

Abstract: The Tale-Tweaking Tool (TTT) is a cutting-edge smartphone application designed to enhance the storytelling skills of first-semester diploma students at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM). Students accustomed to academic writing, particularly expository writing, often struggle to compose a concise 100-word narrative paragraph, a requirement of UiTM's new English language curriculum for first-semester diploma students (LCC111). To address these challenges, TTT provides lectures, multiple-choice questions based on the lectures, and step-by-step exercises to develop students' ability to craft succinct narratives. After engaging with the app, an online survey was conducted to gather feedback on its effectiveness. The survey results indicate that TTT significantly enhanced students' understanding of sentence construction, story sequencing, concise writing and narrative elements such as plot, character, and setting. In conclusion, TTT serves as a valuable teaching tool that greatly enhances narrative writing skills, making it an essential component of UiTM's current language curriculum. Its potential for wider adoption and further refinement could revolutionise creative writing instruction, ultimately benefiting a broader audience.

Keywords: narrative writing; mobile application; Tale-Tweaking Tool (TTT)

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1. INTRODUCTION

The popularity of brief written compositions is closely linked to their applicability and suitability for assessment in literary and creative writing courses (Kiosses, 2021). Additionally, the growing interest in microfiction raises several research questions regarding its narrative techniques, thematic and morphological characteristics, and potential implications for the basic idea of narrativity and the act of reading narratives (Kiosses, 2021). Crafting a narrative involves more than just basic writing skills; it also requires mastery of genre-specific techniques and the ability to organize thoughts, articulate experiences, and deliver a meaningful resolution, whether the content is factual or fictional

(Kiuohara et al., 2024). As a key component of creative writing, narrative composition engages both cognitive complexity and imaginative thinking (Kirby et al., 2021; Lonigro et al., 2020). Given these demands, it is essential to employ effective instructional tools that can help students learn to construct well-developed stories efficiently.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Narrative writing is an essential skill in creative and academic contexts. It requires students to master not only the fundamental aspects of writing procedures but also the ability to construct engaging and coherent narration. However, many students face significant challenges in crafting effective narrative compositions. One of the key difficulties faced by students is the need to integrate intrinsic and extrinsic elements into their narrative writing effectively. As highlighted by Fauzi and Pratama (2021), narrative writing necessitates both creative thinking and technical expertise, making it a cognitively demanding task. Additionally, Borromeo et al. (2017) affirmed that the process of generating ideas, structuring a storyline, and ensuring coherence can be overwhelming for students who lack prior exposure to creative writing. This challenge is further reinforced by Freeman and Phillips (2021), who found that students often experience anxiety, apprehension, and discomfort when engaging in creative writing tasks, leading to a lack of confidence and motivation.

Despite the increasing popularity of microfiction and its relevance in contemporary writing practices, Kiosses (2021) identified a notable gap in the availability of structured, technology-driven interventions to support students in narrative composition. Transitional classroom instruction often fails to provide the individualised support needed for students to develop confidence in their storytelling abilities. While various learning aids exist, they generally lack an interactive, step-by-step approach tailored to the needs of novice writers. Recognising these challenges, the researchers have developed the Tale-Tweaking Tool (TTT), a mobile application designed to provide guided instruction in narrative writing. TTT aims to bridge the gap between conventional teaching methods and the need for a more engaging, accessible, and effective approach to storytelling instruction. By offering structured lectures, multiple-choice questions, and interactive exercises, TTT seeks to enhance students' understanding of sentence construction, narrative structure and key storytelling elements such as plot, character development, and setting. Based on these ideas, the present research intends to achieve the objective and test the hypothesis below:

Research objective: To identify if Tale-Tweaking Tool (TTT) significantly improves students' narrative writing scores

H1: The use of the Tale-Tweaking Tool (TTT) significantly improves students' narrative writing scores

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Writing Microfiction and Narrative

Microfiction, also known as flash fiction or sudden fiction, is a literary form distinguished by its brevity, often comprising fewer than 100 words (Kiosses, 2021). Writers of this genre are challenged to encapsulate complex ideas within tight constraints, often highlighting pivotal moments that deepen the reader's understanding of key themes like violence, existence, and the human condition (Naimou, 2021). Its concise structure demands careful word choice, narrative precision, and a high level of creativity, making it a valuable pedagogical tool for developing expressive writing. According to Kiosses (2021), microfiction mirrors the fragmented yet intense storytelling patterns of today's digital communication.

Writers employ various methods to produce microfiction, such as using writing prompts, adhering to strict word limits, or incorporating visual cues. Popular formats include the "drabble," which is exactly

100 words, and the “69er,” a story with no more than 69 words (Howitt-Dring, 2011). These formats allow writers to express significant revelations or emotional shifts within a compressed narrative frame (Howitt-Dring, 2011). Furthermore, microfiction has gained recognition in educational settings for its role in fostering students’ narrative thinking, evaluative skills, and creativity (Naimou, 2021). In summary, microfiction represents the intersection of concise writing and narrative skill, offering both creative opportunities and literary challenges. As technology evolves, microfiction continues to grow in relevance, exemplifying a dynamic and efficient mode of storytelling in contemporary literature.

2.2 Difficulties with Writing Narratives

Students often face considerable obstacles when writing narratives, including difficulties in idea generation, maintaining logical event sequences, and achieving textual coherence. These challenges frequently result in underdeveloped narratives and hinder students’ writing proficiency (Kiuhara et al., 2024). A lack of experience in creative writing further complicates the inclusion of storytelling features in student narratives (Lonigro et al., 2020). Narrative writing also demands clear organisation, typically following a traditional structure of introduction, development, climax, and resolution which students commonly struggle with, especially when transitioning from more structured expository texts (Thompson, 2023; Kim & Zagata, 2024). Additionally, emotional barriers such as anxiety and low self-confidence often discourage students from engaging effectively with narrative writing tasks (Freeman & Phillips, 2021).

The absence of personalised feedback in conventional classrooms further impedes students’ ability to improve narrative skills. Strobl et al. (2019) emphasise that scaffolding strategies are essential for guiding students in crafting coherent stories. Without such support, learners frequently encounter difficulties in areas like character development, plot pacing, and story resolution (Fauzi & Pratama, 2021). However, these barriers can be addressed through digital instructional tools that offer structured learning paths and targeted feedback (Kim & Zagata, 2024; Fauzi & Pratama, 2021).

2.3 Utilising Digital Tools for Writing Narratives

Integrating digital tools in writing instruction has been widely acknowledged for improving student engagement and performance. Research suggests that applications featuring interactive and game-like components can significantly increase learners’ motivation and creativity in writing (Nadeem et al., 2023). In particular, platforms that use scaffolded learning frameworks help students organise their ideas more clearly and improve overall writing fluency (Bektiyan & Ferdiansyah, 2023).

One of the key strengths of digital writing tools is their capacity to deliver immediate feedback and customised support. Unlike traditional classrooms where feedback may be delayed, digital platforms often provide instant responses that guide students in grammar, sentence construction, and narrative skills (Strobl et al., 2019; Kim & Zagata, 2024). Moreover, gamification elements such as rewards and progress tracking further stimulate student engagement in writing tasks (Ryan et al., 2006). Digital applications also support storytelling development by offering step-by-step instructional support throughout the writing process. According to Tifrea (2024), structured guidance at different stages of composition, particularly in organising narrative content, plays a critical role in strengthening students’ writing abilities.

2.4 Tale-Tweaking Tool (TTT) Application

The Tale-Tweaking Tool (TTT) is a mobile application designed to enhance the narrative writing skills of particularly the first-semester diploma students at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) who are completing the course LCC111: English for Communicative Competence I. It offers step-by-step exercises to address students’ challenges in microfiction writing, particularly in story sequencing, sentence construction, and textual coherence. Its core features include “Story Connector,” which

develops sentence starter creativity; "Tale Weaver," which aids in logical sentence arrangement; and "The Grandmaster," which reinforces narrative writing concepts. Through the integration of guided instruction and audio-visual design, TTT supplements traditional writing pedagogy, fosters self-directed learning, and aligns with Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) frameworks, thereby contributing to advancements in digital education (Kudus et al., 2024).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study employed an experimental research methodology to assess the effects of the Tale-Tweaking Tool (TTT) on students' narrative writing skills. As noted by Creswell and Creswell (2018), educational interventions can be evaluated comprehensively through experimental research, as it facilitates the identification of systematic differences among the learners. The participants were assigned into two major groups, with one serving as the control group and the other acting as the experimental group that utilised TTT. The use of TTT functioned as the independent variable, whereas the participants' narrative writing performance (through their narrative writing scores) represented the dependent variable. Narrative writing performance was assessed using a t-test to evaluate quantitative improvement, and to act as the evidence to TTT's impact on narrative writing performance. Students' experiences, perceptions and challenges encountered during their use of TTT were captured qualitatively through interviews. The study adhered to traditional experimental procedures such as participant selection, random assignment of treatment, controlling for extraneous variables, and maintaining consistency in the data collection process (Braun & Clarke (2006). The participants for the interviews were randomly selected from the group of students who used TTT. The approaches employed in this study are expected to enhance the existing literature in terms of narrative writing research.

3.2 Participants and Sampling Method

This study employed purposive sampling, which is used to locate individuals with particular attributes, traits, or characteristics that are important to the research focus Bougie and Sekaran (2020). The sample comprised first-semester diploma students who were enrolled in the LCC111 course and had access to the Tale-Tweaking Tool (TTT). This ensured that only individuals who had previously interacted with the tool and were willing to provide feedback were included in the study. Purposive sampling is regarded as one of the best approaches in educational research because it enhances the chances of choosing participants with relevant prior experience that can lead to supplying the rich and insightful data Patton (2015). In addition, the selection of participants was also based on the availability of devices, given that TTT was only compatible with certain device systems.

3.3 Research Instrument

3.3.1 LCC111 Narrative Writing Assessment

Students' narrative writing skills were evaluated through a pre-existing task in the students' final evaluation in the LCC111 course (English for Communicative Competence I). This evaluation asked students to compose a narrative of not less than 80 words and not exceeding 100 words from a pre-defined starting sentence and through the eyes of a provided character. As previously stated, this task served as a post-test for both control and experimental groups. The control group was made up of students with no exposure to TTT, while the experimental group was given access to TTT and its narrative writing exercises before the test. Although the application was not utilised during the test, participants in the experimental group had an exposure to guided practices prior to the test.

3.4 Data Collection Method

Students were divided into two groups: a control group with no exposure to the Tale-Tweaking Tool (TTT) and an experimental group that used TTT for practice before the test. During the final evaluation for the LCC111 course, all students were asked to write a short narrative of 80 to 100 words based on a given sentence and from a specific character's perspective. The test was done individually in a controlled classroom setting, without any reference materials or use of TTT during the task. The experimental group had earlier used the app's lectures and exercises to prepare. Participants' narratives were graded using a pre-designed rubric focusing on coherence and cohesion, vocabulary and grammar, imagination and creativity, and use of narrative elements. This set of criteria made it possible to measure the degree of difference in performance between the two groups in order to determine the effects of TTT as a learning tool on preparatory learning.

3.5 Data Analysis Method

The data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 29. A Pearson correlation analysis was performed to examine the relationship between the use of the Tale-Tweaking Tool (TTT) and students' narrative writing scores. These statistical procedures were applied to determine whether the use of TTT had a significant impact on students' writing performance. To further explore the predictive relationship, a simple linear regression analysis was performed to determine whether narrative writing scores could significantly predict the likelihood of TTT usage.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Demographic Data

Table 1. Participants Demographic Information

Demographic details	f	%
Gender		
Male	31	48.4
Female	33	51.6
Age		
19	64	100
Education level		
Diploma	64	100
TOTAL	64	100

A total of 64 participants took part in the study. The gender distribution was relatively balanced, with 48.4% male (n = 31) and 51.6% female (n = 33) participants. All participants were 19 years old, accounting for 100% of the sample. In terms of education level, all respondents were enrolled in a diploma programme (100%). These demographic characteristics indicate a homogenous group in terms of age and education level, with a nearly equal representation of gender.

4.2 Correlation Data

Table 2. Correlation between TTT Use and Narrative Writing Score Data

		Used/Did not use TTT	Narrative writing score
Used/Did not use TTT	Pearson Correlation	1	.351**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.004
	N	64	64
Narrative writing score	Pearson Correlation	.351**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	
	N	64	64

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The Pearson correlation value ($r = 0.351$) indicates a moderate positive correlation between the use of TTT and students' narrative writing scores. This means that students who used TTT tend to have higher narrative writing scores compared to those who did not use it. The p -value of 0.004 is below the 0.01 significance level, suggesting that the correlation is statistically significant. This indicates that there is a very low probability (less than 1%) that this relationship occurred by chance. Since the correlation is significant at the 0.01 level, we can conclude that there is a meaningful positive association between the use of TTT and narrative writing performance. The results suggest that using TTT may have a beneficial impact on students' narrative writing skills.

4.3 Regression Data

Table 3. Summary of Simple Linear Regression Predicting Narrative Writing Score from TTT Use (H1)

Hypothesis Path	R ²	F	df	β	t	p	Result
H1: TTT use → Narrative Writing Score	.123	8.73	(1, 62)	.351	2.96	.004	supported

For H1: The use of the Tale-Tweaking Tool (TTT) significantly improves students' narrative writing scores, a simple linear regression analysis was performed to test whether TTT usage predicts students' performance in narrative writing. The independent variable was TTT usage (coded as 1 = did not use, 2 = used), and the dependent variable was the narrative writing score. The regression model was statistically significant, $F(1, 62) = 8.73$, $p = .004$, supporting H1. The model explained approximately 12.3% of the variance in narrative writing scores ($R^2 = .123$), indicating that TTT usage has a modest but meaningful predictive value.

The unstandardized regression coefficient was $B = 0.56$, with a standard error = 0.19. This result was statistically significant, $t(62) = 2.96$, $p = .004$, and the standardized beta coefficient (β) = .35 suggests a moderate positive effect. These findings indicate that students who used TTT scored, on average, 0.56 points higher on their narrative writing task compared to those who did not use the tool. Overall, the analysis provides empirical support for the hypothesis that TTT usage is a significant and positive predictor of narrative writing performance.

4. DISCUSSION

The findings indicate a significant and positive relationship between the use of the Tale-Tweaking Tool (TTT) and students' narrative writing performance. Students who used TTT demonstrated better writing outcomes compared to those who did not. The results support the hypothesis that TTT usage is a meaningful predictor of improved writing skills. Overall, the study

concludes that TTT is an effective digital tool for enhancing students' narrative writing abilities and holds promise for further integration into writing instruction.

5. CONCLUSION

The results of the study provide clear evidence that the use of the Tale-Tweaking Tool (TTT) positively influences students' narrative writing performance. Students who engaged with TTT performed better in their writing tasks compared to those who did not, suggesting that the tool offers meaningful instructional support. The consistent findings from both the correlation and regression analyses reinforce the conclusion that TTT not only relates to higher writing achievement but also serves as a significant predictor of writing success. These outcomes highlight the value of incorporating digital tools like TTT into language instruction, particularly for tasks that require creativity, structure, and coherence, such as narrative writing. By offering guided support, interactive features, and practice opportunities, TTT can help students develop stronger storytelling skills. Therefore, the integration of TTT into the writing curriculum is strongly recommended, as it has the potential to enhance writing outcomes and support more engaging and effective learning experiences.

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