



Original Research

The Effectiveness of the Animated Film Frozen in Improving Grade XI Students' Narrative Writing Ability

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Abstract

Narrative writing remains a persistent challenge for Indonesian secondary school students, who often struggle with grammar, vocabulary and the development of ideas, while previous studies of animated media have mostly examined writing in general, other text types or other educational levels. This study investigated the difficulties that students experienced in writing narrative texts and examined whether the animated film Frozen was effective in improving the narrative writing ability of Grade XI students at a public senior high school in Padangsidimpuan, North Sumatra, Indonesia. A quantitative pre-experimental one-group pre-test and post-test design was employed with 35 students from one class, who were selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through a narrative writing test, scored with an analytic rubric of five aspects (content, organisation, vocabulary, grammar and creativity), and a ten-item four-point Likert questionnaire. Because the scores were not normally distributed according to the Shapiro-Wilk test, the pre-test and post-test scores were compared with the Wilcoxon signed-rank test. The mean score rose from 74.29 to 82.00, and 33 of the 35 students improved while none declined ($Z = -5.126$, $p < .001$). Grammar was the weakest aspect both before and after the treatment, followed by vocabulary, whereas vocabulary showed the largest gain and organisation the highest post-test mean. Most students also responded positively to the film-based lessons. The findings suggest that a complete animated film, combined with teacher guidance on generic structure, can serve as an effective supporting medium for teaching narrative writing, although grammar requires additional and explicit instructional support.

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1. Introduction

Writing is often regarded as the most demanding of the four language skills for learners of English as a foreign language (EFL), because it requires them not only to express ideas but also to organise those ideas logically while controlling vocabulary, grammar and mechanics at the same time (Harmer, 2004). Brown (2007) describes writing as a complex cognitive process that draws on critical thinking and creativity, and Knapp and Watkins (2005) argue that learning to write is a complicated undertaking that calls for teaching strategies suited to every stage of learning. For Indonesian secondary school students the difficulty is greater still, because English is not their first language and the

habits of their mother tongue shape the way they choose words and construct sentences in English.

Narrative text is one of the most important genres in the secondary school English curriculum because it allows students to express ideas, experiences and imagination through stories. A narrative organises a sequence of events into a meaningful whole, and its generic structure is conventionally described in terms of orientation, complication and resolution (Knapp & Watkins, 2005). To write one, students must invent characters and settings, build a conflict, arrange events in a logical order and use the appropriate language features of the genre, such as the past tense. Many students still struggle with these demands. Richards and Renandya (2002) note that limited vocabulary prevents learners from conveying their ideas clearly, and Fareed et al. (2016) reported that the writing problems of ESL learners arise largely from limited vocabulary and an inability to develop ideas. Preliminary interviews with Grade XI students at Sekolah Menengah Atas (SMA) Negeri 2 Padangsidempuan, a public senior high school in North Sumatra, Indonesia, pointed in the same direction. The students found it hard to develop ideas, structure a story, choose appropriate vocabulary and understand the text structure, and their motivation to write was low because lessons relied on conventional methods and few engaging media.

Hyland (2003) identifies the lack of contextual input that helps learners generate and develop ideas as one of the main obstacles in second language writing. Without visual stimuli and contextual support, students find it difficult to turn their imagination into written text. Learning media that provide both visual stimulation and contextual language input are therefore needed, and animated films are a promising candidate. As audio-visual media, they tell stories through images, sound and dialogue, so that learners can follow a storyline, get to know its characters and meet vocabulary in a meaningful context. Mayer's (2009) theory of multimedia learning holds that combining visual and verbal information improves understanding and memory when the two are presented in an integrated way, while Berk (2009) argues that using films in teaching increases motivation, attention and engagement because it creates a more meaningful learning experience.

Film, defined as a sequence of moving images combined with sound and arranged to tell a story or convey information (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013), is a medium of communication that uses images, dialogue, music and sound effects to express ideas and emotions (Monaco, 2009). Animation adds the freedom to present imaginative worlds that are not bound by the constraints of reality, which makes animated and fantasy films especially suitable for stimulating story ideas. In educational terms, appropriate media can also help learners to go beyond remembering information to understanding, applying and critically processing it (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). These characteristics match the purpose of narrative writing, which Brown (2001) associates chiefly with entertaining readers through engaging and imaginative stories.

The animated film *Frozen* (Buck & Lee, 2013) is a musical fantasy about the sisters Elsa, a queen with ice powers, and Anna, who are joined by Kristoff, the snowman Olaf and the reindeer Sven. Its themes include family love, courage, friendship and self-acceptance, and its story contains a complete narrative structure of orientation, rising conflict, complication and resolution. The magical powers, kingdom setting and fantasy adventure of the film supply concrete material for a fantasy narrative writing task. When

a writing task is aligned with the content of the film, students can reuse the vocabulary and ideas they meet in it, which is consistent with the view that writing development depends on meaningful input and contextual support (Hyland, 2003) and that multimedia input is most effective when visual and verbal information are integrated (Mayer, 2009).

Several studies have examined animated media in writing instruction. Zaswita and Meladina (2022) used classroom action research in an Indonesian higher education EFL context and found that animated films improved students' writing, especially in developing ideas and using vocabulary, and increased their motivation and engagement. Wahyuni (2017) compared students' descriptive writing before and after the use of English animated movies and reported a significant improvement, suggesting that the films helped students express their ideas more systematically. Saraswati and Al Hakim (2025) applied short animated films over two cycles of classroom action research and found gains in narrative writing in each cycle, with the films helping students to grasp orientation, complication and resolution. Pangaribuan and Prayuda (2021) reported that animated films were effective in improving junior high school students' narrative writing, particularly in organising ideas and using suitable vocabulary.

These studies indicate that animated films can support writing, but they differ from the present research in important ways. They generally focused on writing skills in general or on other text types, used action research designs, or involved students at other educational levels. The present study differs in three respects. It concentrates on narrative writing; it uses a complete feature-length animated film with Grade XI students in Padangsidempuan; and it looks beyond the overall score to ask which analytic aspects of writing (content, organisation, vocabulary, grammar and creativity) students find most difficult and which of them improve after the treatment. Aspect-level evidence of this kind is important because it can help teachers decide where a film-based lesson is sufficient and where additional instruction is needed.

Accordingly, this study aimed to identify the difficulties that Grade XI students experienced in writing narrative texts and to examine the effectiveness of the animated film *Frozen* in improving their narrative writing ability. Two research questions guided the study: (1) What difficulties do Grade XI students at SMA Negeri 2 Padangsidempuan experience in writing narrative texts? and (2) Is the animated film *Frozen* effective in improving the narrative writing ability of these students? It was hypothesised that using the film would have a significant effect on students' narrative writing ability (H_a), against the null hypothesis of no significant effect (H_0).

2. Method

This study employed a quantitative approach, which focuses on numerical data and statistical procedures to test hypotheses (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Sugiyono, 2017), with a pre-experimental one-group pre-test and post-test design. A single class received the treatment, and its writing performance was measured before and after it. Effectiveness was defined operationally as the extent to which the use of the film improved students' narrative writing, judged by comparing pre-test and post-test scores: a significant improvement would indicate that the film was effective, and the absence of one would indicate that it was not.

The research was conducted at SMA Negeri 2 Padangsidempuan, North Sumatra, Indonesia, in July 2026. The population comprised all 235 Grade XI students, who were distributed across seven classes. Purposive sampling, a technique based on specific considerations (Sugiyono, 2017), was used to select the sample. On the recommendation of the school, Class XI-2, which consisted of 35 students, was designated as the research class because its students were studying narrative texts at the time, a choice supported by the English teacher and the school administration. All 35 students took the pre-test, the post-test and the questionnaire.

Two instruments were used. The first was a narrative writing test. Students wrote a narrative text of 90–200 words consisting of an orientation (at least three sentences), a complication (one to two paragraphs of at least four sentences) and a resolution (at least three sentences), with each paragraph beginning with a topic sentence followed by supporting sentences. In the post-test the text had to be based on the story of *Frozen*. The texts were scored with an analytic rubric adapted from Harmer (2004) and Cambridge Assessment English (2020) that comprised five aspects (content, organisation, vocabulary, grammar and creativity), each rated from 1 (very poor) to 4 (excellent); the descriptors are given in Table 1. The ratings for the five aspects were summed, and the final score was calculated by dividing the total obtained by the maximum score of 20 and multiplying the result by 100. Content validity was pursued by deriving the rubric from indicators of narrative writing (generic structure, vocabulary, grammar and the creative development of ideas) and by aligning the writing task with the content of the film.

Table 1. Analytic scoring rubric for narrative writing

Aspect	Excellent (4)	Good (3)	Fair (2)	Very poor (1)
Content	The content is complete, relevant to the topic and the ideas are fully developed.	The content is relevant but some ideas are less developed.	The content is limited and only partly relevant to the topic.	The content is unclear, irrelevant or very limited.
Organisation	The text has a complete and well-organised structure (orientation, complication, resolution) and is logically arranged.	The structure is complete but less well organised.	The structure is incomplete and somewhat unclear.	The text has no clear structure.
Vocabulary	Uses a wide range of appropriate and varied vocabulary related to the context.	Uses adequate vocabulary with minor errors.	Uses limited vocabulary with several errors.	Uses very limited and inappropriate vocabulary.
Grammar	Uses correct grammar with very few or no errors.	Uses generally correct grammar with some minor errors.	Uses incorrect grammar with many errors.	Uses incorrect grammar that makes the text difficult to understand.
Creativity	The ideas are highly creative and imaginative.	The ideas are fairly creative.	The ideas are less developed.	The ideas are not creative or unclear.

Source: Adapted from Harmer (2004) and Cambridge Assessment English (2020).

The second instrument was a closed-ended questionnaire of ten statements answered on a four-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (SA, 4), Agree (A, 3), Disagree (D, 2) and Strongly Disagree (SD, 1). A neutral option was deliberately omitted to avoid the tendency of respondents to choose a middle answer. The statements covered students' interest and participation (items 1–2), their understanding of orientation, complication, resolution and narrative structure in general (items 3–7), the vocabulary gained from the film (items 8–9) and the sequencing of events in their writing (item 10).

Data were collected in three stages. In the pre-test, held during one 45-minute lesson with 35 minutes of writing time, the students wrote a narrative text on a topic set by the researcher. The treatment took place on a different day. The students watched the complete film *Frozen* (approximately 92 minutes) while recording the characters, setting and key events (orientation, complication and resolution) on a worksheet, and the researcher paused the film at several scenes to explain the generic structure of narrative texts. The post-test followed directly: the students had 60 minutes to write a narrative text based on the film, and they then completed the questionnaire in the remaining lesson time.

The treatment, post-test and questionnaire therefore took place within a single block of four 45-minute lesson periods.

The data were analysed with IBM SPSS Statistics 22. Descriptive statistics (mean, median, minimum and maximum) summarised the pre-test and post-test scores, and the mean score for each rubric aspect was compared in order to identify the aspects that students found most difficult; the aspect with the lowest mean was treated as the main difficulty. Because the sample contained fewer than 50 students, normality was tested with the Shapiro–Wilk test, with a significance value above .05 indicating a normal distribution. When the assumption of normality was not met, the difference between the pre-test and post-test scores was tested with the Wilcoxon signed-rank test, a non-parametric alternative to the paired-samples *t*-test, at a significance level of .05; H_0 was to be rejected if the Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) value was below .05. The effect size was estimated as $r = |Z|/\sqrt{N}$. The questionnaire responses were analysed descriptively as percentages ($P = F/N \times 100\%$, where *F* is the frequency of a response and *N* the number of respondents). Because the study involved one group without a control group and a single treatment session, its results are interpreted as change associated with the treatment rather than as proof of causation.

3. Results

3.1 Students' Difficulties in Writing Narrative Texts

The pre-test scores of the 35 students ranged from 65 to 85, with a mean of 74.29 and a median of 75 (Table 2). Most students clustered in the middle of this range: 23 students (65.7%) scored 70 or 75.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the pre-test and post-test scores (N = 35)

Statistic	Pre-test	Post-test
Minimum	65	75
Maximum	85	90
Median	75.00	80.00
Mean	74.29	82.00

Source: Students' pre-test and post-test results.

To identify the difficulties behind these scores, the mean of each rubric aspect was examined (Table 3). Grammar was the weakest aspect, followed by vocabulary, whereas content and organisation were the strongest. On a 100-point scale, the pre-test means for grammar and vocabulary were 61.4 and 67.1, compared with 82.9 for content and 84.3 for organisation. The students were therefore relatively more capable of developing content and organising their narrative texts than of using accurate grammar and appropriate vocabulary.

Table 3. Mean score of each writing aspect in the pre-test and post-test (scale 1–4)

Aspect	Pre-test mean	Post-test mean	Gain
Grammar	2.46	2.77	+0.31
Vocabulary	2.69	3.09	+0.40
Creativity	3.03	3.40	+0.37
Content	3.31	3.40	+0.09
Organisation	3.37	3.74	+0.37

Source: Students' pre-test and post-test results. Aspects are listed from the lowest to the highest pre-test mean.

3.2 Effectiveness of the Animated Film *Frozen*

After the treatment, the post-test scores ranged from 75 to 90, with a mean of 82.00 and a median of 80 (Table 2), an average gain of 7.71 points. Every aspect improved (Table 3 and Figure 1). The gains were largest for vocabulary, creativity and organisation, moderate for grammar and smallest for content, which had already been relatively high in the pre-test. Grammar nevertheless remained the lowest-scoring aspect after the treatment, followed by vocabulary.

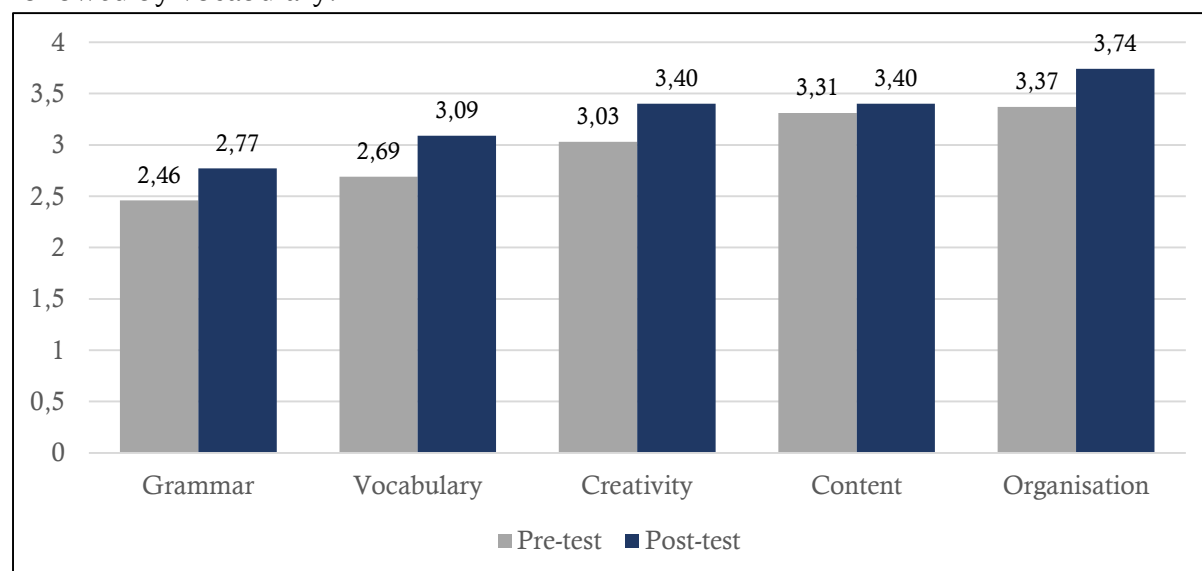


Figure 1. Mean score of each writing aspect in the pre-test and post-test (scale 1–4)

The Shapiro–Wilk test showed that neither the pre-test nor the post-test scores were normally distributed, as both significance values were below .05 (Table 4). The Wilcoxon signed-rank test was therefore used to compare the two sets of scores.

Table 4. Results of the Shapiro–Wilk normality test

Data	Statistic (W)	df	Sig.
Pre-test	.908	35	.007
Post-test	.866	35	.001

Source: Output of IBM SPSS Statistics 22.

As Table 5 shows, no student's score fell after the treatment, 33 students scored higher in the post-test than in the pre-test and two students obtained identical scores. The test statistic was $Z = -5.126$ with an Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) value below .001, which is under the .05 threshold. H_0 was therefore rejected and H_a accepted: the difference between the pre-test and post-test scores was statistically significant, and the effect size was large ($r = .87$).

Table 5. Results of the Wilcoxon signed-rank test (ranks)

Ranks (post-test – pre-test)	N	Mean rank	Sum of ranks
Negative ranks (post-test < pre-test)	0	.00	.00
Positive ranks (post-test > pre-test)	33	17.00	561.00
Ties (post-test = pre-test)	2		
Total	35		

Note. $Z = -5.126$ (based on negative ranks); Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) = .000; effect size $r = 0.87$. Source: Output of IBM SPSS Statistics 22.

3.3 Students' Responses to the Questionnaire

The students responded positively to the film-based lessons (Table 6). Across the ten statements, 312 of the 350 responses (89.1%) were Strongly Agree or Agree, and only two responses were Strongly Disagree. Agreement was highest for the statements on understanding the orientation (item 3, 100%), the complication (item 4, 97.1%) and the resolution (item 5, 97.1%), and lowest for the statement on acquiring new vocabulary from the film (item 8, 77.1%), with which eight students disagreed.

Table 6. Students' responses to the questionnaire (frequencies; N = 35)

No.	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	SA + A (%)
1	The film made students more interested and motivated to learn English	23	5	6	1	80.0
2	Students participated more actively in writing narrative texts with the film	19	10	6	0	82.9
3	After watching the film, students could understand the orientation	27	8	0	0	100.0
4	After watching the film, students could understand the complication	27	7	1	0	97.1
5	After watching the film, students could understand the resolution	26	8	1	0	97.1
6	The animated film helped me understand the structure of narrative texts	19	11	5	0	85.7
7	I found it easier to identify orientation, complication and resolution	23	10	2	0	94.3
8	I gained new English vocabulary from the film	17	10	8	0	77.1
9	The vocabulary I learnt from the film helped me write narrative texts better	17	12	5	1	82.9
10	The film helped me arrange events in my writing in sequence	24	9	2	0	94.3
Total (10 items × 35 students)		222	90	36	2	89.1

Note. SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree. Statements are paraphrased in English from the original Indonesian questionnaire.

4. Discussion

The first research question asked which difficulties students experienced in writing narrative texts. The aspect-level analysis showed that grammar and vocabulary, rather than content or organisation, were the main problems. This agrees with Fareed et al. (2016), who traced the writing problems of ESL learners to limited vocabulary and difficulty in developing ideas, and with Richards and Renandya (2002), who observe that a limited vocabulary prevents learners from expressing their ideas clearly. The weakness in grammar is plausibly related to the demands of the genre. Narrative texts are normally told in the past tense, which requires control of tense forms, subject–verb agreement and more complex sentence construction, all of which differ from the structures of the students' first language. This explanation is an interpretation of the pattern rather than something the data tested directly, but it is consistent with the finding that the students handled the text-level demands of narrative writing (content and organisation) better than its sentence-level demands.

The second research question asked whether the animated film *Frozen* was effective. On the evidence of this study it was: scores rose significantly after the treatment, almost all students improved and the effect was large. The result is in line with earlier studies

reporting that animated films benefit students' writing (Pangaribuan & Prayuda, 2021; Saraswati & Al Hakim, 2025; Wahyuni, 2017; Zaswita & Meladina, 2022). The present study extends that evidence in three ways. It involved senior high school students writing narrative texts, whereas earlier work concentrated on other text types or other educational levels; it used a complete feature-length film rather than short clips; and, through the aspect-level analysis, it shows where the improvement occurred and where it did not.

The pattern of improvement gives some indication of why the film helped. Organisation had the highest post-test mean, vocabulary showed the largest gain, and the questionnaire responses were most favourable for understanding the orientation, complication and resolution. These patterns fit the argument that writing develops better when learners receive meaningful, contextual input (Hyland, 2003) and that integrated visual and verbal information supports understanding and memory (Mayer, 2009). A film presents a whole story with a clear beginning, a problem and an ending, together with the language used to tell it, so the students could see the generic structure at work and borrow story ideas and words for their own texts. The generally positive questionnaire responses also agree with Berk (2009), who links the use of films to greater motivation, attention and engagement. The improvement should not, however, be attributed to the film alone. The researcher paused the film to explain the generic structure of narrative texts, so the effect reflects a film-based lesson with teacher guidance rather than passive viewing. Content improved least, but this does not indicate that the film was ineffective for content: its pre-test mean was already high, which left little room for further gain.

Grammar improved but remained the weakest aspect. Watching a film supplies vocabulary, story ideas and a model of narrative structure, but it does not in itself teach the grammatical rules that students need to write accurate sentences, and a single session may be too short for students to internalise such rules. Film-based writing lessons should therefore be combined with explicit and focused grammar work, for example practice with past tense forms and subject–verb agreement in the context of retelling scenes and revising drafts. A further observation concerns vocabulary. The statement on acquiring new vocabulary received the lowest level of agreement, even though vocabulary showed the largest gain in the rubric scores. Some students may not have been aware of what they had learnt, which would suggest that vocabulary learning from film is partly implicit, but this possibility needs further investigation.

These findings have practical implications. For English teachers, animated films can serve as a supporting medium in writing lessons, provided that viewing is accompanied by guidance on generic structure and followed by focused work on grammar and vocabulary. For school leaders, the results support making available the facilities that film-based lessons need, such as projectors, sound equipment and internet access, and encouraging teachers to take part in professional development on instructional media. For students, the results suggest that regular writing practice and attention to grammatical accuracy should

accompany the use of films and other English-language materials as sources of vocabulary and story ideas.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The one-group design has no control group, so the improvement cannot be attributed to the film with certainty: maturation, familiarity with the test format and other events between the two tests cannot be ruled out. The pre-test topic was set by the researcher, whereas the post-test task was based on the film the students had just watched, and the writing time also differed (35 minutes against 60 minutes), which may have favoured the post-test. The treatment was a single session, the sample was one purposively selected class, and no inter-rater reliability or internal consistency coefficients were computed for the rubric scores and the questionnaire. In addition, the four-point rubric produced final scores that moved in steps of five points, which limits their precision. Future research should use a quasi-experimental design with a control class taught by conventional methods, equalise the pre-test and post-test tasks and writing time, add a delayed post-test to examine retention, use more than one rater, and combine test scores with qualitative data such as error analysis of students' texts or interviews. Studies could also test film-based lessons combined with explicit grammar instruction, given that grammar was the most persistent difficulty.

5. Conclusion

This study examined the difficulties that Grade XI students experienced in writing narrative texts and the effectiveness of the animated film *Frozen* in improving their narrative writing ability. Grammar, followed by vocabulary, was the most difficult aspect for the students, whereas content and organisation were comparatively strong. After the film-based lesson the mean score rose from 74.29 to 82.00, 33 of the 35 students improved, and the Wilcoxon signed-rank test indicated a significant and large difference ($Z = -5.126$, $p < .001$). The students also responded positively to the film-based lessons.

The study addresses a research gap by providing aspect-level quantitative evidence on the use of a complete animated film to teach narrative writing at senior high school level in Indonesia. Its novelty lies in showing where a film-based lesson helps most (organisation, vocabulary and creativity) and where it is not enough on its own (grammar). The implication for teachers is that animated films, accompanied by guidance on generic structure, can be used as a supporting medium for narrative writing, provided that they are paired with explicit grammar instruction. Schools can support this practice by making viewing facilities available and by encouraging professional development in media-based teaching. Given the limitations of a one-group design and a single treatment session, the findings should be regarded as preliminary and should be tested in controlled and longer-term studies.

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