CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the background of study, formulation of research problems, research objective, research hypotheses, research significance, research assumption, research scope and limitation, definition of the key terms. The researcher will discuss these topic bellow:

A. Background of Study

In the Indonesian education system, English has held a prominent position as the first foreign language officially taught in secondary schools since 1946.[1] As a global lingua franca, English provides access to international discourse, educational resources, and career mobility. The government continues to reinforce the importance of English through national curricula such as the School-Based Curriculum (KTSP) and the current Kurikulum Merdeka.[2] Mastery of English, especially in productive skills, is not merely a curricular goal but a national necessity. In today's globalized and digitally interconnected era, the ability to communicate effectively in English enables students to participate in cross-cultural dialogue, access global knowledge, and compete in the international job market.

[1] Johannes A Prayogo, "English Language Teaching in Indonesia in the 21st Century: What Needs Reinforcing and Enhancing for the Teachers," *KnE Social Sciences* 2022 (2022): 12–22.

[2] Kemendikbud, "Kurikulum Merdeka: Panduan Implementasi Kurikulum," *Jakarta: Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi* (2021).

Among the four essential language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Writing is widely acknowledged as the most demanding skill. It necessitates not only grammatical accuracy but also cognitive processes such as planning, organizing ideas, revising, and editing.[3] In his work, "College Writing Skills with Readings (6th Ed)," John Langan affirms that writing allows individuals to convey meaning, preserve experiences, and articulate thoughts across time and space. In addition, writing plays a critical role in shaping learners' critical thinking and metacognitive awareness.[4] Beyond these foundational aspects, writing itself describes writing as an intellectually rigorous task that demands idea formulation and clarity of expression. In academic settings, writing is both a communication app and a learning process.[5] However, for EFL learners, especially in Indonesia, writing remains a challenge due to the simultaneous demands of linguistic proficiency, cognitive development, and limited classroom practice.[6]

The constructivist theory offers a compelling foundation for integrating technology into language learning. This theory posits that learners build their own understanding and knowledge of the world through experiences and reflection.[7] In language education, constructivism promotes learner autonomy,

[3] Ken Hyland, "Second Language Writing," *Second Language Writing* (2020).

[4] John Langan, "College Writing Skills with Readings (6th Ed)," *Mc Graw Hill* (2005).

[5] H Douglas Brown, "Teaching By Principles: Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy 2nd Edition," *New York: Addision Wesley Longman* (2001).

[6] A R Rahmawati and A Umamah, "Challenges in Teaching Writing in EFL Contexts: A Case Study at Indonesian Senior High School," *Indonesian Journal of EFL and Linguistics* 7, no. 2 (2022): 223–239.

[7] Jeremy Harmer, "The Practice of English Language Teaching," *First Edition Longman* 31, no. 1 (2007): 401–405.

active engagement, and contextualized learning, principles that align well with technology-enhanced instruction. Digital platforms provide interactive environments that support learners' exploration, collaboration, and personalized expression. With the increasing relevance of digital literacy in education, technological app such as online writing platforms can empower students to become more engaged, independent, and reflective writers. The use of digital app thus embodies the constructivist ideal of meaningful and student-centered learning.

Despite curricular emphasis on communicative competence, a significant gap remains between educational expectations and actual student performance, particularly in writing. Data from the EF English Proficiency report shows that Indonesia ranks 79th out of 113 countries and is categorized as having low English proficiency.[8] This reflects systemic challenges in English instruction, especially in productive skills like writing. Traditional methods, dominated by grammar drills and memorization, often fail to nurture creativity, confidence, and communicative ability.[9] As a result, many students view writing as a stressful task rather than an expressive outlet. Preliminary observations at MTs Darussalam Kademangan support this concern; eighth-grade students struggle with recount text writing due to limited vocabulary, poor grammar, and lack of structural coherence. Their reluctance to write reflects broader issues of writing

[8] EF English Proficiency Index, "EF EPI 2023," *EF English Proficiency Index* (2023), https://www.ef.com/epi/.

[9] Tragina Elisa Putri, "Students' Perceptions on EFL Teachers Teaching Writing (A Case Study at the Department of English Education UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta)," *Jakarta : UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta* (2021).

anxiety, lack of feedback, and minimal opportunities for practice—problems that call for innovative, student-centered solutions.

In response to these challenges, digital diary writing emerges as an effective pedagogical strategy that blends technology with reflective writing. Unlike conventional writing tasks, diary writing allows students to express personal experiences in a non-threatening environment, thus promoting self-expression and motivation.[10] A study by R. S. Dewi notes that writing diaries fosters fluency and emotional engagement helping learners develop both linguistic and cognitive competencies.[11] Digital diaries, in particular, support autonomous learning by encouraging students to write frequently and independently. The informal nature of diary writing reduces anxiety, builds confidence, and cultivates writing habits. Furthermore, diary entries provide rich data for teachers to assess learners' progress and offer constructive feedback, aligning well with formative assessment practices.

Penzu is a widely used digital diary platform that supports various learning goals. It offers customizable templates, privacy controls, multimedia features, and progress tracking—all of which can enhance students' engagement with writing. Existing evidence shows that Penzu can create a more interactive and personalized learning environment. Students are able to reflect, write freely, and

[10] E Yüce, "Digital Diary Use in EFL Writing: Enhancing Motivation and Fluency," *International Journal of Contemporary Educational Research* 7, no. 1 (2020): 48–56.

[11] R S Dewi, "The Process of Writing in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Classroom: An EFL Student's Experience," *Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra* 13, no. 1 (2013): 30–42.

revisit their progress, which fosters writing fluency and cohesion.[12] Additionally, Penzu accommodates diverse learning preferences and allows for differentiated instruction. For beginner writers, the simplicity and accessibility of the platform reduce technological barriers, enabling them to focus on content rather than formatting or layout. As such, Penzu aligns with the principles of both constructivist learning and inclusive education.

While digital diaries have shown promising results in language learning, limited research exists on the specific effectiveness of Penzu in improving recount writing among Indonesian junior high school students. These studies collectively suggest that digital diary writing enhances the chronological organization and narrative clarity required in recount texts.[13];[14] However, these findings have not been thoroughly explored in diverse educational contexts. Furthermore, few studies investigate students' perceptions of using digital platforms like Penzu as a learning app. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by examining both the impact of Penzu on recount writing proficiency and students' attitudes toward the digital writing experience. The findings will contribute to a deeper understanding of how technology can be used not just as a app, but as a transformative medium in language instruction.

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[12] I Ismail and A Abidah, "The Use of Digital Diaries to Improve Students' Writing Skills in EFL Classroom," *Journal of Digital Education and Technology* 3, no. 2 (2021): 101–110.

[13] N Azizah, "The Use of Digital Diary in Teaching Recount Text Writing to Improve Students' Writing Ability," *Journal of English Language Teaching and Learning* 7, no. 1 (2020): 55–65.

[14] S Nugraheni and Y Astuti, "From Informal to Formal: Transitioning Digital Diary Writing into Recount Text Mastery," *Journal of English Language and Pedagogy* 5, no. 1 (2022): 22–34.

This esearch holds both theoretical and practical importance in the field of EFL pedagogy. Theoretically, it contributes to the discourse on digital integration in writing instruction, particularly within the Indonesian junior high school context, by aligning with constructivist principles that promote student-centered learning. Practically, the study offers strategic insights for educators and policymakers on utilizing Penzu as a digital diary to overcome common hurdles in recount writing, such as poor coherence and structural difficulties.

Consequently, this study, titled "The Effectiveness of Using Penzu as a Digital Diary App to Improve Recount Writing Skills among The Eighth Graders of MTs Darussalam Kademangan," aims to empirically measure the impact of the app on student performance and explore their perceptions of digital media. Ultimately, the findings are expected to bridge the gap between students' current proficiency and the communicative expectations of the curriculum, fostering a more autonomous and engaging writing environment.

B. Formulation of Research Problem

Based on the background of the research above, the formulated research problems are as follows:

1. Is there any significant difference in recount writing skills between the eighth-grade students of MTs Darussalam Kademangan who are taught using Penzu as a digital diary app and those who are taught without it?

2. How does the use of Penzu as a digital diary app influence the motivation and confidence of eighth-grade students of MTs Darussalam Kademangan in writing recount texts?

C. Research Objective

Based on the research problems above, the research objectives are formulated as follows:

1. To find out whether the use of Penzu as a digital diary app significantly improves the recount writing skills of the eighth-grade students of MTs Darussalam Kademangan.
2. To know about the influence of using Penzu as a digital diary app on the motivation and confidence of the eighth-grade students of MTs Darussalam Kademangan in writing recount texts.

D. Research Hypothesis

Based on the formulation of the research problems and relevant theories, the following hypotheses are proposed:

1. Null Hypothesis (H_0):

   There is no significant difference in recount writing skills between the eighth-grade students of MTs Darussalam Kademangan who are taught using Penzu as a digital diary app and those who are not.
2. Alternative Hypothesis (H_1):

The eighth-grade students of MTs Darussalam Kademangan who are taught using Penzu as a digital diary app have significantly better recount writing skills than those who are not.

3. Alternative Hypothesis 2 (H_2):

   The use of Penzu as a digital diary app has a positive influence on the motivation and confidence of the eighth-grade students of MTs Darussalam Kademangan in writing recount texts.

E. Research Significance

This research is expected to contribute to the development of language learning practices, particularly in the integration of digital technology in English writing instruction. The findings may offer valuable insights and benefits for several educational stakeholders, as described below:

1. For English Teachers:

   This research provides empirical evidence on the effectiveness of using Penzu as a digital diary application to improve students' recount writing skills. It can serve as a practical reference for implementing more innovative, interactive, and student-centered teaching strategies that make writing more engaging and accessible. The digital approach aligns with modern pedagogical trends that promote the use of educational technology to improve language instruction.[15]

[15] Greg Kessler, "Technology and the Future of Language Teaching," *Foreign Language Annals* 51, no. 1 (2020): 205–218.

2. For Students:

   The study aims to support students in developing their writing skills in a more personal and less intimidating environment. Through consistent digital diary writing using Penzu, students are encouraged to reflect on their experiences, express their ideas in English, and gradually build their confidence and motivation in writing. This aligns with 21st-century learning goals that emphasize learner autonomy, digital literacy, and communication skills.[16]

3. For Future Researchers:

   The findings of this study may serve as a foundation for further research in the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), particularly concerning the integration of digital app in genre-based writing instruction. It can inspire comparative studies, longitudinal research, or investigations into other genres or language skills. Moreover, this study may stimulate innovation in instructional media development in line with technological advancement in education.

4. For the Development of Educational Technology and Writing Pedagogy:

   By highlighting the impact of digital diary platforms on students' writing competence, this research contributes to the growing body of knowledge that supports the integration of digital technology in writing pedagogy. It demonstrates how technology can be a practical solution for

[16] UNESCO, "Digital Literacy for Life and Work," *Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization* (2021), https://unesdoc.unesco.org/.

overcoming traditional barriers in language learning, such as low student participation, fear of making mistakes, and lack of exposure to writing practice.

F. Research Assumptions

In conducting this research, the following assumptions are made as the foundational basis for the study:

1. Substantive Assumption:

   It is assumed that students' writing skills—especially in writing recount texts—can be improved through regular and meaningful writing practice using digital platforms such as Penzu. Furthermore, it is assumed that digital diary writing provides a reflective, personal, and low-anxiety environment that encourages learners to express their ideas more freely and improve writing fluency and coherence.

2. Methodological Assumption:

   It is assumed that students' recount writing skills and motivational changes can be objectively measured using appropriate writing assessment rubrics and motivation scales. Additionally, it is assumed that the use of experimental research design (pre-test and post-test with control and experimental groups) is valid and reliable for determining the effectiveness of using Penzu in improving students' recount writing performance.

G. Research Scope and Limitation

This research focuses on investigating the effectiveness of using Penzu as a digital diary app to improve the recount writing skills of the eighth-graders students at MTs Darussalam Kademangan in the 2024/2025 academic year. The scope of the study includes the independent variable (the use of Penzu as a digital diary app) and the dependent variable (students' recount writing skills). The writing aspects assessed are limited to content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics, in alignment with standard writing assessment criteria.

The population of the study consists of all eighth-grade students at MTs Darussalam Kademangan, with samples selected through purposive sampling technique involving two classes—one as the experimental group and the other as the control group. The research setting is the English classroom environment of the school, and the data collection period takes place during the second semester of the academic year.

This research does not address other language skills such as speaking, reading, or listening, nor does it explore the impact of Penzu on different writing genres outside of recount texts. Additionally, factors such as students' home environment, access to technology outside school, and prior writing habits are beyond the researcher's control.

H. Definition of Key Terms

To avoid misinterpretation of the terms used in this research, operational definitions are provided to clarify how each term is specifically understood and measured within the context of the study. The definitions below are supported by recent scholarly sources.

1. Digital Diary Writing:

   Digital diary writing is defined as a consistent, reflective writing activity carried out by students using a digital platform, allowing them to express personal experiences, thoughts, and feelings in written form. In this study, it is implemented as a pedagogical strategy to support the development of recount writing skills in a low-stress, student-centered environment. The research conducted by Yüce argues that digital diary writing fluency and provides a space for self-expression that enhances engagement and autonomy in learning.[17] It supports language learning by encouraging regular practice, reflection, and emotional connection to writing.

2. Penzu:

   Penzu is an online journaling platform that allows users to create, organize, and manage private diary entries with cloud-based storage. In the context of this study, Penzu serves as the medium through which students practice recount writing in a digital format. The platform supports student

[17] Yüce, "Digital Diary Use in EFL Writing: Enhancing Motivation and Fluency."

learning by offering features such as entry tracking, multimedia integration, and a distraction-free writing environment.[18] It also provides opportunities for teachers to monitor progress and deliver feedback, thereby improving both the quantity and quality of student writing.

3. Recount Text:

   A recount text is a genre of writing that retells events or experiences in a chronological order, typically employing past tense verbs and time connectors. The structure generally includes orientation, a sequence of events, and reorientation. Hyland further notes that recount texts serve an important function in academic literacy by helping learners narrate and reflect on past actions clearly.[19] In this study, recount writing is used as a measurable output to evaluate students' development in narrative composition, focusing on coherence, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics.

4. Writing Skill:

   Writing skill refers to a learner's ability to communicate ideas effectively and accurately in written form. It involves multiple sub-skills, including idea development, organization, grammatical correctness, vocabulary usage, and mechanical accuracy.[20] In this study, writing skill is operationally defined through student performance on recount texts, assessed using a rubric adapted from the framework by covering five

[18] Ismail and Abidah, "The Use of Digital Diaries to Improve Students' Writing Skills in EFL Classroom."

[19] Hyland, "Second Lang. Writ."

[20] L Zhang, "The Impact of Writing on Students' Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving Abilities in Higher Education," *Journal of Educational Psychology Studies* 13, no. 3 (2021): 110–124.

components: content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics.[21] Improvement in writing skill is determined through comparison of pre-test and post-test scores.

5. Digital Literacy:

Digital literacy is defined as the ability to use digital app and platforms effectively, responsibly, and critically for learning and communication. UNESCO defines digital literacy as encompassing technical skills, information management, and digital communication competencies. In this study, digital literacy refers specifically to students' competence in navigating and utilizing the Penzu platform for educational purposes. It includes their ability to manage entries, engage in reflective writing, and integrate feedback to improve their written work.[22]

[21] H. L Jacobs et al., "Testing ESL Composition: A Practical Approach. English Composition Program.," *Newbury House Publishers, Inc., Rowley, MA 01969* (1981).

[22] UNESCO, "Digital Literacy for Life and Work."