

# Story Mapping Innovation as a Differentiation Strategy in English Narrative Text Learning

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**Abstract:** *This study aims to explore the effectiveness of using story mapping in improving students' reading skills and understanding of the structure and elements of narrative texts, and to see how this strategy can be combined with a differentiation approach based on prior knowledge levels. More than 80% of students reported being helped by the combination of surveys, interviews, and classroom observations in identifying important components of the text such as orientation, conflict, climax, and resolution. Visualization in the form of a story map helped students organize ideas and retell the story content coherently. In addition, the application of differentiation based on initial mastery of the material made students more comfortable and confident because they were in groups with the same learning pace. However, technical problems arose, especially when students had to draw the map manually. Most students recommended the use of digital media such as Canva to make the process more interactive and efficient. These results indicate that story mapping is not only effective in supporting narrative text comprehension, but also has the potential to be a flexible collaborative medium when combined with the right technology and grouping strategies. This study recommends that digital media be integrated into learning and emphasizes the need for teacher training to provide learning experiences that meet the needs of today's students.*

**Keywords—** Story Mapping; Narrative Text; Differentiation; Reading Skills

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Reading skills are one of the basic skills that English learners must have, especially for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. In this case, reading skills are not just a means of obtaining information, but are the main foundation for English learners. This is because this skill helps them in mastering the language, understanding the material, and improving their language skills more comprehensively. Yiming (2023) said that reading skills help learners to be able to focus on details, so this helps develop their critical thinking skills as well. Reading also helps language learners become more familiar with the rhythm, structure and vocabulary of a foreign language, which ultimately helps develop other skills (Yurko, Styfanyshyn, & Koval 2020). Mastery of language structures can help them develop writing skills, while mastery of a wide vocabulary helps them develop communication skills more effectively. Thus, reading skills can support the overall success of English learners, from writing, listening, to speaking skills.

Unfortunately, the facts on the ground show that many EFL students still face great difficulties in comprehending English reading, especially when studying complex texts such as narrative texts. They often have difficulty identifying important text elements such as characters, settings, and plots, thus having difficulty in understanding general text structures such as orientation, complication, and resolution. In addition to being caused by a lack of knowledge of English vocabulary,

this weakness also occurs because reading learning usually focuses on literal translation only rather than understanding the context and meaning comprehensively. Nation (2009) said that the extent to which readers can relate information in the text to what they know and experience is the main factor that influences their understanding of the text. Thus, if students do not know the structure and purpose of the text they are reading clearly, they will feel confused and frustrated. As a result, this affects the decline in students' motivation and confidence in reading English texts, which then makes teachers face a big challenge in creating effective and meaningful learning for each student.

Different levels of prior knowledge are one of the main components that influence differences in student learning outcomes (Limbong & Nasution, 2025). Students who are accustomed to reading and writing stories may be quicker to understand the structure of narrative texts. On the other hand, there are still students who need additional assistance to understand the overall content of the text. Students who lack knowledge tend to lag behind in conventional learning, where teachers provide the same material to all students without considering the differences in their initial abilities. As a result, motivation to learn can decrease and learning objectives can be achieved unevenly.

The differentiated learning approach is one solution to this problem. Differentiated learning is a teacher's effort to adjust materials, processes, products, and learning environments according to students' interests, needs, or readiness

(Marantika, Tomasouw, & Wenno, 2023). This strategy requires teachers to care more about students' circumstances and create an inclusive learning space for all. However, differences in initial knowledge levels have not been widely used as a basis for adaptive learning design, the application of differentiation often focuses on students' interests or learning styles. Nevertheless, mapping knowledge levels can serve as an important basis for creating more targeted learning strategies.

One strategy that has been proven to support students' reading skills and understanding of narrative texts is story mapping. It is a graphic organization strategy in which all or part of the components of a story are presented visually (Cure, Batu, & Gulboy, 2020). Through this strategy, students can visualize the elements of the story directly, so that they can organize the information contained in it better. Aini (2024) said that this strategy helps students to realize the correlation between main ideas and detailed information in the text more clearly. In addition, students can also map the structure and important elements in the text, including in narrative texts, such as characters, settings, conflicts, climaxes, and resolutions. Thus, this strategy helps students' understanding in understanding the text more systematically and deeply.

Furthermore, according to Ali and Mousa (2023), the use of visual media such as story mapping also helps students who have difficulty understanding the contents of complex texts to make them simpler. In long and complex texts, such as narrative texts, some students may have difficulty understanding the relationships between parts of the text due to their limited analytical skills. So they have difficulty identifying the structure of the text correctly, which results in a lack of in-depth understanding of the text. According to several studies, this strategy has been recognized as one of the effective strategies in helping students understand story texts better. However, most previous studies have used the same story mapping for all students, without taking into account variations in students' abilities or levels of understanding before learning. This suggests that there is an opportunity to develop a more flexible method by incorporating story mapping into a differentiation strategy.

To fill this gap, this study aims to explore how story mapping can be used as a reading strategy in differentiated learning based on students' prior knowledge levels, especially in English learning narrative text material at the senior high school level. Through this study, the author attempts to comprehensively discuss how story mapping as a method of differentiated learning based on prior knowledge levels can be applied in English learning narrative text material. This study not only investigates how effective the method is in terms of learning outcomes, but also observes how students act on this more contextual and flexible method. It is hoped that the results of this study can help teachers create more responsive learning strategies. In addition, the results can open up discussions on how to create an inclusive and student-based learning model.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Reading skills are one of the foundations that need to be strengthened early on, especially in learning English as a foreign language (EFL). Through reading, students can understand basic understanding such as recognizing words and sentence structures, where this understanding influences the understanding of meaning that improves their cognitive processes. One of the strategic learning to improve students' reading skills in learning English as a foreign language (EFL) is narrative text. Anderson and Anderson (1997) stated that narrative text helps students develop their imagination and critical thinking skills, not only in understanding the overall structure of the story. Through understanding the story about the setting, characters, setting, plot, conflict, etc., students can construct understanding and explore the contents of the text as a whole. In EFL learning, this plays an important role because many students find it difficult to understand English reading texts comprehensively. Thus, an interesting learning strategy is needed to support the improvement of students' reading skills through narrative texts.

One strategy that is widely used and proven effective in developing students' narrative text reading skills is the story mapping strategy. Story mapping is one of the techniques widely used to help students understand narrative texts and help them find and organize important information from the story into a visual format such as a diagram or concept map. According to research conducted by Grünke, Wilbert, & Stegemann (2013), story maps can improve students' reading comprehension, especially students who have difficulty following the storyline. Presenting narrative information in visual form through story mapping is able to support students connect parts of the story logically and chronologically, especially for students who have difficulty following the storyline in a foreign language. Through story mapping, students can see the big picture and understand the details of the story. Ultimately, this strategy improves their reading comprehension because they are directly involved in organizing information into a format that is easier to understand, which helps their memory of the contents of the text. Thus, this strategy is relevant to be applied in EFL classes that have diversity in terms of student backgrounds and reading abilities.

Furthermore, story mapping also increases students' engagement in the learning process and improves their understanding of the text. By creating a story map, students can assess information, make connections between parts of the story, and convey the content of the reading in their own way. Students not only gain better understanding, but it also increases their confidence in interacting with English texts. In their study, Bangsri and Phusawisot (2021) found that story maps can significantly improve the reading skills of elementary EFL students in Thailand, especially in terms of finding the main idea and supporting details of the story. In addition, the study found that students were more interested in reading and did not feel burdened by long or complex narrative texts. In EFL learning, active participation like this

is very important because students' learning motivation often determines their learning outcomes. Thus, it can be said that the story mapping strategy is a successful, interactive, and motivating learning strategy for students.

On the other hand, the success of using story mapping strategy in the classroom depends on the variation in students' reading ability as well. Students in one class may be accustomed to reading English texts, but others may have just learned basic sentence structures. If not handled well, these differences can lead to differences in students' learning outcomes. Therefore, story mapping strategy can be combined directly with differentiated learning approach. Tomlinson (2014) stated that differentiated learning allows teachers to change their learning methods according to their students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles. In learning English narrative text, teachers can give different levels of difficulty of story mapping tasks, such as using more complete templates for students with basic abilities, then more advanced students can be asked to create their own story maps. Thus, each student receives challenges that are appropriate to their respective abilities and feels involved in the ongoing learning process.

Story mapping strategy and differentiated learning approach are an effective combination of strategies to improve students' reading skills in EFL classes, especially in narrative text learning. At the beginning of learning activities, teachers can conduct an initial assessment to measure students' initial abilities in reading and understanding the structure and elements of English narrative texts. Through the results of the assessment, teachers can divide students into several study groups to determine the form of story mapping tasks that will be given. Hall (2019) stated that an approach based on student readiness can increase students' self-confidence and reduce their anxiety when learning a foreign language. Thus, a responsive learning strategy like this helps students not to feel left behind or too pressured when learning because it is adjusted to the learning abilities of each student. In addition, the integration of story mapping as a visual learning tool also makes learning more interactive and inclusive. It is relevant to the principle of student-centered learning, where teachers try to create a learning environment that supports differences in student abilities as a whole.

In general, the integration of story mapping strategy and differentiated learning approach enables the improvement of EFL students' reading skills. With its structured and visual nature, story mapping offers a strong connection between text structure and understanding of its meaning, which is much needed by EFL students. Furthermore, through the integration of these two strategies, learning will not take place homogeneously, but can facilitate differences in student characteristics. Thus, when learning is adjusted to the characteristics and needs of each student, their involvement and desire to read will increase. Not only that, with learning that adjusts to students' initial knowledge level, teachers can monitor each student's learning process and provide constructive feedback appropriately. In this way, this approach can help overcome problems faced by students and

help make the class more active, productive, and meaningful when learning narrative texts takes place.

### **3. METHOD**

This study is a qualitative descriptive study that aims to explain how the innovation of story mapping learning differs in narrative text learning in one class. The main focus of this study is to understand how the innovation is applied contextually and how students respond to the strategy, especially when they are grouped based on their initial knowledge level. This method was chosen because it can describe the dynamics of the class as a whole, as well as students' affective and cognitive reactions to the learning strategy provided. Data were collected naturally through learning activities, not through experimental or repeated interventions.

This learning innovation was implemented in class X-3 of Pakusari State Senior High School in Jember Regency. There were 35 students as subjects in this study. Furthermore, the focus of learning was to improve students' ability to understand and create narrative texts in English. This ability includes understanding text structures, such as orientation, complication, and resolution, as well as narrative elements such as plot, characters, setting, conflict, and resolution. During two meetings, story mapping was used to improve students' understanding of the main components of the story text. This was also done to encourage them to actively participate in building the story structure.

Implementation begins with an initial assessment in the form of a pre-test to determine students' initial knowledge level of narrative texts. Based on the results of this assessment, students are grouped into basic, intermediate, and advanced categories. Each group is given a story mapping task with different levels of difficulty and scaffolding. The basic group is given the task of analyzing easier texts with clearer guidance on story structure and elements. The intermediate group is given the task of analyzing texts with moderate difficulty accompanied by assistance with guiding questions. Finally, the advanced group is encouraged to create a story map independently by analyzing more complex texts. This process is designed to confirm that all students can access materials and actively participate in learning despite their varying abilities.

This study used several main instruments such as questionnaires and semi-structured interviews for the data collection process. Through this questionnaire, the researcher attempted to find out how students view the learning strategies used. Meanwhile, student representatives from each group were interviewed in a semi-structured manner so that the researcher could interpret students' experiences during learning in detail. Furthermore, a thematic approach was used to examine the results of the data received. This approach allows the researcher to identify the main themes from the questionnaire and interview responses that have been conducted. Some of the themes found include students' views

on the effectiveness of the story mapping strategy, experiences working together in groups, and the difficulties they face during the integration of narrative text learning using story mapping. With this analysis, the researcher can have a comprehensive understanding of how this innovation affects students' English learning in the classroom, especially on narrative text material.

#### **4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

##### **4.1 Theme 1: Story Mapping Helps Students Understand the Structure and Elements of Narrative Texts**

The main purpose of using story maps in narrative text learning is to help students understand the structure and main elements of the story. More than 80% of students who filled out the questionnaire stated that this strategy helped them recognize text structures such as orientation, complication, and resolution. Before this, they were often confused about which part of the text was the resolution or conflict. One student said when interviewed, "When asked to explain the previous story, I couldn't explain it in order and often jumped to the next part of the story." But after using the story map, it became easier for me to sequence the storyline and could retell the story given more coherently.

Story mapping helps students think more systematically, especially those who have difficulty understanding stories directly. By visualizing the structure and elements of the story visually, students can more easily understand the relationship between parts in the narrative text given. Their ability to rewrite or retell the text is also influenced by this. As stated by Cure, Batu, & Gulboy (2020), visual story mapping has the potential to improve EFL students' reading comprehension and critical thinking skills because the information is arranged more systematically and is easier to understand. This shows that this method not only improves the understanding of the text content but also improves the mastery of the narrative structure as a whole.

##### **4.2 Theme 2: Differentiation Based on Knowledge Level Increases Learning Comfort**

The differentiation learning approach in this learning innovation is applied starting with grouping students based on their initial knowledge level about narrative texts. This grouping activity is carried out after students have completed an initial assessment in the form of a pre-test to determine the extent of their initial mastery of narrative text material. The results show that students' learning experiences increase with this grouping. From the results of the questionnaire data that has been distributed to students, around 74% of students said that they were more motivated and felt more comfortable in the learning process in class when they were grouped according to their respective learning speeds. It can be seen that groups with moderate and higher understanding grasp instructions faster and immediately compile story maps creatively, while groups with lower understanding are given more focused templates so that they can follow the process meaningfully.

Furthermore, based on in-depth interview data with several students representing each ability group, they said that they felt more confident when joining a group with the same ability. One student said, "I am happy because I am not too stressed. I can study with other friends who have the same understanding, so we can study together." It shows that differences are not always based on learning styles, on the contrary, if they are based on the level of mastery of concepts, it will also be effective (Tomlinson, 2017). This learning approach allows teachers to avoid the dominance of students who are able to win learning faster and allows all groups to develop according to their respective needs. Thus, this shows that story mapping can be a flexible learning strategy for collaborative activities if used with the right grouping strategy.

##### **4.3 Theme 3: Implementation Challenges and Media Development Opportunities**

Although most students gave positive responses, the implementation of the story mapping strategy still faces several problems. According to several students, the manual story mapping activity takes more time, and sometimes makes group members who do not like to draw passive. As many as 28% of students who answered the questionnaire suggested the use of technology or visual applications such as Canva in the future so that the process of working on assignments becomes more efficient with more interesting results. "If I use the application, I can be more enthusiastic, because I can choose the colors, images, and icons that I like," said one student.

These results indicate that there is a need to use technology when creating learning innovations to better suit students' current digital habits. According to Panagiotidis et al. (2023), the use of technology in foreign language learning makes students more motivated and more engaged. Thus, technology-based story mapping can be used as an additional development to support project-based learning or collaborative tasks in the classroom. In addition to allowing students to understand the contents of narrative texts comprehensively, this technology integration also encourages their collaboration and digital skills in compiling story mapping through visual applications. Thus, the learning process in the classroom not only develops their academic skills but also encourages the development of 21st century skills.

On the other hand, teachers must undergo training in the use of visual technology so that they are better prepared to design interesting and adaptive learning activities according to the needs of today's students. Such training will also help teachers learn the use of digital applications, such as Canva, Google Slides, or AI platforms, which help teachers develop English narrative text learning with story mapping. Thus, in addition to acting as a material deliverer, teachers can also act as facilitators who provide a more interactive, relevant, and memorable learning experience for all students.

#### **5. CONCLUSION**

Based on the discussion above, the implementation of story mapping as a learning strategy has proven effective in



providing a more relevant and meaningful learning experience for students. With visual story mapping, students can understand the structure and elements in narrative text more easily. Thus, this increases their confidence when asked to convey the entire storyline from beginning to end. Thus, this learning strategy not only deepens their understanding of the concept of the material but also motivates them to be more actively involved in learning in class. Through the positive responses they share, this also shows that story mapping is an effective visual learning tool, especially when used according to the context and abilities of students.

On the one hand, the implementation of this learning innovation also shows how important it is to combine it with a differentiation approach to design a more comfortable and comprehensive learning environment. By grouping students based on their initial knowledge level, it can allow them to learn at their own pace and build equal group collaboration activities. However, this innovation still needs to be further developed due to several obstacles experienced by students, such as time constraints and students' tendencies towards the use of digital technology. The integration of technology in learning, such as visual design applications, is one important opportunity that can be further developed. Thus, the use of this story mapping strategy can run more interactively and efficiently, in accordance with the development of today's student learning. Thus, this innovation deserves to be further developed as part of an adaptive, supportive, and enjoyable learning strategy, especially in English learning.

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