

## ANALYZING FRAME STORIES IN A PILOT STUDY OF EMPATHY-BASED STORIES TO IMPLEMENT IN INDONESIAN ELT CONTEXT

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### ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini menyelidiki keakuratan dan keefektifan penggunaan kerangka cerita dalam sebuah uji pilot yang akan diimplementasikan pada penelitian-penelitian selanjutnya. Dengan menggunakan Metode Cerita Berbasis Empati (MEBS), enam partisipan berpartisipasi dalam merangkai kerangka cerita positif dan negative melalui *Google Forms*. Penulis menggunakan metode observasi untuk menilai efektivitas kerangka cerita. Penulis juga menyertakan hasil penelitian-penelitian sebelumnya dan mencari validasi profesional untuk meningkatkan keandalan penelitian. Temuan penelitian ini menyoroti beberapa faktor yang perlu dipertimbangkan ketika mengintegrasikan kerangka cerita ke dalam penelitian

MEBS di masa depan. Penelitian ini mengungkapkan bahwa integrasi MEBS yang efektif dalam penelitian di masa depan membutuhkan pelaksanaan uji pilot untuk memastikan pengembangan kerangka cerita yang dirancang dengan baik. Selain itu, penyediaan lembar persetujuan penelitian terbukti secara signifikan meningkatkan otonomi partisipan untuk terlibat dalam kerangka cerita. Sementara itu, penggunaan instruksi dan kebebasan untuk menulis kerangka cerita dalam bahasa pertama, bersamaan dengan penjelasan berbasis video berdurasi 5 menit terbukti meningkatkan pemahaman dan keterlibatan partisipan dalam menulis bingkai cerita. Penelitian ini menyarankan untuk mendiversifikasi metode pengumpulan data selain Google Formulir, termasuk *email* dan media sosial, untuk memastikan temuan hasil penelitian dapat diterapkan di berbagai konteks.

### ABSTRACT

*This study investigated the accuracy and effectiveness of employing frame stories in a pilot study to be implemented in future studies. Employing the Method of Empathy-based Stories (MEBS), six participants participated in constructing positive and negative frame stories through Google Forms. The writers used the observation method to assess the effectiveness of frame stories. The writers also included the results of previous studies and sought professional validation to enhance the study's reliability. The study's findings highlighted several factors that needed to be taken into account when integrating frame stories into future MEBS research. The study reveals that the effective integration of MEBS in future research requires the conduction of pilot studies to ensure the development of well-designed frame stories. Providing informed consent was found to significantly boost participants' autonomy in engaging with the frame story. Additionally, the use of instruction and freedom to write frame stories in first language, alongside with 5-minute video-*

*based explanations was shown to enhance participants understanding and engagement in writing the frame stories. The study suggests diversifying data collection methods beyond Google Forms, including email and social media, to ensure the findings are applicable across diverse contexts.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The Method of Empathy-Based Stories (MEBS) is a method for gathering qualitative data where the participants construct short imaginative writings according to a frame story presented by the researchers (Särkelä & Suoranta, 2020). MEBS was created in the 1970s in the United States. It was developed to study how people understand various situations through non-active role-playing. The development of MEBS was driven by the need to illustrate the reasoning and logic behind people's behavior and how society works. However, the concept of empathy in MEBS does not primarily relate to the emotional aspect of empathy but rather to the actions of perspective-taking or role-playing (Wallin et al., 2019).

The crucial aspect of MEBS research is the utilization of imagination. Although empathy-based stories are products of the imagination, they are not regarded as entirely fictional. In essence, the fictional elements in empathy-based stories are intertwined with reality as participants imagine scenarios based on their pre-existing knowledge. As a result, empathy-based stories can be viewed as narratives that describe plausible events and ways of thinking and behaving (Wallin et al., 2019).

MEBS itself has been utilized in recent studies. For example, Wallin et al. (2020) used MEBS to illustrate Finnish government employees' perceptions regarding work and professional advancement in the digitalization era. Särkelä & Suoranta (2020) also used MEBS to illustrate the threat posed by climate change and different coping mechanisms in the Helsinki area, Finland. By employing MEBS, researchers are provided with a chance to examine the world from a new perspective, allowing them to gain a deeper understanding of a particular phenomenon.

In MEBS research, participants are provided with a frame story as a starting point, which prompts them to envision themselves in a specific scenario. MEBS always has frame stories that portray a situation with a fictional character. Frame stories are usually short, simple, and always based on research question(s). Typically, the frame stories are categorized into positive (success) and negative (failure) components, enabling

researchers to explore how narratives evolve when a single element is modified (Wallin et al., 2020).

In this study, the authors aimed to thoroughly assess the efficacy of employing frame stories as a method for gathering qualitative data in future research endeavors. The technique known as MEBS has thus far been predominantly utilized within Finland or by Finnish researchers (Wallin et al., 2019), prompting the writer to explore its application in a distinctly different context: Indonesian English Language Teaching (ELT). By conducting a detailed analysis of how frame stories function within the Indonesian ELT landscape, the study seeks to determine their effectiveness, identifying both their strengths and potential limitations.

This evaluation is crucial not only for understanding the utility of frame stories in diverse educational settings but also for providing valuable guidance to researchers considering the adoption of MEBS in their own studies. By shedding light on both the advantages and challenges associated with frame stories, the research aims to contribute insights that could enhance the methodology's application and adaptation beyond its original Finnish context. Such findings promise to enrich the field by illuminating new possibilities for qualitative data collection methods in international educational research.

To evaluate the accuracy and effectiveness of the proposed frame stories, the writers employed two frame stories, one positive and one negative, to inquire about the positive and negative impacts of acquiring writing skills for a fictional character named Taylor regarding their future life and professional growth. Subsequently, all the written stories were analyzed to determine the accuracy and effectiveness of the frame stories while also providing a brief explanation of the importance of acquiring writing skills in an announcement text for professional development in the future life.

## **METHODS**

The writers utilized two frame stories, one positive and one negative, to explore how writing skills in the announcement text affected the development of a fictional character named Taylor. These stories were shared with the participants through Google Forms. In the introduction section of the form, the participants were given information about the study's consent, goals, and procedures. The writers emphasized that there were no correct or incorrect answers as the aim of the study was not to test the participants' abilities but to write stories based on empathy. Additionally, the participants had

unlimited time to complete the frame stories. Table 1 is the frame stories that were used in the study.

**Table 1** *The Positive and Negative Frame Story*

<b>Positive Frame Story</b>	<b>Negative Frame Story</b>
During high school, Taylor felt so interested in learning announcement text during English class. Taylor always made an effort to understand the announcement text. Taylor also paid attention to the social function, language features, and generic structures when he/she wrote the announcement text. Taylor's hard work and seriousness succeeded in producing good announcement texts. Imagine that YOU are Taylor. Please describe the possible benefits of acquiring writing skills in the form of announcement text for your future life opportunities and career.	During high school, Taylor was not interested in learning announcement text during English class. Taylor was lazy to understand the announcement text. Taylor also did not acquire its social function, language features, and generic structure concepts. Taylor's apathy and unseriousness did not produce satisfying announcement texts. Imagine that YOU are Taylor. Please describe the possible results of not acquiring writing skills in the form of announcement text for your future life opportunities and career.

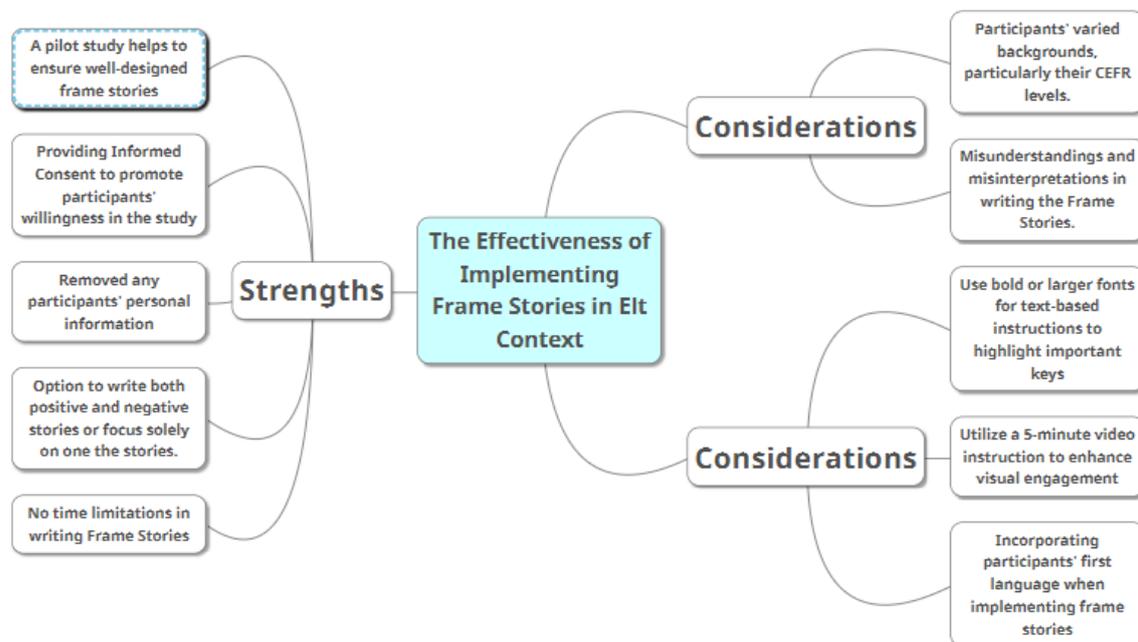
A total of five ELT eleventh-grade students and one English teacher chosen by YS Private Senior High School in Batam city, Indonesia had participated in writing the empathy-based stories. Despite the small number of participants, the MEBS data collection has produced rich data, and the results have also supported previous findings on the subject. The writers ensured that any personal data given by the participants would be used for the purposes of the research only, serving as a means to protect the privacy, show respect, and uphold the personal dignity of the respondents (Czarnota-Bojarska, 2021).

The collected data was analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis, which identifies and reports common themes found in the data (Kiger & Varpio, 2020) with the help of Microsoft Excel. Microsoft Excel is an affordable and user-friendly software with features like color and sorting, making it ideal for creating codes and reviewing themes. (Bree & Gallagher, 2016). The writers initially merged and assigned numbers to all the stories in a Microsoft Excel workbook. Then, the authors read the stories multiple times to grasp a basic understanding of the written stories. After that, the writers assigned codes to phrases or sentences to identify patterns among them. These codes were then categorized into themes and sub-themes to review and adjust. The final findings of the themes would be then presented in

At the same time, the writers used the observation method to determine the reliability and effectiveness of the frame stories. After collecting all the written stories, the writers analyzed them to draw conclusions about the observed behaviors or phenomena. The writers also included previous research to determine what questions haven't been answered yet and which areas need more exploration. The writers also sought validation from professionals who are capable of offering information, evidence, evaluations, and analysis. to ensure the study's reliability (Khidhir & Rassul, 2023).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Below is the Conceptual Framework of the study's results, which will be discussed in more detail in the following sections.



**Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study's Result**

Before implementing MEBS, researchers must prioritize conducting a pilot study. Wallin et al. (2019) recommend conducting a pilot study before data collection to ensure the frame stories are well constructed. If the frame story is poorly constructed, it could potentially impact or limit the participants' imagination. Therefore, the researcher must ensure the research problems correspond with the frame story. This implies that even if the frame story is intriguing and properly constructed, it might not produce answers that address the relevant research questions.

In MEBS research, obtaining informed consent from participants is of utmost importance. This process ensures that individuals willingly and knowingly agree to participate in research activities (Metselaar, 2019). It is crucial to provide participants with detailed information regarding the content and objectives of the research to ensure their comprehension and eliminate any ambiguity regarding the purpose of the study (Falvo et al., 2021). When participants are fully informed about the MEBS study, they are more likely to feel at ease and exhibit a cooperative attitude throughout the entire research process. Additionally, having a clear understanding of the study's context enables participants to provide thoughtful and honest responses, thereby enhancing the overall credibility and integrity of the research (George et al., 2023).

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the individuals involved in writing the frame stories remain anonymous and do not disclose personal information regarding their background, physical appearance, or other distinguishing factors. If the researcher wants to compare empathy-based stories based on the participant's age, gender, or other background data, they may ask these questions before or after the stories are written (Wallin et al., 2019). At the same time, any information that could have been used to identify the participants was removed when presenting and publishing the results. Conversely, the participants have the option to decline to answer any of the demographic questions, including gender, age, and job title.

Moreover, the notion of employing writing frame stories emphasizes voluntary participation (Wallin et al., 2020). The participants were free to decide whether they wanted to write both positive and negative stories or solely focus on one of the frame stories aspects. The participants were also granted the liberty to write empathy-based stories without any time limitation. The researchers needed to ensure the participants that there was no right or wrong way to write empathy-based stories. Thus, the participants could write the stories without any force, pressure, or a sense of urgency.

According to the observation, the researchers found that some of the participants did not pay attention to the MEBS guidance given in the introduction of the Google Form. As proof, the guidance clearly stated that participants only needed to continue one aspect of the story in the introduction. Still, many overlooked this important information and wrote both positive and negative stories. Hence, using a bold or larger font style in the MEBS guidance is recommended. Using a larger font size can emphasize key points and essential information, making it easier for readers to quickly identify and remember crucial details (Luna et al., 2019).

The writers also suggest the integration of video-based instructions alongside the written form instructions for the MEBS guidance. Video-based instructions utilize video materials to deliver information, clarify concepts, and actively involve learners in the learning process (Perdani, 2022). This approach can be particularly effective for MEBS guidance, as it allows participants to engage with the material visually and enhances their comprehension and retention of the content (Larson, 2020). Furthermore, these videos offer the convenience of being accessible anytime and anywhere, empowering students to engage with the material at their own preferred pace and convenience.

The duration of instructional videos in research can vary due to various factors, such as the content's complexity, the participants' attention span, and the specific goals of the material being taught. There is no fixed or universal time limit for instructional videos in research, as it depends on the nature of the study and the desired learning outcomes. The findings of Humphries & Clark (2021) study tend to prefer videos that are divided into smaller chunks and range from 3 to 17 minutes in length. This approach can enhance attention, time management, and overall engagement with the video material. Similarly, in the study conducted by (Thompson et al., 2021), participants preferred videos that were approximately 20 minutes long. However, it is advisable to employ video instructions that are approximately 3-5 minutes in duration, as this enables students to concentrate on the video content without feeling overwhelmed. Short videos tend to be easier to watch and have a higher probability of maintaining students' engagement.

Simultaneously, paying attention to participants' Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) levels is crucial in collecting data. The CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) is a standardized framework used to assess and describe language proficiency (Zaki & Darmi, 2021). It is widely utilized not only in Europe but also in various regions around the world to evaluate language skills in different languages. According to the CEFR website, the proficiency levels are divided into three categories: A1 and A2 are considered beginner levels, referred to as Basic Users. At the same time, B1 and B2 are classified as intermediate levels, known as Independent Users. On the other hand, C1 and C2 levels are categorized as advanced levels and referred to as Proficient Users (Sulistyaningrum & Purnawati, 2021).

In Indonesia's context of the Independence Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka), English learning in senior high school specifically aims to reach CEFR Level B1 or B2 (Kamil, 2023). Attaining the CEFR B1 (Intermediate) level indicates that learners possess

the ability to comprehend uncomplicated texts, engage in basic conversations, and express their thoughts in written form on a range of everyday topics. Progressing to CEFR B2 (Upper-Intermediate) represents an advanced stage where individuals can understand more complex texts, actively participate in discussions on various subjects, and produce more detailed and refined written pieces. CEFR B1 or B2 implies that individuals have made significant progress in utilizing the language; however, there is still more to learn, and their word choices may be comparatively less complex and sophisticated compared to higher proficiency levels.

Apart from considering the CEFR level, the researchers need to acknowledge the diverse backgrounds of the participants. Not all participants possess advanced English language skills due to diverse educational backgrounds and linguistic exposure (Shamsuzzaman, 2015). Therefore, using clear and straightforward language can help overcome language barriers and guarantee that participants can easily understand the questions and instructions. It is advisable to avoid using complex or ambiguous words as they may result in misunderstandings and misinterpretations of the questions, ultimately distorting the data (Sudheesh et al., 2016).

To accommodate the diverse backgrounds and different CEFR levels of participants, researchers can incorporate the participants' first language in the MEBS guidance and frame stories. Using the participants' first language ensures clarity and minimizes the likelihood of misinterpretations, enabling individuals to fully comprehend the objectives and requirements of the study (Younas et al., 2022). Moreover, this approach demonstrates respect for different cultures and languages, fostering inclusivity throughout the research process. Using participants' first language in research instructions helps create fair and clear communication, especially when the L1 is not the dominant research language (Schembri & Jahić Jašić, 2022), making the study more reliable and respectful.

In addition, allowing participants to use their first language when writing empathy-based stories is recommended for the study. When participants are able to use their first language in a second-language environment, it becomes easier for them to generate ideas, comprehend the content, and delve deeper into a topic. Moreover, in most cases, this approach does not necessarily compromise the quality of their writing (Alzahrani, 2019). Allowing participants to respond in their first language can also create a sense of comfort and willingness to participate actively in the research process, ensuring their voices are heard and valued.

Now, the writers wanted to discuss the positive and negative stories written by the participants. Acquiring writing skills in announcement text opens up doors to a wide range of future career prospects, such as news anchors, radio announcers, secretaries (office work), marketing, etc. Prasodjo & Sally (2022) mentioned that the better an individual's English proficiency, the greater their chances of finding a job and securing a higher position. Additionally, individuals who have mastered this skill are better equipped to convey their ideas, share information, and communicate, fostering a heightened sense of teamwork and collaboration (Parchanda, 2021). Individuals also exhibit increased motivation and a greater willingness to give their utmost effort on a daily basis (Brinton, 2020).

Simultaneously, individuals who fail to acquire proficient writing skills in announcement text may experience a lack of confidence and develop a fear of failure (Wahyuni & Umam, 2017). These negative emotions can hinder their willingness to initiate or complete tasks, as they may doubt their own abilities and judgment. On top of that, individuals who possess limited language proficiency may also be perceived as less capable or less professional. Over time, poor writing skills can become a major obstacle to personal and professional development, as writing plays a crucial role in numerous academic and career endeavors.

## **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION**

If researchers plan to include MEBS in future studies, they need to consider various factors. Firstly, it is advisable to conduct a pilot study before implementing MEBS in the actual research, ensuring that the frame stories are well-designed and capable of effectively addressing the research questions. Furthermore, the study must include informed consent and MEBS guidance, enabling participants to comprehend the research objectives and procedures. Moreover, it is important to notify participants that they are free to engage both or only one of the frame story elements without disclosing personal details or being restricted by time limits.

In addition, researchers need to consider the participants' varied backgrounds and English proficiency levels. Not all participants have the same English proficiency. Thus, including the first language when gathering the data is recommended to ensure the participants understand the research procedures and freely express themselves in writing empathy-based stories.

The writers also further recommend using 5 minutes video-based instructions besides the written instructions. A video-based instruction allows participants to engage visually with the material and enhances their comprehension and retention of the content. If researchers still prefer utilizing written instructions, it is advisable to employ bold or larger font styles in order to emphasize the significant key information. This approach will facilitate the participants in easily identifying the key information.

Furthermore, the writers suggest the use of diverse data collection platforms to integrate the frame stories. These platforms include not only Google Forms but also email and social media. Each data collection platform has its own strengths and limitations, and the choice of the platform depends on the research question. Therefore, choosing the appropriate data collection platform is important to ensure that the researcher gathers accurate and relevant data that correspond with the research objectives.

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