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The Soul-Healing Story: Implementing Bilingual Digital Storytelling as an Educational Rehabilitation Medium for Post-Disaster Elementary School Students

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ABSTRACT

Landslides do not only cause environmental and infrastructural damage but may also disrupt the continuity of children's learning. This community engagement program aimed to implement an educational rehabilitation innovation based on digital storytelling, arts, bilingual literacy, and digital technology for elementary school students in a post-disaster context. The program was carried out at SDN Cisarua, West Bandung Regency, through three stages: teacher training, student mentoring, and creative performance. Teacher training was conducted on August 19, 2026, involving two teachers; student mentoring on August 20, 2026, involving 73 students; and creative performance on August 24, 2026. The main innovation was a bilingual Indonesian–English digital story poster presenting three narrative stages: the beautiful valley, the landslide disaster, and community-based environmental recovery. The results show that digital storytelling can function as a multimodal learning medium integrating language literacy, creativity, environmental education, and disaster communication. Students actively participated in storytelling and poster production as environmental campaign media, while teachers acquired alternative creative instructional strategies.

Keywords: Digital Storytelling, Educational Rehabilitation, Post-Disaster Education, Bilingual Literacy, Environmental Education

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INTRODUCTION

Natural disasters disrupt the continuity of children's education in ways that extend far beyond damaged buildings (Phillips & Mincin, 2024; Purwanto et al., 2026; Shah et al., 2020). When schools and living environments are affected, children lose not only classrooms but also daily routines, a sense of safety, and the opportunity to learn under normal conditions (Harini et al., 2024; Lunga et al., 2025). UNICEF (2024) affirms that education in crisis situations is a critical component of child protection and recovery, because schools provide structure, learning continuity, and psychosocial support. Climate-related educational disruption has affected hundreds of millions of students globally, demonstrating that learning continuity must be treated as an essential element of disaster response rather than an afterthought (Peek et al., 2025). In this context, post-disaster educational rehabilitation must be understood more broadly than merely restoring teaching and learning activities (Miyaji, 2026). UNESCO (2026) positions psychosocial support, community recovery, and safe learning environments as integral parts of education in emergencies. Approaches that enable children to interact, express themselves, create works, and rebuild a sense of belonging to their environment therefore become highly relevant.

Three largely separate bodies of scholarship inform this problem. *First*, research on digital storytelling consistently shows benefits for language learning (Barua, 2023; Nga et al., 2024; Veyis et al., 2025). A recent systematic review reports positive effects of both traditional and digital narrative-based interventions on speaking, reading, grammar, and vocabulary (Yu & Zeng, 2026), while earlier work established digital storytelling as a technology that connects pedagogy and content (Robin, 2016). *Second*, arts-based and participatory approaches have been shown to promote children's psychosocial well-being (Lee et al., 2020; Mastrothanasis et al., 2025; Wigham et al., 2020). Systematic reviews document that participatory arts programmes and creative-arts interventions support youth mental health and well-being (Williams et al., 2023) and that school-based arts interventions improve student well-being outcomes (Liu, 2026). *Third*, disaster education and psychosocial programming have advanced toward building children's resilience: psychosocial support programmes for disaster-affected children show generally positive impacts (Gibbs et al., 2021), while storytelling itself has been used as a disaster-mitigation medium grounded in local legends (Harini et al., 2021, 2024; Zainudin et al., 2026).

Despite these advances, the three strands have rarely been brought together. Studies on digital storytelling typically address language classrooms in normal schooling conditions; studies on arts-based psychosocial support usually target trauma recovery without a literacy-technology focus; and disaster education programmes tend to emphasize risk knowledge rather than the integration of narrative creativity, bilingual literacy, and digital media within an ordinary school subject. There is, to the best of the authors' knowledge, limited empirical work examining how bilingual digital storytelling, as an integrated pedagogical medium, functions in a post-disaster elementary school setting where teachers also require capacity building (Oda & Ichinose, 2025; Shafa et al., 2025). This integration, rather than any single component, constitutes the gap the present program addresses.

This community engagement program therefore implemented bilingual (Indonesian–English) digital storytelling as an educational rehabilitation innovation at SDN Cisarua, West Bandung Regency (a school affected by landslides). The program combined storytelling, visual narrative, student-created posters, digital media use, and environmental recovery messages in a single integrated medium. This design was chosen because the Indonesian component supports narrative and literacy development while the English component extends vocabulary learning in context; the visual story structure (The Beautiful Valley → The Disaster → The Solution) scaffolds comprehension of cause-and-effect; and the student-authored posters transform learners from recipients into creators and communicators, consistent with arts-based and multimodal learning principles.

The program aimed to (a) implement bilingual digital storytelling as an educational rehabilitation medium, (b) strengthen teacher capacity in storytelling and arts-based strategies, and (c) provide students space to develop literacy, creativity, communication, and environmental concern. Three guiding evaluation questions directed the assessment: To what extent was the program implemented as designed? How did students and teachers participate? and What learning products and early evidence of learning emerged? Consistent with its descriptive–evaluative scope, the study offers a limited but potentially replicable contribution by documenting an integrated pedagogical model for post-disaster schooling, without claiming causal effects on psychological well-being.

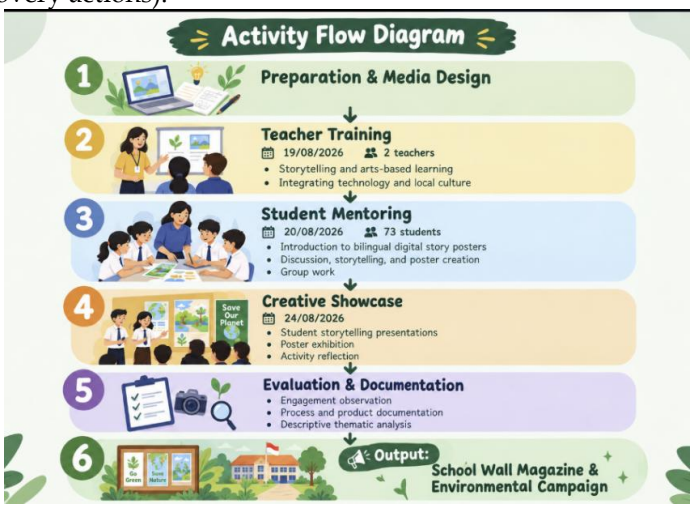
METHOD

This community engagement program used a participatory community engagement approach with descriptive-evaluative characteristics. This approach was chosen because the program actively involved teachers and students in the learning process, creation of works, presentation, and reflection. The activity design adapted the principles of learning by doing, arts-based learning, storytelling, and multimodal learning, with reference to the TPACK framework (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) and the principles of Universal Design for Learning (CAST, 2024).

The program was implemented at SDN Cisarua, West Bandung Regency, targeting teachers and elementary school students. The program was designed in five stages, which were consolidated into three main activities. The first stage was preparation and media design. The second stage was teacher training, conducted on August 19, 2026, involving two teachers. The training covered the introduction of the Soul-Healing Story concept, storytelling, arts-based learning, the use of digital media, the integration of local culture, and environmental education. Teachers were guided to use prompting questions so that students could analyze the relationships among environmental conditions, disaster, and recovery actions.

The third stage was student mentoring, conducted on August 20, 2026, involving 73 students from two classes. It began with the introduction of the bilingual digital story poster. Students observed the visuals, read the text, understood the storyline, discussed the problem, and identified the solution. Subsequently, students developed storytelling and visual works participatively through discussion, story construction, delivery practice, poster creation, and group work. The fourth stage was the creative performance, held on August 24, 2026, in which students presented their storytelling using posters as supporting media. The posters were then used as wall-magazine media and environmental recovery campaign materials.

The fifth stage was evaluation, conducted through observation of teacher and student engagement, documentation of the process and products, and activity reflection. Data were analyzed thematically and descriptively based on four indicators: participation, media use, creativity/communication, and understanding of environmental messages. The main innovation product was a bilingual Indonesian–English digital story poster presenting three narrative stages: The Beautiful Valley (a harmonious environmental condition), The Disaster (the landslide event and its impacts), and The Solution/Happy Ending (community-based environmental recovery actions).



Picture 1. Activity Flow Diagram

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Implementation fidely

All five planned stages were consolidated into three main activities and were carried out on schedule: teacher training (August 19, 2026; 2 of 2 invited teachers attended), student mentoring (August 20, 2026; 73 students across two classes), and the creative performance (August 24, 2026), together with the evaluation stage. Teacher training covered the Soul-Healing Story concept, storytelling, arts-based learning, digital media use, local-culture integration, and environmental education. This section reports *completion of activities* as planned; it does not by itself demonstrate improved learning.

Participation

Throughout this manuscript, "participation" refers to *observable engagement in the three student activities*: (a) attendance at mentoring and the performance, (b) involvement in group discussion and story construction, and (c) completion and oral presentation of a poster.

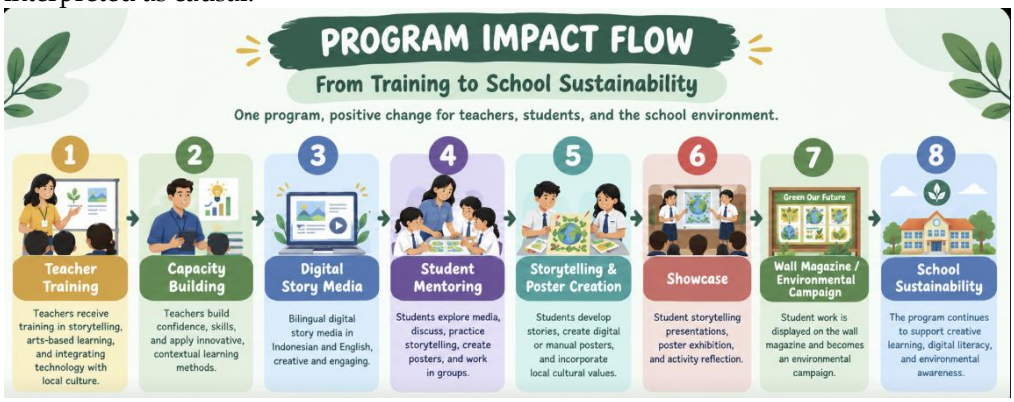
Attendance was recorded at 73 of 73 students (100%) on both August 20 and August 24. All students were observed to contribute to group poster production under teacher facilitation. The creative performance involved every group presenting its story using its poster; 12 group posters were produced (one per group). Engagement was assessed through structured observation guided by four indicators: participation, media use, creativity/communication, and understanding of environmental messages, with field notes and photographic documentation as supporting evidence.

Learning products

The central learning product was the bilingual Indonesian–English digital story poster built on a three-part narrative structure: *The Beautiful Valley* (a harmonious environment), *The Disaster* (the landslide and its impacts), and *The Solution/Happy Ending* (community-based recovery). Student-created posters served a dual function as wall-magazine media and environmental recovery campaign materials. Posters consistently featured the story's three stages, included Indonesian and English labels for key vocabulary (e.g., village, river, mountain, disaster, landslide, plant trees, protect water), and depicted recovery actions such as tree-planting and river care.

Evidence of learning

Because the program employed a descriptive–evaluative design without pre–post assessment, claims about learning are reported as *early observational evidence* rather than measured outcomes. During mentoring, students moved from recognizing narrative elements (characters, setting, problem, sequence, solution) in Indonesian to using targeted English vocabulary within the story context rather than in isolation. Students progressed from material recipients to message creators, exercising story comprehension, information organization, communicative language, and visual media use. These observations are consistent with the UDL principle encouraging multiple forms of expression (CAST, 2024); however, the absence of a formal assessment instrument means improvements in vocabulary or well-being **cannot** be interpreted as causal.



Picture 2. Program Impact Flow

DISCUSSION

The novelty of this study lies in the *integration* it achieves rather than in any single component. While digital storytelling, bilingual literacy, arts-based psychosocial support, and disaster education have each been studied before, they have typically been examined in isolation and in non-disaster school settings. The present program brings these strands together into one pedagogical medium, a bilingual digital story poster with a coherent three-stage environmental narrative, and situates it in an actual post-disaster elementary school, while simultaneously building teacher capacity. This integrated, context-sensitive model represents the study's principal original contribution**.** Mastrothanasis et al. (2025) highlighted the importance of digital drama interventions in crisis contexts to support bilingual literacy and psychosocial support, further underscoring the relevance of this integrated approach.

The key results can be summarized in three points. First, the program was implemented with full fidelity across its three activities (2 teachers trained; 73 students mentored; full-group

creative performance). Second, the bilingual digital story poster functioned as a multimodal medium: students engaged with text, images, colors, symbols, and visual sequences simultaneously (Kress, 2010), and the three-part narrative structure supported higher-order questions: "*What happened? Why did it happen? What can we do?"* while enabling Indonesian literacy and contextualized English vocabulary learning. Hidayat et al. (2024) & Wang (2025) also demonstrates how digital storytelling enhances student engagement in multimodal literacy. Third, the students' shift from recipients to creators of environmental messages, evidenced in 12 group posters used as campaign media, signals the pedagogical value of student authorship. Sidemen et al. (2025) emphasizes that digital storytelling can foster future literacy, including creativity and critical thinking, through student participation. These findings are practically relevant because they show that a replicable medium can serve dual literacy and environmental objectives within ordinary classroom constraints.

The findings align with and extend several lines of prior research. The observed benefits of digital storytelling for language outcomes corroborate the systematic review by Yu & Zeng (2026) and Robin (2016) early conceptualization of digital storytelling as a technology linking pedagogy and content. Gregori-Signes (2014) it also supports the use of digital storytelling to promote a critical socio-educational focus and the explicit inclusion of multimodal teaching in the curriculum. The multimodal meaning-making observed resonates with Kress (2010) Kress's (2010) social semiotic account. In addition, Kendrick & Early (2022) highlight the potential of digital storytelling to improve language and digital literacy among young people from refugee backgrounds. The psychosocial value of creative, participatory expression is consistent with Williams et al. (2023), who report benefits of participatory arts programmes for youth mental health, with Gibbs et al. (2021), who document positive impacts of school-based psychosocial programmes for disaster-affected children, and with Fukuchi et al., (2026) & Laksmita et al. (2026) whose expressive-arts program. Decosimo et al. (2019) also found that community-based expressive arts programs are effective in the psychosocial recovery of children after the Ebola outbreak. The use of storytelling as a disaster-mitigation medium parallels Harini et al., (2021, 2024) while the emphasis on moving disaster education from risk knowledge toward preventive action echoes (UNICEF, 2022). Peek et al. (2025) & Swank et al. (2022) even demonstrates how children's life experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic have contributed to their disaster literacy through altruistic behavior. The consistencies likely stem from shared mechanisms: multimodal and narrative formats engage learners through multiple cognitive channels, and creative authorship fosters agency and belonging, factors common across arts-based and storytelling interventions. The differences arise mainly from *scope, method, and context*. Unlike the outcome evaluations reviewed above (Fukuchi et al., 2026; Laksmita et al., 2026; Williams et al., 2023), which employed pre–post or trial designs with measurable well-being outcomes, the present program used a descriptive–evaluative design without psychological measurement. Its population, Indonesian elementary school students in a landslide-affected school, working through teachers with limited prior digital-media training, also differs from the youth populations, settings, and qualified-professional delivery typical of the literature (Gibbs et al., 2021). Marie Pacheco et al. (2022) & Lai et al. (2024)highlights the important role of schools in building children's resilience in the midst of disasters, a context relevant to this study. These differences explain why the present study can report early observational evidence but cannot claim causal effects.

The study's contribution is twofold. Conceptually, it demonstrates that a single integrated medium, bilingual digital storytelling with student-authored visual posters, can simultaneously serve language literacy, environmental education, and disaster communication, thereby filling the gap between the three separate literatures identified in the Introduction. Practically, it offers a low-cost, replicable model for post-disaster educational rehabilitation that foregrounds teacher capacity building, which the reviewed literature suggests is essential for sustained school-based psychosocial impact (Gibbs et al., 2021). Çay & Demiroğları (2025) also found that professional support and teacher resilience are key components of post-disaster educational recovery strategies.

Three implications follow. *Practically*, the model invites adaptation by schools in disaster-prone areas, provided teacher training and follow-up support are included. *Academically*, the study underscores the need for rigorous designs—pre–post assessments, vocabulary tests, and validated well-being instruments—to move from observational evidence to measured outcomes in future replications. *For policy*, the results support integrating creative, bilingual, and locally grounded media into post-disaster curriculum recovery rather than treating learning continuity and psychosocial support as separate tracks. Future research should develop digital storytelling series, strengthen teacher capacity development, construct measurable evaluation instruments, and test the model across multiple disaster-prone schools to establish generalizability.

CONCLUSION

The Soul-Healing Story program has successfully implemented bilingual digital storytelling innovation as part of post-disaster educational rehabilitation at SDN Cisarua, West Bandung Regency. The program was carried out through three stages: teacher training (August 19, 2026, two teachers), student mentoring (August 20, 2026, 73 students), and creative performance (August 24, 2026). The main product, a bilingual Indonesian–English digital story poster, integrates storytelling, visual illustration, language literacy, environmental education, and disaster education through the narrative structure of The Beautiful Valley, The Disaster, and The Solution/Happy Ending. The results show that the product functions as a multimodal medium that supports language learning while providing space for students to develop storytelling, creativity, communication, and cooperation. For teachers, the activity provided experience in applying technology as a pedagogical strategy. For the school community, the student posters functioned as environmental recovery campaign media. Nevertheless, this activity did not use an experimental design or psychological measurement, so the impact on student well-being cannot be claimed as a causal relationship. It is expected that this model can be further developed through the addition of digital storytelling series, strengthening teacher capacity, developing more measurable evaluation instruments, and replicating the model in other disaster-prone schools.

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